

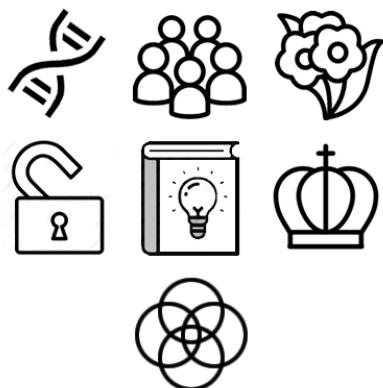
Bruno Cancellieri

Psychology of needs

Ideas and tools to suffer less and enjoy more

Translated from the Italian by the author

November 3, 2025



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Needs Psychology is based on the idea that pleasure and pain are the building blocks of every emotion and feeling, and that they depend, respectively, on the satisfaction and non-satisfaction of particular needs.

One consequence of this idea is that, in order to suffer as little as possible and enjoy as much as possible, a human being should satisfy as best as possible, and in a sustainable way, a set of his or her own and (given our interdependence) others' needs.

This goal is far from easy to achieve because of certain structural conflicts in society and the individual mind. Understanding such conflicts requires a systemic and ecological view of nature in general, culture, others and ourselves. That is a view that considers, among other things, what differentiates us, and the resistance to change inherent in all living things.

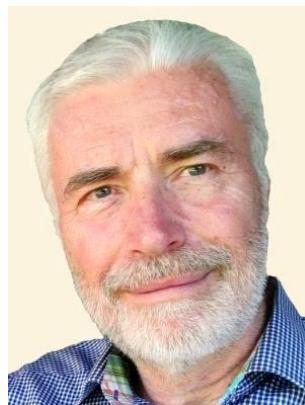
This book offers a number of useful ideas and tools in this regard. In particular, it contains:

- a description of human nature based on different authors' ideas about life, mind, man, and society;
- a methodology and set of tools to be used as an adjunct to psychotherapies of any kind or for self-improvement.

The same book can be found in a web version at: psychologiadeibisogni.it. The web version also contains a set of multimedia resources (with animations) useful for stimulating imagination and creative thinking and making psychotherapeutic exercises more effective.

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I will be grateful to everyone who sends me their opinions, suggestions or questions about this work via the "contact" page of the above site.



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Preface by Claudia Muccinelli

Why a book on the psychology of needs? Hasn't everything that needs to be said about human needs already been said?

And why title it "Psychology of Needs," since it is actually a book of psychology and philosophy about life and human nature in the broadest sense?

These are some of the questions that potential readers of this book might ask themselves, as well as wondering whether anything new can still be said about human nature today, and devising original ideas on how to "suffer less and enjoy more," as promised by the work's subtitle.

This work is the result of the personal research of a self-taught scholar who, with a critical spirit and the intention to transcend the academic boundaries in which the humanities are still organized, wanted to summarize in an open book (also freely accessible online) his vision of life and human nature, which he arrived at after years of study and experimentation, some of which he conducted by making use of methods and computer tools that he himself conceived and implemented.

The originality of the "Psychology of Needs" lies above all in having linked concepts from various theories and disciplines, placing man, his needs, emotions and problems as the focal point. The author's "feeling pragmatism" is a systemic approach that never loses sight of the existential goal of decreasing our suffering and increasing our ability to enjoy life and social relationships.

The motivation for this book is not profit, nor the intention to "get on the cathedra," but the desire and pleasure to share one's reflections, to stimulate the comparison of ideas, and to initiate a dialogue with readers for mutual enrichment. In this sense, this work is also an exhortation to be mentally open-minded, to question oneself and to adapt to the changes in mentality required by wisdom, which for the Author coincides with the ability to meet one's own and others' needs in a sustainable way.

Claudia Muccinelli

psychologist

Introduction

Since I was a child, and for most of my life, I suffered from an existential malaise that I could not define and whose causes I could even less understand. I only guessed that it concerned my relationships with others and the differences between me and them. Of one thing, however, I was certain: understanding the nature and causes of my sufferings would help me defeat them, or at least alleviate them.

I thus began to take an interest in psychology, convinced that it would help me shed light on my problems and overcome them, and I had my first experiences with psychotherapy, which I discontinued after a few weeks, having observed their ineffectiveness and the therapist's attempt to fit me into his predefined theoretical schemes without considering my unique particularities. Indeed, it seemed to me more useful and productive to study psychology as an autodidact, enticed by its promises of personal and social improvement.

However, I soon discovered that there was not just one psychology, but many different ones, which either ignored or discredited each other, and although each claimed not to need the others, none seemed sufficient to deal with my problems.

Of all the psychology books out there, I would have liked to find one that put together useful ideas from different psychological theories, that is, a manual to be used on all occasions to understand and deal with my own and others' psychological problems, with the ultimate goal of suffering less and enjoying more. But such a book I have never found, and so it is that, after much hesitation and some human and literary experiences that have particularly enlightened me, I decided to write it myself, both to put in order all that I have learned during my lifelong research and to enable other people to benefit from what I have learned. The result is the book you are now reading, which I hope will be as useful to you as the things you will find in it have been to me.

I wrote this book for the purpose of understanding (to the extent possible) how we are made and how we function, especially with regard to our feelings, motivations, knowledge, and relationships with others.

I chose as my title *Psychology of Needs* because I consider psychological research indispensable for understanding the motives and logics of our behaviors, and because I consider needs (and their dynamics of satisfaction) essential for the formation and maintenance of the life of organisms and for the preservation of related species.

Despite its title, this work is not specialized, but generalist. In fact, it has the ambition to include, in broad strokes, all that is important to understand (through the tools of the natural sciences and the human and social sciences) in order to live a satisfying life as far as possible. To depth and detail, I preferred completeness and overview, to specialized knowledge, general understanding.

During my research I gathered from the scientific and literary heritage on human nature (psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, neuroscience, literature, etc.) a quantity of

mostly specialized and fragmentary notions, like details of an undefined whole. Reflecting critically on such notions, I have selected some authors whom I consider useful with respect to the purpose of this book, and I have integrated and summarized their ideas into an organic logical structure.

What is original about this work is, in my view, the connections I have made between ideas from different authors, and my understanding of their concepts. In addition, here I have described practices and tools for psychotherapy and self-improvement that I have conceived and experimented with on myself.

The ultimate goal of this book is to help (myself and others) become wiser, that is, more able to know and meet their own and others' needs and, as a result, be happy as much as possible. All this, in a way that is sustainable for the person, society and the environment in an ecological sense. To this end, I have tried to cover the most significant aspects of human existence in a document that can be used as a *vademecum*.

I would call my approach to the study of human nature *sentimental pragmatism* in the sense that I consider feelings (i.e., pleasure and pain in all their possible forms, intensities, and manifestations) the most real and important things for a human being, and the measure of all value.

The writing of this book has been difficult, indeed tormented, not so much because of the complexity of the subject matter as because of a conflict between two antithetical needs (in the sense that the satisfaction of one entails the frustration of the other): on the one hand, the need to pursue knowledge and wisdom, to create something original and useful, to verbalize and share my ideas; on the other hand, the need to be appreciated, accepted and loved by others as much as possible.

This conflict is due to the fact that, normally, we tend to regard as a threat those who feel they have something new to teach us about human nature (and, consequently, about our personality). The threat consists in the risk of discovering that we have wrong, illusory and/or deficient ideas about life, nature, others and ourselves.

In that sense, this work has been a challenge and a kind of self-therapy for me.

See also: Summary of the Psychology of Needs.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who, with their demonstrations of esteem, encouraged me to do this work, and in particular:

- my friend, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and "pananthropologist" philosopher Luigi Anepetà, without whose teachings I could not have conceived this book;
- psychologist Claudia Muccinelli who assisted me in structuring and revising the text;
- my friend John Milone for the long hours we spent together on Skype exchanging ideas, speculating, and discussing human nature and the workings of the mind;

- my friend Laura Gentili, for her valuable contribution to improving my language style;
- my daughter Laura, for her excellent advice on how to structure the book and what to add to it to make it more interesting to potential readers.

Wisdom and happiness

As explained in the introduction, the ultimate goal of this book is to help one become wiser, meaning wisdom is the ability to meet one's own needs and those of others in a sustainable way.

This goal is based on the principle that the satisfaction of a need causes an increase in pleasure or a decrease in pain in their various forms and, at the same time, contributes to the survival of the individual and the preservation of his or her species. Conversely, it is assumed that the frustration of a need causes an increase in pain or decrease in pleasure and, at the same time, contributes to the individual's sickness or death and threatens the preservation of his or her species. It is also assumed that pleasure and pain are symptoms of the satisfaction or frustration of needs.

I have not attempted to prove the truth of such a principle, both because I do not think I could, and because it seems self-evident to me. Let us therefore take it as a non-falsifiable axiom (as Karl Popper would say). I admit, however, that if this principle were invalidated, a good part of this book would prove to be unfounded and misleading.

For as long as writing has existed, the media have abounded with recipes for being happy. After all, this book is also a recipe for happiness, this mysterious and subjective state of mind defined in the vaguest and most arbitrary ways in both popular and educated culture. This is because it is not a scientific concept, and everything that is not scientific is to some extent arbitrary (but not necessarily false).

I would define an individual's happiness as a habitual condition in which his or her basic needs are sufficiently satisfied before any frustration of them causes psychophysical damage. By sufficient I mean to such an extent that the individual willingly accepts the life he leads and does not wish to change it structurally.

From this definition I infer that wisdom is, as the ability to satisfy needs, also knowledge of what causes happiness and what hinders it.

Let us ask then: what causes happiness, what hinders it?

I have no doubt that, given the general interdependence of human beings, happiness depends on the quality of social relationships, that is, how well those relationships meet the basic needs of the interactants, taking it for granted that a human being cannot do without social interactions.

The wise man knows that a social relationship may contribute more or less to the happiness or unhappiness of the contracting parties, and he knows why. This enables him to make the right choices in the sense of improving one relationship (to the extent that it can be improved) or replacing it with another more conducive to his own and others' happiness.

The wise man lives in the present with an eye to the future, and chooses each day whether to continue living as he usually lives or to change something, especially with regard to his relationships with others.

The wise man is always prepared for upcoming social interactions, knows his own and others' needs and desires (distinguishing the healthy from the sick), knows when to seek companionship and when solitude, knows how to present himself to others, what to reveal and what not to reveal, when to cooperate and when to compete, when to lead and when to

be led, what to offer and what to ask, what to give and what to take, what to accept and what to reject.

The whole and the parts, chance and necessity

In the following chapters I discuss human nature and the mind. Being convinced that it is impossible to understand a concept outside a certain context, I want to talk here about the context in which a mind and a human being can exist and function.

First, two basic terms need to be defined: the "whole" (or "whole") and the "part." I think that the concept of "whole" does not require explanation, which would be difficult, if not impossible, to provide anyway in a nontautological way. I also think that every "whole" consists of "parts" and that everything is part of a "whole."

By saying "a whole" instead of "the whole," I mean that we can speak of various "all's," that is, consider anything a whole divisible into parts. Furthermore, we can say that each whole is part of a higher-level whole.

We do not know whether there is anything that is not divisible into parts, nor do we know whether the universe is not part of a higher-level whole, but these questions are beyond the scope of this book. So let us consider the universe (or the world as we know it) as the higher-level whole and try to divide it into parts.

C. G. Jung divided reality into two parts: the *pleroma* and the *creature*, meaning by the former term the set of nonliving beings (thus the mineral kingdom) and by the latter term the set of living beings (microorganisms, plants and animals, including humans).

Both the *pleroma* and the *creature* are not static, but change continuously in space and time. For science, changes in the *pleroma* are subject only to the laws of physics (for example, the two principles of thermodynamics). In contrast, changes in the *creature*, which consists of *pleroma* with special characteristics, are subject to both the laws of physics and the laws of biology. For most common religions, both the *pleroma* and the *creature* are also subject to the wills of the deities, but in this book, I disregard religious thought on this subject.

According to *determinism* (understood as a philosophical current) nothing happens *by chance*, that is, in a way that is not subject to some law. I believe that in the strict sense, that is, at the molecular and sub molecular level, this is true; however, for practical purposes I believe that chance, understood as unpredictability, not only exists and acts, but also has a definite function in the sphere of life, a determinative function, that is, one that is indispensable for the preservation of species. Just think of the randomness with which the genetic makeup of an unborn child is determined by randomly mixing the parents' genes in sexual reproduction.

As for the *plerome*, to convince oneself of the intervention of chance, one only has to look at the variety of shapes and arrangements of the moon's craters, which follow no law except in terms of their physicochemical constitution.

We can therefore, at least for practical purposes, say, quoting Jacques Monod, that the world is governed by chance and necessity, meaning by chance the unpredictability of certain events and by necessity the observance of physical and (as far as the *creature* is concerned) biological laws.

Physical necessities (or laws) are inescapable, that is, they cannot be disregarded. Biological

necessities (or laws), which in my view coincide with *needs*, are relative, i.e., they can be disregarded, but the non-fulfillment of a need can cause the death of an organism, one of its organs, or the temporary or permanent cessation of one of its functions.

A whole can be organized or disorganized. In the former case its parts interact in ways that give the whole properties not present in any of its parts; in the latter, the whole is an amorphous collection of parts with no particular relationships or interactions among them. A disorganized whole has no properties or functions that are not already present in its parts. An organized whole is commonly called a *system*.

An *object* can be part of multiple systems, that is, multiple contexts. Therefore, reality is complex and inextricable, and any simplification of it is arbitrary.

We can call the human organism a system consisting in turn of lower-level systems (which we can call *subsystems*). We do not know whether aggregations of organisms, such as humans, animals or plants, constitute a system, that is, an organized whole. However, we do know that they interact in a more or less symbiotic way. Therefore, we can call the biosphere an ecological *whole*.

The human mind is thus part of a whole that is the human organism, that is, a specimen of the species *Homo Sapiens*, which in turn is part of the earth's biosphere. This is made up of interdependent living beings, and is subject to the laws of physics (as it consists of *pleroma*) and biology, and to some degree of chance. Chance is partly necessary to ensure the conservation and evolution of species (in the sense of more resilient biodiversity) and partly unnecessary or potentially harmful.

Meaning, method and limits of knowledge

Since the *Psychology of Needs* aims to provide knowledge about human nature, I think it is necessary to say something about the meaning of the term *knowledge*, the ways in which a knowledge can be acquired and the limits of knowledge itself, that is, what (and how much) we can and cannot know.

To define and explain the meaning of *knowing*, I think there is no better way than to resort to the metaphor of a map and territory. Indeed, a map expresses a certain knowledge of the relevant territory, yet "the map is not the territory" (a phrase coined by Alfred Korzybski and quoted many times by Gregory Bateson and other authors).

We must never forget that knowledge, or "map," of a reality concerns only certain aspects of it, which are of particular interest to those who use it (e.g., a "physical" map is different from a "political" one). Moreover, a knowledge, like a map, can be more or less detailed and complex. However, it is clear that reality is infinitely more complex than any map or description that represents it.

A knowledge can be acquired through direct experience of a "territory" (this is the case for those who draw a map from scratch), or by copying a pre-existing map drawn by others.

In a map there are drawings and words. Drawings are images that more or less faithfully reproduce real shapes in greater or less detail, while words have a meaning defined in some vocabulary. Through words we associate particular points on the map with proper names and common names with particular meanings, which constitute *abstractions* of real objects and features.

When we look at a map or remember it, we "imagine" the territory it represents. However, a drawing is not the thing drawn and a word is not the thing conjured up. Consequently, what we know is not the thing we think we know, but a reduction and transformation of it from a direct perception or a "narrative" provided by someone else. Therefore, every map is subjective in that it offers a partial and arbitrary representation of a reality and provides information that is not absolute, but relative to certain purposes.

Knowledge of a reality is also therefore always subjective, as it depends on personal choice of the objects to be represented in the "map" and their purposes, i.e., the use for which it is intended.

If we do not want to continue to unconsciously and uncritically use "maps" of reality subjectively drawn by other people (whom we often do not even know), we should begin to ask ourselves some questions about the maps themselves, and eventually consciously draw new maps that better meet our own defined purposes and criteria.

The fundamental question concerns what objects the map should represent, and at what level of detail, since a map cannot represent everything.

Once the types of objects to be represented and their level of detail have been chosen, it is necessary to decide how to qualify the different objects, i.e., which names (proper or common) to associate with each of them, to express their identity and their "properties" (i.e., qualities, characteristics, functions, etc.), starting with a vocabulary that includes all the possible properties

that an object can have.

After representing certain objects (constituting a certain reality) and associating each object with certain "properties," it is important to indicate in the map the "relationships" between the objects themselves, i.e., which object is connected with which other and how they interact, i.e., what they exchange in terms of information, energy and/or substances.

This stage of "knowledge" is most important because, as Gregory Bateson taught us, we cannot know things per se, but only the relationships between them. In fact, the "properties" of an object are nothing more than a description of its capabilities and ways of interacting with other objects.

A certain "map" of a certain "reality" constitutes a "context" in which certain events take place. These can be objects of knowledge as causes of changes" in the context itself.

Indeed, while the metaphor of map and territory corresponds to knowledge of "static" realities, another metaphor is needed to account for knowledge of "dynamic" realities. For this purpose, I believe there is no better metaphor than that of a computer (i.e., a cybernetic system) that behaves according to a set of "logics" also called software, programs or algorithms.

A cybernetic system is characterized by an external interface through which input (input) and output (output) information is exchanged. The logic of the system defines how the system itself should react to certain inputs, that is, what outputs it should generate in the face of certain inputs. We can in this sense consider inputs as "causes" and outputs as "effects."

We can at this point speak of two types of knowledge:

- "Associative" knowledge, which aims to create a map of a reality, consisting of spatial and/or temporal associations (or juxtapositions) between phenomena;
- "causal" knowledge, which aims to establish "logical" cause-and-effect relationships between events generated by objects in the associative reference map.

Just as a "map" represents only a tiny part of an associative reality, a logic (or "reasoning"), represents only a tiny part of a causal reality, that is, one of the infinite number of logics that determine the behaviors of the objects involved.

Added to this is the fact that each entity (i.e., physical or logical object) is part of a higher-level entity and made up of lower-level entities, so knowing an entity (at a certain level) requires knowledge of the entity (or entities) of which it is a part, and of the entities that make it up. In this sense, knowledge of an entity requires its "division" into lower-level entities. Indeed, the Latin etymology of the term "reason" (in the sense of rationality) is equivalent to "division." Thus, it could be said that to understand anything one must first divide it into parts to be later reassembled by observing the relationships present among them.

The knowledge provided in the next chapters consists of "maps" and "logics" that represent the "objects" contained in the mind and the relationships between those objects and external objects.

Such knowledge does not claim to be complete or objective. They are in fact the result of my choice of what is most important to consider for the purposes of this book. However, I am

aware that I can only represent a small part of the complex reality of nature in general and human nature in particular.

Life, information, cybernetics

Gregory Bateson taught us that the life of any living thing, from protozoa to humans, is based on information and its processing, and he defines information as "any difference that makes a difference."

As a "difference," information is therefore immaterial. In fact, the difference between an object A and an object B lies not in either, but in the comparison "between" the two. In metaphysical terms, if spirit means something that can act on matter while not being material, then information could be said to be "spirit."

While immaterial, any information "needs" material support (mass and/or energy) in order to be transmitted, stored and processed, so there can be no information without matter (organic or inorganic) or energy to support it. In metaphysical terms, one could say that there can be no spirit outside some matter or energy that hosts or transports it.

As the word itself suggests, information "informs" (i.e., shapes) life, instructs it, acting on its organic matter according to certain "logics." This is what makes the difference between a nonliving and a living object. In what follows we shall call an "organism" a living object composed of organs (and these in turn composed of lower-level organs) governed by biological laws and algorithmic logic.

The essential, vital function of information for life, which our ancestors could not have known, is today evident (and indisputable) in the genetic code of every living species, which is in fact composed of information written on molecular media (such as DNA and RNA). Nor can we rule out the possibility that in the future it will be discovered that there is vital "information" at the subatomic level as well.

An organism is an organized "whole" composed of organized parts, which we call "organs." These behave according to certain logic written in the genetic code. Some of these organs (such as certain parts of the brain) are also capable of learning, that is, of developing codes of behavior as a result of experiences. By the behavior of an organ I mean the logic by which, in the face of certain inputs (information, energies and substances) from certain other organs, objects or environmental states, it generates certain outputs to certain other organs or objects.

The overall behavior of an organism and that of its organs can be random if they follow no logic, or "logical" if they follow logics. In nature, the behaviors of living things and their organs are normally almost entirely governed by logic, but with some degree of randomness. This serves to ensure biodiversity, as it promotes the survival of genes.

For example, in sexual reproduction, the embryo inherits parental genes half from the father and half from the mother, but the origin of each gene from either parent is entirely random, as is the sex of the embryo itself. The randomness of the mixing of genes produces embryos that are always different from the parents, so that some combinations turn out to be better adapted to the environment, others less suitable. Those that are more suitable are favored in natural selection by increasing the odds of preservation of the species and by positively evolving the species itself in the direction of better biological equipment.

Following Gregory Bateson's teaching, any organism (i.e., any living object) can be considered as a cybernetic system, that is, an organized whole consisting of material parts (hardware) and intangible parts (software, i.e., information). Every "living" cybernetic system interacts with external objects (living and nonliving) by self-governing according to certain algorithms.

The information that constitutes the software of a cybernetic system (living or nonliving) is divided into "data" and "instructions." Data are analyzed and processed by the system according to the instructions of its software.

A living system's software is partly inherited from its predecessors (as genetic code) and partly "learned" through the system's own interactive experiences.

The idea that every living being, and humans in particular, function as a cybernetic system (such as an ordinary computer) is still unacceptable to most people today. The most common objection to such an idea is that we are "much more" than a computer and very different from it, especially in that we are endowed with consciousness, feelings and free will, while the computer is a machine without consciousness or feelings, merely carrying out the orders of its programmer.

Another objection is that the behavior of a human being is not as rigid as that of a computer, but more or less random, not predefined, precisely as a consequence of free will.

To such objections I reply that while there are differences between a computer and a human being, these do not concern the general principles of a cybernetic system, but rather collateral aspects, such as the following.

- The hardware of a computer is generally made of inorganic, "hard" and fixed material, while that of a living being is made of organic, "flexible" material that is capable of growth and destined to decompose after death (and partly before).
- The software of a living being is enormously more complex than that of a computer, and only minimally decipherable by humans.
- A computer's software is generally modified only by an external programmer, whereas an organism has the ability to self-program; however, computers capable of independently modifying their programs can already be built today.
- It does not appear that a computer could be endowed with consciousness and feelings, but this is probably true of many other living species. Indeed, it can be reasonably assumed that consciousness and feelings have "emerged" in the course of evolution as a result of genetic mutations, nor can it be ruled out that in the more or less distant future a computer will acquire consciousness and feelings, since these are still mysterious phenomena even to neuroscientists.

If it is reasonable to admit that a human being has something more than an ordinary computer, I also think it is reasonable to assert that a human being functions and behaves like a computer, that is, like a cybernetic system (both overall and at the level of its organs down to its cells).

I cannot prove with scientific arguments what I have stated, however I will attempt to do so conceptually based on the idea of the "logic of behavior."

The behavior of a living or nonliving system can theoretically be completely random, completely algorithmic, or hybrid (i.e., partially algorithmic and partially random). My view is that human behavior is hybrid, that is, almost completely algorithmic but with random choices predicted by the algorithm itself. In fact, a computer program can predict random choices, as is the case, for example, in the software that governs slot machines, which are now completely digital.

The non-random part of human behavior, not being random, is by definition subject to certain criteria, i.e., certain logics such as, "if X happens do Y, otherwise do Z." The logics by which we choose (consciously or unconsciously) are predefined, that is, programmed. Someone might object that a human being can "improvise" a new logic of behavior at the very moment he or she needs to make a choice. To that objection I reply that the new logic will either be "drawn" at random (and in that case it would fall under the random component of behavior) or it will be drawn according to another higher-level predefined logic. In fact, humans continually design logics, or strategies, to achieve their goals, based on higher-level predefined logics, or guiding principles. In other words, a logic can generate subordinate level logics.

The overall behavior of a human being is thus determined by an enormous number of logics present in his various organs (not only within the brain), each of which helps to steer the person in a certain direction, sometimes in conflict with what other logics dictate. Just as in physics the force applied to an object is the resultant (i.e., the combination) of all the forces applied to it in all possible directions, so a person's choices are the effect of the combination of all the logics (conscious and unconscious) that intervene at any given moment.

Mind, ecology, society

Gregory Bateson, in his book "Mind and Nature," defines "mind" as an entity that meets the following criteria (parts in italics are my comments):

1. **It is an aggregate of interacting parts or components.**
2. **Interaction between the parts of the mind is triggered by "differences" (i.e., *information*);** these consist of intangible phenomena that cannot be located in space or time. The "difference" concerns entropy and negentropy rather than energy. *In fact, the greater the entropy of a context, the more information needed to describe it.*
3. **The mental process requires collateral energy.**
4. **The mental process requires circular (or even more complex) chains of determination. *This means that a mind considers the effects of its behavior to determine its subsequent behavior.***
5. **In the mental process, the effects of differences must be regarded as transformations (i.e., encoded versions) of events that preceded them.** The rules of these transformations must be comparatively stable (i.e., more stable than the content) but are themselves subject to transformations. *The differences (i.e., information) that a mind perceives (and on the basis of which it acts) do not coincide with the facts that caused them, but are the result of transformations and encodings operated automatically by the organs involved in perception.*
6. **The description and classification of these transformation processes reveal a hierarchy of logical types immanent to phenomena.** Logical types are *meta-information, i.e., information that is used to decode, interpret, classify, and contextualize other information, i.e., to enable its understanding.*

The following considerations are deduced from these criteria:

- a mind does not necessarily belong to a living being (in fact, even computers have minds);
- A mind does not need a consciousness;
- a mind does not necessarily reside in a single organism, but can be distributed over several organisms;
- a mind can be constituted by the organization and cooperation of several minds.

For these reasons, we can assume, among other things, that every cell of an organism possesses a mind, and that the human mind (understood as a conscious mind) emerges from the interaction of various unconscious minds distributed throughout the brain and the rest of the body.

Bateson further asserts that what we call thought, evolution, ecology, life, learning and similar phenomena occur only in systems that meet the above criteria, that is, within or as a result of "minds."

In the previous chapter we stated that a living being is a cybernetic system. We can therefore consider the mind the "software" of such a system.

Moreover, considering that every living being needs to interact with other living things in order to live, we can consider the biosphere an "ecology of minds" (a term coined by Gregory Bateson) and assume that the essential function of a mind is precisely to "manage" the interactions between its host body and external bodies, as well as the interactions between its internal organs.

One could logically divide the human mind into two sections: one "social" and one "non-social."

The first is "in charge" of managing social relationships and interactions, that is, providing the logics (conscious and unconscious) of social behavior according to which we know and decide what to do and not to do, say and not say, believe and not believe in regard to our fellow human beings. The second deals with managing relationships and interactions in which other human beings are not involved. It is obvious that the social mind is by far the most interesting and problematic, especially since Homo Sapiens invented (or discovered) language and culture. Not that the "non-social" mind is simple, but it is almost completely automatic and instinctive, and does not cause concern, at least until it becomes the object of social prescription or disease or dysfunction.

For this reason, when we talk about the mind and psychology, we normally refer to the social part of the mind, that is, the part that directly or indirectly involves other people.

For George Herbert Mead, the mind is a social device, which develops through social interactions and serves to manage them. For this purpose, the entity called by Mead "generalized Other" plays a key role in that it represents the set of possible social roles learned by a subject through interactions with others. Thus, the generalized Other could be said to represent society.

Given the interdependence of human beings, that is, the fact that everyone needs others in order to survive and satisfy his or her needs, we can say that the main purpose of the mind is to manage the relationships between the subject and others in order to satisfy his or her own and others' needs.

It is good to reflect on the relationship between the individual and society by seeing it as the relationship between the mind of a certain individual and the idea of society that has been constructed in his mind from his social experiences.

What we call "society" is in fact a mental construct to which we tend to ascribe characteristics as if it were a homogeneous organism endowed with its own autonomy and personality. I doubt that society or any society, even if it is organized, can be considered a homogeneous and integrated organism, and see it rather as a collection of human beings linked by more or less stable and codified relationships.

In this regard, it is important to consider the circularity of the relationship between individual and society, that is, the fact that a society is "formed" by its members, whose minds are "formed" by the society in which they grow up and live. In other words, society "forms" its members, but these

members can (at least in theory) "reform" the society that formed them (assuming they are capable of reforming themselves first).

To sum up, we can consider society an ecology of human minds whose function, as with any ecology, should be to meet the needs of the interacting parties.

Logical structure of the mind

Consistent with what has been said in the previous chapters, we can assume that the human mind is a system that is part of a higher-level system, and that it in turn consists of parts, or lower-level systems. To know and understand the mind, therefore, it is necessary to analyze:

- The system to which it belongs
- With what other parts of that system (and how) it interacts
- Which parts it consists of
- How these parts interact with each other.

This is a "systems" approach to knowledge of the mind, applicable to any other entity.

Since we cannot (yet) observe the structure of the mind directly, we only have to make assumptions about it from the study of human behavior, introspection and the results of neurobiological research. This procedure is analogous to the so-called "reverse engineering" of computer scientists who, having lost the source code of a certain software, try to reconstruct it by deducing it from the external behavior of the host computer and from examining the active binary code in its memory.

That said, we can reasonably assume that the next higher level system to which a mind belongs is what we call by various names including "person," "individual," "organism," "body," etc.

The term "individual" etymologically means "not divisible." However, today we know that it is actually "divided" into parts, even though these cannot be taken away without causing death or serious malfunction of the individual itself. As Antonio Damasio teaches us, the Cartesian division of the person into body and mind is therefore erroneous. In fact, the mind is part of the body that houses it, in addition to the fact that it cannot be circumscribed or located at any precise point of it. It should also be remembered that an information (immaterial entity) cannot exist without something material to support or transport it, so a mind (which is a processor of information) cannot exist without a body to support it.

As we mentioned in a previous chapter, to understand something we must first divide it into parts (logical or physical) and then mentally bring them together by observing the relationships that bind them.

Having shown that it would not make sense to divide the "person" into body and mind, that is, into a physical part and a mental part (in fact, even cells have a mind) the first meaningful division of a "person" (that is, a human body) is in my opinion that between the conscious self and the rest of the body, which we can therefore call the "unconscious body."

By "conscious self" or "consciousness," I mean that mysterious entity that makes us aware of ourselves, of existing, of feeling, of making choices and expressing will.

Having defined the conscious self, the unconscious body is defined by subtraction, namely:

unconscious body = total body - conscious self

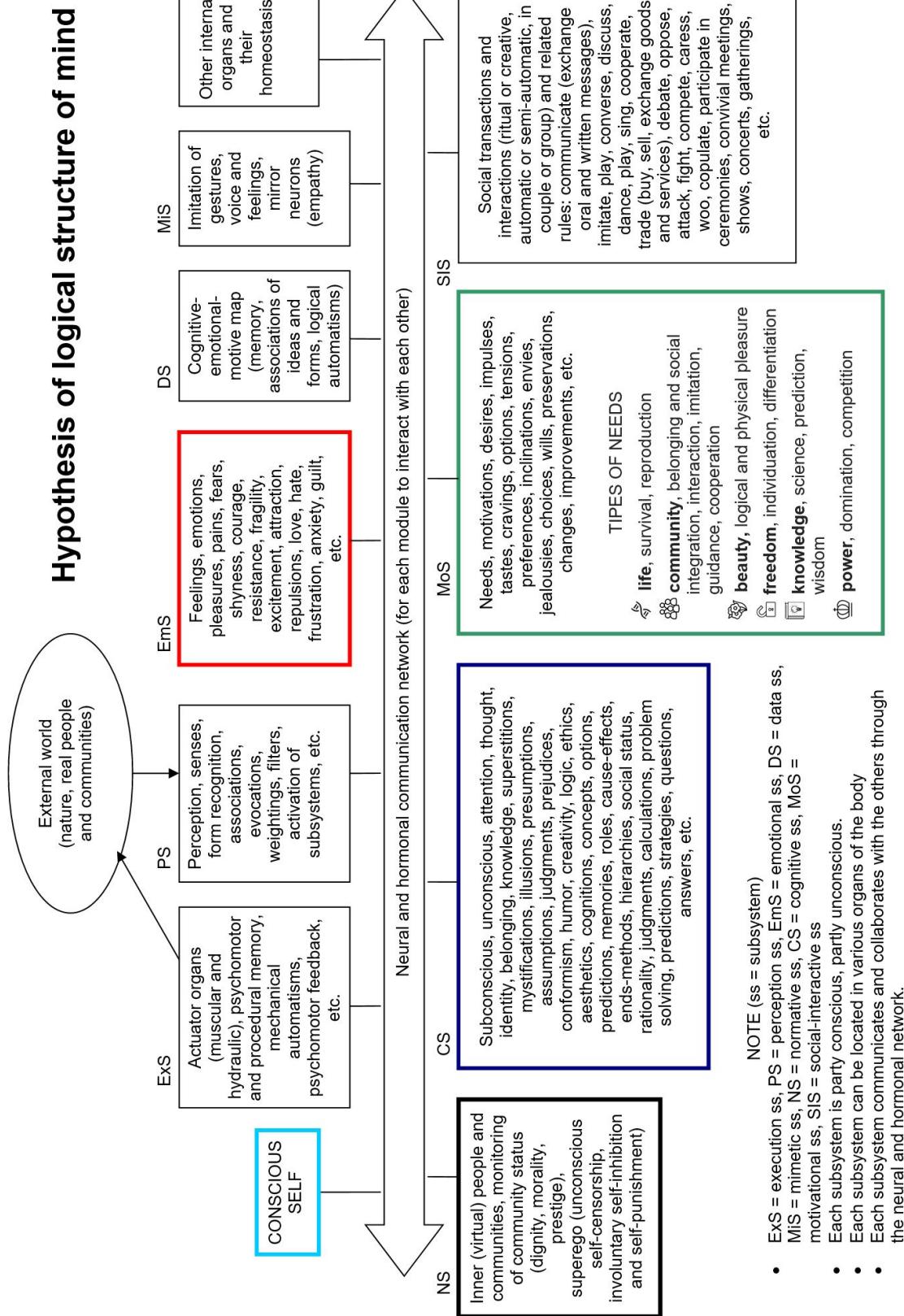
The conscious self has the ability (real or illusory, as we shall see in the chapter on free will) to command the voluntary muscles of its host body, although the same voluntary muscles can also be commanded by automatisms of which the subject is unaware.

We can therefore say that the unconscious body consists of a large number (on the order of billions and more) of cybernetic subsystems of various levels that are completely automatic and not subject to the will of the conscious self, with few exceptions.

We can further assume that the subsystems that make up the unconscious body interact according to certain logics (genetically determined or interactively learned) designed to keep the organism alive and ensure the reproduction of its species.

We can assume that the interaction between the subsystems of the unconscious body occurs through the nervous system (which we can consider as the body's *internet*), the hormonal system, and perhaps in other ways that science has not yet identified.

The following figure represents in a simplified (but not too reductive) way the parts into which the mind can be divided and the complex interactions between the automatisms of the unconscious body that we can hypothesize. These are grouped into a series of hypothetical subsystems, which communicate and interact with each other through the neural and hormonal network.



The "neural and hormonal network" is represented by a two-headed arrow, a symbol used in computer science to represent a "bus" or electronic apparatus that allows all components connected to it to exchange data with each other, thus avoiding the need for direct physical connections between components. In fact, thanks to the "bus," each component uses only one connector instead of one for each other component with which it interacts.

I have indicated with a colored border the subsystems that I consider most important from a psychological point of view.

The conscious self is the only subsystem with awareness and (perhaps) free will. All others are unconscious. However, the conscious self exchanges information with other subsystems so that, for example, it is able to experience feelings (input from the emotional subsystem), drives (input from the motive subsystem), inhibitions and restraints (input from the normative subsystem), think notions (input from the cognitive subsystem), recognize situations and objects present (input from the perceptual subsystem), and issue commands to voluntary muscles (output to the actuation subsystem).

The functions of the various subsystems, hinted at in the relevant boxes, as well as their interconnections, will be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

Subjectivity and awareness (consciousness)

By "subject" we normally mean one who acts, who performs an action, while by "object" we mean one who is subjected to another's action, that is, one who is affected by it. Curiously enough, we also use the word "subject" in the opposite sense (i.e., passive) to mean one who is "subject" to an authority, i.e., who is subject to it or who suffers an action of others. But even then, we can understand the passive subject as the active subject of the action of obeying, following, and respecting authority.

Talking about human beings and their behavior, we tend to consider each person as a "subject" (of his or her own active and passive actions and perceptions), as if the person were an indivisible whole that decides from time to time what actions to take and what things to perceive. In fact, the person who says "I," normally understands himself as the subject of his own actions, his own existence ("I" exist) and his consciousness or awareness ("I" know that ..., I am aware that ..., I feel that ... etc.). Therefore, we can say that subjectivity (that is, being the subject of one's actions and perceptions) coincides with what we call the person's "I." The same goes for the other personal pronouns: "you," "he," "she," "us," "you," "them," etc. In fact, we use all these pronouns to refer to certain persons as indivisible "subjects."

However, on closer inspection, things are not as they seem. For, first of all, it is not true that the person, or individual, is indivisible (as the term "individual" would imply). In fact, the person is a collection of interacting parts, most of which are excluded from decisions about what to do and how to do it. For example, my feet or kidneys do not (normally) intervene in decisions about my social behavior.

If all parts of my body are not "subject" to my actions, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, consciousness, and wills, which parts are? This is the question.

Sigmund Freud was one of the first scholars to deal rationally with this problem, resulting in the division of the mind into three entities: the ego (understood as the conscious self, that is, the seat of consciousness or awareness), the id (understood as all biological mechanisms and automatisms), and the superego (understood as a series of automatisms of cultural origin that exert pressure on the ego in a normative, prescriptive and inhibitory sense). Freud's quote "the ego is not master in its own house" is to be understood in this sense. In what follows by "I" as a component of the mind we shall mean the "conscious self."

Freud's great merit (regardless of the validity of his psychoanalytic theory) was that he taught us that the mind is not something unitary, integrated, conscious and coherent, but a set of "agents" more or less in agreement with each other, of which only one, the "I" (understood as the conscious self), is aware of itself and the rest of the world, while everything else acts autonomously and independently of the "I" itself, indeed exercising authority over it. In other words, Freud "formalized" the existence of the unconscious (already intuited by philosophers such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and writers such as Dostoevsky), attributing to it a certain number of properties and functions, which entail a certain "power" over the conscious self.

Today, the existence of the unconscious is generally accepted, even in religious circles, but with different connotations, more or less extensive. Consequently, we can say that the self

does not coincide with the whole person or the whole mind, but constitutes "only" a part of it. It follows from this that there are relations between the conscious self and the rest of the mind (i.e., the body), where the "I" does not occupy a particular hierarchical position.

The conscious self is distinguished from the rest of the body, first of all, by its awareness, or consciousness. In fact, by definition it is the only conscious component of the body. This statement does not rule out the possibility that there are other parts in the human body with consciousness, but if this were the case they would be consciousnesses that are not communicating with the "central" one, namely that of the "I," the only one of which we are conscious until proven otherwise.

The ego consciousness can be divided into three parts that are intimately connected in the sense that each depends on the other two:

- knowledge (or cognitive part)
- the feeling (or emotional part)
- the will (or motivating part)

If any of the parts of this triad were missing, the other two could not exist. In fact, without the cognitive part, that is, without the possibility of knowing anything, feelings and will could not be associated with any object or concept, and thus would be "useless" and meaningless from a biological point of view. If the emotional part were missing, will and knowledge could not be associated with any object or concept, since nothing would have "value," so they would be useless and meaningless from a biological point of view. If the motivational part were missing, the other two would be useless because the person would not be able to will or desire anything, not even to continue living.

It could be argued that there are living beings not endowed with consciousness but capable of "knowing," "feeling," and "wanting," but they would be unconscious knowledge, feelings, and will, and as such would not be part of a "conscious self" and would not be known to it.

The triad of consciousness, that is, the conscious self, is a mystery to me both scientifically and philosophically. A mystery in the sense that we cannot see it or touch it or measure it, nor do we know how it came into being. In fact, it is a tautology in the sense that it cannot be explained except in a self-referential way.

Although the triad is a mysterious object, it is the only thing whose existence and importance is certain. Everything else is in fact uncertain, questionable, deceptive, hypothetical in that it is known and perceived through the triad itself, which we do not know except through its effects and some of its relations to the rest of the body.

For we know that a person can lose consciousness (for example, due to physical or mental trauma) and then regain it, and we know that certain perceptions or thoughts can evoke a knowledge or memory, arouse a feeling and activate a will or desire. We also know that knowledge, feelings and will are mutually activated, that is, that each influences the other two, we know that they depend on the state of the rest of the body, that they die when the body dies, and that, on the other hand, the body dies or continues to live in a vegetative state if it permanently loses consciousness.

We can therefore speculate about the relationships between the components of the triad and between them and the rest of the body.

The most important things we know in this regard are as follows:

- feelings span a continuum between maximum pleasure and maximum pain, both physical and "mental."
- the will tends toward maximum pleasure and minimum pain, both "here and now" and in the indefinite future;
- knowledge allows one to develop logics (i.e., strategies and tactics) to achieve maximum pleasure and minimum pain;
- there are particular things that cause pleasure and particular things that cause pain;
- certain pains are associated with potentially deadly situations, and certain pleasures are associated with the preservation of life and its reproduction.

From the above, we can assume that the knowledge-feeling-will triad is the most "evolved" (from an evolutionary perspective), i.e., the most recent and sophisticated tool by which the human species secures its preservation and reproduction, i.e., meets its vital needs. Indeed, we assume that consciousness "emerged" (we do not know whether gradually or suddenly) during evolution.

In the following chapters we will examine the ways in which the elements of the triad intervene in the satisfaction of a person's needs.

Unconscious

As mentioned in the previous chapter, by "unconscious" I mean the whole person (that is, both his material and immaterial parts) minus his conscious part, that is, minus the conscious self.

This definition of mine coincides only slightly with the psychoanalytic definition, which defines the unconscious as a repository of information removed as conflicting with the subject's moral principles.

In fact, Freud, in his first topic of the psyche, divides it into three zones: the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious, where the subconscious, unlike the unconscious, contains information that can without difficulty become conscious insofar as it has no morally reprehensible connotations.

I believe that the distinction between unconscious and subconscious is useless and misleading. Useless because it does not help us to make conscious what is unconscious, and misleading because it can lead us to look for connotations and moral aspects in problematic situations independent of ethical issues. In other words, I believe that the difficulty in becoming aware of certain facts is not necessarily attributable to ethical or moral aspects.

Consistent with Samuel Butler's thought taken up by Tiziano Possamai in his essay "Unconscious and Repetition," I make no distinction between subconscious and unconscious, and include in the concept of unconscious any mechanism, automatism, logic or algorithm present and acting in any part of a body, of which the subject is unaware for whatever reason, (ethical or not), even if the subject itself is influenced or governed by them.

For example, in the unconscious I include automatisms such as playing a musical instrument or driving a car. In fact, after a certain number of repetitions, certain sequences of gestures become automatic in the sense that they are performed by the subject without the need for the subject to *remember* the steps from which they consist. In fact, it is enough for the subject to decide to implement a certain procedure, and it is performed as if another person or robot were doing it.

When I think, "I" (understood as the conscious self) do not choose the individual thoughts, i.e., individual concepts, individual words that follow one another in my consciousness, but to do so are unconscious automatisms activated by decisions, i.e., logic, of a higher level.

In fact, the behavior of a living being is structured in levels as in a human organizational pyramid, where, starting from the highest levels of command, directives are issued in increasingly detailed form going down the hierarchy.

Let us take another example. Let us imagine that, faced with danger, a person decides to flee. At the top of the "will" pyramid, an agent orders to "flee." But the person who issues the command, does not carry it out. At the next lower hierarchical level, "someone" or "something," that is, a certain mental agent, in obeying the order, decides in which direction to flee and by which means (on foot or by means of a motor vehicle). At the hierarchical level below, if the decision is to flee on foot in a certain direction, "someone" orders to move

the legs in such a way as to cause a move away from the place of danger; at the next lower hierarchical level "someone" orders when to make the leg muscles contract and when to release them in such a way as to achieve the desired effect. The entire chain of command is unconscious, except (perhaps) the highest hierarchical level, which is capable of doing nothing more than issuing orders to entities capable of executing them.

As for the "psychoanalytic" unconscious this is included in my general concept of the unconscious as a special case of unconscious automatisms. In fact, the drives of the es and the prescriptions of the superego are to be considered mental agents intervening in the "chain of command" mentioned above, in higher or lower hierarchical positions and with greater or lesser intensity and potentially in conflict with other agents. On the concept of "mental agent" see the chapter devoted to it.

Needs, desires, motivations

Life, genes and needs

As mentioned in the Introduction, I consider needs (and the dynamics of their satisfaction) essential to the generation and maintenance of life in organisms and related species.

Indeed, as Richard Dawkins teaches, at the root of every living being's behavior is the *need for* its genes to reproduce using the means and strategies that they have developed over the course of evolution and that are encoded in the DNA of the species that carries them. In this sense, organisms can be considered gene *replicators* and each species a peculiar reproductive strategy.

Beginning with the fundamental need for genes to reproduce, I assume that the various *needs of* organisms and their organs have *emerged* in the course of evolution, that is, the mechanisms that drive the organism (and the conscious self in humans) to procure, when needed, what is *necessary* to ensure their survival as individuals, and the preservation of their species.

The "when needed" is determined by *homeostatic* mechanisms, which in higher animals are related to pleasure and pain in their various forms, as taught by Antonio Damasio.

Homeostatic mechanisms and the needs to which they are related serve to manage the preservation of the concerned organ or the whole organism through appropriate internal or external changes. In fact, every organ, in order to function, *needs to* be in a certain biochemical state between two *threshold quantities*, below and above which it ceases to function properly or dies. When the state of the organ approaches one of the limiting quantities, processes are activated to bring the state of the organ back toward the optimal position, that is, the median position between the two limits.

Such processes may *require* some cooperation with other organs and give rise to changes in the behavior of the organism such as to promote the return to a *healthy state of* the organ that required intervention to restore its optimal state.

In this sense, the mind, prompted by demands generated by certain organs, can be the instrument through which actions are decided and implemented to meet those demands. The most trivial example of such mechanisms is that of hunger, which prompts the mind to find a solution to procure food for the body, a solution that may require an action, that is, a temporary or permanent change, in the person's behavior. Sometimes, therefore, the body *needs to* change something in order to conserve itself. In other words, a need always requires some larger or smaller change, even if only to bring the organism back to a previous state.

I call **primary needs** the genetically determined homeostatic mechanisms, and **secondary needs** those that develop over an organism's lifetime as means or strategies to satisfy the primary ones.

All needs (both primary and secondary) are functionally *ordered* in the sense that each need

is tasked with satisfying one or more higher-order needs and is in turn satisfied through the satisfaction of one or more subordinate needs. In other words, each need is not an end in itself, but serves other needs and is served by additional needs, in a functional network that develops from the primordial need of every living form, which is that of its genes, to reproduce.

Terminology and classification of needs and their derivatives

The term *need*, in common usage, can have several more or less broad meanings and almost always related to situations of distress or lack of which the person is more or less aware. In addition, the concept of need is often contrasted by difference with that of desire. Less used but still relevant are also the concepts of motivation, need, drive, desire, attraction, passion, interest, instinct, will, etc.

In my conception, need represents a *lack* that if not met (or filled) causes the dysfunction, disease or death of an organ or an entire organism (understood as an organ system). In this sense, *need* is the demand for a certain change of state or the acquisition of elements (material or immaterial) that can cause the *needed* change.

If the request for change implies the obtaining of something, then we speak of *positive need*, need for obtaining or need *tout-court*. If, on the other hand, the request implies the elimination, removal or avoidance of something, then we speak of *negative need*, avoidance need or *rejection* need.

In the following I will use the opposite expressions **need** and **rejection** to denote need to obtain and need to avoid, respectively. However, where not better specified, the term need *tout-court* includes both obtaining and avoidance needs in the following.

Regarding the concept of **desire**, I define it as a feeling of *a lack* that, if not satisfied, gives rise to an unpleasant *feeling of frustration* that is more or less intense, but without major health consequences.

As for the concept of **motivation**, I define it as the class to which all phenomena of requesting or seeking change (whether innovative or conservative) belong, a class to which belong the concepts of need, desire, drive, exigency, necessity, attraction, hope, desire, will, etc., and negative ones such as repulsion, avoidance request, allergy, fear, terror, etc.

We saw above that *needs* have a vital function. As for the other types of motivation, and particularly desires, I think they are all derived from *needs*, that is, they are expressions of needs themselves. In fact, if a person desires a certain thing, I do not believe that the object of desire, nor the mechanism of attraction is random, i.e., I am certain that there is a *reason* or *rationale* why a desire is formed and manifested, and I assume that each desire constitutes an *attempt* (like others) to satisfy an underlying need. In other words, through the satisfaction of a desire a need is also satisfied, at least in part and for a longer or shorter time.

Note: For simplicity's sake, when I use the term "need" without specification, I mean "motivation" for it, thus including "desire" and other derivatives of needs.

It is interesting to note the connection that may exist between the concept of *need* and the

concept of *feeling*. In fact, many needs are associated with feelings (for example, fear and repulsion are feelings normally associated with avoidance needs or desires).

In this regard, I believe that feeling is the measure and signal of the degree of satisfaction of one or more needs. That is, pleasure (in its various forms, including joy) arises from the satisfaction of a need, and physical pain (as well as *mental* suffering) from its dissatisfaction. We can consequently assume that without needs there would be no feelings, no emotions, no pleasures, no pains, no joys, no sadness, and perhaps no consciousness either.

Before we delve into a classification of needs, it is necessary to consider that while primary needs are by definition "healthy," that is, they have developed in the phylogeny of our species to promote the survival and reproduction of our organisms, secondary needs (induced or self-induced due to the influence of culture and learning) may be more or less *healthy* or *diseased*, that is, more or less useful or counterproductive. In fact, I do not think there is any need to prove that every culture and education can have psychopathological and painful effects on certain individuals.

Consequently, when stating the importance of satisfying needs for a person's psychophysical well-being, we need to refer to *healthy* needs.

Classification of human needs

For convenience of analysis, I have divided human needs into the following six classes. The concept of need is understood here in a broad sense and includes instinct, desire, passion, interest, attraction, drive, motivation, hope, etc., and the corresponding rejections, i.e., avoidance needs of that which opposes the satisfaction of the former.



Biological needs

Pertaining to: life, health, survival, sexuality, shelter, nutrition, protection and rearing of offspring, stimulation, sensation, rest, sleep, exercise, hygiene, recovery from disease, etc.



Community needs

Pertaining to: community, cooperation, membership and social integration, imitation, sharing, alliance, affiliation, solidarity, affinity, intimacy, interaction, participation, service, acceptance, approval, acceptance, respect, morality, ritual, dignity, reputation, responsibility, etc.



Freedom needs

Pertaining to: freedom, individuation, diversity, rebellion, opposition, transgression, novelty, innovation, creativity, change, humor, selfishness, reserve, irresponsibility, etc.



Power needs

Pertaining to: power, strength, competition, power, skill, ability, supremacy, superiority, prevalence, dominance, ownership, possession, competitiveness, aggression, control, arrogance, jealousy, envy, etc.



Knowledge needs

They concern: knowledge, language, cognition, understanding, exploration, calculation, measurement, information, observation, surveillance, curiosity, prediction, progress, memory, recording, documentation, etc.



Beauty needs

Pertaining to: beauty, harmony, simplicity, uniformity, conformity, cleanliness, symmetry, synchronism, regularity, purity, rhythm, dance, song, sound, music, poetry, aesthetics, enchantment, etc.

To the six classes listed above, I have added one that affects all the others in the sense that it aims for consistency among them, that is, to avoid and overcome conflicts between needs:



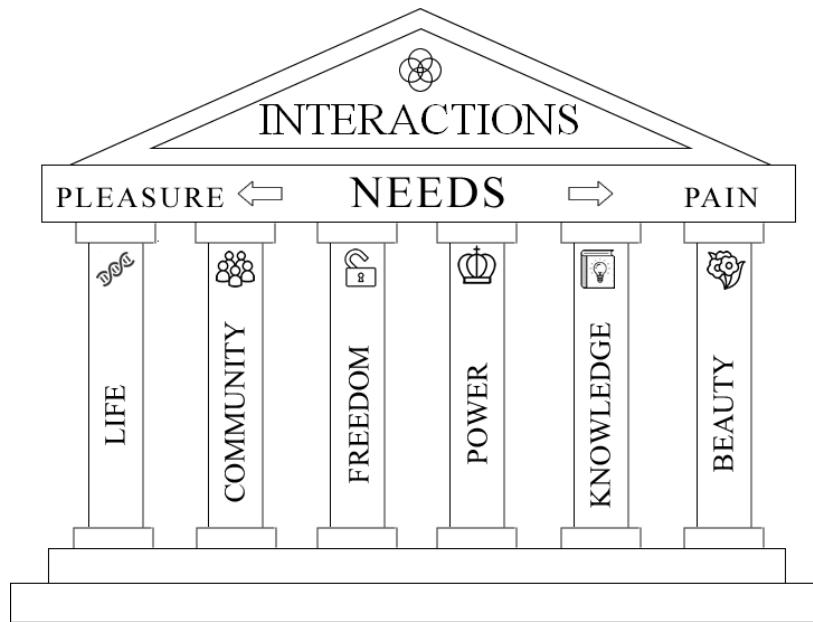
Consistency needs

They concern: consistency, non-contradiction, concordance, conciliation, unity, synthesis, synergy, harmony, order, etc. among needs. They also concern the perception of the "meaning" of existence.

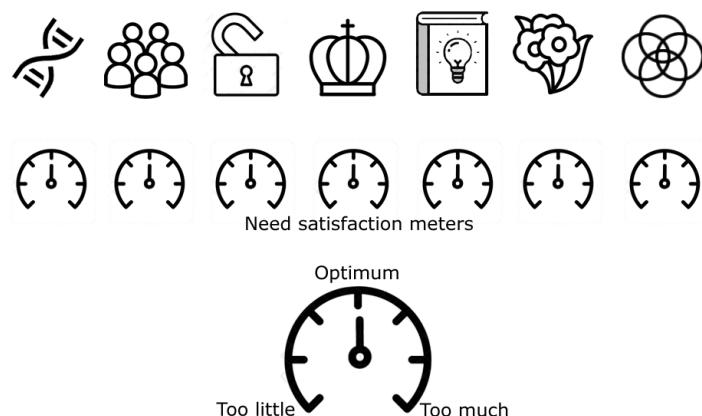
For each of the classes listed above, I assume that there are one or more *mental agents* that are concerned with the satisfaction of the relevant needs autonomously, unconsciously and involuntarily with respect to the conscious self. On this subject see the chapter Mental

Agents.

The following figure is an allegorical representation of the above-defined classes of needs, in which the relationship between needs and feelings (pleasure and pain) is alluded to, and the fact that needs cause humans to interact with the outside world, and in particular with other human beings, in order to satisfy those needs and thus ensure the life and stability of the individual as well as the preservation of his species.



The following figure metaphorically illustrates the fact that, for each class of needs, there is a homeostatic mechanism that, starting with the "measure" of the satisfaction of those needs, generates motivations and feelings designed to bring the degree of satisfaction to optimal levels as far as possible.



Free will

By free will I mean the ability to voluntarily and consciously choose what to do, without any external or internal compulsion.

On the nature and existence of free will theologians, philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists, and no specialists have debated and continue to debate for centuries without arriving at a general consensus. The positions of different authors fall between two extremes: the first states that every sane man fully possesses free will; the second states that free will is an illusion since our choices are always decided by unconscious, automatic and involuntary mechanisms and algorithms that depend on genetic predispositions combined with environmental conditioning. In between these extremes we find doubtful, agnostic, possibilist, hybrid, etc. positions.

The prevailing trend on this issue recognizes that our choices are largely determined by genetic and environmental factors over which we have no control. The controversy therefore concerns whether the individual can, to a certain extent and under certain circumstances, overcome these factors by his or her own will. There is a vast literature on the issue, which I do not intend to summarize in this text as it is readily available, even in summary form, on the Internet.

I considered to deal with the topic of free will in this book because I consider it very relevant to the understanding of human nature and psychological and psychotherapeutic mechanisms. In fact, the approach to solving psychological and psychiatric problems differs greatly depending on how one conceives of free will: those who affirm the prevalence of free will over genetic and environmental conditioning are convinced that in order to achieve certain improvements in one's own and others' mentality and social relations, one needs above all an effort of will in the desired sense, while those who affirm the non-existence of free will believe that in order to achieve those improvements, one needs to intervene above all in the social environment in general and in particular in the one closest to the individual concerned.

My personal position on the issue is that free will is most likely (but not certainly) illusory, but that, despite its probable nonexistence, it is convenient to consider it really exercisable within very narrow limits. I refer both to the good of the individual concerned and to the good of the society in which he or she lives. Indeed, to affirm with certainty the nonexistence of free will would be to deny all moral responsibility with all the possible negative consequences in human interactions and in the stability of society. In this regard, according to some psychologists, people led to believe less in free will are more likely to behave immorally.

As for the limits of free will, in my conception it boils down to choosing between options defined by external entities or involuntary internal mechanisms, and in the possibility of vetoing all options considered. That is, it would be a matter of making no decision, i.e., doing nothing, which amounts to voluntary immobilization and not following up on any drive.

Outside these limits, in my opinion free will does not exist since we *still* and *necessarily* choose what we like best or what comforts or reassures us most, that is, what makes us feel better or less worse, and this is determined by circumstances and the logic on which our

mental activity is based. Indeed, no one would choose what makes him feel bad unless that feeling bad has a utility, such as, for example, the atonement of a fault.

Added to this is the fact that the thoughts, feelings and motivations that contribute to determining our choices are generated by automatic, unconscious and involuntary mechanisms. As Schopenhauer said, "Man can do what he wants, but he cannot want what he wants."

One possibility to escape from the *forced choices* of our mind might be to entrust to chance the choice among the options that the mind presents to us. But in that case, we could no longer speak of free will since it would be chance that would choose for us, and not our conscious self.

More generally, it can be said that everything that happens (including our "voluntary" choices or deemed as such) happens by chance or according to certain laws or logic. There is no third cause because whatever internal or external agent or *arbiter* we can imagine, this in turn will choose either by chance or by following laws or logics. And the choice between two alternative logics would also occur either randomly or following, in turn, certain laws or logics.

Returning to the relevance of the concept of free will to psychological research and psychotherapy, I find the *conscious illusion* of free will useful in that it motivates us to seek new ideas and solutions to improve ourselves and others, and it makes us morally responsible. On the other hand, awareness of the limits of free will should make us understanding and tolerant of those who behave in ways we do not agree with. Indeed, we may believe that the ability to exercise free will (however limited) differs from person to person and is not easily modified except by special therapeutic exercises, such as those presented in this book.

The exercise of free will should therefore always be regarded as an attempt at self-control that may fail or succeed depending on circumstances and luck.

In the logical structure of the mind (see the dedicated chapter), free will is located in the *conscious self* and constitutes its main function in cooperation with the cognitive, emotional and motive subsystems.

See also the chapter Self-government.

Conflicts and synergies between needs - Origin of mental disorders

Evolution of needs

While each gene has only one need, that of reproduction, an organism has a great number and variety of needs: at least one for each of its organs, indeed, for each of its cells. Indeed, evolution from the eukaryotic cell to complex organisms has resulted in a multiplication of needs in each new species. In other words, the more complex an organism is, the more numerous and diverse are its needs.

Most of an organism's needs are met automatically and unconsciously by homeostatic processes. For example, the maintenance of a certain amount of blood sugar in the blood is regulated automatically by the *behavior* of the pancreas. Other needs may be satisfied through more complex logics of behavior that may require the intervention of multiple organs.

We can assume that the mind is a device that serves to satisfy the needs of its host organism (or organ) through the execution of cybernetic logic. Consequently, we can assume that every homeostatic process is governed by a *mind*, however simple, and that every cell possesses at least one, which operates autonomously and independently of the organism's *central* one located (presumably) in the brain.

Man is almost certainly the most complex being that exists in nature and, as such, the one with the greatest amount and variety of needs (i.e., motivations in the broadest sense). We can therefore say that man is the neediest animal. But what makes human life much more problematic than that of other animals is the conflicting nature of his needs, in the sense that the satisfaction of one of them often results in the frustration of certain others.

Consider in this regard the classes of human needs defined in the previous chapter. The most important needs are the biological ones since the survival of the individual and the preservation of his species depend directly on them. Immediately after, in order of importance, there are, in my opinion, community needs. In fact, man is physically so weak and so poorly equipped compared to other animals that he has an absolute need for the cooperation of others to survive. No human can, in fact, survive without exchanging goods and/or services with other humans, that is, without the support of others, especially during the period before sexual maturity, which is the longest period of any other animal species.

The rearing and protection of offspring, the organization of hunting and agricultural activities, defense against dangerous animals, the exchange of goods, etc., make it essential to be part of at least one community of individuals bound together by commitments of cooperation and mutual aid and succor, as well as the sharing of knowledge and material resources.

Antithesis between community needs and freedom needs

With reference to the classes of needs described in the chapter Needs, Desires, Motivations, after biological needs and community needs, in order of importance there are, in my opinion, **freedom needs**.

The trouble is that being part of a community, i.e., interacting with other people, requires adherence to certain rules in terms of obligations and prohibitions, which entails a limitation of the freedom of the interactors. Consequently, it can be said that the needs for community and the needs for freedom are antithetical. In other words, the more integrated one is in a community, the less free one is, and, conversely, the freer one is, the less integrated one is in a community. This is true (from a logical point of view) even in the case where the limitation of freedom is not perceived as such or is unwelcome.

Human interactions involve the assumption of temporary or permanent complementary roles, such as that of provider and that of service user.

Obviously, the roles of *supplier* and that of *user* can be overlapping and reversible, in the sense that a person A may be *supplier* with respect to a person B and *user* with respect to a person C; or between two persons A and B, at a certain time A may assume the role of supplier and B that of user, and at a later time the roles may be reversed. Other cases are those of barter and business transactions.

Obviously, the roles of *supplier* and *user* between two people can be assumed peacefully or through violence (exercised or threatened). Thus, there is always a risk in interactions between two people that one will exercise violence toward the other, which may result in a response of submission or defensive violence.

The relationship of supply-fruition, or domination-submission, can be established (peacefully or violently) not only between two people, but also between two communities. If the complementary roles are not accepted (willingly or unwillingly) by the parties involved, there are two possible outcomes: separation (or estrangement) of the parties, or a war. Since the supplier-user relationship serves to satisfy needs of the user, we can say that wars arise from conflicts between the needs of one party and those of the other, where solutions for the satisfaction of both cannot be found.

Functions of the needs for power, knowledge and beauty

Right after the needs for freedom, in order of importance, in my opinion, are the **needs for power**.

These serve, on the one hand, to defend oneself against violence from others (both within and outside the communities to which one belongs) and, on the other hand, to have greater *bargaining power* in the negotiation of supplier-user relationships and in the choice of partners.

More generally, the *power* an individual *needs* serves to facilitate the satisfaction of all other needs (i.e., biological, community, knowledge, and beauty needs).

Right after power needs, in order of importance, in my opinion, are **knowledge needs**.

These serve to facilitate primarily the satisfaction of power needs, but also that of all other needs, either directly or through the *power* gained through knowledge. Through knowledge, in fact, the individual knows how to move, knows how to win in competition, knows where

to find or how to produce the resources (material, informational and human) he needs, etc.

In the last place in order of importance in the classes of needs, in my opinion, are to be placed the needs for beauty. Beauty, in fact, is not essential for survival, nor for social integration, yet it constitutes a competitive factor in sexual reproduction (since all things being equal, an individual prefers to mate with the most attractive partner), and a factor of orientation and selection in the search for the satisfaction of all other needs. Indeed, all things being equal, an individual prefers the "most beautiful" option, and beauty is often linked to health, efficiency and harmony in an ecological sense. In other words, beauty often coincides with goodness in the sense that *good* relationships are most often also *beautiful*. In this sense, the pursuit of beauty causes us to make the best choices in interactions with the natural and social environment.

External vs. internal conflicts, double binds, origin of mental disorders

Conflicts between needs can be external or internal. External ones concern the incompatibility between one or more of an individual's needs and those of others. For example, in a situation of resource scarcity, the satisfaction of one person might result in the frustration of another. Concepts such as selfishness and altruism, cooperation and competition, concern external conflict, where one is all the more selfish and all the more competitive the more he or she prioritizes the satisfaction of one's own needs over those of others.

By *internal conflict* I mean the conflict (conscious or unconscious) between two antithetical needs present in an individual. For example, the conflict between the desire for adventure and the fear of its dangers, or the conflict between the desire to eat and the fear of gaining weight.

However, internal conflicts can affect other people, as is often the case.

For example, a subject strongly desires to date a person whom his or her partner does not like. Satisfying that desire could result in breaking the relationship with the partner, but the subject does not want to give up that relationship. Both options (giving up dating the desired person or giving up the relationship with the partner) are painful. If either option were significantly more painful, the subject would opt for the one that is less painful. But if the two options are equally very painful, the subject is in a stalemate and suffering situation that corresponds to the "double bind" theorized by Gregory Bateson and the "cognitive imbalance" theorized by Fritz Heider.

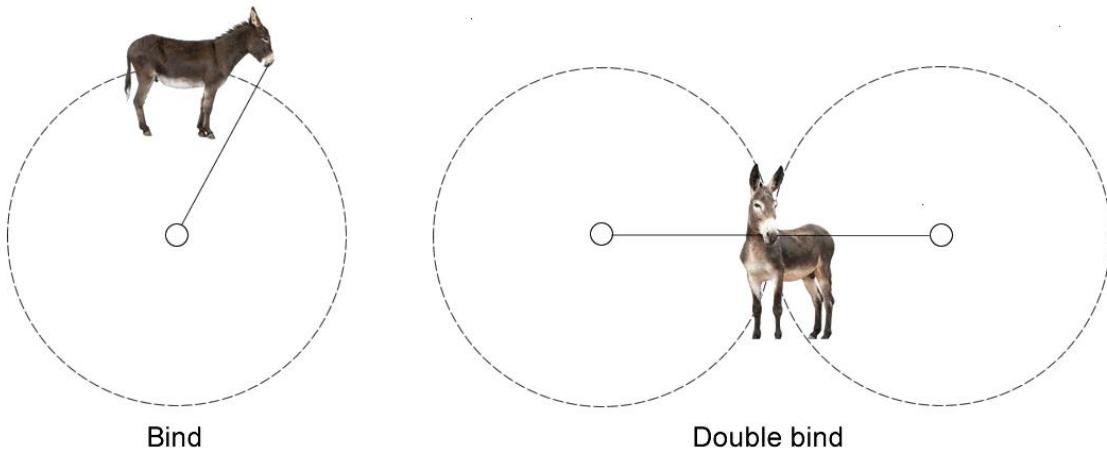
The subject's mind, in fact, wanting to avoid the pain that either choice would entail, decides (consciously or unconsciously) not to choose, becomes immobilized and ends up removing the desire toward both persons, or ends up developing two opposing personalities, one favorable to the first person, the other favorable to the second; incompatible personalities that alternate over time in guiding the person.

For Gregory Bateson, *double bind* (understood as the perception of conflicting social pressures) is the main cause of schizophrenia. In the example given by Bateson, a mother scolds her child for not being affectionate enough toward her, but when the child approaches her, she rejects him. The child is thus torn between the need for intimacy with the mother, and the fear of being punished by her as unwelcome.

For Louis Anepete, the unresolved conflict between the need to belong and the need for individuation (in which one of the two needs is removed in the psychoanalytic sense) is the cause of almost all mental disorders. In his *Structural Dialectical Theory*, Anepete theorizes a structural, permanent conflict between the superego and what he calls the *antithetical self*, which represents what I have called *needs for freedom*. Both the superego and the antithetical self never allow themselves to be completely overwhelmed and, when cornered, exert pressure on the conscious self causing mental disorders such as depression, panic attacks, psychosomatic symptoms or severe psychopathy.

Thus, we can assume that nature, besides endowing us with needs to ensure our survival, has also endowed us with mechanisms such as pain and mental disorders (psychic and psychosomatic) that constitute unconscious *protests, defenses or retaliation* against the frustration and inhibition of needs caused by external social pressures or by the subject himself.

In conclusion, I believe that the presence of a mental disorder or existential suffering is almost always a symptom of some conflict between needs, frustration of a need or an attempt to inhibit or remove it. I also believe that this idea should form the backbone of any psychotherapy and any quest to improve one's mental and physical well-being.



Feelings and emotions, pleasure and pain

Differences between feeling and emotion

Feeling and *emotion*, although they are different concepts, are often used as synonyms, which I also often do to simplify what I write.

From what I have learned, criteria such as the following can be used to distinguish emotion from feeling:

- Emotions are visible from the outside, public, while feelings are internal, private.
- Emotions are short-lived, while feelings last much longer.
- Emotions are generally variable, feelings more stable.
- Feelings are subjective experiences of emotions.
- The main characteristic of feelings is affection, a term by which is meant the awareness of pleasure or pain, or of the pleasant or unpleasant character of the object of emotion.
- Feelings are conscious representations of past emotions (memories of emotions), present emotions (current emotions) or future emotions (expectations of emotions).
- Feelings are weak emotional experiences, devoid of impulse to action and physical upset.

In this regard, the Treccani Encyclopedia states:

"Emotions and feelings manifest as states of psychological and physiological activation in response to a change in one's physical, social, or mental environment. According to neuroscientists, emotions can be described as the set of publicly observable responses as a result of the activation of a certain bodily state related to certain mental images; feelings, on the other hand, refer to the individual's experience of such changes, thus the private experience of emotions. Moreover, emotions, as "public" manifestations are short-lived and transient states, while feelings can remain active for a longer period."

From the above I infer that emotions and feelings are made of the same substance that manifests in different forms, durations and intensities. In other words, an emotion is a rather strong, evident and short-lived feeling.

Therefore I use the terms *feeling* and *emotion* as synonyms, leaving it up to the reader, depending on the context, to assess whether they are emotions or feelings proper.

Activation of feelings

Feelings are not *felt* randomly, but are activated by particular perceptions from outside or inside. For example, witnessing a scene of violence may elicit feelings of fear or aggression. On the other hand, thinking about a certain past or impending pleasant or unpleasant event may elicit equally pleasant or unpleasant feelings.

Since witnessing the same event or remembering it can elicit different feelings from person to person, we must assume that the activation of feelings depends on the particular

relationship between the perceived event and *something* associated with that particular *type of event* in the subject's memory.

In this regard, I hypothesize the existence of a "cognitive-emotional map" that the mind uses to recognize the type of event and elicit feelings associated with that type, as well as any particular motivations, i.e., certain demands for action.

A special chapter in this book is devoted to the "cognitive-emotional map."

Feelings as forms of pleasure and pain

In my opinion, feelings are always expressions of pleasure and/or pain, that is, they always have a connotation (overt, implied or hidden) of pleasant or unpleasant pathos.

Take, for example, the following list of common feelings (or emotions): joy, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, sympathy, empathy, attraction, repulsion, safety, insecurity, love, submission, confusion, admiration, disapproval, remorse, disdain, aggression, optimism, pessimism, trust, distrust, interest, disinterest, ecstasy, worry, loneliness, bewilderment, excitement, fatigue, disappointment, etc.

It is not difficult to associate each of the above terms with a more or less strong connotation of pleasure or pain. In other words, in my opinion, feelings are the forms by which pleasure and pain are manifested, in association with some satisfied or unsatisfied *need* or *rejection*.

What feelings are for - Needs and feelings

Feelings presumably *emerged* by chance during the evolution of the human species (and perhaps other animal species as well) and have remained in our DNA because they have an adaptive function, that is, they promote the survival of the individual and the reproduction of his or her species. In my opinion, the appearance of feelings is related to the appearance of consciousness. In fact, I would say that feelings are a component of consciousness itself. For what good would consciousness be if it were not linked to feelings?

Feelings are indicators of what is good or bad for us and, if we are empathic, also of what is good or bad for others. It is precisely on the basis of such indicators that the remaining functions of consciousness (the cognitive and the motivational) can perform their functions, which are, respectively, to *learn about* the causes of pain and those of pleasure, and to motivate the person to avoid the former and seek the latter. In other words, I believe that if there were no feelings, there would be no cognition or motivation either.

As I have said elsewhere, in my view pleasure and pain are associated with the satisfaction and frustration of needs, respectively. To be more precise, there are needs that cause pleasure when they are satisfied and others that cause pain if they are not satisfied. In other words, the satisfaction of a need can cause pleasure or the cessation of pain.

Without the above correlation between feelings and needs, I could not explain the existence, that is, the *raison d'être*, of both. In fact, if there were no correlation between feelings and needs, the former would not help us satisfy the latter and our species would already be extinct. Therefore, I believe that, excluding religious narratives, the definition of good and evil, and thus morality and ethics, can only be based on the satisfaction or frustration of needs and the resulting pleasure and pain.

Consequently, we can assume that feelings are the messages by which the body informs us about the satisfaction or frustration of our needs, so that we can understand what satisfies and what frustrates them, so that we can adapt our behavior to the needs of our bodies and thus safeguard our physical and mental health, as well as the preservation of our species.

Thus, it could be said that nature uses pleasure and pain to compel us to do what she desires of us.

Pleasure of perception

Between the root cause of pleasure, which is the satisfaction of a need, and pleasure itself are endorphins, which, in addition to making us feel pleasure itself, are neurotransmitters, that is, they facilitate communication between neurons.

Well, I hypothesize that, in addition to the fact that neurotransmitters facilitate communication between neurons, an inverse process may also take place, that is, that continuous stimulation of communication between neurons achieved through appropriate perceptions may increase the secretion of the neurotransmitters themselves, including endorphins, in that case giving rise to feelings of pleasure or euphoria. This would explain the pleasure that can be caused by the perception of particular configurations of images, texts and sounds.

The effect could be long-lasting, analogous to the development of muscles by training them. Thus, it would be a matter of training the communications between neurons through reading, seeing and listening to particular objects, shapes and information in order to make neural interconnections more effective and efficient (with positive effects on creativity and intelligence), and to enjoy the pleasure associated with the resulting secretion of endorphins.

Reality and importance of *feelings* - Sentimental Pragmatism

Although they are neither tangible nor measurable, and despite their subjectivity, feelings are perhaps the most real thing that exists in the world from the point of view of a human being. I mean that although one may have unwarranted, irrational or morbid feelings, they are always real insofar as they are *felt*.

In other words, the cause of a feeling may be unreal, that is, it may be imaginary and unfounded, it may even be just an idea, but the feeling that idea arouses is always real and important insofar as it causes pain or pleasure.

Therefore, we can say that feelings (i.e., pleasure and pain in their various forms) are the measure of all value, and that the purpose of all human action is to avoid pain and to seek our own or others' pleasure.

Feelings are mysterious in the sense that we cannot understand what they are in themselves, but only what causes them and what they provoke, and through such knowledge we can *influence them* if we can act on their causes.

However, humans often err in identifying the causes of feelings, and as a result do not behave optimally in order to avoid pain and seek pleasure.

In fact, when asked "why do you do what you do and don't do what you don't do," almost no one answers "to suffer as little as possible and enjoy as much as possible." Instead, we get answers such as "because it's right," "because it feels good," "because it's my duty," "because I feel like it," "because everyone does it," "because God wants it," etc.

I think that human relationships would be simplified and mutual satisfaction could be achieved more easily if we accepted the fact that the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure are the fundamental criteria for evaluating good and evil, right and wrong, useful and useless.

My philosophy, which I like to call *sentimental pragmatism*, corresponds quite well to Greco-Roman Epicureanism. But it is not *hedonism*, for three reasons.

The first is that we should attend not only to our own pleasure and pain, but also to the pleasure and pain of others, given the interdependence of all of us human beings.

The second is that we should understand pleasure and pain in all their forms, that is, not only the physical, but also the immaterial and sublime, that is, related to knowledge, contemplation, imagination, logic, beauty, that is, the world of ideas and forms.

The third reason is that we should be more concerned with avoiding or reducing pain than with seeking unlimited pleasures. Also, because every pleasure, in the long run, not only tires, but also carries a price to pay in moral terms.

Mental agents

By *mental agent* or *demon*, I mean a part of the mind capable of *acting*, that is, *interacting* with other parts of the mind in order to satisfy needs of the organism. The conscious self is the only conscious mental agent; all others are unconscious.

Mental agents directly or indirectly influence the behavior of the individual by being able to elicit particular feelings, thoughts and motivations in response to particular stimuli.

Mental agents are as immaterial as the mind that contains them and, as such, are neither visible nor measurable, but only conceivable. I, in fact, assume the existence of mental agents since, without conceptual recourse to them, I could not explain the activity and functioning of the mind.

The mental agents I hypothesize correspond to the processes described as follows by Marvin Minsky.

"The human brain is a vast organized society, composed of many different parts. Inside the human skull are crammed hundreds of different kinds of motors and organizations, wonderful systems that have evolved and accumulated over hundreds of millions of years. Some of these systems, for example the parts of the brain that make us breathe, function almost independently. But in most cases these parts of the mind have to coexist with the others, in a relationship that is sometimes one of cooperation, but more often one of conflict. It follows that our decisions and actions almost never have simple, unambiguous explanations, but are usually the result of the activities of large societies of processes in a continuous relationship of challenge, conflict or mutual exploitation. The great possibilities of intelligence arise from this enormous diversity, and not from a few simple principles."

I view mental agents as subsystems of the general cybernetic system that is mind. We cannot explore and analyze the mind by means of technological tools, but we can hypothesize its structure and functioning by doing *reverse engineering* (from the English *reverse engineering*), that is, by observing the external behavior of the organism, this being determined by the processes taking place in the mind itself.

It is impossible to determine how many mental agents make up the mind; we can only speculate. I hypothesize, for example, that there is at least one mental agent for every need of the organism. In such a hypothesis, given the conflict between certain needs (as discussed in the chapter Conflicts and Synergies between Needs - Origin of Mental Disorders), I assume that mental agents may interact cooperatively or competitively.

Another hypothesis of mine is that there is a mental agent for each *significant* person the subject has met and with whom he or she has established a positive or negative affective relationship. In that case we speak of an *internalized person*.

In fact, I assume that within us there are, in symbolic form, all the important people we have interacted with throughout our lives, and the imaginary ones we would like to meet and interact with.

Referring back to classical culture, we can call **demons** both mental agents who preside

over needs and those who represent known persons. The term *demon* is not to be understood as a *devil* but as a psychodynamic entity capable of arousing feelings and motivations in the person who hosts it.

These are not metaphysical entities but bio-logical, that is, mental agents emerging from the activities of our neurons. Each of these *demons* suggests, demands, promises or threatens us something. Some urge us to go in certain directions, others in others, and we must decide whom to obey and whom to disobey, whom to follow and whom to ignore.

The significant people we have internalized are more important than the real ones because they are always active within us and guide us even when the corresponding real people no longer exist or are different from the internalized ones.

The demon in computer science and philosophy

In computer science, a *daemon* is a program that runs in the *background*, that is, continuously simultaneously with the execution of application processes. The tasks and activities of a *daemon* can be the most diverse and relate to the general operation of the computer (operating system) or to particular applications ready to go into action at any time. More than one demon may be active simultaneously.

In Greek philosophy and various religions, the *demon* is a supernatural figure. In general, it is a being who stands halfway between what is divine and what is human, serving as an intermediary between these two dimensions. Depending on the authors and particular philosophies, religions and cultures, the demon may be more or less evil.

For Heraclitus, the *demon* corresponds to man's character or disposition, which determines his fate.

For Socrates, the *demon* is a divine guide, that is, a moral conscience that assists him in every decision, not so much to induce him to do certain things as to deter him from doing them if they procure evil.

For Senocrates, the *demons* can be both good and evil and correspond to the gods in conflict with each other, thus transferring the conflict between good and evil to earth, to humans.

For Alexander of Aphrodisia, the *demon* of each individual is his or her own nature.

Because of the above, I consider it appropriate to use the term demon as a synonym for mental agent.

Mental agents as cybernetic subsystems that preside over needs

I consider the 'mental agent (or *demon*) to be the personification of a need, that is, its guardian, in the sense that it is concerned with obtaining its satisfaction and avoiding its frustration. This occurs independently of the activity of the conscious self, that is, unconsciously, automatically and involuntarily.

Every mental agent consists of *software*, that is, logic that determines its behavior. In other words, each mental agent behaves according to a program (or algorithm) that determines

the exchange of information with other mental agents based on the information received.

We can assume the existence of hierarchies of mental agents, that is, agents that use the services offered to them by subordinate agents. We can also assume that one mental agent is able to activate or deactivate others.

The individual's motivations and behaviors are, in my opinion, the results of the joint *will of* all his mental agents, keeping in mind that each of them has a greater or lesser weight, which varies from person to person. Consequently, in the case of conflicts between *demons*, it may happen that the individual limits his behavior by giving up a number of options, or paralyzes himself altogether, as discussed in the chapter Conflicts and Synergies between Needs - Origin of Mental Disorders.

The concept of the *mental agent* or *demon* is important in scaling back the importance of the conscious self, which is neither the master nor the *director of* the mind (even if it deludes itself into thinking that it is), but an agent like others, with the difference that it is endowed with awareness, albeit a very limited one.

In other words, the conscious self also has its own *software* that responds algorithmically to information coming to it from other mental agents in the form of cognitive perceptions, feelings and motivations. In this sense, the conscious self is not free (or is free within very narrow limits), as discussed in the chapter on Free Will.

Cognitive-emotional-motive map (CEMM)

Anything we see or that happens to us can elicit in us an automatic triple response: cognitive, emotional and motivational (i.e., motivational).

The *cognitive* response (which corresponds to what Alfred Korzybski called the *semantic response*) depends on our knowledge, the *motivational response* depends on our needs, and the *emotional response* depends on the perception or expectation of their satisfaction or frustration. The three responses are interdependent in the sense that each influences the other two in a reinforcing or inhibiting sense.

The above responses, of course, are not random, but follow certain associations and logic characteristic of the individual, which must be recorded somewhere in the mind. Well, by the name *cognitive-emotional-motive map* (CEMM) I refer to the *subsystem of* the mind in which are recorded (i.e. *programmed*), the automatic cognitive, emotional and motivational responses characteristic of the individual.

How is CEMM formed and how can it be modified?

I assume that at birth an individual's CEMM already exists, and that it contains only the elementary associations and logic written into the DNA, i.e., those we have in common with other mammals.

After birth, the infant begins to interact with his environment and in particular with his mother (or an equivalent figure) and, because of his specifically *human* capabilities, he unconsciously begins to record in his CEMM associations between his feelings and the objects, events, and symbolic and linguistic expressions that provoke or accompany them. At the same time, the infant learns to *recognize* such *objects*, events and expressions, and particularly those associated with the people on whose care he depends.

The CEMM is a fundamental component of the mind, without which it could not function. In this regard, George Herbert Mead taught us that the human mind (i.e., the specifically human part of our mind, to distinguish it from the parts we share with other animals) is formed and constructed through social interactions in order to manage the social interactions themselves in an adaptive sense, i.e., to meet the needs of the individual.

Well, the formation of the human mind described by Mead corresponds to the progressive *programming* of CEMM, which continues throughout the individual's life, although its early stages are the most important and pregnant as they constitute a kind of what in ethology is called *imprinting*. In fact, each learning is the basis on which subsequent learnings, which are normally *additive*, rest. That is, what has already been learned influences and limits or favors what is possible to learn later. In other words, the more limited and *restricted* what is learned at a young age, the more difficult it is to learn something new in adulthood. This is also due to the fact that brain plasticity decreases with age.

On the other hand, we can see that it is easier to learn something completely new than to unlearn something, that is, to modify what has already been learned.

Thus, the CEMM can be modified, but to a more or less limited extent depending on how it

was constructed in childhood and youth. In this regard, I believe that the purpose of psychotherapy should be to modify or neutralize *maladaptive* cognitive-emotional responses, to the perception of certain ideas, images, linguistic expressions or other stimuli. I also believe that in order to change responses to certain stimuli, it is necessary to re-present (live or by means of simulations) such stimuli in association with others, capable of generating responses of the opposite affective sign than those elicited by the former.

Examples of maladaptive responses that it pays to neutralize through psychotherapy or self-therapy are *unjustified*, that is, unfounded contempt and fear. In fact, both contempt and fear (which often go hand in hand with each other) not only result in a state of stress that is potentially detrimental to psychophysical well-being, but also prevent one from establishing a useful, satisfying or even pleasant relationship with the object of such feelings.

Social reward

CEMM is essentially used to *answer* (in a systemic sense) questions such as the following: is the entity (object, person, behavior, idea, etc.) that is presented to me or is it good or bad? Pleasant or unpleasant? Useful or useless? Comprehensible (acceptable) or incomprehensible (unacceptable)? Consistent or inconsistent with my personality and social reputation? Does it require any particular behavior on my part? What should I expect in relation to this entity?

An individual's behavior in the various circumstances in which he or she may find himself or herself depends on the answers to questions such as those above. Such answers constitute the programming of CEMM, which is primarily concerned with social relations, and all that is *cultural* (in the sense that it is produced, exchanged or shared by human beings).

Since an individual's well-being depends on the quality of his or her social interactions, and since the CEMM essentially serves to direct the individual's choices in a direction favorable to his or her well-being, it follows that the most interesting part of the CEMM is that in which the social consequences related to various perspectives of behavior are stored. In other words, the CEMM tells us whether, given a certain behavior, we should expect reward or punishment from particular people or, in general, from the community to which we belong.

Regarding the role of the CEMM during social interactions, we need to consider that when two people A and B interact, each is present (as an *idea* or as a *dictum*) in the other's CEMM, so A's behavior toward B, and B's behavior toward A depend on the particular associations stored in the CEMM concerning the interlocutors.

These associations concern both the reactions that A expects from B in the face of a certain behavior, and the reactions of third parties or the community they belong to that same behavior.

Regarding the second case, see the chapter [Trilateral Relationships and Affective Consistency](#).

Interdependence, cooperation, competition, violence, authority

As I have said elsewhere (and it cannot be remembered enough), human beings are interdependent, that is, they cannot survive or satisfy their needs and desires without the cooperation (willingly or unwillingly) of other individuals.

This fact has fundamental importance not only in economic relations, but in all human activities, and consequently in all human and social sciences. In fact, as George Herbert Mead taught us, the human mind is formed and developed as a tool for managing social relationships and interactions in order to meet the needs of the individual.

What makes human relationships most difficult and sometimes dangerous is what I call the *need to prevail* (of the *power-needs* class), a term by which I mean the tendency to prevail over others in hierarchies, the exercise of authority, the distribution of resources, the choice of partners, private property, etc. In other words, every human being, if he could, would like to impose his wills and worldview on others, i.e., to induce them (by violence or nonviolent persuasion) to obey his orders, follow his directions, learn his teachings, cooperate in ways favorable to himself, etc.

Any cooperation, to be such, requires at least one party to do something in favor of the other. In this sense there must be a *requester* (i.e., one who asks the other for a good or service) and a *supplier* (i.e., one who procures and/or gives the requested good or service to the other). Obviously, the role of the supplier is normally onerous, while that of the requester is free. In other words, asking costs nothing, while providing always has a cost, except in games and sexual interactions, where responding to a request may involve enjoyment for the provider as well.

Any cooperative transaction is thus asymmetric in terms of charges (with the above exceptions) and can be sustained only if it involves a periodic exchange of roles in the sense that the requester becomes the provider and vice versa, as in the case of payment for a service rendered.

Cooperation is *normally* subject to factors that may make it difficult or impossible, such as the following.

If everyone is free to choose a cooperation partner, competition should be expected to choose the most attractive (or most productive) partners and to be chosen by the most desirable partners. As a result, the less fortunate must settle for partners of little *value* or, in the worst case, find no partners at all.

The terms of cooperation may not be clear, so the parties understand the quality and quantity of the goods or services to be transferred and the related fees differently.

Covenants may be broken by one or both parties for any reason, justified or unjustified.

One party may overestimate their own abilities and skills and underestimate those of their partner.

There may be different assessments of compliance with the rules of cooperation (obligations, prohibitions, rights, limits, etc.).

The covenant can be cancelled unilaterally if one of the contracting parties prefers to work with a different partner, deemed more advantageous, without feeling obliged to remain loyal to the current one.

Indeed, it is very rare for a cooperative relationship to be free of more or less serious, resolvable or unresolvable conflicts or difficulties.

To avoid or resolve the aforementioned critical issues (where clarification or conciliation is not possible or not sufficient) and to force the desired cooperation, one of the parties may resort to violence (threatened or exercised) or to the intervention of a higher authority to act as arbiter and guarantor of *justice*.

In the second case, the question arises as to who should impersonate the guarantor authority, that is, who should occupy the various rungs of the hierarchies governing the community to which the parties belong. In this regard, it is normal for there to be competition for the highest rungs.

Since every human being (with few exceptions) tends to overestimate his own rights and underestimate those of others, to underestimate his own duties and overestimate those of others, competition to assert one's own point of view is inevitable. On the other hand, cooperation is not sustainable without power (of one party over the other, or of a higher third authority) to impose or guarantee it.

Because of the above, I believe that human interactions are based on an intertwining of cooperation and competition, with competition being understood as the assertion of hierarchical superiority that can be accepted or rejected by the lower or disadvantaged party. In case of rejection, a situation of more or less violent conflict ensues that ends only with a reversal of positions or resignation of the *rebellious* party.

Cooperation and competition can take place both between individuals and between groups (families, political parties, organizations, companies, states, etc.).

In the intertwining of cooperation and competition, more or less lasting alliances can be formed between individuals and between groups, with the looming risk of *betrayal*, that is, the replacement of a partner or ally with a more advantageous one.

Ironically, it happens that cooperation, order and social peace, always threatened by unregulated competition, are protected and guaranteed by regulated competition, that is, by the political, religious and cultural hierarchies of the community, accepted as such by its members. That is to say, outside of a community (with its hierarchies and rules) no

cooperation is possible that guarantees the satisfaction of human needs.

Man therefore has a *vital* need to belong to one or more communities. Consequently, the community (with its demands and psychic pressures) constitutes a mental agent or *demon* in the individual's mind, in that it influences his choices and defines his morality (consciously or unconsciously).

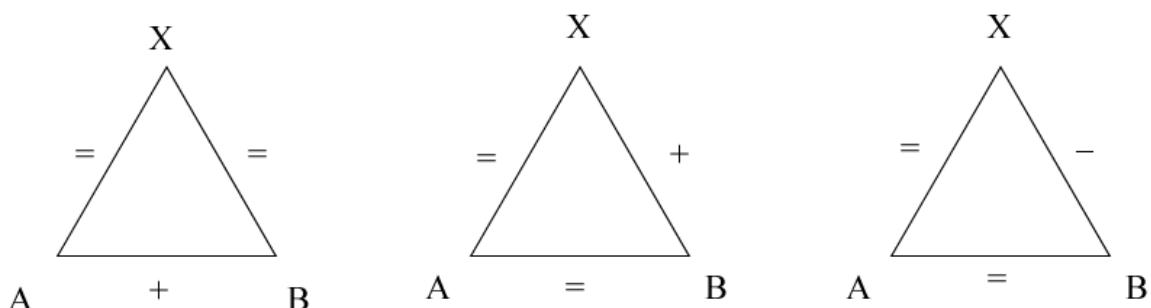
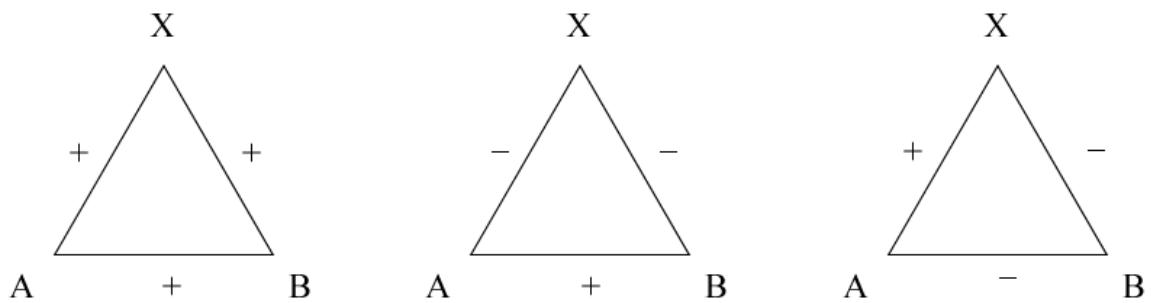
Trilateral relationships, affective coherence, social worthiness

Bilateral affective relationships between two individuals are actually almost always *trilateral* -- indeed, *multi-trilateral* in the sense that they involve a number of third entities (people, things, media, actions, ideas, etc.) with which both individuals have an affective relationship.

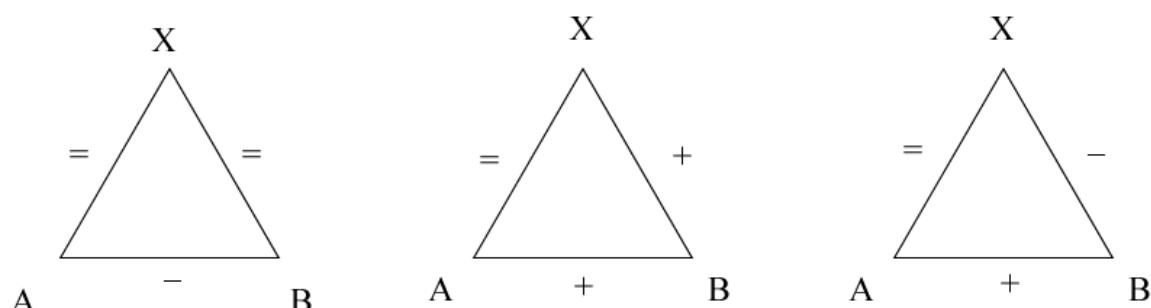
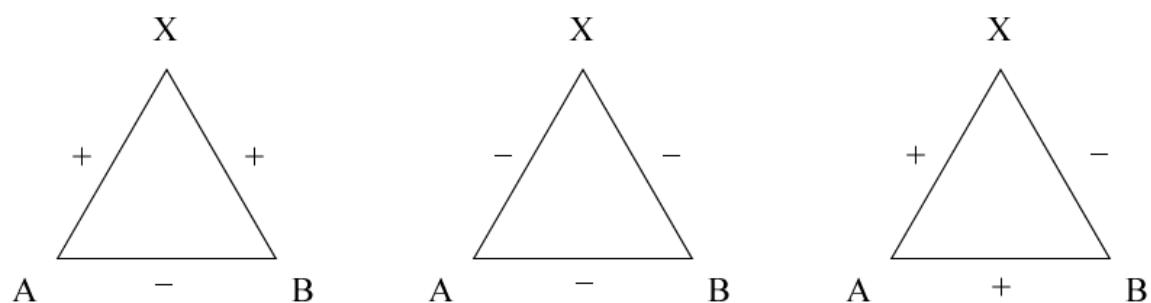
According to Fritz Heider's Equilibrium *Theory* (commonly and improperly translated as *Cognitive Equilibrium Theory* -- in German *Balancetheorie*), in the relationship between two individuals, the sharing of feelings (liking or disliking, attraction or repulsion, etc.) toward the same third entity contributes to the determination of a positive affective bond between them. In such a case, the trilateral relationship is called *balanced*. Conversely, an affective discordance toward the same third entity (e.g., appreciation of a third person by the former and disdain for the same by the latter) contributes to determining dislike or hostility between the two individuals. In such a case, the relationship is called *unbalanced*.

According to Heider's theory, an unbalanced trilateral relationship results in a state of mental stress in the people involved and the consequent activation of dynamics (conscious or unconscious) that tend to rebalance the relationship.

The following figures illustrate the above theory.



Balanced affective triangulations



Unbalanced affective triangulations

+ liking - disliking = indifference

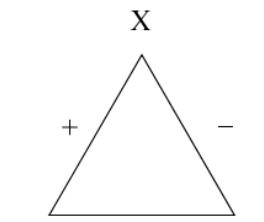
Take, for example, the case of the affective relationship between two individuals A and B, and their attitudes toward a third entity X where:

- A and B appreciate each other
- A appreciates X
- B despises X

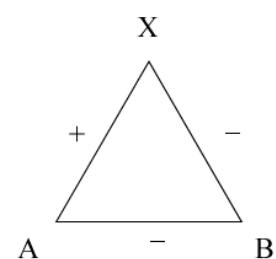
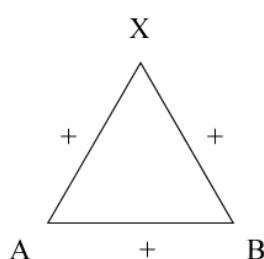
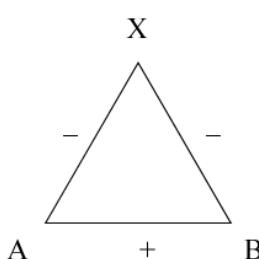
In such a case, the affective triangle is unbalanced because of the different affective attitude toward X. Three alternatives are possible to rebalance it:

- A stops appreciating X and begins to despise it
- B stops despising X and starts appreciating it
- A and B stop liking each other and start despising each other

The three *solutions* are shown in the figure below.



Balanced triangle



Unbalanced triangles

The conscious or unconscious logic underlying this theory could be summarized in the following sentences:

I like people who like things or people I like, and who don't like things or people I don't like.

I don't like people who like things or people I don't like, and who don't like things or people I like.

The above does not apply in the case of competition between A and B to gain X's favor. In that case there will be a minus sign between A and B, and a plus sign between A and X and between B and X, and the triangle is unlikely to find equilibrium.

Heider's theory has important implications that, in my opinion, have not been given enough consideration by the various schools of psychology and psychotherapy. It, in fact, reveals to us the general *trilaterality* of human interactions, in the sense that relationships between two individuals are almost always *mediated* by *third entities* known to and affectively connoted by both parties, such as the following:

- Language (syntax and semantics) used to communicate
- Knowledge (scientific and literary background learned)
- moral principles
- aesthetic principles
- mode
- customs and rules of interaction
- policy objectives
- economic objectives
- authority
- etc.

With respect to such third entities, two individuals may have more or less convergent or divergent feelings, cognitions and interests. In other words, about each entity there may be some degree of agreement or disagreement.

Immediate vs. mediated interactions

In my opinion, *immediate interactions* between two people, i.e., not mediated by third entities such as those listed above, are very rare and often violent, as they are neither limited nor protected by mutually accepted rules. Even in cases where two people freely negotiate the rules of their interaction and collaboration without reference to third-party entities, the negotiated rules become the third-party entities that the people agree to abide by. In fact, the *regulating third entities* in a relationship between two people can be given *a priori* (as cultural factors) or can be negotiated by the people involved.

Role of communities in human interactions

The membership of a person A in a community X implies a number of triangles where A and X are two corners, and the third is any other person B. Again, the triangle may be more or less balanced in an affective sense. In that case X represents the community understood as the set of its members who are supposed to share the same forms, norms and values characteristic of the community. X corresponds in this case to the *generalized Other* theorized by George Herbert Mead.

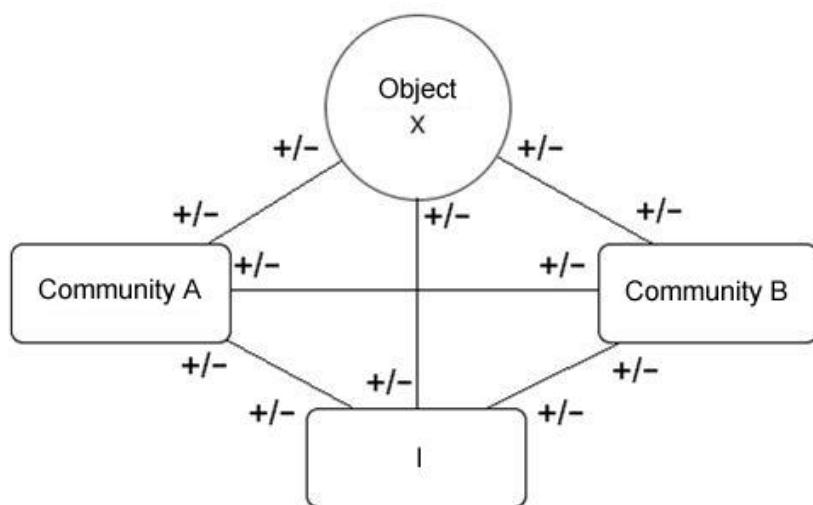
If two people A and B have similar feelings, notions and interests (positive or negative) with respect to community X, the affective triangle is balanced, and between A and B there is a positive affective relationship, for example, a sense of fraternity, friendship or affinity. Otherwise, that is, if the two people have opposite feelings with respect to one and the same community, their relationship tends to be one of hostility. This is especially true for

communities to which only one of the two belongs.

Social valence

By *social valence* I mean the subjective value that an individual consciously or unconsciously attaches to any entity (person, object, medium, idea, activity, etc.) as likely to win him or her approval or disapproval (i.e., acceptance or exclusion) from the community to which he or she belongs.

Take for example a person A who has to decide whether or not to buy a certain item of clothing X. In this case we must consider a trilateral AXB relationship, where B represents the community to which he belongs, which has a certain *feeling* or judgment toward X. If B approves of the purchase of X, then this takes on a positive *social valence*. Conversely, if B disapproves of the purchase of X, then it takes on a negative *social valence*. The social valence attached to X influences A's choice about the purchase of X. If X's attraction to A remains very strong despite B's disapproval, in order to balance the relationship, it may happen that A begins to dislike his home community and contemplate moving to a different community favorable to X.



Whatever entity an individual can imagine has a more or less positive or negative social valence for him insofar as it is a possible object of judgment on the part of his or her community of belonging. We can therefore assume that the cognitive-emotional map (see the chapter Cognitive-emotional map) also includes the social valences of all entities that the individual knows and can recognize.

In this regard, I assume that any human activity or expression has social valence for those who perform it and for those who observe it, and that when two people attribute the same social valence to a certain entity, it constitutes a factor of social cohesion. Therefore, I believe that every community is characterized by the social valences shared by its members.

In other words, the pleasure conferred by an object may be due not so much to its peculiar

characteristics but to its social valence, that is, to the fact that the subject feels part of a community that appreciates that type of object. Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish the pleasure emanating from an object from the pleasure of sharing the appreciation of that object with other people.

By the same principle it may be the case that a thing that has inherently positive characteristics is not appreciated because of its *social disvalence*, that is, because it is not appreciated by the community to which the subject belongs.

A trilateral perspective of human relationships and interactions is necessary and important, as a bilateral view fails to explain the logics of human behaviors and discomforts. In fact, on the one hand, everything we do must be approved by the community to which we belong (on pain of our exclusion from it) or by significant others (on pain of their removal from us). On

the other, any interaction between two people must refer to *regulating* third entities characteristic of the community to which both people belong, if violence and misunderstanding are to be avoided.

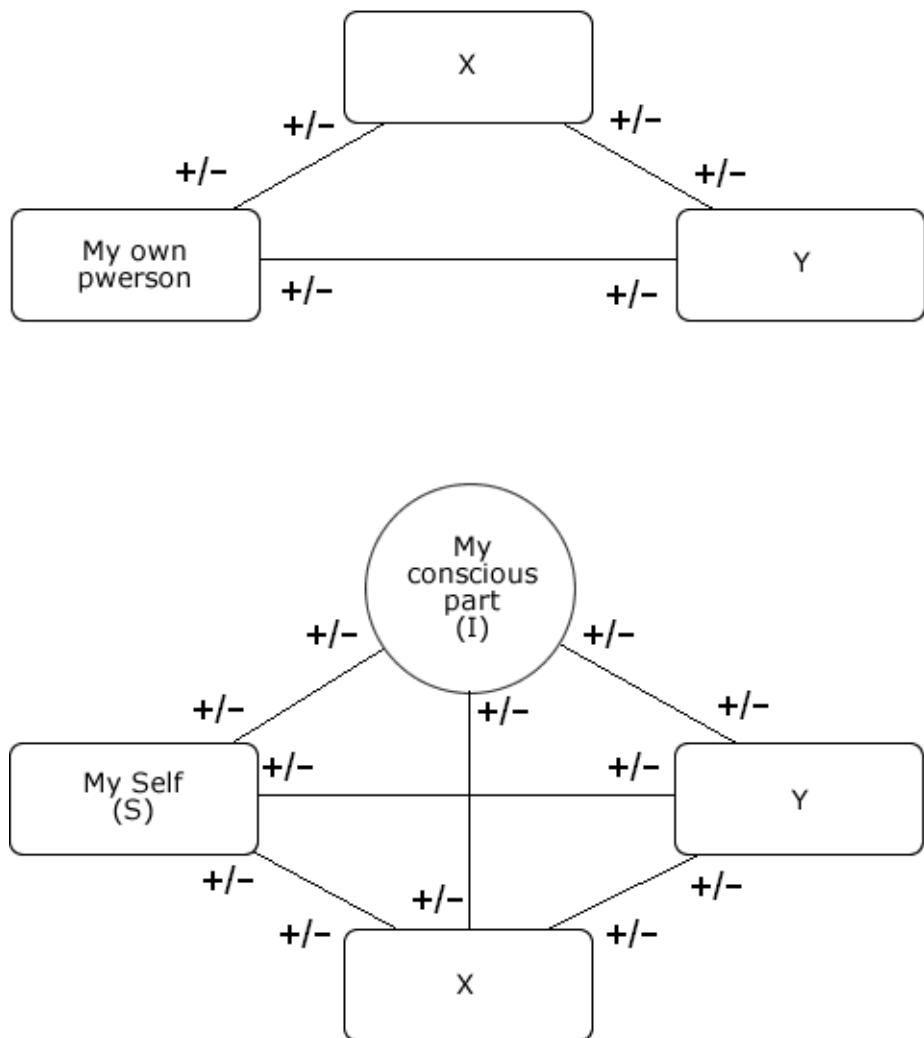
Metarelations

Consider an affective triangle consisting of:

- my person
- X
- Y

where X and Y are any other entities (people, things, media, actions, ideas, etc.).

We conceptually divide "my person" into "my conscious self" (I) and "my self" (S), meaning by "self" the whole individual excluding its conscious part. If we now draw all possible relationships between the four resulting entities, we get four triangles (SIX, SXY, IXY, ISX) as shown in the figure below.



We can now apply the *equilibrium theory* to the four triangles separately. From the subject's ("my person") point of view, the SXY triangle is unconscious, while the other three are conscious, that is, they can be examined by his conscious self, which can (if it has sufficient cognitive tools to do so) detect any affective imbalances and make decisions to resolve them.

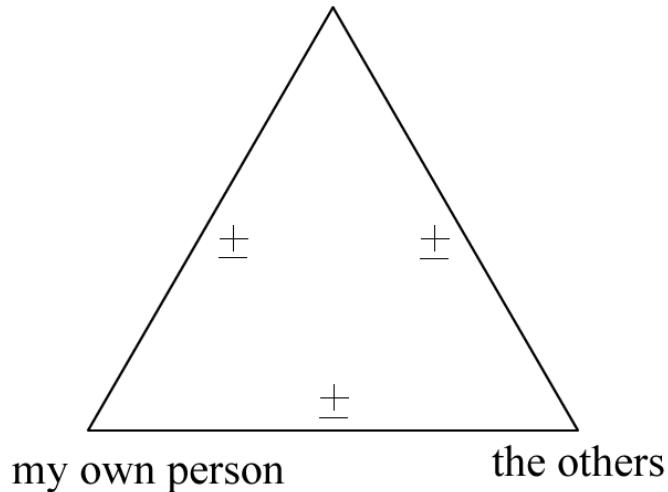
By the term *metarelation* I mean a relationship in which the conscious self is aware of itself (as separate from its own self) and of all the relationships involved (the four triangles in the figure). This enables it to assess the affective coherence of each triangle and to decide on actions to resolve any imbalances.

Of particular interest is the relationship between the conscious self (I) and its self (S). There can be a more or less positive or negative affective relationship between these two entities, which can result in cooperation or antagonism. For example, the conscious I may consider the habitual behavior of its self to be inappropriate and decide to begin psychotherapy to modify it. In turn, the self may resist control by the conscious self by resorting to distractions, excessive workloads, or consumption of alcohol or other drugs.

A triangle concerning me and this book

The following figure represents the trilateral relationships between my person, others and this book.

Psychology of needs



Looking at this figure, questions such as the following come to mind.

- What opinion will others have of this book?
- How will other people's opinion of this book affect their opinion of me?
- Will this book increase or decrease my popularity that is, my acceptance by others, their esteem, sympathy and affection for me?
- Did I do right or wrong in writing this book? What social reward will I get from it?
- Who will this book bother?
- Will this book help me improve my interactions with others?
- Will this book cause my sympathy for others to increase or decrease?
- Will this book make me more sociable?
- What will others think of me when they read this book? Will they think I am an arrogant person? A conceited person? A deluded? A failure? An ignoramus? Or a genius? A wise man? A highly educated one? Or is the fact that I wrote this book insignificant?
- Who will read this book? Who will appreciate it? Who will despise it? Who will criticize it? Who will find it useless? Who will ignore it?

I do not have an answer to these questions, but I find it very useful to have thought about them and verbalized them. If they remain unconscious, they could result in irrational answers that are far from reality, answers that would still unconsciously affect me. For example, they might diminish my motivation to complete, to improve and to make this book known.

Concluding remarks.

The theory of affective balance and the concept of trilaterality of relationships can be useful in understanding the social dynamics in which one is involved and making the most effective decisions to resolve any affective imbalances. These, in fact, in the long run can be a cause of stress and mental disorders.

In fact, we can assume that *community needs* include the need to resolve affective imbalances in trilateral relationships, that is, the need to maintain *consistency* among multiple affections.

Learning, imitation, empathy, conformity

Need for imitation

René Girard taught us that man imitates (i.e., *copies*) from others his desires, opinions and lifestyle, and that the ability and desire for imitation are essential elements of learning mechanisms, especially with regard to children.

Girard speaks of *mimetic desire*. By this expression we must mean, in my opinion, not only the imitation of the desires of others, but also the desire to imitate, in general, the behavior and feelings of others, a desire that I call the *need for imitation*.

I believe, in fact, that man has an innate need to imitate his fellows, at least those on whom his survival depends, for the simple fact that without imitating others he would not know how to live, how to learn, how to speak, how to think, how to behave socially, that is, how to communicate and interact within a community.

When a child is born, his cognitive and rational abilities are practically nil, so he can only learn social behavior by imitation. On the other hand, its cognitive and rational resources, including critical capacity, are developed through imitation of others' expressions and *reasoning*. Therefore, I consider it impossible to think rationally without resorting to modes learned by imitation from someone else.

On the other hand, it is evident that perfect imitation (in the sense of an acquired skill) is possible without an understanding of what one is imitating, that is, what one is copying unconsciously. The result is what Daniel Dennett calls "competence without understanding."

Mirror neurons

The discovery of *mirror neurons* by Giacomo Rizzolatti's group seems to confirm the validity of Girard's theory. This discovery leads us to think that there is a genetically determined apparatus in the nervous system dedicated to imitating the behavior of others not only in terms of outward forms, but also the feelings that accompany the gestures observed. We can therefore hypothesize that mirror neurons are devices that make empathy, gestural imitation, and perhaps rational imitation possible.

In fact, I suppose that the human mind mainly serves to *copy* gestures, languages, cognitions, feelings, and motivations from other human beings. In general, I would say that humans copy from others strategies for satisfying their needs. This explains the ease with which what we call *induced needs are* formed in an individual. In other words, if an individual copies others, it is not so much because others induce him to copy them by force or persuasion (which can happen anyway) but because of a spontaneous desire or need on the part of the individual to imitate those on whom his well-being depends, beginning with his own parents.

I further suppose that just as we have a need and instinct for imitation, so we have an innate ability to understand how similar or different our interlocutor is from us in thoughts and

feelings, and to react accordingly, automatically, involuntarily, in a friendly or hostile way. We might call this ability *feeling the degree of affinity*.

Reassessment of conformity

The need for imitation is consistent with the fact that human beings are interdependent. Indeed, if there were no such need and the consequent conformity of individuals to the forms, norms and values of a community, indispensable cooperation would be impossible.

In light of the above, a reassessment of *conformity* is in order. This, in fact, should not be seen as a (deleterious) free and conscious choice, but as a genetically determined imitative drive, i.e., an *instinct*, one of the few left to humans in the course of evolution. In other words, conformity has, in my opinion, a fundamental and irreplaceable adaptive function for the survival of the individual and the preservation of his species. In summary: we cannot not imitate; if anything, we can choose whom to imitate.

Given the social function of imitation, alongside the need to imitate external models, we must also consider the need to be imitated, that is, the need for others to conform to the forms, norms and values adopted by the subject, a conformity necessary to enable cooperation. From this need to be imitated arises the individual's intolerance, hostility and aggression toward those who choose imitation models other than their own, thus making cooperation impossible, only competition.

We can therefore say that conformity has two faces. On the one hand, the need to conform in order to cooperate; on the other hand, the need to fight those who do not want to conform, and consequently do not want to cooperate, but only compete, so it is seen as a threat to the community to which the individual belongs.

Learning narratives

Among the things that a human being is able to learn, and also to teach others, are *narratives*. These can be religious, esoteric, historical, scientific, or relate to folk wisdom about any aspect of practical life.

As Yuval Noah Harari teaches us, man's cultural evolution has occurred primarily through his ability to invent and transmit, from generation to generation, narratives of various types (more or less realistic), and to share them collectively as a factor of social cohesion. This transmission is made possible by our ability to learn abstractions through language, especially at a young age, when critical skills are not yet developed and the child is unable to understand whether what he or she is being told is true or false, well-founded or unfounded. Once the narrative has been learned as an indispensable factor of social belonging, the adult has no reason to question it; on the contrary, he or she will have an unconscious fear of doing so. A fear that very few can overcome, because it carries the risk of exclusion from the community.

On the other hand, as Nietzsche said, man does not need truths to survive, but knowledge (no matter if true or false) that will help him survive and therefore allow him, first of all, to be integrated into a community.

Learning and psychotherapy

Both primate experiments and the observation of human behavior show that the ability to learn by imitation (or copying) of others' gestures and expressions is inversely proportional to the subject's age, that is, it is greater in the early years of life and tends to disappear in later life. This means that what has been learned becomes increasingly difficult to unlearn or modify over time. For example, it is very difficult for an adult to unlearn the accent with which he or she learned the mother tongue and learn that of a new language.

This fact is of particular relevance to psychotherapy, since it consists of a modification of certain learning (in terms of cognitive, emotional and motivational responses to certain stimuli) considered deleterious or inadequate for the satisfaction of one's own and others' needs. That is to say, psychotherapy should consist of learning new social automatisms that must replace some of the old ones.

A psychotherapy is in fact like learning to play correctly, by reading the notes, a musical instrument after playing it poorly by ear for years. It starts with theory, reading the notes, and then it takes a lot of repetition, a lot of rehearsal, until old bad habits are unlearned and playing well becomes automatic.

Another problem is that learning normally happens by accumulation on the structural basis of previous learning. Therefore, it is difficult to learn something that is not consistent with already formed mental structures, just as it is very difficult, as well as traumatic, to change the foundational structures of a mindset.

Reward learning

As children, we almost all underwent what I call *reward imprinting*, that is, we learned what behaviors of ours bring us pleasure and what bring us pain, especially with regard to affection and approval from others (starting with parents and educators).

For example, those who have undergone a strict upbringing in a disciplinary sense tend to regard obedience as a source of social reward. Similarly, those who have had very intellectually demanding educators tend to regard intelligence and its manifestations as indispensable means of being accepted and loved. The same phenomenon occurs with other educational styles that give importance, for example, to morality, respect for traditions, religion, sports, beauty, money, competition in general, savings, etc., so that permanent associations (conscious or unconscious) can be created between such values and the expectation of social reward.

Of course, as adults it is possible that the expected rewards may not be realized, or the results of one's efforts may be counterproductive. This can result in a state of chronic stress and frustration with related psychological and psychosomatic discomfort and disorders.

In such a case, psychotherapy aimed at neutralizing maladaptive or unrealistic imprints may be useful. During such therapy, the patient should learn, through interaction with the therapist, alternative ways of obtaining social rewards, and be able to unlearn (this is the most difficult part) inappropriate associations.

Identity and social qualities (being = belonging = imitating)

The object of being

Applying the verb to be followed by a noun or adjective to a person has vast and profound implications of which we are normally unaware.

In fact, we commonly say (or think) phrases such as "I am (an) xxxx" (e.g., "I am an employee," or "I am free," or "I am an artist") without asking ourselves who established that identity or quality, nor who ascribed it to us, nor what are the consequences of that attribution.

On first reflection, it occurs to me that the identities and qualities of a human being make sense only in a social context. In fact, it would never occur to an individual totally and hopelessly isolated from others to think "I am (an) xxxx," not least because that attribution could not be shared and therefore could not have any consequences.

It then occurs to me that the identities and qualities of a human being are meaningful to the extent that they are (or can be) recognized by others. Indeed, there is no point in believing that one "is (an) xxxx" if one is certain that such an identity or quality is invisible to others and always will be. We can therefore say that we *are* what others recognize (or will recognize) in us.

What does xxxx (i.e., the object of being) mean and how can it be instantiated? To answer, it is convenient to turn to the idea (of Gregory Bateson) that we cannot know things (nor people) *per se*, but only the relations between things (or people). The object of being is thus a relation, specifically a social relation.

Being = belonging

For the above, I hold that the object of *being* is a social *role* assumed by the subject or a social category to which he believes he belongs (or to which others believe he belongs). In more general terms, and considering the *role* a kind of *category*, I would say that the object of being is constituted by belonging to certain categories.

We can therefore, almost always, replace the verb to *be* with the verb to *belong*. For example, saying "I am free" is equivalent to saying "I belong to the (social) category of free people." To say "I am a merchant" is equivalent to saying "I belong to the category of merchants." To say "I am stupid" is equivalent to saying "I belong to the category of stupid people." To say "I am Italian" is equivalent to saying "I belong to the category of Italians."

It follows that before one can say "I am (an) xxxx" one must define the category xxxx. For example, before saying "John is stupid," the category of stupid people needs to be defined, and before saying "I am free," the category of free people needs to be defined.

The definition of social categories is, of course, a social process. When an individual is born, categories are already defined by those who came before him, and he only has to learn them, as he cannot invent new ones (at least until he becomes an intellectual, political or religious

authority).

The definitions of categories used by ordinary people are rather imprecise and vague. Indeed, few people consult a vocabulary before using certain words. These are usually generalizations and simplifications that everyone can interpret as he or she pleases. It follows that the identities and social qualities that we ascribe to ourselves or that others ascribe to us are always subjective and coarse.

Belonging = imitating

As we saw in the chapter Learning, imitation, empathy, conformity, learning is based on imitation. This also applies to the learning of *social categories*. Through imitation we not only learn what such categories are, but also how to behave in such a way as to belong to those we wish to belong to. On the other hand, we desire to belong to certain categories because the people we wish to imitate belong to them, as René Girard teaches.

To be = to imitate

If Being = to belong, and belonging = to imitate, then being = to imitate.

As a consequence of these equations, we might say that an individual's identity consists in belonging to the categories of people he or she has imitated and/or is successfully imitating.

In light of the above, a phrase like "be yourself" (used in exhortations such as "be yourself") does not make much sense since one cannot *be* something without *belonging* to some category, that is, without *imitating* someone. Therefore, the issue is not whether to imitate or not to imitate someone, but *who to* imitate.

On the other hand, the choice of people to imitate can be problematic and give rise to external and internal conflicts. Indeed, if one belongs to a certain community, the members of that community expect him to imitate people from the same community, and not from others. At the same time, one may be torn between the desire to imitate certain people and the desire to imitate certain others who are incompatible with the former because they belong to antithetical communities.

Wanting to be different from everyone else, that is, not wanting to imitate anyone, is a mistake that can cause mental disorders, since it is impossible to interact with other people without imitating some role model. On the other hand, as far as choosing models to imitate is concerned, the study of humanities and social sciences and narrative allow us to broaden and deepen our knowledge of many different models of humanity, enabling us to choose the ones to imitate that best suit our personality.

In any case, it pays to avoid, as far as possible, ascribing (to oneself and to others) well-defined identities and social qualities, since these are subjective, reductive and limiting of the freedom to change the models of behavior to be imitated. On the other hand, a person whose social identity is undefined and mysterious can have a certain appeal.

Human differences

Equal and different

We humans are all almost identical in our basic physical and mental structures, that is, in our genes, especially when compared with other animal species. What changes from one person to another (and from one age to another in the same person) are mainly the contents of the structures themselves (i.e., what they have acquired through experiences), and certain variations of genetic or interactive origin such as organ size, skin and eye color, morphological features, health, resistance to fatigue and exhaustion, physical and mental performance, sensitivity, temperament, character, culture, tastes, etc.

In general, we can divide human differences into two classes: those of genetic origin and those of interactional origin. Obviously, both contribute to an individual's behavior, and it is useless, as well as impossible, to determine which are more important and to what extent. However, we can say with certainty that characteristics of interactive origin develop on the basis of those of genetic origin.

Human differences being obvious and undeniable, when we say that *we are all equal*, we are referring not to the physical or mental constitution of people, but to their civil rights and *social dignity*. This *equality* is established in democratic and liberal countries, where "the law is the same for everyone" (at least as a principle) and no discrimination is allowed (in public relations) regarding ethnic, religious, political, sexual, performance, physical, etc. differences.

In any case, I think no one can deny that we are all different in the quality and quantity of our thoughts, feelings, and motivations.

Why should we study human differences?

Talking about human differences (especially when in public), is still considered *politically incorrect* by most, perhaps because many fear that this topic (consciously or unconsciously) will be used as a justification for racism, fascism, injustice or so-called *social Darwinism*.

In this regard, Henry Geiger wrote:

Differences between human beings are rarely discussed as such, because the mere fact of admitting or declaring that there are important differences between humans means that one probably possesses a theory that allows one to explain what gives rise to them, and today a theory that explains the causes of human differences is enough to start an ideological war. The first principle of a democratic society is the equality of human beings. To discuss human differences without appearing as one who wants to attack that principle is difficult, though not impossible.

This theme, however, is usually ignored by popular writers, for the reason that one who writes about human differences, unless he or she is particularly wise, usually has the air of someone who thinks he or she is a little better than the rest of humanity, and a writer who does this has little chance of remaining "popular."

But much can be lost by a society that fails to recognize and admit human differences. It may even lose an understanding of the real meaning of equality, and it certainly loses an appreciation of the many forms of human distinction that do not challenge the validity of the political principles of an egalitarian society, and may even support them indirectly.

Another reason why people avoid talking about human difference even in private is, in my opinion, the unconscious fear of finding themselves classified into some hyped-up, despised, socially useless or harmful, or simply *losing human type*: in a word, *inferior*. In fact, if one dares to say that one person is *worth* more than another, one must expect very harsh objections including, most likely, the accusation of sympathizing with Nazism.

As a result, outside of people collectively regarded as *stars of entertainment*, culture and science (and publicly celebrated as such), and excluding criminals and the mentally ill, everyone else is put on virtually equal footing, as if there were no significant differences between them.

In my opinion, there are several reasons why we should study human differences, and talk about them, more than we do.

The first is that when we detect differences between people, communities or lifestyles, we cannot help but wonder (consciously or unconsciously) which variants are better or more desirable than others. In other words, we tend to ascribe some *relative* value to each variant. This *valorization* (positive or negative) of variants obviously influences the choice of people we wish to *imitate* (as René Girard would say) or with whom we wish to interact.

The second reason is that among the main human differences are those involving tastes and preferences, so it is important to know the tastes of others in order to avoid behaving in ways others do not like, and to choose as partners people with tastes *compatible* with one's own.

In fact, because of the increasing freedom of thought and behavior, and the consequent social *diversification*, two people are less and less likely to be compatible with each other. As a result, loneliness is increasingly common.

In this regard, one mistake we often make is to assume that others think like us, react emotionally like us, have similar morals, similar interests, similar motivations and similar fears, know what we know, that we and others suffer and enjoy for similar reasons, that our minds are similar, etc.

Another reason why the study of human differences can be useful is that it enables us to *recognize ourselves* in some type endowed with special psychological characteristics. Which is equivalent to knowing ourselves better. For example, the *introvert* personality type (which I discuss below) is little and poorly known, and introverts would be pleased to discover that there is nothing wrong with being such, in fact, there is much good in it.

In general we can also say that getting to know a person (or oneself), if it is true that we are all different, is impossible without resorting to a range of predefined types with which to compare oneself.

For all these reasons, that is, in order to know and evaluate others and ourselves better, each with its own peculiarities, needs and habits, I believe it is useful to deal rationally and scientifically with the problem of human differences. That is why I would favor the foundation of a *Science of Human Differences*. However, I fear that there would be too much objection and resistance regarding such a project, for the reasons stated above.

Pretending to be normal

Perhaps because of the *need for imitation* theorized by René Girard, and the consequent conformism prevalent in all kinds of societies, the perception of human differences undergoes a distortion, or a bias, especially regarding the subject's differences from others.

The result of this bias is that the subject, wishing to be *like others*, tends to repress, remove (in the psychoanalytic sense) or hide (even from himself), his peculiarities or differences from others.

A consequence of this tendency is a general ignorance and confusion regarding the actual differences between human beings.

In fact, whatever one may say, even in our culture, which prides itself on being among the most liberal, human differences are not considered an asset (as is, for example, biodiversity in the plant world) but a *problem*. It is a problem because it involves diverse value judgments that the individual is incapable of assigning without using criteria shared with others. One then ends up not judging the *different* openly, even though he or she often considers it (consciously or unconsciously) as a threat to the established order.

In any case, humans are generally afraid of being different from others (i.e., from the *majority of others*) because they fear not being accepted because of their diversity. In fact, for the unconscious being different from others is a guilt that sooner or later is discovered and punished.

These psychic dynamics mean that the topic of human differences is generally kept as far from consciousness and social debate as possible, and that people compete to be as *normal as possible*.

Categories of differences and mutual influences

We can divide human differences into three categories:

- Psychological
- physics
- social

Psychological differences concern personality, i.e., cognitive abilities, sensitivity and, more generally, the *logics of behavior* stored in the cognitive-emotional map (see the chapter Cognitive-emotional map).

Physical differences relate to physical constitution, health, energy performance and body appearance.

Social differences are about social roles, hierarchical positions, responsibilities, reputation, private property, group and community memberships, clothing and furnishings, and everything of cultural, political, ethical, and economic significance.

About physical differences and social differences there would be nothing to say in a book about psychology, except that they can have, indeed, certainly have repercussions on psychological differences, and vice versa. I mean that some psychological differences can be a consequence of physical and social differences, and, vice versa, some physical and social differences can be a consequence of certain psychological differences.

Objective, perceived, attributed differences

There are objective human differences, such as physical stature, weight, skin color, etc. Then there are perceived differences, such as beauty, authority, dangerousness. Finally, there are attributed differences based on objective conditions or perceptions. For example, it is thought that a more expensive product is better than a cheaper one, or that a university professor in a certain discipline (especially if humanities) is more competent than someone who does not have a professorship or degree in the same discipline, and so on.

The third case can be related to the trilateral relations I discussed in the chapter Trilateral Relations, Affective Consistency, Social Valence. In fact, by the principle of cognitive or affective coherence, we tend to believe that one who has a good reputation with a person we esteem is estimable and vice versa, that is, one who is despised by a person we esteem is despicable.

Psychological differences (personality types)

By *personality types* I mean a theory, or model, in which a number of psychological traits (or *types*) are defined against which an individual can be classified. In other words, it is a taxonomy of personality traits, detectable by means of special tests.

The personality types that I find most interesting among the most well-known ones are the following:

- Introversion/extroversion
- MBTI (Myers-Biggs Type Indicator).
- Big Five
- Eysenck's three factors
- 16PF (16 personality factors) by Raymond Cattell

Introversion/extroversion typology was theorized by Carl Gustav Jung in his book *Psychological Types* from which I quote some useful quotes to understand the difference between introvert and extrovert.

"...the first (the extrovert) takes his bearings from external facts as they are given, the other (introvert) reserves an opinion that stands between him and objective reality. [...] When one thinks, feels and acts, in a word, he lives in a manner directly corresponding to objective circumstances and their requirements [...] he is extroverted. His life is such that the object, as a determining factor, manifestly possesses greater importance in his consciousness than his subjective opinion. Therefore, he never expects to come across any absolute factor in his

inner world, since factors of this kind he detects only on the outside. [...] in the introvert between the perception of the object and the behavior of the individual a subjective point of view is inserted which prevents the behavior from taking on a character corresponding to the objective datum. [...] The introvert's consciousness does indeed see external conditions, but it elects the subjective element as the determining factor. [...] Whereas the extrovert type relies mainly on what comes to him from the object, the introvert relies rather on what the external impression puts into action in the subject."

To learn more about introversion/extroversion, I invite you to read my article "What is Introversion."

The **MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator)**

typology is also based on C. G. Jung's psychological types, but in addition to the introvert/extrovert trait, it includes three others, also taken from Jungian theory. The four traits are as follows:

- Extroversion - Introversion (E-I)
- Sensation - Intuition (S-N)
- Thinking - Feeling (T-F)
- Judgment - Perception (J-P)

Each trait forms a continuum between two extremes. A person can be found at any point on the continuum of each trait, represented by the letter that identifies the closest extreme. A person's profile can thus be expressed with four letters, for a total of 16 possible combinations (ISTJ, ISTP, INTP, INTJ, ISFJ, ISFP, INFP, INFJ, ESTJ, ESTP, ENTP, ENTJ, ESFJ, ESFP ENFP and ENFJ). For example, according to a test I took a few years ago, I belong to the ISTJ (Introversion, Sensation, Thinking, Judgment) type.

The **Big Five** type, is based on the following five traits, each with two *sub-dimensions* indicated in parentheses:

- Extroversion (*dynamism, dominance*)
- Friendliness (cooperativeness/empathy, friendliness/friendly attitude)
- Conscientiousness (thoroughness, perseverance)
- Emotional stability (emotion control, impulse control)
- Open-mindedness (openness to culture, openness to experience)

Eysenck's **Three Factors** typology defines three traits:

- Introversion/Extroversion
- Neuroticism
- Psychoticism

Cattell's 16PF typology defines 16 personality factors:

- Emotional expressiveness (high-low).
- Intelligence (high-low).

- Stability (strength of the ego-weakness of the ego).
- Dominance (dominance-submission).
- Impulsivity (upwelling and downwelling).
- Group conformity (strong superego - weak superego).
- Audacity (boldness-timidity)
- Sensitivity (sensitivity-hardness).
- Distrust (confidence-diffidence).
- Imagination (pragmatism-imagination).
- Cunning (sharpness-ingenuity).
- Culpability (consciousness-imperturbability).
- Rebellion (radical-conservatism).
- Self-sufficiency (self-reliance-dependence).
- Self-control (self-esteem-indifference).
- Tension (tension-tranquility).

Cattell also defined four additional *second-order* factors:

- QS1. Introversion vs. extroversion.
- QS2. Low anxiety vs. high anxiety.
- QS3. Susceptibility vs. hardness.
- QS4. Dependence vs. independence.

Personally, I tend to qualify people according to the following traits, with all possible caution to avoid misjudgments:

- degree of introversion/extroversion
- tendency toward preservation/change
- degree of physical and psychic sensitivity
- degree of physical and mental fragility
- degree of courage
- Abstraction, analysis and synthesis skills
- ability to conceive of complex ideas
- Tendency to lead (dominance) vs. being led (gregariousness)
- Self-control, self-discipline and self-analysis skills
- capacity for self-criticism, conscientiousness
- creativity

In particular, I tend to distinguish people into two categories:

- Those who accept the world as it is and try to adapt to it, and
- those who do not accept it as it is and therefore criticize the mentality of most people who, by adapting to it without criticizing it, perpetuate the errors of humanity.

General considerations about personality types

In my opinion, the weak point of all personality types (including the one I prefer) is the difficulty in determining the subject's position on the continuum of each trait, since that position, in addition to the fact that it may vary over time and depending on circumstances, may be closer or closer to the center, sometimes leading to uncertainty in type assignment. Therefore, the assignment of a type or weight of a trait in a complex profile is always approximate and arbitrary.

It is interesting that the *introversion/extroversion* trait is found in all the types mentioned, so we can assume that it is among the most important for a person's social life. For this reason (besides the fact that I consider myself an introvert) I have devoted special attention and research to this personality trait (see my article "What is introversion").

The purpose of this brief exposition of some of the best-known personality types was not so much to describe their contents as to show how difficult, subjective and arbitrary it is to differentiate and classify human beings on the basis of abstract types. This difficulty is also due to the lack of general consensus in academia on this issue, as well as on psychology in general. In fact, each personality type is linked to a particular general psychological theory, that is, to a certain conception of human nature.

Human differences as factors of cooperation and competition

Every human difference can be a factor of cooperation and/or competition. Take for example the characteristic that is commonly called "intelligence" (whatever that is). In choosing a partner with whom to cooperate for a particular purpose, it may be necessary for that partner to have an intelligence no lower (and sometimes no higher) than a certain level. In other words, a certain *difference in* intelligence (relative to the average) may be a *requirement* for a certain kind of cooperation.

On the other hand, the same intelligence may be a factor in competition in several cases. For example, when one applies to be hired by a company that is looking for people of a certain level of intelligence, so one may have several candidates competing against each other. Another example is political competition, whereby each candidate in an election for public office tries to prove to voters that he or she is more intelligent than the other candidates.

Competition over intelligence is almost always present in bilateral relationships, such as in couples, friendships, relationships between colleagues, etc. where decisions need to be made about what to do, where to go, what the priorities should be, etc. If there are no clear and shared hierarchical positions, it is expected that in case of disagreement one will do as the smarter person decides. It may therefore be important to determine who between two people, is the more intelligent one, because common choices may depend on such a determination.

Since human differences are both factors in cooperation and competition, they carry a great deal of weight in social relationships and interactions, much more than we think. In fact, in my opinion, every human being is *concerned* (consciously or unconsciously) about his or her *differential status*, that is, his or her position relative to the average and relative to particular people, with regard to certain characteristics considered desirable and competitive. For this reason, feeling inferior to others can be the cause of mental distress (what Alfred Adler called the *inferiority complex*) and compensatory psychic dynamics. That is, a person who feels inferior in a certain aspect of personality may strive to become superior to others in another aspect in which he or she is more competitive. The fact remains that the feeling of inferiority may be more or less well-founded, and the subject may attach more or less importance to it than it actually is.

For the above, a better knowledge and evaluation of human differences in general, and a reasonable measurement of one's own and others' *differential status*, can facilitate cooperation and resolve competitions as quickly and easily as possible.

Subject involvement in the perception of human differences

Human differences can be a problem when their perception and evaluation influence an individual's behavior toward others. This depends on the meaning, value, and cognitive and affective implications that an individual associates with the differences he or she perceives, either between himself or herself and others or between third parties.

What are the most relevant differences for a human being involved in comparing different types of people?

I suppose that a difference is relevant to the extent that it affects the satisfaction of one's own and others' needs, especially with regard to cooperation and competition. As we have also seen in the chapter Interdependence, cooperation, competition, violence, authority, a person's possibility of cooperation and competitiveness are related to his hierarchical position within the community to which he belongs, on which his *productivity*, his attractiveness as a partner, and his ability to defend and attack depend.

When choosing partners for cooperation, the evaluation of candidate differences is very important, precisely because, since not all candidates are equal or equivalent, some may be more advantageous than others.

The same principle applies when the subject sets himself up as a candidate (in competition with others) to be chosen by a potential partner, so the subject is led to *compare himself* with his competitors. Such comparison can give rise to envy, jealousy, competition and hostility.

As Alfred Adler taught us, the essential purpose of human existence is to realize a future that is more fulfilling (with respect to one's needs) and more secure than the present by overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of its affirmation. Obstacles are normally constituted by *others* as competitors (both violent and nonviolent), so each individual has a natural tendency to overcome others (or at least not to be overcome by them) so that he can defend himself against their possible violence and not be overcome by them in active or passive competitions. As a result, each person deploys his or her resources by trying to compensate for his or her inferiorities in certain activities with his or her superiorities in

others, and tends to invest his or her energies and ingenuity in the activities in which he or she is strongest, neglecting those in which he or she is weakest and has little chance of improving.

For example, one who is endowed with great physical strength and endurance tends to engage in jobs and sports in which such gifts are required (even to put them on display), while one who is physically weak but endowed with above-average intelligence tends to avoid harder jobs and sports and to prefer occupations in which intelligence rather than strength is required. Equally, a particularly beautiful person tends to exploit the advantages of his or her beauty, while a particularly ugly person tends to compensate for his or her ugliness by investing in his or her cultural background, elegance, and so on.

Differences between individuals vs. differences between groups

The perception of human differences affects not only individuals but also groups and communities. In fact, a person who is part of a certain community compares it with others; if he or she detects differences in a competitive sense in favor of another community, the following may occur:

- if emigrating to the other community is possible (in the sense that one is sure to be accepted by that community in a desirable role) and there are no contraindications (e.g., severe punishment as a traitor by the community of which one is still a member), the person attempts to move to the more competitive community to enjoy its benefits;
- if an emigration is not possible or has too high a cost, the person may develop feelings of envy, jealousy, or hostility toward the other community that he or she cannot access and try to discredit it as much as possible.

The individual thus competes not only against others within his own community for the most coveted places in the various hierarchies, but also against members of other communities, who compete with his own for political hegemony or the possession of economic resources.

As a result of affective and cognitive balance (which we discussed in the chapter Trilateral relationships, affective coherence, social valence), the enemy is always bad and despicable (otherwise he would not be perceived as an enemy). In other words, the subject tends to see the differences between members of his own community and those of the enemy community in a light unfavorable to the latter, especially from a moral point of view. This tendency has always been exploited by governments during wars to prevent feelings of affinity or brotherhood from arising toward enemy populations, at the risk of weakening the aggressiveness of their own troops toward them.

Concluding remarks - The double bind of immoral competition

As has emerged from the above considerations, the most relevant human differences concern the cooperative and competitive capacities of each individual, namely productivity, political and economic power and aesthetic attractiveness.

Human beings are indeed, in my view, constantly concerned (consciously or unconsciously) with keeping their cooperative, productive and competitive capacities at the highest possible levels relative to those of others, because their survival, membership in one or

more communities, possible cooperative roles and social status depend on it.

However, our culture, especially because of Christian influence, is, at least in words, opposed to competition and unequal treatment toward the less gifted. Christian morality, in fact, preaches equality, brotherhood in God, the right and duty of charity, and condemns competition as an expression of selfishness. Trying to be better than others, to surpass them, is therefore a *sin* in the unconscious of those with religious imprinting, except when it comes to Christian zeal, that is, having more faith in God and obeying him more and better than others do.

We are therefore in a double bind, as Gregory Bateson would say. On the one hand we have the natural need to compete against others for both cooperative and defensive purposes, and on the other hand we have the need to conceal this need as it is considered immoral by Christian doctrine and by a secular culture that has failed, deep down, to free itself from its Christian roots.

In my opinion, in order to avoid the psychopathological effects of this double bind, we must resort to humor, which enables us to move abruptly and without warning from a position of superiority to one of humility, and vice versa, without ever permanently fixing ourselves in either. (See the chapter [Humourism](#)).

Selfishness, ignorance, wickedness, indifference

*Note: In this chapter I have deliberately avoided using the term **ethics** and its derivatives, preferring the term **morality**. Indeed, I believe that ethics concerns theoretical reflection on good and evil, whereas I am interested here in discussing the practical and psychodynamic aspects related to these concepts.*

Moral judgments are very important in social relationships and apply only to these. The exception is religious contexts, where moral judgments also apply to the relations between the subject and the divine or spiritual entities in which he or she believes.

Moral judgments are factors of social cohesion in that they prompt individuals to behave according to certain rules necessary for the survival and functioning of communities as *cooperative environments*. Since human beings, because of their interdependence have a *need for community*, and morality is indispensable for community life, humans also have an innate need for morality. It could also be said that the need for community also contains the need for morality or coincides with it.

Moral judgments, which differ qualitatively and quantitatively in different religious or secular ethical doctrines, basically deal with the following aspects of individual mentality:

- selfishness
- ignorance
- wickedness
- indifference

By **selfishness**, I mean the tendency to pursue the satisfaction of one's own needs without concern for the satisfaction of others' needs, where fully satisfying one's own needs entails, to some extent, the frustration of others' needs. This happens, for example, when there are limited and insufficient resources for all, and one does not want to give up even part of the desired resources.

By **ignorance** I mean, in this context, culpable non-knowledge, that is, not wanting to know the needs nor desires of others, nor the circumstances of their satisfaction or frustration.

By **wickedness** I mean the pleasure associated with the suffering of others, that is, exerting violence on other people in order to gain advantage, or to take pleasure in seeing others suffer.

By **indifference** I mean a lack of empathy regarding the suffering or joy of others, and consequently a lack of motivation to help those in need.

We can qualify the above judgments as *negative*.

A single *positive* moral judgment is sufficient to represent the opposite of all the negative ones: **altruism**. The altruist, in fact, is not selfish, nor *ignorant*, nor evil, nor indifferent.

Moral judgment thus serves to *qualify* a person as more or less altruistic, or selfish, ignorant, evil, indifferent, or a combination of these qualities.

What can be the consequences of such a judgment?

I have already mentioned that moral judgments are factors in social cohesion. In fact, the more an individual seeks to *merit* positive moral judgment, the more altruistically (i.e., cooperative and noncompetitive) he or she behaves and the more he or she promotes the *common good* of the community, i.e., the greatest possible satisfaction of the needs of the greatest number of community members.

This idea corresponds to the thought of Jeremy Bentham summarized in the expression "the greatest happiness for the greatest number [of people]," and John Stuart Mill, who defines his *utilitarianism* as "that doctrine which accepts as the foundation of morality utility, or the principle of the greatest happiness, (and which) holds that actions are lawful in so far as they tend to promote happiness, and unlawful if they tend to generate its opposite." In both quotes I mean by "happiness" the satisfaction of a person's needs.

An individual who *habitually* or *normally* behaves in an immoral way does not contribute to the common good, but constitutes a burden or harm to the community, which therefore tends to punish and/or expel him. This eventuality is for the individual something fearsome indeed, terrifying, consciously and even more unconsciously, partly because it opposes the innate *need for community*.

Relativity of morality

Moral judgment can be very complex, as well as subjective, because an individual can behave differently *morally* over time and with different people. That is to say, one can sometimes be more moral and sometimes less so toward the same person, and one can be more moral with some people and less so with others. Moreover, each person may give different *weight* to the different rules that characterize his or her moral paradigm.

Another cause of complexity and subjectivity of morality concerns attitudes toward communities other than one's own, and toward minorities within one's own, who are often regarded as *other* communities. I refer to the dimensions of "us" and "them" as opposed or antagonistic.

Indeed, history has shown us how naturally or *trivially* (as Hannah Arendt would say) a community does not consider it necessary to behave *morally toward* other communities or toward minorities within its own, if they are considered enemies of their own community. Just think of the Holocaust of Jews during Nazism, where even a tolerant attitude toward this minority was considered immoral.

Prohibitions, obligations and duties - Subjectivity of morality

Moral prescriptions can be divided into three categories: prohibitions, obligations and duties.

Prohibitions are by far the easiest to understand and comply with. They are injunctions such as "do not kill," "do not steal," "do not do to others what you would not want done to you," and the like. Indeed, it is normally easy and objective to determine whether one has killed or stolen.

Obligations are also relatively easy to understand and comply with. These are legal or contractual injunctions such as paying taxes, paying the price of a commodity or service, and the like. To prove that an obligation has been fulfilled, a receipt is sufficient in many cases.

Moral duties, on the other hand, are much vaguer and more subjective. They are in fact about helping others meet their needs and coming to their aid in case of need or misfortune. In other words, it is about being supportive of others. Vagueness and subjectivity concern both the identification of people to be helped or rescued and the extent (in quantity and duration) of help. How many people does an individual have to help, and to what extent, in order to be considered *moral*, that is, to be able to say that he or she has done his or her duty? Nowhere is it written (and it could not be otherwise), so everyone can set these limits as he or she likes and at his or her convenience. And indeed, everyone tends to adopt the moral system (and measures of duties), which absolve him.

There are situations where it is very difficult to determine whether a certain behavior is moral or immoral. For example, paying a worker a "starvation" wage (although peacefully agreed upon) thanks to the fact that, due to high unemployment, many people, in order to work, make do with very low wages. Such an example refers us to a more general and larger moral problem of whether it is *right*, that is, *moral*, for some to be much richer than others.

Double bind in moral judgment

Since the obligations, duties and prohibitions of one are linked to the rights of the other, moral judgment affects all human beings and constitutes one of the strongest pressures in determining human behavior in both a coercive and inhibitory sense.

Indeed, we are all very concerned (consciously or unconsciously) about how others judge us morally, and since no one can consider himself or herself completely blameless (partly because of the relativity and subjectivity of moral judgment) we are almost all literally afraid of being judged negatively. Exceptions are certain mentally ill people and certain criminals.

Because of this fear, we tend to avoid discussing morality, or even thinking about it, except in cases where we are absolutely certain of our innocence, that is, that we are clearly better off, in a moral sense, than those we are judging negatively.

Because of the dynamic described above, a situation of *double bind* can result: on the one hand, the need to behave morally in order not to be punished or excluded from the community to which one belongs, a need that would require a lucid and rational analysis of one's behavior; on the other hand, the fear of being at fault, and the related cognitive biases, which prevent the subject from rationally addressing and investigating the problem.

To resolve this double bind, the subject should find the courage to reflect on his moral duties, possibly helping himself by reading texts dealing with morality and ethics, in order to judge himself rationally and responsibly.

Super-ego and unconscious self-censorship

I assume that a human being's behavior is always aimed at satisfying his needs and desires, according to the *programs* recorded in his cognitive-emotional map (see the chapter Cognitive-emotional map). Faced with problems to be solved or decisions to be made, on the basis of that map the conscious self and other (unconscious) mental agents concur to determine what to do, what to say, what to think, what to choose, moment by moment.

One of these unconscious agents corresponds to what Sigmund Freud called, and we will also call, *Super-ego*.

The function of the superego is to contribute to the satisfaction of the need for community by ensuring *moral* behavior on the part of the subject. It is, therefore, a kind of guardian angel (or rather, demon) that warns us if we are about to do, are doing, or have done something immoral or *bad*, that is, contrary to the ethics and/or aesthetics of our community of belonging.

The warning, if appropriate, is conveyed by arousing a *sense of guilt* which corresponds to the fear of being punished or expelled from the community. Conversely, if the action we are about to perform, are performing or have performed is in accordance with the ethics and/or aesthetics of our community, the superego rewards us with a pleasant sense of moral conformity.

I believe that the superego emerged during the evolution of the human species and has persisted to us because of its adaptive value. In fact, I believe that without it our species would have died out or remained at the prehuman stage.

I also believe that religions have had an easy time establishing themselves because of the ability of the human species to feel guilt, that is, to self-censor.

Thus, the superego is the self-censor, that is, the internalized representative of the community, reminding us what our obligations, prohibitions and duties are (see the chapter Selfishness, Ignorance, Evil, Indifference - Moral Judgment).

Man is capable of self-censorship both consciously and unconsciously. Conscious self-censorship follows a rational logic that, based on the subject's experiences and knowledge, predicts the social repercussions of any kind of behavior, that is, it estimates the likelihood that a certain action will be approved or disapproved of by others, that is, will be liked or disliked by them.

Unconscious self-censorship, on the other hand, follows a coarse and unmeasured, we might say binary, logic, in the sense that it determines whether a certain action is absolutely praiseworthy, absolutely reprehensible, or morally irrelevant and does not explain the reason for such judgment, partly because it is communicated to the conscious self by a sentimental, nonverbal way. In fact, the verdict of the superego is always and only one of the following:

- an unpleasant sense of guilt (or misfortune)
- A pleasant sense of innocence (or grace).
- no particular feeling

If the superego is useful for the survival of the individual and the preservation of his species, where is the problem?

The problem is that the logic of the superego may be *wrong*, that is, it may signal as immoral behavior that, from a rational point of view, is not, in the sense that there is no reason to expect that as a result of that behavior there may be negative social repercussions. The opposite can also happen, namely, that the superego does not signal as immoral a particular behavior that would be better censored as socially dangerous.

The problem then is the proper *calibration of the Super-ego*, that is, its adaptation to the actual community to which it belongs, rather than to an internalized community that does not correspond to the real one, with different moral rules in a qualitative or quantitative sense, that is, much more or much less strict.

Another problem is that the superego is generally an ally of conformity, and tends to censor all forms of nonconformity or nonconformity, constituting a brake on creativity and civil progress.

The superego is formed in the early years of a human being's life, when he or she lacks sufficient knowledge and critical capacity toward the moral teachings he or she receives. Therefore, following a very strict moral upbringing, one may develop a Super-ego that is more demanding than necessary, or excessively strict to the point of causing psychic and psychosomatic discomfort and disorders. By the same principle, as a result of too permissive upbringing, the Superego may not develop sufficiently.

In the worst cases, it may even happen that the Superego gives rise to a self-boycott of the subject in the sense that it tries to prevent the subject from successfully completing a project that, according to its logic, is immoral. And if the subject has managed to successfully complete the project despite the Super-ego's resistance, it may happen that this prevents the subject from enjoying its fruits by generating a need for atonement involving the destruction or setting aside of what has been accomplished, and some form of penance, such as a psychosomatic illness.

In such cases, psychotherapy can be a solution to recalibrate the superego so as to correct its errors and excesses, and thereby free the subject from unnecessary, harmful and painful feelings of guilt, and dangerous tendencies to let its projects fail.

Pragmatics of human interaction

Pragmatics of Human Communication is the title of a successful essay by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson (of the *Palo Alto School*), which takes a systems approach to analyzing communication between humans. This text defines five axioms, i.e., five ever-present aspects of communication between humans:

1st - **It is impossible not to communicate.** In any kind of interaction between people, even with a gesture, facial expression or silence, something is always communicated to the interlocutor.

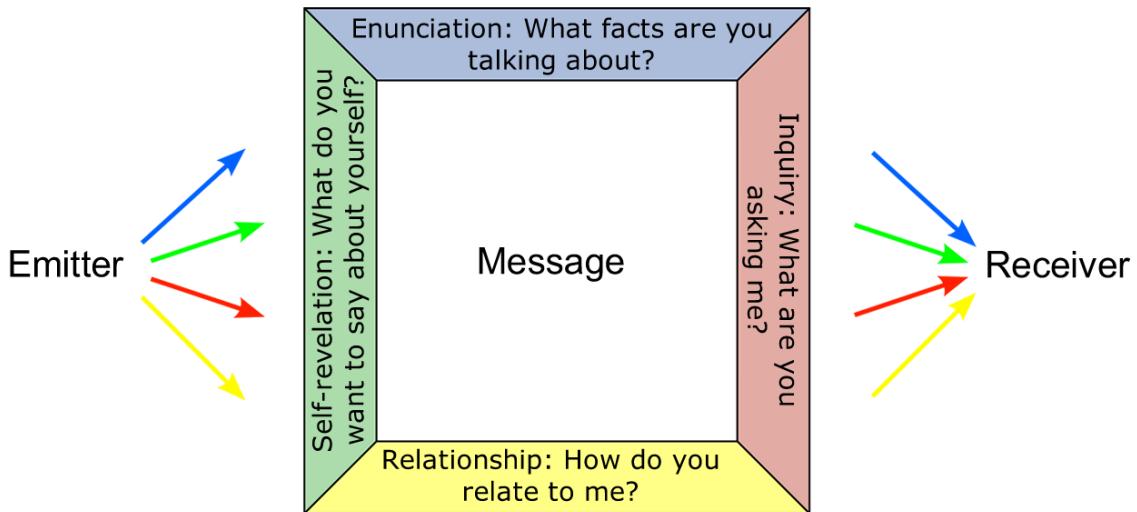
2° - Every communication has a *content* and a *relationship* (or *context*) aspect, and the latter determines or influences the meaning of the former, constituting a **metacommunication** (i.e., communication about communication). For example, if two people agree that they are joking, the meanings and consequences of what they say are different than if the people do not intend to joke.

3rd - Communication between two people is structured by **punctuation**. This term means the identification of the beginning of interactive structures such as question and answer, action and reaction. It is an important aspect of communication because a reaction may give rise to a further reaction, and thus cause a *chain reaction* in which there may be discordant views as to who initiated it, especially in cases of conflict or verbal violence.

4th - Communications can be of two types: **analog** (i.e., images, signs, gestures) and **digital** (i.e., words). That is, communication can be a mixture of verbal and nonverbal expressions, both of which are meaningful.

5th - Communications can be **symmetrical**, in which the communicating parties place themselves on an equal level (e.g., two friends or two students), or **complementary**, in which the interlocutors place themselves in different hierarchical positions (e.g., mother and child, teacher and student, etc.).

Following in the footsteps of Watzlawick and companions, Friedemann Schulz von Thun presents a model of human communication depicted in the figure below:



Schulz von Thun's model, which does not replace that of Watzlawick & c. but is an extension of it, can be summarized by saying that each message contains four meanings:

- **Enunciation:** what are the facts that the issuer wants to communicate to the receiver?
- **Self-revelation:** what does the issuer want to tell the receiver about himself?
- **Request:** what is the issuer asking of the receiver?
- **Relationship:** in what relationship does the issuer assume to be with the receiver?

Both models are useful for analyzing and solving communication problems between individuals and for improving the quality, i.e., effectiveness, of communication itself.

Communication vs. interaction

Communication is a subset of interaction, in the sense that in the interaction between two people there can be not only communication (understood as the exchange of information) but also transactions of other kinds, such as the following.

- Transfer of objects, goods, money, etc.
- Energy transfer (caresses, physical support, protection, sexual acts, etc.).
- Provision of services (free or for a fee)
- Exercise of violence (coercion, beating, wounding, killing, etc.).

The title of this chapter, "Pragmatics of Human Interaction," while evoking that of Watzlawick & c.'s "Pragmatics of Human Communication," thus has a broader scope.

However, it must be said that even a *non-informative transaction* can constitute communication (i.e., an informational transaction) if the issuing and/or receiving parties associate a *communicable meaning* with it.

Purpose of human interaction

What are the reasons why human beings interact? This question is more challenging than it may seem, because answering it requires appealing to general knowledge of human nature.

Consistent with the central idea of this book, the first answer to that question that comes to mind is that humans interact to (try to) satisfy their own and/or others' needs, since without social interaction it would be virtually impossible to satisfy them.

In other words, human interdependence results in a need for interaction that goes hand in hand with the need for community that we have already discussed. Indeed, being part of a community implies the need to interact in certain ways with a number of its members.

Some might object that human beings interact not only to satisfy their needs but also for other reasons, for example, for pleasure, for enjoyment or to satisfy a religious injunction.

To such an objection I reply that pleasure and enjoyment, as well as obedience to religious injunctions, constitute needs in themselves, or means of satisfying higher-order needs.

I therefore remain of the view that everything man does (and particularly interacting with his fellow human beings) he does in order to satisfy his own and/or others' needs, where satisfying others' needs is a means of satisfying his own needs as well. In fact, man needs to satisfy the needs of others, for if he did not do so, he could not satisfy his own, for then he would not easily obtain cooperation from others.

Based on the above principle, let us see in what ways a person can satisfy his own needs and those of others through interaction. That is, let us try to define the basic aspects of a *pragmatics of human interaction*.

Negotiation and cooperation

I assume that human interaction essentially serves to negotiate, prepare or exercise cooperation. I therefore divide interaction into two stages:

- negotiation phase (or preparation)
- stage of cooperation

Negotiation is basically about communicating to the other party:

- What you are looking for, that is, what you need or want
- What you are willing to offer in exchange for cooperation aimed at meeting your needs
- Any conditions and rules (obligations, prohibitions, freedoms and limits) for cooperation

The duration of the negotiation phase may be longer or shorter, even very short (sometimes a glance is enough to complete it); it depends on the affinity between the interlocutors and the compatibility and correspondence of their demands, that is, the extent to which one's demand *matches* the other's offer.

Negotiation may require several rounds in which each adjusts his demands and offers

according to those expressed by his interlocutor.

In Schulz von Thun's model, the elements of negotiation are well represented in the "request," "self-revelation" and "relationship" aspects of the message. It must be said, however, that these aspects are normally almost hidden in the message, so understanding them requires a certain degree of empathy and *social competence*.

In fact, it almost always happens that the negotiation phase is more or less cryptic, i.e., not explicit, not clear, neither direct nor frank, as if each party wants to be ready to withdraw its proposals and requests, even to deny them, in case it has the feeling that the other party is not willing to accept them. Indeed, there is often a fear of rejection, as if the rejection of one's proposal corresponds to a lowering of status or social dignity.

Who is in charge here?

A crucial aspect of interaction, whether in negotiation or in cooperation, is the definition of the hierarchical relationship between the interactors, that is, the answer to the question "who is in charge here?" Both the question and the answer are politically incorrect in our culture, so they are normally removed into the unconscious or conscious hypocrisy. However, the question is always latent and emerges sharply whenever there is conflict or disagreement about what to do and not to do, and even about what to discuss and not to discuss.

Since it is usually assumed that in case of disagreement, one should do what the one who *knows best*, that is, the one who is smarter and/or more educated on the subject under discussion, indicates, and since each would like to have the upper hand, each tries to prove that he or she is more knowledgeable than the other on the subject itself.

The same problem exists in the case of disagreement over adherence to agreed rules, where one partner accuses the other of not adhering to them, and the accused asserts the opposite.

Demonstrations (direct or indirect, implicit or explicit) of one's own intellectual and moral superiority over the interlocutor are normally affected by self-deception (which we will discuss in the chapter of the same name) whereby each person thinks he or she is the best person to determine what is best to do in case of disagreement.

In the end, one does as the less reasonable, less patient, less competent, or less intelligent person prefers, if the other cares about maintaining the cooperative relationship and preventing the partner from being disgruntled or frustrated.

What determines the success of a cooperative interaction

An interaction is successful when it sufficiently satisfies some needs of both interactors, meaning that for each of them the balance of the exchange is positive. That is, the weight of advantages (or gains) is greater than the weight of disadvantages (that is, costs or losses). I am talking about advantages in a broad sense, not limited to economic aspects.

For the balance of the interaction to be positive for both partners, the following conditions must be met:

- there must be sufficient correspondence and compatibility between what each person is asking for and what the interlocutor is willing to offer;
- each interlocutor must be able to express clearly and understandably his or her own demands and availability, and to understand those of the other;
- there must be a common understanding of the rules and conditions of cooperation;
- there must be a willingness and moral obligation on the part of both to abide by the agreed rules;
- there must be a mutual recognition of each other's intellectual and moral skills and abilities.

Satisfying the above conditions is all the more difficult the less explicit the negotiation of the interaction and the discussion in case of conflict. Consequently, it pays to resist conventions that advise against being explicit and direct in terms of expressing one's requests and availability, as well as assessments of one's own and others' capabilities.

I hope this book will be helpful in knowing one's needs in such a way that they can be expressed clearly to potential partners.

Mind games

Our minds play with each other without our knowledge.

Life is a game, indeed a complex of games of various levels.

Each elementary action is part of one or more games, and each game is part of one or more larger games.

By "game" I mean a cybernetic program that can be active in a mind, i.e., an organic complex of forms and rules, stimuli and responses, obligations, prohibitions and margins of freedom, rewards and punishments, i.e., a complex of actions and reactions (i.e., interactions) endowed with relevant meanings with respect to the satisfaction of players' needs.

I believe that a relationship between two entities consists of a series of "games" that these entities intend (or agree to) play together, with their respective specific rules (logical, formal, syntactic, semantic, energetic, etc.).

Thus, a relationship is made up of "games," which in turn are made up of "interactions," and these are made up of elementary transactions (meaning relationships, games, interactions and transactions that are habitual and non-random). In this sense we can say that transactions are part of interactions, that interactions are part of "games" and that "games" are part of relationships, and that no instance of these categories can exist without a hierarchically superior instance.

If we do not know the games of which a certain action is a part, we cannot understand the meaning of that action.

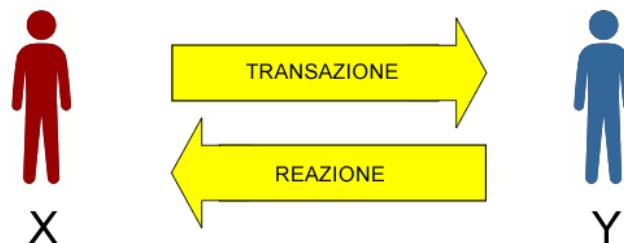
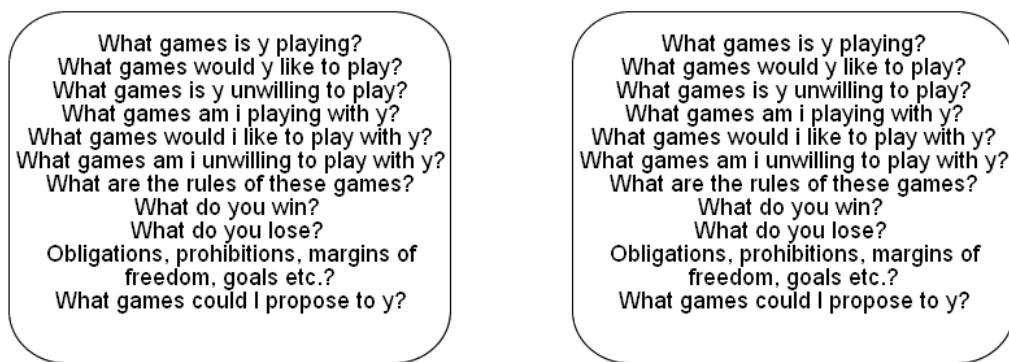
Humans do not need transactions (active or passive) per se, but to participate in particular natural and social games that involve certain transactions with certain meanings. Knowledge (both scientific and humanities) that focuses on transactions and interactions without considering the games of which they are a part does not meet human needs.

In what games do I need to participate, and in what roles? In what games do my stakeholders need to participate, and in what roles? With whom do I feel like playing, and with whom do I not feel like playing? With whom do my interlocutors feel like playing, and with whom do they feel like not playing? These should be some of the questions that those who want to live consciously and in good relationships with others should ask themselves.

Perhaps today's man has lost the sense of play and does not even know that he needs to play. Perhaps today's man is sad and bored because he has given up playing, and he has given up playing perhaps because the games of the past are no longer suitable for current situations.

To get out of the existential crisis and nihilism, we must then invent together and practice new social games, such as to meet our needs in the current (scientific, technological, economic and sociocultural) reality.

It is therefore worthwhile, from time to time, to do a "meta-game"; that is, to try to figure out what games we are playing, with whom and with what rules, and possibly negotiate with others new games or changes to known games.



Self-deception

Anxiety, attention, self-deception

What we are aware of (or unaware of) is an effect of attention (or inattention). In other words, we are aware only of what our attention rests on, that is, the ideas, perceptions and memories to which our attention is directed at any given moment. This is an infinitesimal part of what exists and affects us, so consciousness is always very limited.

Beyond that, consciousness is deceptive and illusory. In fact, what governs our attention and determines its directions are the stimuli we receive from outside and the filters built by our anxiety defense systems, which keep our attention (and thus consciousness) away from those ideas that would make us feel uncomfortable or cause us suffering.

In his book "Lies, Self-Deception, Illusion," Daniel Goleman describes for us a connection between attention and anxiety in the sense that conscious thoughts are *steered* by the unconscious so as to prevent them from giving rise to discomforts such as anxiety, distress, bewilderment, fear, insecurity, suffering, loss of self-esteem, guilt, etc.

This connection is consistent with the fact that, as Freud taught us, the conscious self is not the master of its own consciousness or will. That is, the conscious self is not the agent that chooses what and how to think and not to think, and how to articulate its thoughts. In fact, attention, which is normally involuntary and automatic, plays a role in this choice.

Attention, on the other hand, is always selective in that one can only pay attention to one or very few things (perceptions, ideas, thoughts or mental images) at a time. In fact, it is a passive, unconscious, automatic and involuntary cognitive process of selecting some environmental stimuli from the many available at a given time and ignoring others. The selected environmental stimuli are followed by automatic reflexes, i.e., cognitive, emotional and motivational responses, which, to the extent that they are consciously perceived by the subject, constitute, in turn, stimuli. The mind is thus continually subject to stimuli of both external and internal origin, which mutually influence each other and determine the direction of attention and consequently influence the subject's behavior automatically and involuntarily.

Despite this, we normally have the illusion that we are free and master of thinking what we want and that what we think is right, that is, logical and rational. This illusion is due, in my opinion, to the fact that the idea that we are not free even to think what we want is so upsetting and frightening that an unconscious defense mechanism removes it from consciousness.

That freedom to think is an illusion can be demonstrated by starting from the principle that everything that happens in the world (and therefore also in the mind) happens either by chance, or by some predefined law or logic (or by a combination of both). Thus, when we think, either our thoughts are random (and in that sense illogical), or they follow logic (or a combination of logic and chance). Well, if it is true, as I assume, that they mostly follow a logic (more or less realistic), this must be stored somewhere, and I assume that it is in the *Cognitive-Emotional Map* (to which the chapter of the same name is devoted). I mean that the logic to which I refer is not created at the moment of use but exists before it is applied.

We can therefore assume that different logics are stored in the mind for different situations (mostly learned from experience), so numerous that it is impossible to consciously consider them all at the same time. There must therefore be an unconscious and automatic mechanism or agent that, when faced with certain stimuli, chooses the logic of thought and/or behavior to be applied from among many possible ones.

The practical consequences of the above are unsettling from various points of view (existential, ethical, social, philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, etc.). Indeed, not only are our thoughts involuntary (and therefore uncontrollable by the conscious self), but they are also deceptive in that they are not objective. This is because the agent who determines the sequence of thoughts avoids potentially anxious cognitive pathways before they become conscious, resulting in *gaps* or logical leaps in the thought itself. What is worse, is that we are not aware of such gaps and logical leaps since the agent governing our thoughts prevents our attention from going to the inconsistencies and shortcomings of the thoughts themselves. Only higher thinking, or *metathought* (i.e., thinking about one's own thinking) can in fact investigate and question oneself and one's rationality. However, people capable of *metathought* are rare, and one of the purposes of this book is to teach how to do so.

About the gaps in our thinking, R. D. Laing wrote:

"The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And until we can notice what we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change, until we notice how we fail to notice the shapes of our thoughts and actions."

Levels of perception and response

A piece of information, before it reaches consciousness, undergoes a number of automatic processes that transform, filter, interpret, classify, organize and evaluate it from one or more external and/or internal stimuli. So, what we are aware of is never reality as such, but a transformation of it carried out by our mind in ways that differ more or less from one person to another as they depend on the experiences and temperament of the subject.

An information (or idea) may be more or less pleasant or painful, attractive or repulsive. This quality is not established by consciousness, but by unconscious automatisms (based on previous experiences) even before the information reaches consciousness itself. It is precisely at the stage when a piece of information arouses an unpleasant feeling before it has reached consciousness that the unconscious can censor it in the sense of not getting it to consciousness at all, or getting it there altered, distorted, falsified, mystified, belittled or accentuated by the subtraction of particular aspects or the addition of invented aspects.

The purpose of unconscious self-censorship is thus to avoid the greater suffering that would occur if the information reached consciousness. Indeed, an unpleasant idea is so first of all at the unconscious level, causing a feeling of discomfort of an origin not known to consciousness (as in the case of distress), and secondly it may be so at the conscious level, where the discomfort is associated with a particular cause (more or less corresponding to reality).

Social value of self-deception - Collective lies.

Self-deception (i.e., a mental map of reality that does not correspond to reality itself) has a social valence, in the sense that it is an important factor in social cohesion. Indeed, it is impossible to belong to a community without sharing the collective deceptions that characterize it.

Self-deception affects both the *self* and the *we*, and patterns shared with other people prevail over those not shared. Moreover, group cohesion prevails over truth, and any information likely to diminish that cohesion is ignored.

In this regard Yuval Noah Harari wrote:

"Even if we have to pay a price for turning off our rational faculties, the benefits of greater social cohesion are often so great that made-up stories normally trump truth in human history. Scholars have known this for thousands of years, which is why [...] they had to choose between serving truth or social harmony. Should they aim to unite people by making everyone believe the same falsehood, or should they make truth known at the price of disunity? Socrates chose truth and was sentenced to death. The most powerful social institutions in history (Christian clergy, Confucian mandarins, communist ideologues, etc.) made unity prevail over truth. That's why they were so powerful."

Thus, we can say that self-deception, that is, gaps and logical leaps in conscious thought, serve to avoid being excluded or ostracized from the community to which one belongs. In fact, the absence of self-deception would have two serious consequences.

The first would be an accusation of the falsehood of the majority of the members of one's community, an accusation that would not be tolerated by those concerned and would result in the punishment and marginalization of the accuser.

The second consequence would be a self-accusation of one's own falsehood, which would have disastrous effects on self-esteem, both intellectually and morally. For in such a case the subject would feel unworthy of belonging to a community of sincere people.

Let us take religious beliefs as an example. For those who belong to a community characterized by the sharing of certain religious beliefs, to denounce that these are based on fabrications and falsehoods passed off as truths is tantamount to self-condemnation for exclusion from the community itself. Such an eventuality is so frightening on an unconscious level that any logical argument capable of proving the falsity of the beliefs under accusation is simply ignored. Added to this is the fact that if those beliefs were shown to be false, the subject would be shown to be stupid and naive in that he or she is incapable of seeing what is obvious and willing to believe in the existence of things that do not exist, simply because someone has induced him or her to do so or out of an instinct of imitation. Such an eventuality is also frightening to the subject's unconscious as it would undermine his self-esteem to the point of making him feel unworthy of belonging to a community of intelligent and realistic people. There are thus two important reasons for ignoring any argument that might reveal the deception.

I assume that self-deception is based on unconscious axioms such as the following:

- I am part of a community of fair, intelligent, and well-informed people
- I am fair, intelligent and well informed
- I share the beliefs of the majority of the members of the community to which I belong
- I am accepted and approved by the majority of the members of the community to which I belong

Well, any argument that contradicts one of the above axioms is normally censored by the unconscious preventing attention from being placed on it in order to avoid anxiety, loss of self-esteem, suffering, confusion, etc.

For example, the present book may not be accepted as true by most human beings as it would challenge one or more of the above axioms.

Everyone has a worldview that they have constructed as a result of their experiences. Such a view may be erroneous and misleading as to what is more or less important, good, useful and true. The problem is that we are not used to questioning our worldview, partly because it conditions us to such an extent that we cannot see anything that is not consistent or compatible with it.

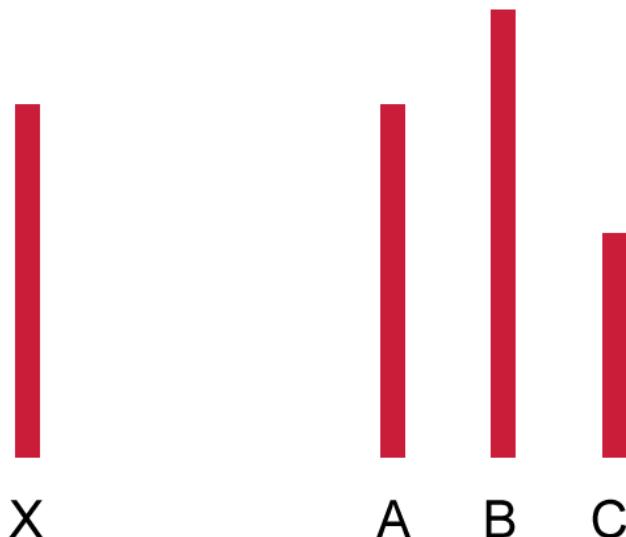
We especially tend to deny the truth of anything that puts us in a bad light. In fact, self-esteem defense overrides recognition of truth, and threats to self-esteem are a major cause of anxiety and stress.

A revealing experiment

Solomon Asch's famous *conformity experiment* determined that there is a probability of about 33% that an individual will believe what others claim to see even if it is contrary to what he or she sees. In effect, the greater the number of people who think a certain way, the greater the probability that a person will go along with their thinking, even when it does not match his or her own experience.

In Asch's experiment, it was a matter of choosing the correct answer from three options, as shown in the figure below. The majority of participants in the experiment, in agreement with the experimenter, would occasionally deliberately answer incorrectly without the knowledge of the one person who was really the subject of the experiment.

WHICH OF THE THREE LINES (A, B, C) IS THE SAME LENGTH AS LINE X?



One-third of the people tested agreed with the majority's incorrect answer even though they believed it to be incorrect at first glance. On the other hand, we can assume that the probability of believing in falsehoods asserted by a majority is much higher than 33 percent in ambiguous situations, where evaluations are not verifiable or when the subject is not completely sure of his or her own ideas and perceptions.

This experiment can be seen as evidence of both conformism in the sense of adjusting one's behavior to the pressures of the majority and self-deception in the sense that adjusting to the majority requires the subject to self-deceive, that is, to suppress one's own truth (based on one's direct experience) in favor of that asserted by others. In this sense, self-deception takes the form of unconscious manipulation practiced on oneself, presumably to avoid punishment or exclusion by a majority intolerant of those who dissent from common certainties.

Mental patterns and social contexts

Each individual's consciousness and unconscious function on the basis of predefined mental schemas constructed (and modifiable) through experiences. Through such schemas, the subject determines what is (or is not) true, good, beautiful and important, that is, to what extent each perceived entity (object, idea, person, situation, action, etc.) is true, good, beautiful and important.

Mental schemas also define the *social contexts* (theorized by sociologist Erving Goffman under the name "frames") in which one can find oneself, the roles one can assume in each context, and what each role can, should and should not do within that context. In fact, any social transaction outside shared contexts, or that does not comply with the rules of the applicable context, is usually considered violent, intrusive or distasteful, or is simply ignored, as if it never happened. We can in this regard imagine the misunderstandings and

discomfort that can arise when two people ascribe different contexts, that is, with different roles and different rules, to the same situation.

Mental schemas are determined primarily by the culture to which they belong and are more or less similar from person to person in the sense that, comparing the mental schemas of two individuals, one can find common entities with concordant evaluations, common entities with discordant evaluations, and uncommon entities (i.e., known to one and not to the other).

When discordances emerge in the interaction between two people on the evaluation of certain common entities, I suppose that an unconscious logic is activated in the same people that says something like the following:

My evaluation of entity X (i.e., to what extent X is true, good, beautiful, important) is different from that of my interlocutor. If his assessment were right, then mine would be wrong. In that case, it would be my mental schema that would be wrong, since it determined the evaluation itself. Since my mental schema coincides with my personality, then my personality would be wrong. And since my personality coincides with my person, then this would be wrong, so I would be wrong. However, I cannot admit that I am wrong because that would make me suffer unbearably, so my interlocutor's evaluation of entity X is necessarily wrong, and consequently so is my interlocutor.

Therefore, in case of discordant evaluations, the unconscious has several options, including the following:

- Maintain their own different assessment by devaluing the interlocutor;
- devalue the importance of the evaluated entity and thus of the evaluation itself by considering it unimportant, meaning that the discordant evaluation has no repercussions in the relationship between the two interlocutors or with other people;
- To eliminate one's assessment, that is, to refrain from assessing the entity in question;
- Deny the existence of the entity in question.

In all cases it is self-deception, at the root of which is the idea that one's mental schema (understood as worldview) coincides with one's own person and that one's evaluations are absolutely true. Instead, the truth is that our mental schemes are relative, variable, changing, "slanted" (from the English *biased*), generalizing, simplifying, always limited and never sufficient.

It is also wrong to assume that two discordant assessments cannot both be valid. Actually they can be, since each assessment should be circumstantiated, relativized, that is, contextualized, so a change in context could alter the assessment itself.

Double bind, self-deception, and lie management

Every human is subject to a "double bind": on the one hand, the duty to be truthful (as we have been taught since childhood), and on the other hand, the duty not to denounce the collective lies of the community to which we belong. Indeed, if he did so, others would

punish him to the point of excluding him from the community itself. The solution to this double bind, in order to avoid emotional stress and other mental disorders, is not to see others' lies nor one's own, that is, not to consider certain statements as lies.

It is difficult to lie to others without also lying to oneself. To be convincing we must believe in what we say to others, even if it is falsehood. In fact, if we cultivated two different versions of facts in our minds, one true for our own use and one false for others, we would end up either confusing between them and inadvertently revealing to others what we want to keep from them, or believing in some of the falsehoods we say.

In fact, we are so accustomed to being deceived and deceiving that we deceive even ourselves without realizing it. Truth and lies are mixed so well that we are constantly engaged in trying to figure out what is true and false in the narratives we receive. We are also engaged in constructing our own lies and hiding inconvenient truths about ourselves. As a result, we are always afraid (consciously or unconsciously) that truths about ourselves will come to light.

Moreover, we cannot expose all the lies of others with impunity, but must often pretend not to see them in order to maintain good relations with our interlocutors.

The most common lies are about religion, politics, social relations, morals, aesthetics, intelligence, one's own and others' status, one's feelings, desires and motives, meaning that everyone tries to appear better and more important than they really are, and to make a virtue of necessity or fault.

I suppose that the unconscious and irrational handling of lies is one of the main causes of our emotional stress, inhibitions, and mental and psychosomatic disorders.

Since we cannot help lying nor manage our own and others' lies, we should then try to do so consciously, pragmatically, with intelligence, moderation, sensitivity and, if possible, with love.

Threat, anxiety, stress and self-deception

Anxiety is the effect of the perception of a real or perceived threat, more or less clear and more or less conscious. Anxiety gives rise to mental stress (aimed at the removal or elimination of the threat), which in the long run can cause fatigue and psychosomatic disorders.

If an event is assessed (consciously or unconsciously) as a threat, anxiety and a series of mechanisms aimed at resolving it are triggered. Attention is then focused on the (real or presumed) cause of the anxiety, and the prevailing motivations are those that lead to attack or escape as opposed to what is perceived as a threat. As a result, attention is diverted away from other behavior options that could more intelligently and effectively neutralize the threat.

We can distinguish anxiety and the resulting mental stress into two categories: that of natural origin (such as when one is in danger of being attacked by a vicious animal or being submerged in an avalanche) and that of social origin (such as when one's reputation is questioned). Natural stress is usually short-lived, and any physical pain is relieved by

endorphins to allow the person to focus on a quick solution of avoiding danger. Social stress, on the other hand, is often of long duration and the connected pain less acute, so the secretion of anesthetizing endorphins does not occur or is quickly exhausted. In addition, the source of *social* stress is much more difficult to determine than *natural stress*. If the cause of social stress is not quickly overcome, the pain is then attenuated by unconscious *palliative* defense mechanisms, which tend to deny threats or distort their perception. In this way, stress is reduced at the expense of the realism of perception.

There can in fact be three responses to a stressful situation:

- Cope with the threat and change the situation by eliminating or removing the threat
- relieving stress by physical (alcohol, drugs, etc.) or mental (self-deception, delusion, etc.) palliation
- Not coping with stress and suffering its damage (fatalism, sense of defeat, reduced attention span, psychosomatic disorders, etc.)

Psychiatrist Mardi Horowitz summarized in the following list some strategies put in place by the defense mechanisms of the unconscious to avoid or decrease social anxiety:

- Unseen associations, i.e., gaps in cause-effect relationships, i.e., in predicting the consequences of what is evident.
- Insensitivity, that is, inhibition of emotional responses to certain perceived situations (emotional distancing).
- Attenuation of emotional response, i.e., downsizing of threat.
- Decreased attention, that is, less ability to focus on information, including thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations.
- Numbness, that is, less readiness and ability to understand and evaluate the meaning of events and messages.
- Narrow thinking, that is, inability to explore other possible meanings besides the most immediately obvious one.
- Memory defects, i.e., selective amnesia of events or details of events.
- To deny the evidence, that is, to think that something with an obvious meaning has another meaning instead.
- Barring with fantasizing, that is, escaping reality or its implications through fantasies about what could have been or could be.

Miscellaneous reflections on self-deception and the unconscious

Deception is a totally or partially false statement, illusion an improbable or impossible expectation, i.e., unrealistic. Human beings deceive and delude each other (consciously or unconsciously) out of ignorance, to exploit each other, to conform or to save face; they deceive and delude themselves unconsciously out of ignorance and to suffer less. In fact, the truth can be disarming, ridiculous, painful, atrocious, upsetting, unbearable.

The more certain we are that we are not deceiving ourselves, the more we deceive ourselves. And conversely, the more certain we are of deceiving ourselves, the less we deceive ourselves. In fact, in the former case we are so sure of our ideas that we do not question them, while in the latter case our doubts cause us to test their soundness.

The unconscious selects what it considers useful and ignores what it considers useless with respect to its motives, making it aware only of what it considers useful.

When we look at a painting, our attention goes to certain details more than others in a non-random way. The unconscious determines which parts deserve more attention and which less. The latter are those most likely to evoke anxiety.

The Freudian mechanism of removal is related to that of selective attention. Indeed, the purpose of removal, like that of selective attention, is to avoid stress and suffering for the subject.

Just as a dictator controls the circulation of information according to his interests and policy, the unconscious controls what can surface and what should not surface to consciousness.

Any desire generally considered pathological, criminal, humiliating, shameful or ridiculous (and as such painful) is normally removed, although it continues to seek its satisfaction in hidden or concealed forms. Sometimes it even happens that the subject thinks he has desires opposite to those removed, that is, he believes he hates what he actually loves and loves what he actually hates.

Lying, as well as self-deception serve (or should serve) to be more respected, accepted, recognized, loved by others. They serve to present ourselves to others in a more respectable and socially worthy way than we really are.

Not only the facts can be removed, but also the feelings attached to the facts. Indeed, sometimes the facts are not removed, but only the feelings attached to them, as if we were indifferent to the facts themselves.

Rationalization is a mechanism that constructs an acceptable narrative to explain facts whose truthful explanation would be unacceptable. That is, it involves denying the true motives for a certain behavior by citing plausible reasons other than the actual, and more politically correct, ones.

We love anything that endorses our lies and hate anything that threatens to expose them.

Alcohol and drugs are palliatives that reduce anxiety by reducing attention to perceived threats.

Advertising and political messages are almost always deceptive, especially in wars and political and economic crises.

When we hear a certain speech, it is possible that it concerns us, that it directly or indirectly says something about us that is unflattering, something that is inconsistent with our self-image and consequently challenges our personality. In such a case, the unconscious causes us not to take that speech seriously, not to give it any weight, to forget it immediately, or to criticize and discredit it.

"Trivers, taking his theory of emotions to its logical consequences, notes that in a world full of falsehood-revealing machines the best strategy is to believe your own lies. You cannot have your hidden intentions revealed if you do not think they are your intentions. According

to this theory of self-deception, the conscious mind hides the truth from itself to better hide it from others. But truth is useful, and so it should be recorded somewhere in the minds, well protected from the parts that interact with other people." [Steven Pinker]

Concluding remarks

It is not true that we normally seek truth and justice, as we believe and would have us believe. We actually seek to satisfy our needs and desires even at the cost of being false and unjust.

Man needs to be loved, respected, welcomed, protected, helped, cared for, served, but he does not need to love, respect, welcome, protect, help, care for, serve, even if he does (or pretends to) because if he did not he would not be considered respectable or accepted.

Man needs rights, not duties; to dominate, not to be dominated; his own freedom, not that of others; to use others, not to be used by them. But these truths are hidden, mystified, concealed from us and from others. We are in fact much more selfish than we are willing to admit.

Therefore, if we want to be less selfish and more respectful of others' needs and desires, we must unveil our self-deceptions and recognize the true extent of our selfishness, without absolving ourselves just because someone is more selfish than we are.

Psychotherapy

To improve a person's mind (in the sense of making him or her more capable of meeting his or her own and others' needs in a sustainable way) psychotherapy conducted by a professional psychotherapist, or self-therapy, may be useful. However, the latter requires skills and knowledge that few people possess.

There are various types and schools of psychotherapy, and it is difficult to determine which are most effective. Indeed, it seems that for each type of personality and mental distress there is a more suitable type of psychotherapy. On the other hand, scientific research has shown that the success of psychotherapy depends more on the quality of the relationship that is established between client and therapist than on the psychotherapeutic technique used, that is, it depends mainly on the personality and skills of the therapist.

My experiences as a psychotherapeutic client (with therapists of different schools) and my research on the workings of the mind (the results of which are described in the present paper) have led me to devise and successfully experiment on myself with a therapeutic technique to which I have given the name ***Synoptic Training***, which I believe can be used as an adjunct to psychotherapies (and self-treatments) of any kind.

Synoptic Training is a method based on the synoptic perception of words, phrases or other graphic or auditory material capable of evoking contents of the subject's psyche of particular relevance to his or her distress. Such material should be collected and recorded (on paper or by means of a computer) in the course of the psychotherapeutic process, as emotionally relevant facts or ideas emerge.

The adjective *synoptic* means, in this context, that the visualization or listening to the collected material should take place simultaneously, that is, by arranging the emotion-evoking objects in combinations (i.e., "configurations"), capable of arousing unwanted emotions that can be linked with the psychic distress complained of by the subject.

The therapeutic effect of this technique consists *in the induction of* connections between psychic entities otherwise isolated from each other due to cognitive or emotional conflicts or incompatibilities.

In fact, whenever we perceive an "object," it is "recognized" by our mind, i.e., evoked in thought and/or in the feeling sphere along with related cognitive, emotional and motivational associations. When two or more objects are perceived simultaneously, several psychic entities are evoked, i.e., "come to mind" simultaneously, *suggesting* a possible logical connection between them. Such linkage could result in emotional responses (pleasant or unpleasant) that do not occur when the same mental entities are evoked separately.

Finding out that the connection (which occurred by chance) between two particular mental entities causes undesirable emotional responses can be an excellent clue to highlight mental connections that are worth changing as they are not "healthy."

On the other hand, the unwanted emotional response to a certain association of ideas may regress to a neutral response, by repetition of perception, over the course of days.

Synoptic Training makes use of paper-based graphic tools such as forms, questionnaires,

mind maps and, optionally, computer applications. It can be practiced with or without the help of a psychotherapist; however, independent use requires skills of abstraction, analysis, synthesis, self-control and psychological knowledge that the subject may not possess to a sufficient degree.

Synoptic Training can be integrated with any type of psychotherapy from any school in order to make the psychotherapeutic process more effective.

Synoptic Training is intended both for psychotherapeutic patients and for people who, although they do not have any particular mental problems or discomforts, wish to improve their mental well-being, wisdom, creativity and/or productivity, cope better and more courageously with life's difficulties, know their needs better and meet them more effectively.

Synoptic Training includes the following three processes:

- **ANALYSIS:** Consists of making a written inventory of the subject's psychic contents with which are associated suffering, dissatisfactions, unjustified inhibitions and fears, undesirable behaviors and emotions, as well as inclinations, desires, aspirations, and sources of well-being of particular importance. To this end, it is recommended that the subject use a number of tools described in the Tools section, and in particular the *Interconnector*. The material should be collected in a random and unstructured manner, i.e., it should not be organized or ordered, and there is no requirement that there be logical or coherent relationships among the various "evokers."
- **CONFRONTING:** It consists of repeatedly viewing or listening to the collected material so as to stimulate unwanted or unwarranted emotional, cognitive and motivational responses, until the responses themselves subside to the point where one can reflect on them calmly. It is important to observe "together," that is, in *synoptic* frameworks, the collected evocations.
- **REORGANIZATION:** It consists of organizing the collected evokers by grouping them into categories such as the following: my needs, my fears, my feelings, values, goals, plans, preferences, abilities, inabilities, superiority, inferiority, problems, strengths, weaknesses, etc., and using the material thus organized, for further coping exercises until a satisfactory attenuation of unwanted emotional responses.

To facilitate these processes, I recommend using the mindOrganizer computer application, developed by me, with which the user can create and display in various modes, including animated and speech synthesized, an unlimited number of pages, using an Internet navigator (*browser*).

The above three processes can take place either in series (i.e., one after the other) or in parallel (i.e., simultaneously and recursively). For none of them is a definite conclusion expected as they all require modifications of the collected material, reflecting the evolving personality and psychic structure of the subject.

Self-government

To govern means to direct, guide, pilot, control, command, care for, guard, nurture, something or someone; self-government means to govern oneself. Come to think of it, self-government seems an absurdity. For how can a thing govern itself? Governing presupposes an object of government, that is, a governed entity. In the case of self-government, a same thing would be both governing and governed. An absurdity, unless we divide the person interested in self-government into two distinct entities: one that governs and one that is governed by the other.

If the *governing* part of the human being is the conscious self, then the governed part is the rest of the body and mind, including the unconscious. But the matter becomes complicated in that the conscious self, which in the following we will simply call "I," is *dependent on* the rest of the body and mind, which in the following we will simply call "me."

So how can a certain entity govern another on which it depends for its life and functioning? In fact, the "I," in order to govern, needs information and energy that comes to it from the "me. Indeed, we can say that the "I" cannot in any way perceive the world directly and on its own, but only through the information provided to it by the "me," and can make its decisions only on the basis of it. In fact, without the me, the "I" could neither exist nor function nor know the world.

We can therefore say that the will of the me is not a first cause, but the consequence of other wills residing in the unconscious and involuntary part of the body. In other words, the conscious will is *willed* by other wills other than itself and located elsewhere.

Because of the above, one could turn the situation upside down and say that it is the *me* that governs the *self*.

I assume, however, that both hypotheses are true, that is, at the same time the *me* governs the *me* and the *me* governs the *me*, each with its own modalities and limitations. We can therefore assume *bidirectional self-government* and play with words by claiming that *the will is involuntary*.

On the other hand, if it is true that the conscious self is an evolutionarily more recent development than the rest of the body, then we can assume that it has a service function rather than a command function, that is, that it commands the body only to serve it, that is, to meet the body's needs as effectively and efficiently as possible, and should have no other motivation.

Self-government by the conscious self can be regarded as the exercise of free will (see the chapter of the same name). In fact, asking whether free will is possible is equivalent to asking whether self-government is possible; moreover, for the same reasons that it is *convenient to believe that* free will is possible, it is convenient to believe that self-government is possible as well.

Before proceeding with our reflections, it is good to distinguish two types of self-government: unconscious and conscious. The former is what normally occurs, while the latter is rather rare because it requires intellectual skills and psychological or philosophical

knowledge that few possess. We could call conscious self-government "meta-self-government," meaning self-government that is self-aware.

In the remainder of this chapter, by "self-government" we will mean *conscious* government that has the "*I*" as its subject and the "*me*" as its object, and that is exercised on the basis of information that the "*me*" sends to the "*I*" and of which the "*me*" may be more or less aware.

Conscious self and self-government

The most important and *highest* activity of the conscious self is self-government, that is, governing, at the highest organizational level, the organism of which it is a part. However, the conscious self cannot exist or operate autonomously since its life and operations are totally dependent on that of the organism it is called upon to govern. Indeed, there are good reasons to believe that the conscious self is born with the organism and dies with it. In other words, I would say that it emerged phylogenetically in the organism to intelligently direct its high-level behavior, and it has reason and cause to exist only to the extent that it is able to perform that function effectively. That is to say, the conscious self is at the service of the organism, and not vice versa, although the conscious self is able to command some parts of the organism to which it belongs, namely the voluntary muscles.

Since an individual's needs and desires can be, indeed are normally, conflicting, an important task of the conscious self, and purpose of self-government, is to reconcile conflicting motivations, that is, to find compromise solutions so that, as far as possible, sooner or later, all needs are satisfied. In this sense, self-government also involves deciding which needs and desires to indulge and which to frustrate, and until when.

By governing himself through the conscious self, an individual can, within certain limits and to a certain extent, also govern other people and the environment around him. Therefore, in order to govern the outside world (including others) as effectively as possible, one must be able to govern oneself effectively.

Why, when and how much to self-govern?

Self-government serves to better meet one's own and others' needs by overcoming the limits imposed by the unconscious on the conscious self and unveiling its self-deceptions and removals.

Before self-government, it is appropriate to ask oneself whether it is good to do so. The question makes sense in that self-government is exhausting, sometimes unpleasant, and in any case not without risk. It is strenuous because it involves resisting the tendency to behave in a habitual way, unpleasant in that it is difficult and sometimes frustrating, and risky in that it leads us to behave in a way that is not habitual, thus potentially dangerous, especially with regard to our social relationships. For we do not know how our self-controlled behavior might be perceived and judged by others (e.g., as an oddity, a threat, an indication of mental disorder, etc.).

Self-government therefore pays off only if and as long as it offers benefits that can offset the drawbacks described above. The main advantages of self-government can be summarized as follows:

- replacing automatisms that have proven to be unproductive or counterproductive, with others that are more satisfactory for their own and others' needs;
- avoiding errors of perception, self-deceptions and illusions that can lead us to make wrong decisions;
- dealing with problems more effectively and intelligently;
- knowing their needs better through analysis of their feelings, and meet them in more targeted ways;
- counteracting self-censorship and unwarranted guilt.

When in doubt whether to self-govern or not, it is therefore good to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of doing it and not doing it at a given time. I mean that self-government is a good thing if done at the right time, otherwise it may be counterproductive. It is therefore a question of when is the right time to do it, and for how long.

In any case, self-government cannot be practiced for too long as it is a source of emotional stress and mental fatigue, especially for those who are not used to it. Excessive self-government could in fact cause mental distress of longer or shorter duration (of this I have personal experience). Therefore, as part of self-government itself, it is necessary to understand when it is appropriate to start it and when to suspend it. It is therefore also a matter of recognizing a particular type of "self-government" stress by distinguishing it from other types of stress.

Practicing self-government requires sufficient free time, a quiet place where one can reflect undisturbed, and the ability to write. In fact, it is very difficult to self-govern in the presence of other people, distractions or intense stimuli.

Self-government procedure, interactions

Doing something (anything) is equivalent to interacting with something and/or someone. Therefore, self-government must always be focused on interactions between the subject and the rest of the world, or between the self and the unconscious.

In the interaction between two or more entities, each transaction can have certain properties such as the following:

- Causes, needs
- Randomness
- Intentions, purposes
- Contexts, roles, rules, languages, forms
- Meanings, messages
- Energies, masses, information
- Effects, changes produced
- Goals and desires for the issuer and the receiver

In general, the transaction may constitute a request or the satisfaction (i.e. fulfillment) of a request.

In self-governance it is necessary to consider all the above aspects as far as possible.

To practice self-governance it is advisable to use lists and questionnaires that suggest what to turn our attention to, what to think about, what questions to ask and what to do. Without

such tools, self-government is much more strenuous because it has to rely only on one's memory, which is manipulated by the unconscious. This, in fact, does not like to be governed by the conscious self and tries to resist its attempts to do so.

The self-government procedure I recommend consists in answering the following questions:

- Preliminary questions.
 - Are the conditions for practicing self-governance in place? (quiet, privacy, not tired, not anxious, sufficient free time, etc.); if the answer is no, postpone to a more suitable time.
 - To satisfy what needs and desires could/would/should I interact? See the chapter Needs, desires, motivations.
 - Are these healthy needs, desires and motivations? If the answer is no, go back to the previous point.
 - For what reasons are these needs and desires not already met? What has prevented or is preventing me from doing so? (Identify any conflicts and incompatibilities, antagonistic needs, impossibilities, anxieties, fears, guilt, risks, opposition from someone, incapacities, self-delusions, naiveté, self-deceptions, etc.).
 - What mental, cultural, intellectual, material, economic, social, etc. resources can I rely on to fulfill my needs and desires?
 - What are my limitations and abilities that I need to consider in trying to fulfill my needs and desires?
 - What drawbacks and risks should I consider in possible interactions?
 - Who should I get advice or guidance from?
 - What should I change and what should I keep in my relationships with others and the rest of the world?
- Main questions
 - Who/what could I interact with? See list of options.
 - What kind of action/interaction could I practice? See list of options.
 - In which role? See list of options.

- Concluding question: what interactions have I decided to exercise here and now or in the immediate future? With whom/what and in what roles?

The lists above are useful menus for deciding what to do, with whom/what and in what roles. Obviously, such a decision can be made without the need for any list, but thanks to them the choice can be more rational and effective, since the lists suggest options that the subject may not have thought of.

Before and during the procedure it may be useful to try to mentally answer the questions contained in the various questionnaires listed on the Questionnaires page. These questions are used, among other things, to become aware of various issues, to counter any unconscious resistance and boycotts to the practice of self-government, and to overcome any anxiety that self-government may cause.

Humor

In my opinion, comedy, that is, the humorous effect, is related to the unconscious perception of the difference in social rank between two people, that is, the superiority or inferiority of one person over another in a general hierarchy.

In fact, I suppose that what snatches laughter is the immediate reversal of the superior/inferior relationship between two people due to a sudden change of context, which in turn brings about a change of meanings and values in the picture being observed or told.

I think this because I believe that every human being is constantly concerned (consciously or unconsciously) about maintaining or increasing his or her social rank, that is, above all, about not going down, and possibly up, in the overall hierarchical ladder of the community to which he or she belongs. This concern is due to the fundamental need of every human being, to belong to a community, and of the consequent fear of being marginalized or being placed in more disadvantageous positions than others.

Take for example the following vignette.



The comic effect of the vignette arises, in my opinion, from the sudden reversal of the superiority/inferiority relationship between the little boy and the little girl unconsciously perceived by the viewer, as a result of the following dynamic.

Initially we have a cognitive context in which the little boy is unconsciously perceived by the viewer as superior to the little girl. In fact, the one boasts that he possesses something that the second one does not. But the latter's response suddenly replaces, in the viewer's attention, the initial context with a different one in which she is successful, that is, superior.

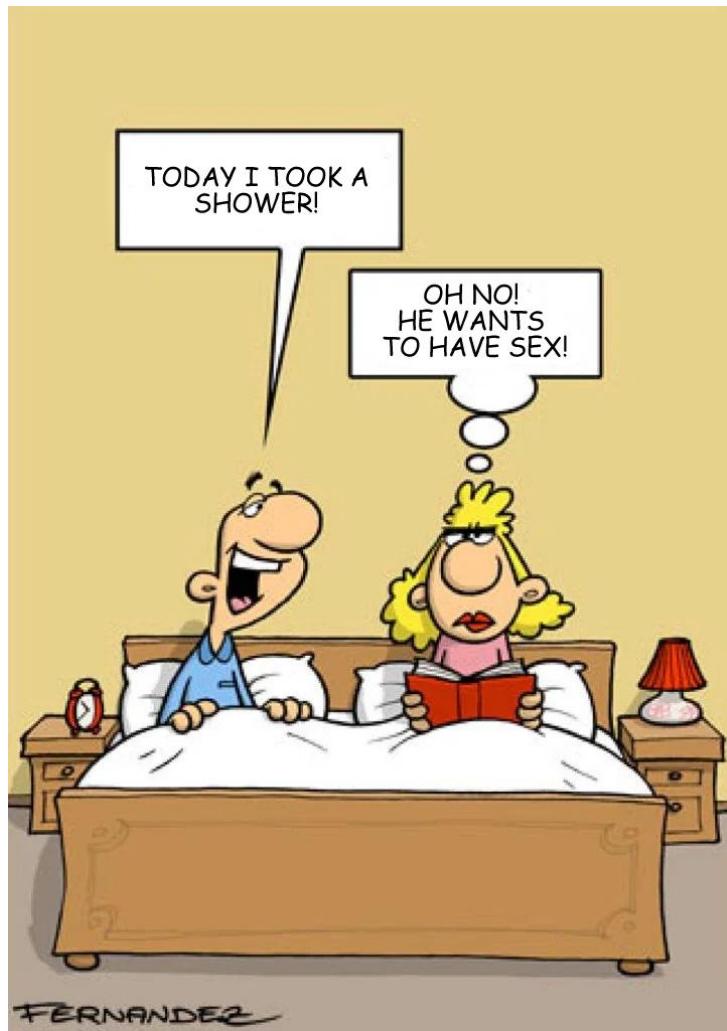
In fact, the little girl convincingly demonstrates that what appeared to be a disadvantageous characteristic of hers is actually advantageous, much more so than that flaunted by her antagonist.

The comic effect is heightened by the fact that the little boy boasts of his superiority, so that his downfall is even more ruinous and the reversal of positions even more obvious.

It is interesting to note that the little boy's sentence and the little girl's sentence, taken separately, have no comic effect. Only by their juxtaposition does such an effect originate. This shows that what makes one laugh is not any element of the scene but a change in the context, and thus the meaning and value, of the elements of the scene itself, since only the context allows things to be given meaning and value.

Moreover, the comic effect requires that the change of context be unexpected and immediate. In fact, the longer the time elapses between key phrases in the two contexts, the weaker the comic effect.

Let's take another example.



Again, we have an abrupt change of context and thus of meaning. In the first context (evoked by the first comic) we have a husband who anticipates sexual intercourse that he believes he deserves having showered, evidently imposed by his wife as a condition. Thus, we have a character who feels "high" and assumes that the interlocutor is at his disposal to fulfill his desire. The wife's comic tells a completely different story, where the husband appears to be a loser, either because his wife has no desire to have sex with him or because he proves to be a fool for not understanding the real situation. In short, in the viewer's unconscious, in the first context the husband dominates, in the second the wife. The sudden change of dominator snatches a laugh from him.

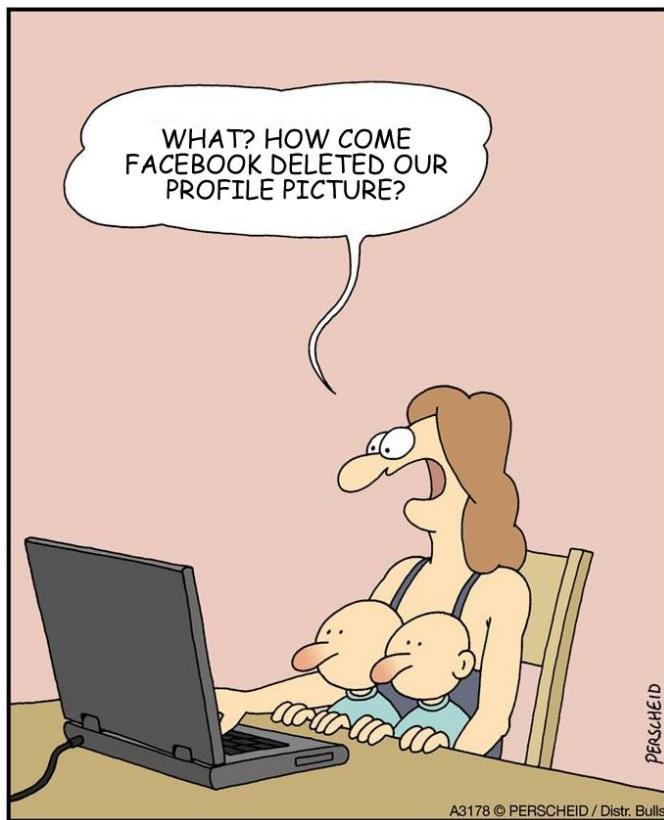
One more example.

In a restaurant a man shouts to the waiter:

- *Be careful! He stuck his finger in my soup!*
- *Don't worry, it's not very hot.*

In this case, in the first context the customer is the dominus in that he scolds the waiter and the waiter is in trouble having done a reprehensible thing such as putting a finger in the soup. In the second context, on the other hand, the dominus is the waiter, who does not feel in trouble at all; on the contrary, he *wins* because he does not recognize the rule against touching the food to be served with his hands. His freedom from the rules is a winner, while the customer is a loser because his rights are ignored and he is disrespected. The little story is doubly comical in that it is not clear whether the waiter is teasing the customer, that is, challenging him, or does not realize that he has done something reprehensible, showing that he is quite clueless. This uncertainty is comical because it suggests a change in the waiter's status from a brash figure to a stupid one.

Let us finally examine this vignette.



Here the comedy is not related to the power relationship between two characters, but is centered on the misadventure of a mom who does not understand what is happening to her. Here in the first context is a mom who does not understand why Facebook has deleted her profile picture. This is a serious thing that could happen to anyone, including the viewer, who therefore sympathizes with the character. In the second context, we find out the reason for the deletion, which reveals a certain stupidity of the character as well as the ugliness of her twins, mistaken by Facebook for mom's breasts. In the sudden change of context, in the eyes of the viewer the character falls from a comparable rank with his own into a much lower one, so the viewer suddenly feels superior to the character himself and stops sympathizing with him. The comic effect is thus due to a change in the power relationship between the character and the viewer.

Comedy as sudden and final betrayal

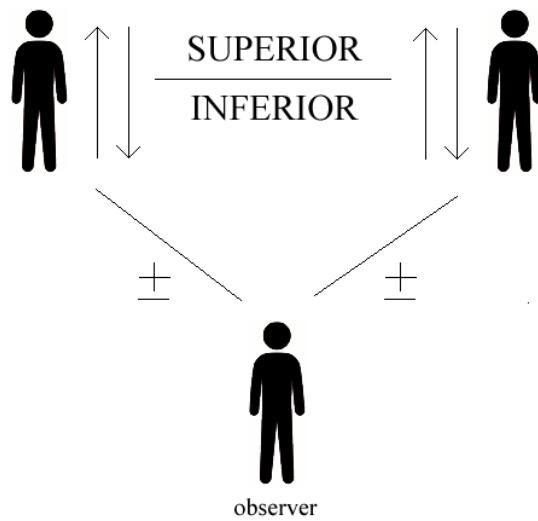
We might at this point ask whether the change of context, that is, the change of dominator of the scene, does not involve a change in the viewer's solidarity with the relevant characters. Indeed, in the case of the second vignette, we can assume that the viewer is initially sympathetic (i.e., sympathizing) with the husband, and that the change of context causes his solidarity (and sympathy) to shift toward the wife. This would be easily explained if we admit that there is in human beings a general tendency to side with the winners.

We might then think that the comic effect is due not only to the perception of a change in the balance of power between two characters toward whom the spectator is detached, but to the change in an unconscious affective position of the spectator who initially sides with a

character, and then, following his sudden fall, *betrays* him to side with his antagonist who has beaten him.

If this hypothesis were true, it could be said that the comic effect implies betrayal on the part of the viewer, and the laughter could be the *psychosomatic* effect of the betrayal itself. In fact, the feeling of well-being that accompanies the laughter could be due to the perception of having made a good choice, of having overcome the anguished indecision about whom to side with affectively. After the twist, the power relations become decidedly, caricaturally clear, and the viewer can wholeheartedly and convincingly side with the winner, which results in relief as sudden as the laughter itself.

In the light of my reflections, I believe that humor is little studied from a philosophical and psychological point of view despite its enormous importance in social life. Just think of all the times we laugh or try to make people laugh when in company, and all the books, movies and comedy shows out there. The reason for this disinclination of philosophers and psychologists, as well as ordinary people, to investigate the deep roots of humor and comedy is, in my opinion, that these roots are *politically incorrect*. For in them come to light aspects of human nature that are ethically reprehensible, such as the interest in social rank, the pleasure in seeing others descend in the hierarchy (since any lowering of others automatically corresponds to one's own elevation) and the tendency to sympathize with the victors.



Comedy as sudden servant/servant role change

Another possible key to understanding humor might involve, instead of status change (superior/inferior), role change (cooperator/servant).

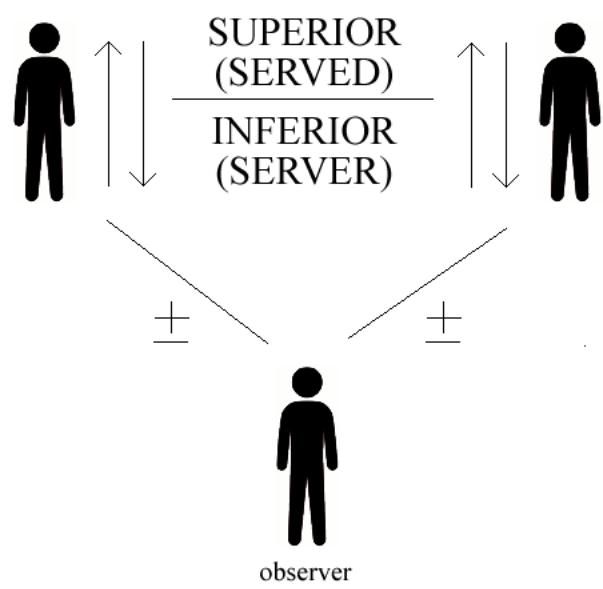
Take for example the following vignette.



In this case, in the first context there is an offer of a service consisting of the possibility of petting an animal in a kind of small petting zoo for children. In the second context we suddenly realize that the real intention of the offeror is to obtain from the unsuspecting customer a sexual service. In other words, the one who initially had a role as a bidder suddenly becomes the user of a different service, and a censurable one at that.

This schema (servant/served) is actually a variant of the schema (superior/inferior) in that we consciously or unconsciously associate superiority with the privilege of being served, followed, and obeyed by inferiors, and inferiority with having to serve, follow, or obey (a)superiors.

The combination of the two patterns (superior/inferior and servant/served) has the strongest comic effect. I am referring to the case where in the first context A presents himself to B as his servant, ready to help and obey him, while in the second context he is revealed as his dominator and exploiter. The second character is suddenly mocked, and the unexpected mockery wrests laughter in the spectator, who was in the first context sympathetic to B as a servant, and in the second context sympathetic to A as a mocker.



Summary of the Psychology of Needs

Fundamental importance of needs

I consider *needs to be* the foundation of any form of life, from the simplest species (such as single-celled organisms) to the most evolved (such as humans). They can be distinguished into *innate* (i.e., genetically determined and unchanging) and *acquired* (i.e., formed as a result of experience and modifiable through further experience). They can also be distinguished into *obtaining needs* and *avoidance needs*. Acquired needs (self-induced or third-party induced) develop as means to satisfy needs (innate or acquired) of a higher order.

The mind as a cybernetic system

I consider the mind to be a cybernetic system of intercommunicating autonomous agents, mostly unconscious and involuntary, whose purpose is to determine the individual's behavior in a way that promotes his survival and the preservation of his species. This is done through the satisfaction of his needs (both innate and acquired).

Origin of mental distress and purpose of psychotherapy

I view mental distress as an effect of the failure or inadequate satisfaction of one or more innate needs due to external or internal obstacles, conflicts between needs, and/or inadequate satisfaction strategies.

Psychotherapy is the methodical treatment of mental distress. It should help the patient (i.e., the *distressed person*) learn about his or her unmet needs and the reasons for their frustration, so as to correct the satisfaction strategies that have proven to be inadequate.

Classification of human needs

I have divided human needs into the following six classes. The concept of need is understood here in a broad sense and includes instinct, desire, passion, interest, attraction, drive, motivation, hope, etc., and the corresponding *rejections*, i.e., the avoidance needs of that which is opposed to the satisfaction of the obtaining needs.



Biological needs

Pertaining to: life, health, survival, sexuality, shelter, nutrition, protection and rearing of offspring, stimulation, sensation, rest, sleep, exercise, hygiene, recovery from disease, etc.



Community needs

Pertaining to: community, cooperation, membership and social integration, imitation,

sharing, alliance, affiliation, solidarity, affinity, intimacy, interaction, participation, service, acceptance, approval, acceptance, respect, morality, ritual, dignity, reputation, responsibility, etc.



Freedom needs

Pertaining to: freedom, individuation, diversity, rebellion, opposition, transgression, novelty, innovation, creativity, change, humor, selfishness, reserve, irresponsibility, etc.



Power needs

Pertaining to: power, strength, competition, power, skill, ability, supremacy, superiority, prevalence, dominance, ownership, possession, competitiveness, aggression, control, arrogance, jealousy, envy, etc.



Knowledge needs

They concern: knowledge, language, cognition, understanding, exploration, calculation, measurement, information, observation, surveillance, curiosity, prediction, progress, memory, recording, documentation, etc.



Beauty needs

Pertaining to: beauty, harmony, simplicity, uniformity, conformity, cleanliness, symmetry, synchronism, regularity, purity, rhythm, dance, song, sound, music, poetry, aesthetics, enchantment, etc.

To the six classes listed above I have added one that affects all the others in the sense that it aims for consistency among them, that is, to avoid and overcome conflicts between needs:



Consistency needs

They concern: consistency, non-contradiction, concordance, conciliation, unity, synthesis, synergy, harmony, order, etc. among needs. They also concern the perception of the "meaning" of existence.

Psychotherapeutic tools - Synoptic training

The effectiveness of psychotherapy (of any school) can be increased through the use of recorded information (writings, drawings, photographs, etc.) that the patient himself can produce (with or without the assistance of a therapist), and of repertoires, questionnaires, forms and guides that the therapist can make available to the patient; such tools can help him to identify and evoke unmet needs and stimulate a reorganization of his own cognitive, emotional and motivational automatisms that will make them more adequate to meet his own and others' needs.

Synoptic Training (which I conceived and tested on myself) is a method based on the **synoptic** perception of words, phrases or other graphic or auditory material capable of simultaneously evoking contents of the patient's psyche relevant to his or her distress. Such material should be collected and recorded (on paper or by means of a computer) during the course of the therapeutic process, as facts or ideas relevant to the process emerge.

In this book I present the principles of Synoptic Training and provide practical tools for facilitating a psychotherapy.

Key concepts for understanding life

I believe that the key concepts for understanding **life** are those of **system**, **information**, **interaction** and **need** and, for more complex life forms, such as humans, that of **feeling**.

The concept of **system** is important because the world is a system of systems, as are the biosphere, all living things, human beings, their minds and societies.

A living system is a collection of parts that **interact** by obeying the laws of physics and biology, that is, by trying to satisfy their own **needs**. From the **interaction** may emerge characteristics that were not present in the individual parts, such as consciousness. This is why a system is said to be more than the sum of its parts.

The concept of **information** is important in living things because life is based on information (encoded in DNA) that instructs living matter to preserve itself, develop, learn, reproduce and die of old age. In fact, the parts, or organs, that constitute a living thing communicate with each other by exchanging information (as well as substances), and their behavior is determined by information either of genetic origin or acquired through previous interactions.

The concept of **interaction** is important because a living system cannot exist as a species, let alone live as an individual, without there being interaction between its parts, that is, an exchange of information, substances and energies. Moreover, the human mind is formed through interactions with others and for the purpose of learning to interact with others in a

way that is functional to the satisfaction of one's own **needs** and those of the people on whom it depends.

The concept of **need** is important for a living system (organism or **ecosystem**) because every part of it, going all the way back to the cell, behaves in such a way as to satisfy needs that are encoded in its DNA and others that have developed through interactions with the rest of the world. The most basic need is that of genes, which need to reproduce and do so with strategies that differentiate through the evolution of the species. Such strategies may involve the development of new needs or subordinate needs. In fact, each need is a means, attempt, or strategy to satisfy a higher-order need.

Feelings and **needs** are intimately related in that feeling is a measure of the degree to which one or more needs are satisfied. In fact, pleasure comes from the satisfaction of needs, and pain from their frustration. Without needs there would be no feelings, no emotions, no pleasures, no pains, no joys, no sadness, and no consciousness.

Importance of social roles

A human being's needs can only be met through interaction and cooperation (direct or indirect) with other human beings. Human interactions are generally regulated by cultures, or civilizations, internalized at the unconscious level, which define forms, norms, values, languages and roles through which (and only through which) nonarbitrary and therefore nonviolent interactions are possible.

Each role corresponds to one or more social functions, that is, behaviors through which an individual contributes to the satisfaction of his or her own and others' needs.

The choice or assignment of roles can be competitive, and give rise to internal and external conflicts, that is, between the subject's different needs, and between the subject's needs and those of others.

A role that is not shared, not consensual, vague, confused, indecisive, or false, and therefore not easily implemented, may hinder the satisfaction of one or more needs and thus cause suffering and mental disorders.

Happiness and wisdom

I define an individual's happiness as a *habitual* condition in which his or her basic needs are *sufficiently* satisfied before any frustration of them causes psychophysical harm. By *sufficient* I mean to such an extent that the individual willingly accepts the life he leads and does not wish to change it structurally.

The ultimate goal of this book is to help one become wiser, that is, more able to know and meet one's own and others' needs, and consequently suffer less and enjoy more. All this, in a way that is sustainable for the person, society and the environment in an ecological sense.

ANNEXES

Tools

The tools described below can be used both for psychotherapeutic purposes (with or without the help of a psychotherapist) and for self-governance and self-improvement.

Non-computer tools

- Mental exercises (things to think about).
- Questionnaires (questions to ask ourselves).
- Therapeutic autobiography.

Tools that can be used via computer or paper

The following tools can be used either on paper or through the computer application [mindOrganizer](#), an online software for recording and reviewing psycho-stimulating words, phrases and images, with automatic animations, speech synthesis and various visualizations:

- Interconnector: a form-based method for creating an unstructured mind map not focused on a particular theme.
- Mind map: a method for creating a mind map of associations related to a particular theme.
- Configurator: a method of creating a configuration of text and/or images without a particular theme.

Interconnector

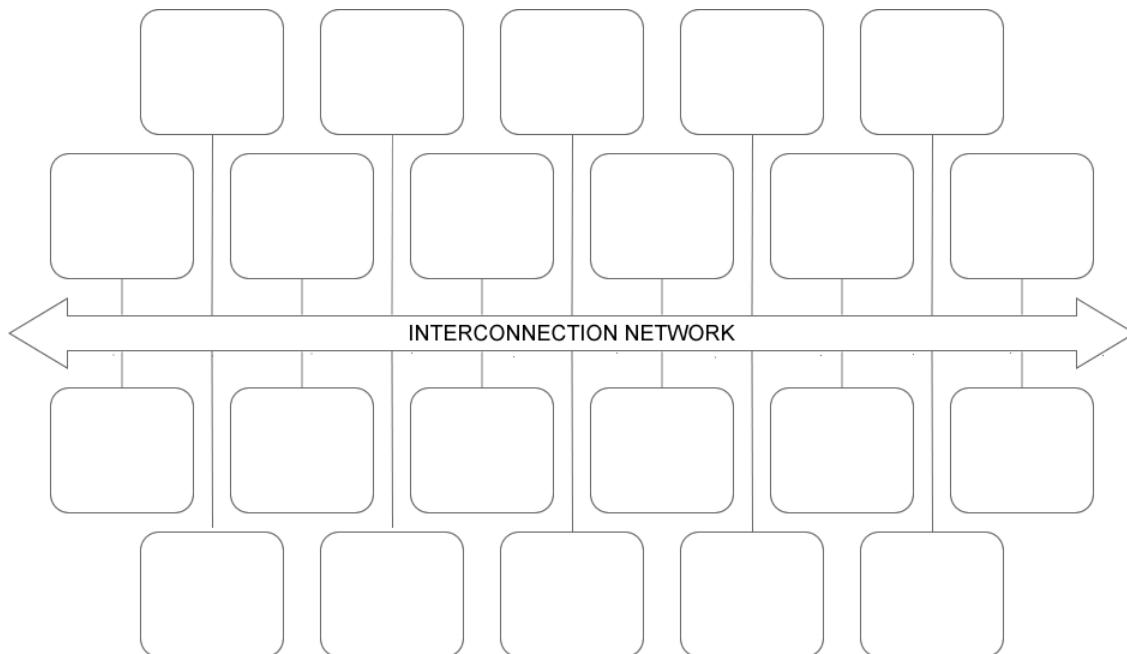
Interconnector (i.e., *non-thematic psychic map*) is a method of exploring, interconnecting and integrating the contents of one's mind more satisfactorily. It consists of the following activities:

- detect and verbally represent a number of emotionally important *mental entities* (i.e., capable of eliciting relevant emotional reactions);
- De-potentiating the disturbing ones;
- Reconcile and harmonize dissonant and antagonistic ones as appropriate;
- To deactivate, activate or reactivate logical interconnections, i.e., mental associations, between any pair of entities in order to improve the emotional well-being of the subject.

A *mental entity* is any mental entity (i.e., information, idea, concept, mental image, memory, sensation or perception) recorded in the subject's memory and evocable by a particular word or phrase, symbol, image or form.

The *Interconnector* serves to facilitate, expedite and document a psychotherapy or self-therapy, improve one's cognitive-emotional responses and develop creativity. In this sense, the *interconnector* can also be said to constitute **an unstructured inventory of the subject's psychic contents**. The *interconnector* is also a tool for constructing unstructured mind maps and *brainstorming* on any topic.

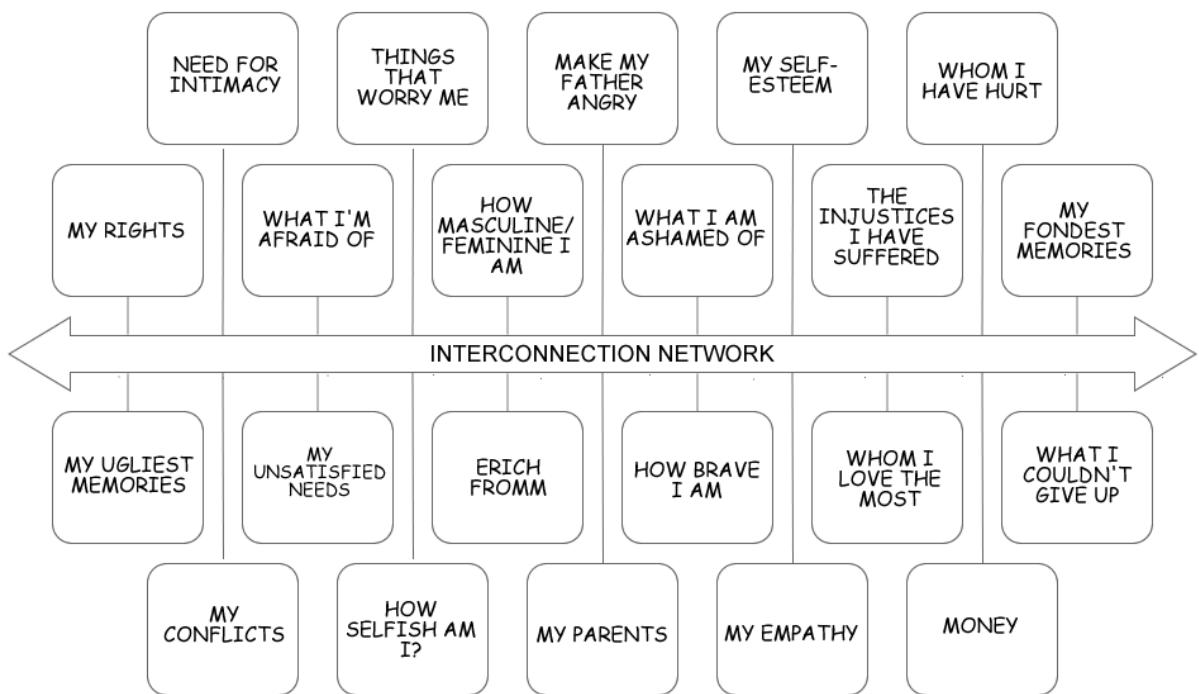
The *interconnector* is based on the use of the A4 printable form below. In it there are 22 boxes connected to an imaginary interconnecting network. In each box the user will write a word or phrase that represents and evokes a certain mental entity.



Interconnector form ([download as PDF](#))

Through the *interconnection network* every mental entity is potentially connected to any other. The number 22 is only due to the practical limitations of the space available in the sheet. In fact, ideally the *interconnector* should have an unlimited number of boxes. In practice, as many forms will be filled as needed, imagining a single, common interconnection network, so even entities belonging to different sheets can ideally be interconnected.

An example of a filled form follows.



Example of filled interconnector

Interconnector Instructions for Use.

- Download the form from [here](#) and print a few copies to fill in as they are needed.
- Get a binder in which to place the filled forms.
- Take a blank form and, at the top, in the space provided, write the start date of completion.
- Write in any box the name or title of the first thing you can think of that has any relevance to your life and/or has a positive or negative affective charge. A box filled in this way represents a *mental entity*. This can be of any type (see below under *Types of Mental Entity* for a list of possible types). Write preferably in block letters so as to facilitate later speed reading.
- Continue adding mental entities to the form until all the boxes are filled.
- Do not try to adhere to any consistency, order, structure, logic or rationality in identifying mental entities. Write down freely the things that come to your mind, even if they have nothing to do with those previously written.

- Add the completed form in the binder and start filling out a new one.
- Freely continue filling out the forms. There are no rules on the minimum and maximum number of mental entities or forms to be filled out each day.
- Whenever you feel like it, browse and reread the collected forms. Viewing the mental entities represented in them provides a stimulus for identifying additional entities.
- It is possible that the vision of mental entities causes anxiety, tension or sadness. This would dwell that the *interconnector* is having the intended effect. If the feeling is bearable, continue using the *interconnector* as described above, otherwise take a break until you feel able to continue again with sufficient serenity.
- Periodically reread all the pages in the folder, from the least recent to the most recent, starting again from the beginning when you reach the last. Rereading can be more or less frequent as you choose and can be paused and resumed at any time, even on different days.
- In moments of discouragement, anxiety or insecurity, or when you feel motivated or inspired to conceive new ideas, flip through the binder and reread the titles of the mental entities.

That is all there is to it. Nothing else needs to be done since the interconnection and harmonization of mental entities happens automatically without the intervention of consciousness or will. As you flip through the binder and look synoptically at the titles of the mental entities, your brain works to interconnect, reconcile and harmonize them (if that makes sense) without you being aware of it or having to play an active role. You will only experience feelings initially of tension then of increasing serenity or even euphoria, until one day you will no longer need the *interconnector* as a physical collector because you will continue to use it in your imagination. However, you will do well not to abandon the binder with the identified mental entities. It may come in handy again in case of anxiety or insecurity or to further stimulate your creativity.

Types of mental entity

- question
- problem
- hypothesis
- equation
- definition
- statement
- thinking
- person
- object
- group or set
- feeling
- desire
- need
- target
- will
- fear
- purpose
- suspect
- problem
- PROBLEM SOLUTION
- means to an end
- HOW TO.
- Comparison of two mental entities
- remembrance
- event
- experience
- mental image
- figure
- symbol
- place
- category of people
- other categories
- phenomenon
- context
- explanation
- conflict
- artwork
- literary work
- artifact
- action

- concept
- idea
- activities
- intention
- interaction
- situation
- status
- forecast
- fantasy
- secret
- hiding place
- composition
- affective triangle
- ascertainment
- source of pleasure
- source of pain
- evaluation
- etc.

Categories of mental entities

Mental entities can be grouped into the categories listed in the following list. "X" represents any person.

NOTE: It is not necessary to organize the mental entities included in the interconnector according to these categories. These are given here only to facilitate the identification of removed, forgotten or neglected mental entities.

- mine and x's needs
- mine and x's fears
- mine and x's worldviews
- my own and x's tastes and sources of pleasure
- disgusts and sources of my and x's pain
- authority that x and I respect
- authority that x and I do not respect
- things that are important to me and x
- my own faults and merits and those of x
- painful and pleasant memories of my own and of x
- particular people important to me and x
- types of people important to me and x
- diversity and similarities between me and x
- my and x's mistakes
- my and x's rights and duties
- options, resources, capabilities, and impossibilities of myself and x
- mine and x's satisfactions and frustrations
- mine and x's feelings
- things that x and I want now
- mine and x's conflicts and dissonances
- mental entities of my own and x's
- etc.

Suggestions of mental entities to be included in the forms

The following list contains some suggestions of mental entities to include in your forms. Replace "X" with the name of a person significant to you.

- my faults
- MY MERITS
- Why am I anxious?
- my duties
- my needs
- my fears
- the time it happened
- What do I appreciate about X?

- my responsibilities
- MY GOALS
- what I want to change into
- how I want to live
- what scares me the most
- what am I doing wrong
- my playmates
- How much my parents respected me
- when I was rejected
- when I was deceived
- when I was exploited
- What do I expect from others?
- MY STRENGTHS
- My parents' affection for me
- my rights
- my ability to assert my rights
- the injustices I have suffered
- my body and its flaws
- Why should I be rejected or excluded?
- my courage to suffer
- what do I risk?
- traditions I despise
- How useful do I feel to others?
- Which of my rights have been violated?
- What rights of others have I violated?
- how much am I right?
- How much peace am I at with God?
- How selfish am I?
- What am I hiding from X?
- laughing at my fears
- In what would I like to be successful?
- what I remember about
- what am I stopping myself from doing
- what do I fear?
- what am I curious about?
- imagine being another
- Who likes me?
- my worldview
- X's worldview
- Who I would like to be vs. who I am
- my addictions
- my limitations
- my conformity
- my sociability
- the authorities I do not respect
- things I'm ashamed of
- What do I despise about X?
- what do I appreciate about myself?
- What do I despise about myself?
- Who am I hurting?
- What can I talk to X about?
- people I envy
- How am I different from X?
- what X and I have in common
- Who I hurt
- the worst thing that could happen to me
- When I didn't have the courage to rebel
- When I didn't have the courage to defend myself.
- When I did not defend those who needed to be defended.
- When I didn't help those who needed help
- When I was arrogant
- my culture
- Who can hurt me?
- in what I can improve
- what will I say to X
- how much I enjoy the company of X
- argue with X
- have sex with X
- joking with X
- because I'm hiding
- things that worry me
- what's boring me?
- my worst memories
- my fondest memories
- Fear of showing myself to others different from how they know me
- My right to change ideas and personalities
- my suppressed and removed anger
- How to make a change?
- my fear of change
- my sources of pleasure
- my sources of pain
- my motivations
- my inhibitions
- my erotic fantasies
- things I was ashamed of
- the authorities I respect
- my limitations
- etc.

Mental map

Mind mapping is used to bring back to consciousness ideas and mental images that have been unused for a long time or removed as painful. It is similar to brainstorming but is not aimed at solving a particular problem. Instead, it aims to search for all possible associations of ideas with respect to a certain topic.

The method consists of writing, on a sheet of paper or in a computer, a map of words or sentences without any rules or logic.

We begin by assigning a title to the map, choosing a topic that is close to our hearts or that causes us discomfort. The title should be written in the center of the page, and the other elements of the map will be arranged around it.

Then we take the first word or phrase that comes to mind that has any relation to the title, and insert it into the map at any location.

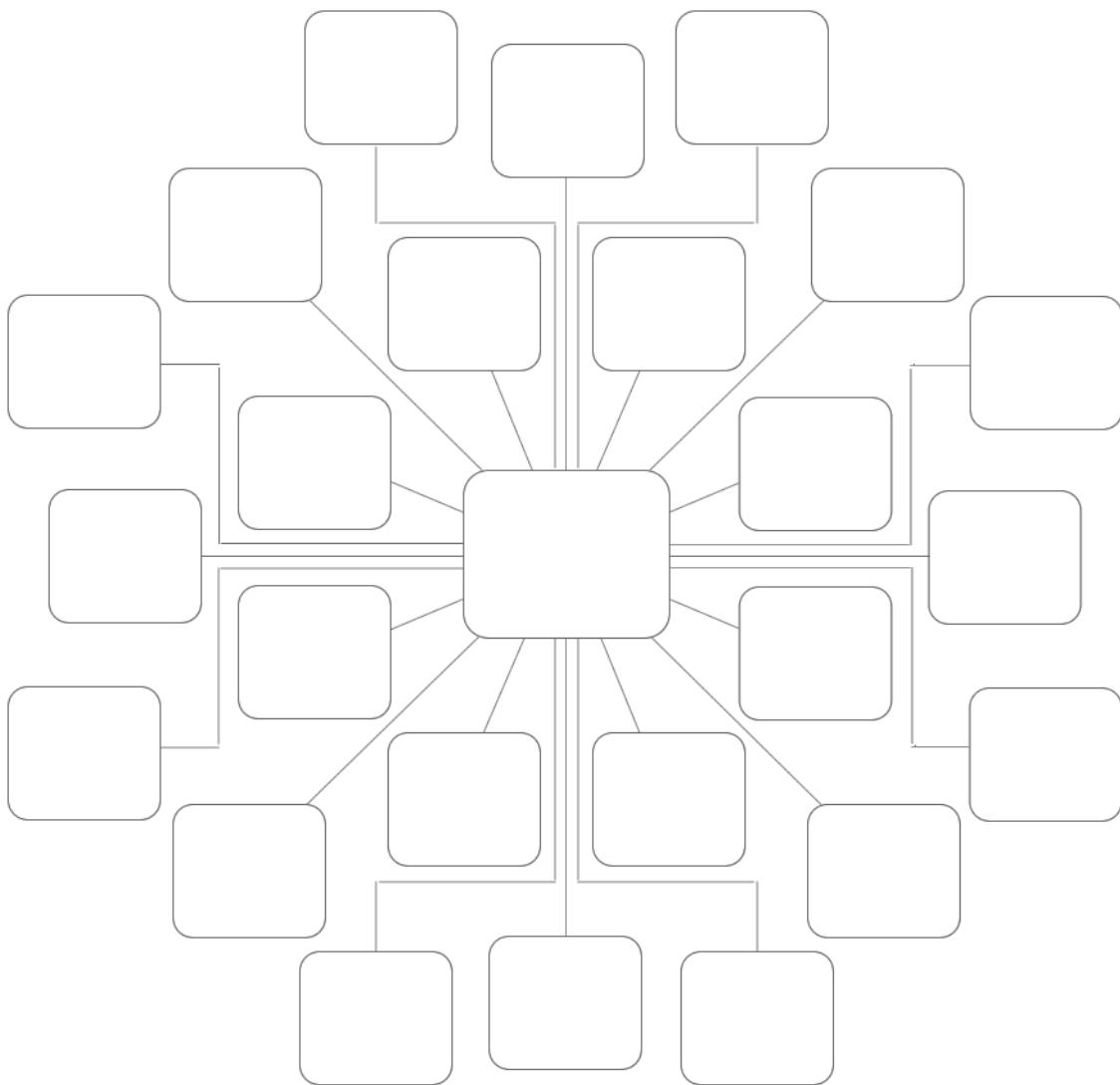
Looking at the map, one continues to add to it any word or phrase that comes to mind, without any rule or limitation, even unrelated to the previous ones, for as long as one wishes.

This technique helps to avoid thinking about the same things over and over again, and can have a therapeutic, cathartic or creative synoptic effect.

Example of mind map:



It is also possible to use the following form:



Mind map form ([download it in PDF format](#))

Emotional reactions to the mind map

It is likely that when looking at the resulting map, one will experience a feeling of discomfort (in the stomach or elsewhere). The discomfort is due to the lack of order and logical connection between the words presented, where we are used to thinking and feeling in a serial, logical, organized way.

The mental agents that determine the activity of the unconscious (based on what is perceived in the current moment) act simultaneously, anarchically, autonomously and disorganized. Therefore, in order to understand and manage one's mind, and especially the unconscious, one must become accustomed to receiving simultaneous, disordered and unpredictable stimuli, and to dealing with related emotional responses. For this purpose, the mind map can help.

After some time of exposure to such stimuli, which may require repeated sessions, the sense of discomfort tends to fade and is replaced by a pleasant arousal, coupled with the feeling of being able to control one's emotions.

Configurator

This method consists of putting together appropriately chosen pictures and words (or phrases) and pasting them, without any logic on the same sheet of paper. The purpose is to achieve *synoptic* stimulation (see the chapter [Psychotherapy](#)).

The elements to be pasted should be chosen by selecting them according to their stimulating power of our thoughts and emotions

The collage does not need to make logical or rational sense, the important thing is that it is "suggestive."

Once completed, it should be affixed to a wall like a painting or placed in a scrapbook to be browsed through whenever you want.

The configurator can have a beneficial synoptic effect in that it contains text and images capable of stimulating our affectivity, emotionality and imagination in various ways, while at the same time helping to connect, reconcile or integrate otherwise isolated or incompatible entities in the subject's mind.

Example of configurator



Mental exercises

Voluntary idleness

Stop, do nothing and try not to think about anything for at least ten minutes. Keep doing nothing even if you feel guilty because something inside you feels that you are wasting your time. Repeat this exercise day after day until you no longer feel guilty about loafing and you have found that a little physical and mental loafing every now and then helps you regenerate.

With eyes closed

Close your eyes and stay with your eyes closed for a few minutes. It will help you think about what you are thinking about, without being distracted by what you see.

Questions about others

Make a list of people with whom you have had relationships of any kind. Read the list randomly by asking yourself the following questions:

- What would they want from me?
- What would I want from them?
- What do they appreciate about me?
- What do I appreciate about them?
- What do they despise about me?
- What do I despise about them?
- What do we share?
- What do we disagree with?
- What could we share?
- How could we cooperate?

Suspension of action

Do not begin any new action until you feel an obvious desire to do a certain thing, and until you have rationally verified that that desire deserves to be indulged.

Under the eyes of all

Imagine that everything you do, think, and feel at any given moment is recorded in a film that everyone can see live and will be able to see in the future.

Imaginary friends and theatrical scripts

Imagine having a number of friends (male and female) with whom you can do anything and talk about anything. Imagine being in the company of one or more of these people and interacting with them in a certain way.

Imagine recording all the transactions that take place between you and these people in a play or movie script.

How to employ the next sixty minutes

Think about what you can do in the next sixty minutes. Consider various hypotheses about how to spend that time. For each hypothesis, ask yourself how people you know would react to knowing that you did what you hypothesized you would do. Would they approve? Would they disapprove? Would their sympathy and esteem for you increase or decrease? Which of my needs and desires would be met, and which would be frustrated?

After considering various hypotheses, take a decision freely being aware of the likely consequences of that choice in your social relationships.

Something new

Imagine you are thinking about and/or doing something new, something you have never thought about before or done before.

Relational and interactive analysis

Consider any concrete object or abstract entity and examine its meaningful relationships and interactions with you and other people, things or ideas.

Things that I fear or make me sick

Make a list of things or ideas that scare you or make you sick, and reread and update it from time to time.

Unwanted emotional reactions

Make a list of the emotional reactions you would prefer not to have, indicating the situations in which they occur and the causes that provoke them (people, activities, words, thoughts, memories, images, etc.).

Reread and update the list periodically until you have no more unwanted emotional reactions.

When you happen to have an unwanted emotional reaction, make a note of it to add to the list.

Occasionally, look at a series of images, and for each one ask yourself:

- What is my emotional reaction to this image?
- I would like to change or neutralize that reaction?

If the answer is yes, add that reaction to the list of unwanted ones.

Suspension of judgment

Go to a bookstore, pick a book at random, imagine its readers, try to understand why they like that book, without judging them or despising them. Do the same thing for Facebook posts, newspaper and blog articles, and any other direct or recorded human expression.

Casual encounters

Imagine that you meet a series of people chosen by chance from among the earth's inhabitants, one at a time, and attempt a dialogue and interaction with each of them. Think of the things that you can say to her and that she can say to you.

Analysis serve/use

It analyzes a newspaper article, video, or book in terms of serving and using, i.e., it detects, in what is being told, the transactions of serving and using (using a thing or person = serving). In other words, it detects who uses whom/what and who serves whom/what.

Adoptive parents

Imagine being born again being able to choose your parents. Who would you choose as your father and mother? Make a list of famous people or people you know personally whom you wish you had as parents and imagine what your life would be like if you did.

Acting another

Imagine you are an actor and you are playing the part of a person very different from you. Invent and improvise a few scenes in which that person is the protagonist and dialogues with others.

The coupon of X

Consider whatever comes to mind (person, idea, object, situation, process, action, etc.) and look for all that is good in it, overcoming any cognitive and emotional biases.

Do this exercise especially on particular people or categories of people you dislike.

My roles and those of others

Ask yourself what roles you would like to take on, in what social groups, and whether other members of the respective groups are willing to accept you taking on those roles.

Also ask yourself what roles the people you know have assumed in general and toward you in particular, and to what extent you approve of them.

The purpose of the exercise is to bring out, and manage, any confusions, conflicts, competitions and obstacles in role assignment, with the understanding that only by assuming agreed roles is it possible to interact peacefully and productively with others.

Watching TV without sound

As an act of rebellion against the mass media system, watch TV without sound, and ask yourself critically (i.e., setting aside common sense) why you see what you see.

By removing the audio, you will avoid being entranced and manipulated by what you see and hear. In fact, seeing is a voluntary and controllable act, while hearing is involuntary and uncontrollable.

What can you teach me?

Imagine a number of randomly chosen people you know personally, or publicly known or unknown characters.

For each of these people, ask yourself, "What can you teach me?" keeping in mind that each person has something to teach, including their experiences and mindset.

Conflicts between needs

Identify conflicts between your needs and describe them on a piece of paper.

For each conflict, decide which need you would like to prevail or which you would like to prioritize.

Analysis of news, TV programs, movies, stories, plays

This exercise consists of doing an analysis of any news story, story, film, TV program, photograph, artwork or representation in general trying to answer these questions:

- Why do people behave the way they do?
- What are their purposes?
- Needs: who needs what?
- pleasures: who is satisfying his own needs or those of others?
- pains: who are frustrating others' needs or is frustrated in his own needs?
- Serve: who/what serves whom/what?

- Use: who/what uses who/what?
- hopes: who hopes to meet his own needs or those of others?
- illusions: who deludes or deludes other people that certain needs will be met?

Environment configurator

Imagine designing, i.e., *configuring*, an ideal (yet realistic) environment, entering it and interacting with its components.

Imagine that you can choose all the components of that environment: place (closed or open), interior and exterior architecture, colors, furnishings, furniture, paintings, books, newspapers, media (audio and video recordings, websites), musical instruments, computers, machines, other objects, people (known and unknown), animals, plants, etc.

Choose the configuration that would best meet your needs and desires.

Personal book

Imagine that you have a *personal book* that only you can read. It contains your memories and advice to yourself. Imagine that you write in this book, whenever you think of it, anything that you may find useful to remember. It is an autobiography and a vademecum, to be read especially when you do not know how to behave in certain situations.

If you want, you can write and actually use such a book.

The people in my life

This exercise consists of imagining the most important people you have met in your life as if they were all together in one place, say a ship, and asking yourself what each of them would like from you, what they could offer you or take away from you that is good or bad, what they have given you and what they have taken away in the past.

What relationships?

Take a random object, for example, a book, a newspaper article, a computer, a painting, a tool, a person, and ask yourself: what relationship or interaction can there be between me and this object? How can I use it? How can it use me? What impact can my relationship with this object have on my relationships with other objects or people? Etc.

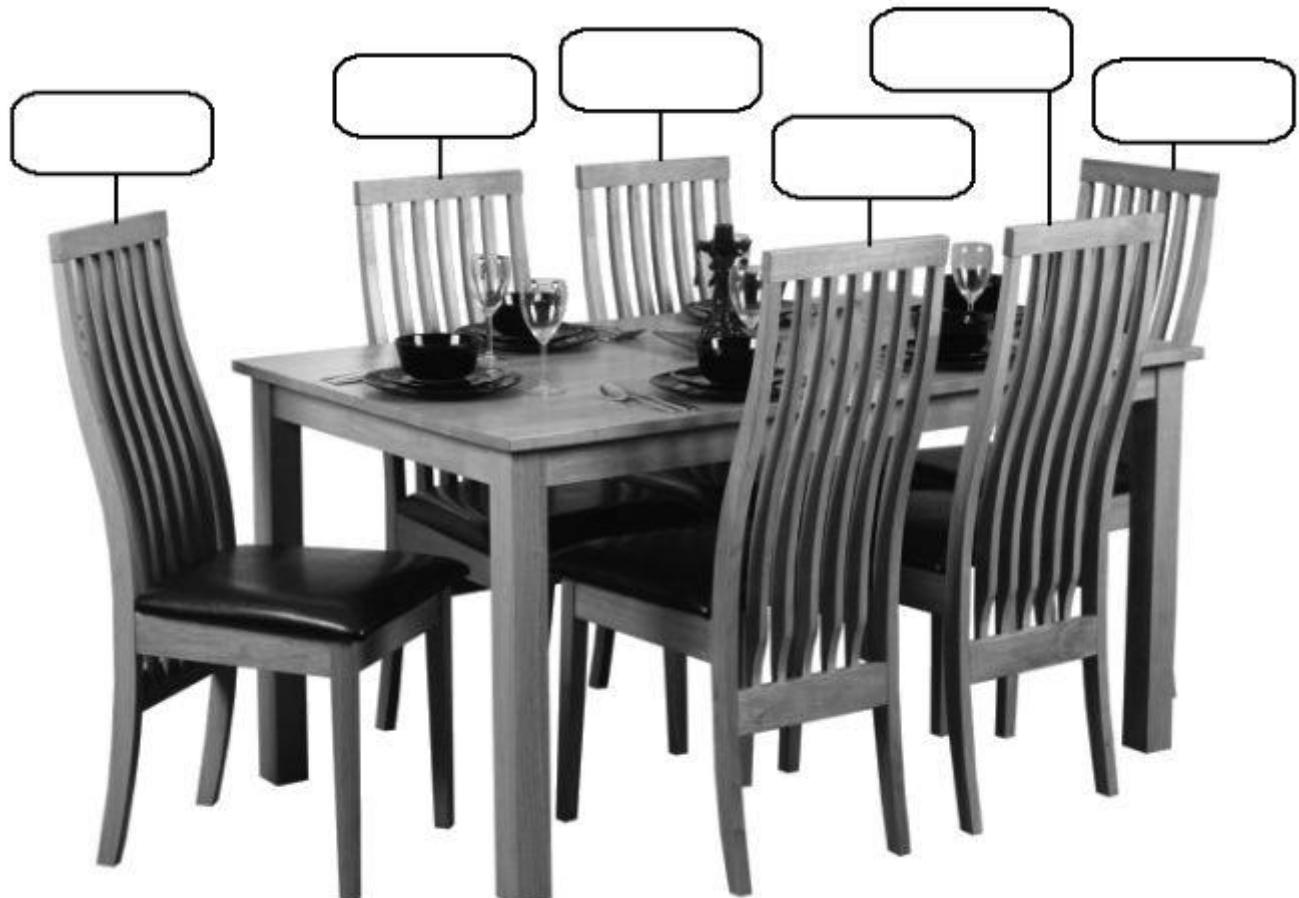
Positive aspects

Take any entity perceived as repulsive and look for positive aspects in it.

Lunch with ...

The exercise is to imagine a lunch attended by 2 to 6 people (including the subject), sitting at a table and in conversation. It involves imagining the things those people might say to each other, as if it were the script of a play.

The names of the guests, who will be chosen by the person from among people with whom he or she has difficulties or relationship problems, should be written in the plates.



Questionnaires

The following questionnaires do not require the writing of answers. Their purpose is only to raise questions and stimulate reflections related to them. You can respond mentally to any of the questions or just become aware of the issues they represent.

- Existential questions
- Dilemmas
- Questions about others
- Questions about the relationship between X and me
- Questionnaire for the realization of wishes or goals
- Questionnaires for the analysis of suffering
- Unmet needs analysis questionnaires
- Questionnaires for imaginary negotiation of human relationships
- Questions of wisdom

Existential questions

See also, with special effects, mindorganizer.d\ardo.eu/2166.

How sane am I? What do I feel guilty about? What are my resources and abilities? What can I share with others?
 What do I feel responsible for? How much do I fear fear fear? How much do I desire success? What merits do I think I have?
 Who/what is intimidating me? Who do I despise? What am I not satisfied with? Who do I dislike?
 In what ways do others criticize me? How inhibited do I feel? Who have I done harm to? Who am I afraid of?
 How capable am I of controlling myself? Who would I not want to meet? Who is dependent on me? How much do I accept death?
 Who is sympathetic to me? How much do I like to joke around? Who disapproves of me? What rights do I think I have?
 Who can I satisfy? What do I know about others? How selfish/altruistic do I think I am? What should I do?
 What could I do together with others? What is the best thing I could do right now? What am I afraid of?
 To whom have I done good? To whom do I feel superior? Who could I hurt? What would I want to remember?
 To whom am I accountable for my behavior? What emotional reactions do I wish I did not have? What would others want from me?
 How much do I like to play? How cocky am I? What do I have too much of? Who is indebted to me? To whom do I feel inferior?
 What would I like to change in my own mind? What would I like to change in myself?
 What is the balance between my serving and using others? Who are my competitors? What would I like to accomplish?
 How brave am I? How will what I am doing affect the way others treat me? What do I like to do? Who am I useful to?
 Who can satisfy me? How empathetic am I? Whom do I need? Who do I disapprove of? What am I ashamed of?
 How arrogant am I? What would I like to understand? Who could help me? What am I proud of? What things can't I stand?
 What do others want from me? How masculine/feminine do I feel? How much do I think I have done my duty?
 How much do I understand others? Why do I ask myself all these questions? What are my limitations and inabilities?
 How sociable am I? What are my current desires? In what do I consider myself unlucky? What do others accuse me of?
 How anxious am I? How violent am I? Who would I like to punish? What would I like to change in others' minds?
 What do I worry about? With whom would I do well to interact? What would I want to forget? On whom do I depend?
 To whom do I have obligations? Who is useful to me? What do I know about myself? What do I hope to achieve?
 What am I risking? What am I hiding? What things bring me joy/pleasure? What do I lack to be happy?
 What should I stop doing? How immoral am I? How afraid am I of winning? With whom would I do well not to interact?
 Who do I not love to interact with? Who would want to punish me? Whom do I like? What should I hide?
 What does it not suit me to do? What does it suit me to do? What duties do I think I have? With whom do I love to interact?
 Who needs me? What do others think of me? How much do I care about other people's judgment?
 What do I expect from others? In what do I feel unprepared? What things bring me suffering/pain? Who could I help?
 What would I like from others? In what do I consider myself lucky? What have I done wrong? What am I looking for?
 What is the worst thing that could happen to me? How misanthropic am I? Who do I think I am? What mistakes have I made?
 Who would I like to meet? How free am I? How afraid am I of being disapproved? What would I like to change in others?
 How beautiful/ugly do I feel? Who would I like to overcome? Where should I go? How much do others understand me?
 To whom am I indebted?

Dilemmas

See also, with special effects, at mindorganizer.dardo.eu/2167.

To forgive or not to forgive?	Collect or not collect?	Accuse or not accuse?	To return or not to return?
Take or not take?	Having fun or not having fun?	Loafing or not loafing?	Endure or not endure?
Throw away or not throw away?	Study or not study?	Reject or not reject?	To ask or not to ask?
To teach or not to teach?	Exploring or not exploring?	To accept or not to accept?	To hope or not to hope?
To kill or not to kill?	To hide or not to hide?	To belong or not to belong?	Punish or not punish?
To act or not to act?	To attack or not to attack?	To give or not to give?	To believe or not to believe?
Sharing or not sharing?	To move away or not to move away?	Avenge or not avenge?	
To cheat or not to cheat?	To approach or not to approach?	To console or not to console?	
To speak or not to speak?	Cooperate or not cooperate?	To love or not to love?	Stand out or not stand out?
Impose myself or not impose myself?	Abandon or not abandon?	To communicate or not to communicate?	
Interact or not interact?	Differentiate or not differentiate?	Destroy or not destroy?	
To beat me or not to beat me?	Surrender or not surrender?	To die or not to die?	Show or not show?
To follow or not to follow?	To rest or not to rest?	To rebel or not to rebel?	To criticize or not to criticize?
Flee or not flee?	To question or not to question?	To offend or not to offend?	To obey or not to obey?
To remember or not to remember?	Repel or not repel?	To work or not to work?	To lie or not to lie?
Organize or not organize?	To live or not to live?	To fight or not to fight?	Analyze or not analyze?
To propose or not to propose?	Defend me or not defend me?	Tolerate or not tolerate?	
To judge or not to judge?	Imitate or not imitate?	To touch or not to touch?	Challenge or not challenge?
To face or not to face?	To change or not to change?	Point out or not point out?	Protest or not protest?
To steal or not to steal?	To think or not to think?	To compete or not to compete?	To help or not to help?
Seek or not seek?			

Questions about others

See also, with special effects, mindorganizer.dardo.eu/2168.

How do I function toward others? Who is exploiting me? Who is weaker than me? Who do I try not to imitate?
 What do I expect from others? Who and how much might need me? Who is deceiving me? Whom do I not love?
 Who would I like to be friends with? Who can I trust? How much do I understand others? What do I like about others?
 Who is superior to me? Who is more evil than me? Who and how much did I need? What problems do I have with others?
 Who am I interested in? In what ways are others and I similar? Who and how useful could I be?
 What pleasure can others give me? How do others judge me? What can others offer me? What do others like about me?
 How much do others need me? What can others ask of me? Who would like to punish me?
 What harm have I done to others? What would I do for others? What do I do for others? Who can't I forgive?
 Who is less good than me? What good have others done to me? Who is interested in me?
 How much are others afraid of me? What do I dislike about others? Who do I try to imitate?
 How sincere are others with me? What do I say about others? Who would like to subdue me?
 What fear do others have of me? How are others and I different? What do I want or desire from others?
 What do others think of me? What faults do others have toward me? What do I ask of others?
 What good have I done to others? How should I present myself to others? Who and how much does he need me?
 Who is better than me? To whom and how useful have I been? Who and how useful am I? Who would like to be my friend?
 Who can punish me? What harm can others do to me? What do others expect of me? How do I judge others?
 Whom do I love? How sincere am I with others? How much do others like or dislike me? What do others accuse me of?
 What do I need to show to others? How do others function toward me? How can others and I cooperate?
 What problems do others have with me? What pain can others give me? Who am I afraid of?
 What would others do for me? What would others do to me? What do others dislike about me?
 Who do I want to interact with? What do others want or desire from me? Who is afraid of me?
 What harm have others done to me? What would I do to others? Who and how much did he need me?
 What do others owe me? Who does not love me? Why do some people dislike me? For what do others and I compete?
 To whom and how useful could I be? What do I need to hide from others? What faults do I have toward others?
 What do I think about others? What do others say about me? Who and how useful was I? How much do I need others?
 What do I owe to others? For what do others and I cooperate? Who can I not trust? How afraid am I of others?
 What do others do for me? Who is inferior to me? What can I ask of others? What do others and I disagree about?
 What do others and I agree on? Who is stronger than me? To whom and how useful am I? What can I offer others?
 What do others ask of me? How much do others understand me? Who do I not want to interact with?
 Who and how much could I need? What good could others do me? What do I accuse others of?

Questions about the relationship between X and me

You should ask yourself questions such as the following for each person with whom you have problems living together and/or interacting or with whom you would like to enter into a relationship. These questions can help you deal wisely with any person and see aspects of them that were previously unnoticed.

See also, with special effects, mindorganizer.dardo.eu/2169.

How much do I respect X?	How can X help me?	What can I offer X?	What does X expect / not expect from me?
What does X ask of me?	How much do I need X?	What needs of X conflict with my own?	
How understanding / intolerant is X toward me?	How well does X know me?	How much do I admire X?	
How likeable/antipathic am I to X?	How much does X respect me?	How much does X depend on me?	
How much do I help X?	How much and how would I like to change X?	What recognition would I want from X?	
What problems are there in the interaction between X and me?	What good/evil can X do me?		
How well does X understand my needs and desires?	What are X's rights/duties toward me?		
What does X like/dislike about me?	What prejudices do I have about X?	How much does X find me arrogant?	
How much can I understand X?	How could I be useful to X?	How much does X need me?	
What relationship can there be between X and me?	What could I propose to X?		
What do I have to gain/lose by interacting with X?	How much empathy do I have for X?	How honest can I be with X?	
What does X envy me?	Do I have guilt towards X?	How much do I consider myself superior to X?	
How much does X like me?	What good/evil can I do to X?	How much does X love / hate me?	
How well do I understand X's needs and wants?	How jealous is X of me?	What could I teach X?	What do I ask X?
How much empathy does X have for me?	What does X think about me?	How much does X help me?	
What prejudices does X have about me?	How much can X and I joke around together?		
What role would I like to have with respect to X?	What can X offer me?	How much can I trust X?	
What do I expect / do not expect from X?	What do I know about X?	What am I curious about X?	How well do I know X?
How much does X admire me?	How can I help X?	How much does X like my company?	Who is superior between X and me?
How much and how would X like to change me?	What could X and I do together?	What harm have I done to X?	
Can I hide from X what I think of him / her?	Is X trying to restrict my freedom?	How likeable/antipathic is X to me?	
What do I like/dislike about X?	How jealous am I of X?	How are X and I similar/different?	Am I trying to dominate X?
What do I envy X?	How much can X understand me?	What could X teach me?	What does X know about me?
How sympathetic / intolerant am I toward X?	What can X and I talk about/not talk about?	What does X owe me?	
Is X trying to dominate me?	What do I appreciate/dislike about X?	How appropriate is it for me to interact with X?	
What role would X like to have in relation to me?	How might X be useful to me?	What harm has X done to me?	
What ideas of mine bother X?	How much do I depend on X?	How much do I enjoy X's company?	
How much do I love / hate X?	What do I owe X?	What does X appreciate/dislike about me?	

Questionnaire for the realization of desires and goals

Express some desires or goals.

For each of them ask yourself:

- Do I really have a need or desire to achieve it?
- How will my life change if I realize this?
- Who does the realization depend on?
- Do I have sufficient skills and abilities to carry it out?
- Do I have the economic and material resources to carry it out?
- Do I have the social resources to achieve it?
- What are the prerequisites to achieve it?
- Are there conditions to realize it?
- What hinders or prevents implementation?
- What is conducive to realization?
- What would I have to change to achieve it?
- How much will it cost me in money to realize it?
- How much will it cost me in commitment to realize it?
- Who can help me realize it?
- What has prevented me from realizing it so far?
- What are the risks in case of non-implementation?
- What are the steps I should take to accomplish this?

Questionnaires for the analysis of suffering

List of sufferings

Examples: acute pain, mild pain, anxiety, distress, fear, phobia, panic, demotivation, depression, disgust, sense of guilt, sense of inferiority, sense of inadequacy, sense of loneliness, sense of helplessness, sense of constraint, sense of threat, sense of danger, sense of conflict, sense of indecision, nausea, sense of lack, pessimism, despair, hatred, desire to die, sense of dissatisfaction, frustration of physical need, frustration of mental need...

<i>Suffering (symptoms)</i>	<i>grade (1-5)</i>	<i>Notes</i>

For each distress fill out a questionnaire like the following:

Suffering _____

<i>Question</i>	<i>Response and notes</i>
When and how often it occurs	
When it began to manifest itself	

Possible causes:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• physical trauma• organic disease• loss (of something with which there was attachment)• anticipation (forecast, expectation) of distress• dissatisfaction of one or more needs• consequences of satisfying one or more harmful needs (example: effects of drugs, gambling, risky activities, self-harm, masochism, etc.).• other (specify)	
What can alleviate it and what can I do about it	

Questionnaires for the analysis of unsatisfied needs

List of unsatisfied needs

For each unsatisfied need indicate the degree of dissatisfaction (1=minimum, 5=maximum) and add a comment. Fill in additional lines with special needs.

<i>Unsatisfied need</i>	<i>grade (1-5)</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Biological needs in general		
Community needs in general		
Freedom needs in general		
Knowledge needs in general		
Power needs in general		
Beauty needs in general		
Consistency needs in general		
...		
...		
...		
...		

For each unsatisfied need, fill out a questionnaire like the following:

Unsatisfied need _____

Question	Response and notes
Is it an innate or learned need?	
Is it harmful or harmless to health?	
Is it harmful, Harmless or required for social integration?	
<p>Possible causes of dissatisfaction? (among those below)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physiological impediments or illnesses (specify which) • External material impediments (specify which) • consequences of satisfying harmful needs • Conflicts with one or more other own needs (specify which) • Conflicts with one or more other needs of others (specify which) • Mental impediments (example: shyness, fears, panic, etc.). • Belief of being unable to satisfy the need because of rivalry or competition from other people (sense of inferiority or inadequacy) • Belief that one is not entitled to satisfaction (not deserving or not worthy of it). • Social impediments, i.e., restrictions imposed by other people (parents, children, partners, employers, friends, peers, state laws, police, etc.) • Voluntary choice to avoid possible negative consequences of satisfaction (example: divine punishment, social marginalization, material loss, emotional loss, etc.). • Involuntary choice to avoid possible negative consequences of eventual satisfaction (example: divine punishment, social marginalization, material loss, emotional loss, etc.). • other (specify) 	
Any substitute or compensatory needs	
Any of my antithetical needs (conflicting / antagonistic / incompatible / censorious)	
Any needs of others that conflict with the one in question	
What can meet the need in question and what can I do about it?	

Questionnaires for imaginary negotiation of human relationships

The questionnaires presented here should help you to analyze:

- Your expectations of others,
- What you are willing to, and able to, offer others,
- any additional conditions

with a view to establishing relationships of various kinds, such as, for example: of friendship, marriage, erotic, economic, artistic, cultural, etc.

The following questionnaires are provided, one for each person, known or hypothetical, called "person X," with whom you consider establishing a relationship of any kind:

- A questionnaire in which your expectations and dispositions toward person X are analyzed;
- A questionnaire in which person X's expectations and dispositions, as perceived by you, are analyzed.

It is important that expectations and dispositions, both yours and Person X's, be analyzed in terms of needs (primary or secondary).

Filling out (real or imagined) questionnaires could shed light on inconsistencies and incompatibilities between both your expectations and dispositions and the other person's expectations and dispositions. This could facilitate changes in social strategies (such as, for example, giving up establishing relationships with certain people) or bring out conflicts between any needs of yours, conflicts that cause their dissatisfaction.

Questionnaire about my expectations and dispositions toward the person X

(ignore topics not relevant to the type of report under consideration)

<i>Theme (field, relational aspect or topic of inquiry)</i>	<i>What I expect to receive from X (my needs that I expect X to be willing, and able, to meet)</i>	<i>What am I willing to give X (X's needs that I am willing, and able, to meet)</i>	<i>Special conditions and notes</i>
Affectivity			
Sincerity			

Culture			
Economic and financial situation			
Generosity			
Empathy			
Estimate			
Courage			
Political ideas			
Physical intimacy			
Sexual intercourse			
Labor collaboration			
Aggressiveness			
Authority, hierarchy			
Lifestyle and environment			
Social class			
Sports			
Tourism			
Health			

Religion			
Physical and aesthetic characteristics			
Moral values			
Personality (introversion, extroversion, etc.)			
Special skills (manual dexterity, musicality, foreign languages, creativity, etc.)			
...			

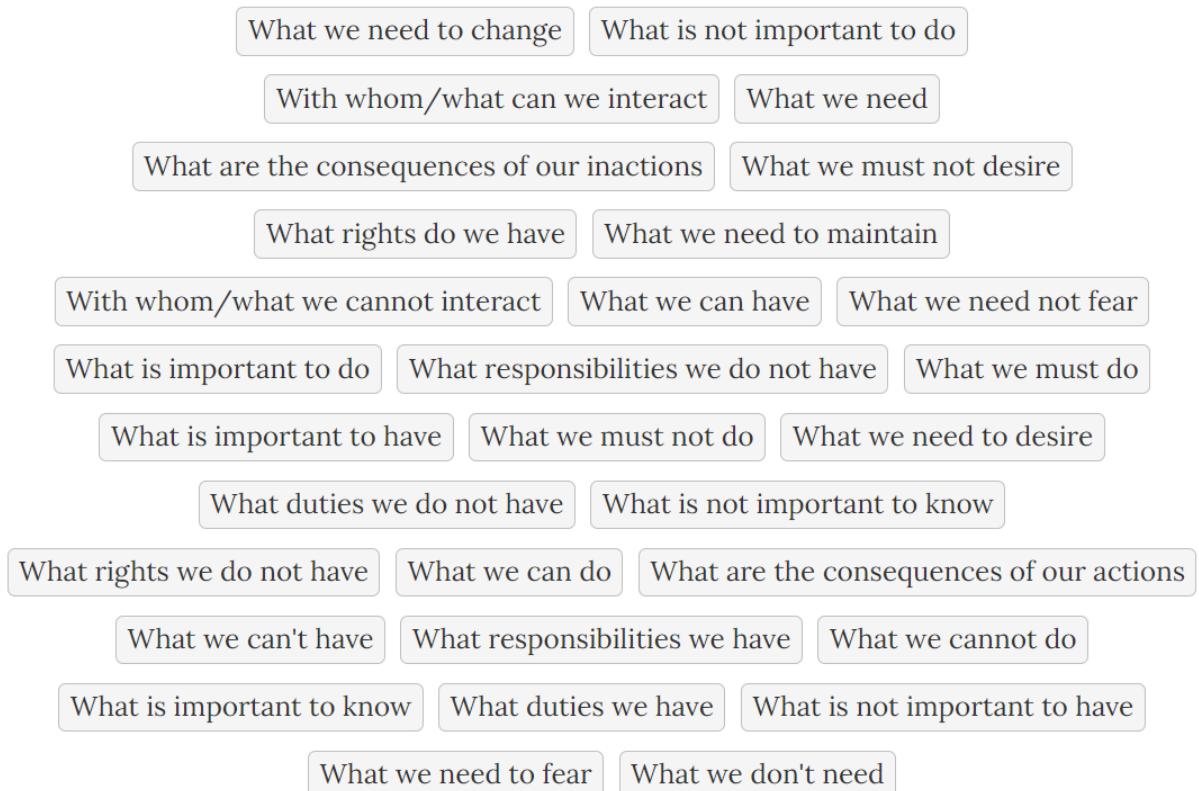
Questionnaire on X's expectations and dispositions toward me, how I perceive them

(ignore topics not relevant to the type of report under consideration)

Theme	<i>What X expects to receive from me (X's needs that X expects me to be willing, and able, to satisfy)</i>	<i>What X is willing to give me (my needs that notes X is willing to, and able to satisfy)</i>	<i>Special conditions and notes</i>
(same themes as in the previous questionnaire)			

Questions of wisdom

See also, with special effects, mindorganizer.dardo.eu/2170.



Therapeutic autobiography

A therapeutic autobiography is a document (handwritten or with a computer) in which you can describe your physical person, personality, history, experiences, relationships, habits, likes, dislikes, mindset, emotions, feelings, desires, plans, and worldview.

This tool helps you compare yourself with yourself, evaluate yourself, improve your sense of reality, and motivate you to do the things you think are right and worth doing. It also helps you present yourself to others with greater self-confidence.

Recommended articulation (autobiography index)

- Chronology of the main events in my life
- My person in general (history, curriculum vitae, habits, hobbies, passions, sexuality, morality, reputation, professional skills, abilities, etc.).
- My personality type (results of intelligence and personality tests introversion/extroversion, MBTI, Big 5, etc.).
- My photographs (past and present)
- My experiences (successes and failures, things I learned, places and people I met, books I read, conflicts I had, heroic and cowardly acts I performed)
- My accomplishments (things I have produced for myself and others)
- My motivations, likes and dislikes (historical and current events figures, favorite writers and artists, filmmakers, journalists, philosophers, psychologists, favorite literary and artistic works, favorite conversation topics, etc.).
- My social relationships (family members, friends, relatives, suppliers, customers, enemies, benefactors, people I depend on, people who depend on me, etc.).
- My problems, disorders and dissatisfactions (physical and mental health, neuroses, psychoallergies, fears, anxieties, obsessions, inabilities, etc.).
- My responsibilities and how I fulfill them (as a parent, spouse, partner, citizen, contractor, etc.).
- My scientific and philosophical knowledge (general culture, personal and social psychology, genetics, ethics, religions, history, economics)
- My vision of the future for myself and society
- My desires, ambitions, will, what I would like to do before I die, etc.
- My agenda, decisions, commitments, projects, strategies, plans, etc.

Quotes

Various authors

Random quotes

George Herbert Mead

Erich Fromm

Louis Anepeita

Gregory Bateson

Edgar Morini

Sigmund Freud

Bertrand Russell

Bruno Cancellieri

Quotes by various authors

It is not a sign of good mental health to be well adapted to a sick society. [Jiddu Krishnamurti].

A healthy society is one that corresponds to man's needs, not necessarily to what he feels to be his needs, for even the most pathological aspirations can be subjectively felt to be what an individual most desires, but to what are objectively his needs, such as can be ascertained by the study of man. Our first task is to determine what the nature of man is, and what needs arise from it. [Erich Fromm]

Every experience of psychic distress can be traced back to a structural conflict between belonging and individuation, that is, between social duties and individual rights represented at the conscious level and, more intensely, at the unconscious level. [Luigi Aneputa]

It is not possible to draw a line between social and individual psychology. [George Herbert Mead]

Man is at once superego, ego and id; he is at once society, individual, species. [Edgar Morin].

The ego is not master in its own house. [Sigmund Freud].

... it can be said that any dynamic set of events and objects that possesses suitably complex causal circuits and in which appropriate energy relations are in force, will certainly exhibit characteristics peculiar to the mind. Such a set will perform comparisons, that is, it will be sensitive to difference (as well as being affected by ordinary physical 'causes' such as collisions or forces); it will 'process information,' and it will inevitably be self-correcting, either in the direction of homeostatic optimality or in the direction of maximizing certain variables. ... [Gregory Bateson].

The lack of something desired is an indispensable part of happiness. [Bertrand Russell]

The human brain is a vast organized society composed of many different parts. Inside the human skull are crammed hundreds of different types of motors and organizations, wonderful systems that have evolved and accumulated over hundreds of millions of years. Some of these systems, for example the parts of the brain that make us breathe, function almost independently. But in most cases these parts of the mind have to coexist with others, in a relationship that is sometimes one of cooperation, but more often one of conflict. It

follows that our decisions and actions almost never have simple and unambiguous explanations, but are usually the result of the activities of large societies of processes in a continuous relationship of challenge, conflict or mutual exploitation. The great possibilities of intelligence arise from this enormous diversity, and not from a few simple principles. [Marvin Minsky]

How can we be "free" as conscious agents if everything we consciously intend is caused by events in our brains that we do not intend and of which we are totally unaware? We can't. [Sam Harris].

According to Epicurus, we are happy when we perceive pleasant sensations and when we do not perceive unpleasant ones. Similarly, Jeremy Bentham established that nature has given dominion over man to two masters-pleasure and pain-and they alone determine everything we do, say and think. Bentham's successor, John Stuart Mill, explained that happiness is nothing but pleasure and freedom from pain, and that beyond pleasure and pain there is no good or evil. Anyone who tries to deduce good and evil from something else (such as God's word or national interest) is deceiving you, and perhaps deceiving himself first. [Yuval Noah Harari].

As life drags us along, we believe that we are acting on our own initiative, choosing our own activities, our own pleasures, but, on closer inspection, it is only the designs, the trends of our time, that we too are forced to follow. [J. W. Goethe].

We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge, ourselves to ourselves: this is a fact that has its good reasons. We have never sought ourselves - how could it ever happen that we might, one fine day find ourselves? [F. Nietzsche].

The needs induced by the old capitalism were basically very similar to basic needs. The needs, on the other hand, that the new capitalism can induce are totally and perfectly unnecessary and artificial. [Pier Paolo Pasolini]

The people who are easiest to manipulate are those who most believe in free will. [Yuval Noah Harari]

Do not cut what you can melt. [Joseph Joubert].

"I did this," says my memory. "I could not have done this," says my pride and remains adamant. In the end it is memory that gives way. [Friedrich Nietzsche].

Biology is engineering. [Daniel Dennett].

There are people who, according to the data we have, have suffered from a lack of love in the first few months of their lives and as a result have lost the desire and ability to give and receive affection forever. [Abraham H. Maslow]

Making good choices is a crucial skill at every level. [Peter Drucker].

Consciousness is the only thing in this universe that cannot be an illusion. [Sam Harris].

It seems clear and obvious, yet it must be reiterated: isolated knowledge achieved by a group of specialists in a limited field has no value in itself, it finds it only in synthesis with all the rest of knowledge and only to the extent that it contributes to answering the question "Who are we?" [Erwin Schrodinger]

We do not see things as they are but as we are. [Anaïs Nin].

A thought comes when it wants "him," not when I want "me." [Friedrich Nietzsche].

The basis of all wanting is need, lack, that is, pain, to which man is bound from origin, by nature. Coming instead to lack objects of desire, when this is taken away by too easy gratification, tremendous emptiness and boredom oppress him: that is, his very nature and being become intolerable burdens to him. His life thus swings like a pendulum, this way and that, between pain and boredom, which are in fact its true constituent elements. [Arthur Schopenhauer].

The best weapon we have against stress is the ability to choose one thought over another. [William James]

Man is the creature who does not know what to desire and turns to others in order to decide. We desire what others desire for the simple reason that we imitate their desires. [René Girard].

One must always keep the whole in mind. If one stops at the detail, it is easy to be wrong and one has only a wrong view of things. [Arthur Schopenhauer].

The distrust with which the extrovert looks at the inner world is equal to that with which the introvert looks at the outer world. [Carl Gustav Jung].

Lord, do not give me what I desire, but only what I really need. [Antoine de Saint-Exupery].

Everyone needs to find reasons for their passion. [Marcel Proust].

I do not need esteem, nor glory, nor any other such thing; but I do need love. [Giacomo Leopardi]

From the moment a person creates a theory, his imagination sees in everything only the features that confirm that theory. [Thomas Jefferson].

The starting point of all economic inquiry is human needs. Without needs there would be no economy, no social economy, no science related to them. Needs are the fundamental cause; the importance their satisfaction has for us, the fundamental measure; the security of their satisfaction, the ultimate aim of every human economy. [Carl Menger].

The weak man is always afraid of change. He feels secure in the status quo, and he has a morbid fear of the new. For him the greatest annoyance is the annoyance of a new idea. [Martin Luther King].

Do what you are most afraid of and the end of fear is certain. [Mark Twain].

There is nothing so practical as good theory. [Kurt Lewin].

The psychiatrist is a guy who asks you a lot of expensive questions that your wife asks you for free. [Woody Allen].

Every want arises from need, that is, from lack, that is, from suffering. This is ended by fulfillment; however, for one desire, which is fulfilled, there remain at least ten others unsatisfied; moreover, the craving lasts a long time, the needs go on forever; fulfillment is brief and measured with a miserly hand. Indeed, the final satisfaction itself is only apparent: the fulfilled desire gives rise to a new desire in toto; that is a recognized error, this an error not yet known. No object of desire, once attained, can give lasting gratification, which no longer mutates: but rather resembles only alms, which thrown to the beggar prolongs his life today to continue his torment tomorrow. So as long as our consciousness is filled with

our will; as long as we are abandoned to the drive of desires, with its perpetual hoping and fearing; as long as we are subjects of the will, we are granted neither lasting happiness nor rest. [Arthur Schopenhauer].

The only way to change our lives is to change our minds. [Ross Cooper].

Change does not always equal improvement, but to improve you must change. [Winston Churchill].

Trivers, taking his theory of emotions to its logical consequences, notes that in a world full of falsehood-detecting machines, the best strategy is to believe your own lies. You cannot have your hidden intentions revealed if you do not think they are your intentions. According to this theory of self-deception, the conscious mind hides the truth from itself in order to better hide it from others. But truth is useful, and therefore it should be recorded somewhere in the minds, well protected from the parts that interact with other people. [Steven Pinker]

Tal in solitude you live as if you were in the square. [Seneca].

You will never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, you build a model that makes reality obsolete. [Richard Fuller].

It is not a sign of good mental health to be well adapted to a sick society. [Jiddu Krishnamurti].

Random quotes

On the page https://psychologyofneeds.dardo.eu/citazioni_random/?quotelang=en you can read, one at a time, quotes by various authors chosen at random from the dixxit.info database.

Each quote is displayed for a number of seconds proportional to its length, so that it can be read comfortably.

It is also possible to see a list of all citations shown in the current session.

Quotes by Gorge Herbert Mead

Society is unity in diversity.

Man lives in a world of meanings.

A multiple personality is somewhat normal.

No one is always stupid, but everyone is sometimes stupid.

The intelligence of simpler animal species does not require a "self."

The delay in reaction is necessary for intelligent behavior.

It is not possible to draw a line between social and individual psychology.

The "self" has the characteristic that it is seen as an object by itself, and that characteristic distinguishes it from other objects and the body.

Social psychology is especially interested in the effect the social group has in determining the individual's experiences and behavior.

Intelligent behavior is essentially a process of selection among various alternatives; intelligence is primarily a matter of selectivity.

It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behavior of the individuals involved in it and who carry it out; in other words, that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members.

Wundt searched the nervous system for centers responsible for the person's unity of action, but he could not isolate any of them. The unity of behavior is a unity of integration, but how this integration between the different parts takes place is unknown to us.

An individual's behavior can only be understood in terms of the behavior of the entire social group of which he is a member, since his individual acts are implicated in larger social acts that go beyond himself and involve other members of that group.

In our approach, the mind is formed when the organism becomes capable of indicating meanings to itself and to others. It is at this point that the mind appears, or "emerges" ... It is absurd to see the mind simply as the viewpoint of a human organism; for although it is

focused in the organism, it is essentially a social phenomenon; even its biological functions are primarily social.

But in a competition, in which a number of people are involved, the child assuming one role must be prepared to assume the role of everyone else. If he plays on a baseball team, he must know all the responses of each position relative to his own position. He must know what everyone will do in order to play his own game. He must be aware of all these roles. Of course, not of all these roles must he be aware of at the same time, but at some moments he must be prepared to have three or four individuals present to himself, the one who is going to throw the ball, the one who is going to catch it, and so on. These responses must be, to some extent, present in his own being. In team play, then, there is a series of responses from others organized so that the attitude of one triggers the appropriate attitude of the others.

Quotes by Erich Fromm

A healthy society is one that corresponds to man's needs, not necessarily those he feels he has, for even the most pathological drives can be subjectively felt as the greatest motivations; but his objective needs, which can be verified as such through the study of man. It is therefore our primary task to investigate human nature and the needs arising from it.

There are imperative needs that must be satisfied before anything else. When only after the primary needs are satisfied does man have time and energy left, civilization can develop and with it those aspirations that accompany the phenomena of abundance. Free (or spontaneous) actions are always phenomena of abundance.

Love is often nothing more than a favorable exchange between two people who get as much as they can expect, considering their value in the marketplace of personalities.

The need to unite with other living beings and to be connected to them is an imperative need on whose fulfillment man's psychic health depends.

Rationalizations ultimately lack this trait of discovering and revealing; they merely confirm the existing emotional bias in the individual. Rationalization is not a tool for penetrating reality, but an a-posteriori attempt to harmonize one's desires with existing reality.

Giving is the highest expression of power. In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This feeling of vitality and power fills me with joy. I feel overflowing with life and happiness. Giving gives more joy than receiving, not because it is deprivation, but because in that act I feel alive.

The act of disobedience, as an act of freedom, is the beginning of reason.

Rationalization is not a tool for penetrating reality, but an a-posteriori attempt to harmonize one's desires with existing reality.

The main task in a man's life is to give birth to himself.

Man thinks he wants freedom. He is actually very afraid of it. Why? Because freedom forces him to make decisions, and decisions involve risks. [...] If, on the other hand, he submits to an authority, then he can hope that the authority will tell him what is right to do, and this is all the truer if there is a single authority-as is often the case-that decides for the whole society what is useful and what is harmful.

Man must not only survive physically, but also psychically. He needs to preserve a certain psychic balance in order not to lose the ability to function; for man, every element necessary for the preservation of his psychic balance has the same vital importance as what is needed for his physical balance. First, man has a vital interest in preserving his pattern of

orientation. On it depends his ability to act and, ultimately, his sense of identity. If others challenge his orientation pattern with their ideas, he will react to those ideas as a vital threat. He will be able to rationalize this reaction in several ways. He will say that the new ideas are inherently "immoral," "uncivilized," "crazy," or any other adjective he can choose to express his revulsion, but this antagonism actually forms because "he" feels threatened.

Quotes by Luigi Anepeta

The human unconscious, which, compared to consciousness, is always more faithful to the needs on which personality is built, constantly nurtures a dual obsession: belonging to a group and a cultural order, and individual freedom.

Every experience of psychic distress can be traced back to a structural conflict between belonging and individuation, that is, between social duties and individual rights represented at the conscious level and, more intensely, at the unconscious level.

Psychiatric symptoms are expressive of a dissociation and "alienation" of basic needs due to interaction with the environment.

Man is, by nature, a social and empathic being who can be induced by cultural and environmental circumstances to act callously, cynically and even ruthlessly.

Usually society uses the need to belong to induce conformist normalization processes, referring to values that may well be mediocre but are rarely inhumane. In particular situations, however, the conformist drive occurs on the basis of cultural or ideological values that involve sacrificing empathy on the altar of them. The weight that the need to belong exerts at the unconscious level is indeed an indication of a substantial vulnerability of human beings to environmental influences.

Intrinsic needs, in the structural-dialectical view, are understood to be psychobiological, genetically predisposed programs whose unfolding, in interaction with the socio-cultural environment, determines the development of the dynamic infrastructure of personality. The intrinsic needs are the need for social belonging/integration and the need for opposition/individuation. The first, by creating a meaningful relationship with the human world, enables the internalization of the cultural value systems proper to the group of belonging and the acquisition of common sense that lead the individual to act behaviors recognized as normal in his socio-historical context. The second, beginning at a certain developmental epoch, promotes a slow process of personality differentiation that, by virtue of the adolescent crisis, allows a certain degree of freedom and personal autonomy to be achieved.

Quotes by Gregory Bateson

Every experience is subjective.

"Life" and "mind" are systemic processes.

Lack of systemic wisdom is always punished.

Wisdom is the intelligence of the system as a whole.

Logic is an insufficient model of cause and effect.

Information: any difference that makes a difference.

Without context, words and actions mean nothing.

The creature that dominates its environment destroys itself.

The meaning of your communication is the response you get.

Creative thinking must always have a component of randomness.

We do not know enough about how the present leads us to the future.

Language normally concerns only one aspect of each interaction.

Rigor alone is mortal paralysis, but imagination alone is madness.

Wisdom is knowing how to be with difference without wanting to eliminate difference.

A walking man is never in balance, but continually corrects his imbalance.

The map is not the territory (coined by Alfred Korzybski), and the name is not the thing named.

We can never know clearly whether we are referring to the world as it is or the world as we see it.

Science, like art, religion, commerce, war and even sleep, is based on presuppositions.

The world's biggest problems are the result of the difference between how nature works and how people think.

Yes, the metaphor. That's how the whole fabric of mental interconnections is held together. Metaphor is really the basis of being alive.

Conscious man, as a modifier of his environment, is now fully capable of devastating himself and that environment--with the best conscious intentions.

There is always an optimal value beyond which everything becomes toxic: oxygen, sleep, psychotherapy, philosophy. Any biological variable needs balance.

A human being in relationship with another has very limited control over what happens in that relationship. He is a part in a unit of two persons, and the control each part can have over the whole is strictly limited.

The laws of conservation of energy and matter are about substance rather than form; but mental processes, ideas, communication, organization, differentiation, structure, are matters of form rather than substance.

I believe that the problem of grace is fundamentally a problem of integration and that what needs to be integrated are the different parts of the mind--especially those multiple levels of which one extreme is called "consciousness" and the other "unconscious."

Thirty years ago, we asked: can a computer simulate all the processes of logic? The answer is yes, but the question was definitely wrong. We should have asked: can logic simulate all the sequences of cause and effect? And the answer would have been no.

When we study culture from this point of view, we are interested in showing in all details of behavior the emotional basis. We will see the whole complex of behavior as a mechanism tuned and oriented toward the emotional satisfaction and dissatisfaction of individuals.

... it can be said that any dynamic set of events and objects that possesses suitably complex causal circuits and in which appropriate energy relations are in force, will certainly exhibit characteristics peculiar to the mind. Such a set will perform comparisons, that is, it will be sensitive to difference (in addition to being influenced by ordinary physical 'causes,' such as collisions or forces); it will 'process information,' and it will inevitably be self-correcting, either in the direction of homeostatic optimality or in the direction of maximizing certain variables. ...

Edgar Morin Quotes

Man is at once superego, ego and id; he is at once society, individual, species.

One conformity is followed by another conformity.

There is a part of me that is inexplicable even to myself.

One cannot fully observe oneself and at the same time fully live.

One must learn to navigate an ocean of uncertainties among some archipelagos of certainties.

The blindness of a world of knowledge that, by compartmentalizing knowledge, disintegrates fundamental and global problems, which need transdisciplinary knowledge.

I know well that when the vanquished are victors, they will behave like those who had defeated them: it is not enough to be persecuted to become good forever, and those who were victims in the past often become perpetrators.

Society and individuality are not two separate realities adapted to each other, but there is a dual system where in a complementary and contradictory way individual and society are constitutive and at the same time parasites of each other.

What is lacking in the humanities is an awareness of the human in its complexity; on the contrary, the human is compartmentalized and compartmentalized among disciplines. The novel makes the human see complexity. It makes one see life immersed in interrelationships and interactions, life immersed in a time, place and society hic et nunc.

As Marx and Engels said at the beginning of 'German Ideology,' men have always developed false conceptions of themselves, what they do, what they have to do, and the world in which they live. And Marx-Engels are no exception.

If I were guided only by the light of reason, I would have to say that we are on the brink of the abyss. But in human history there is the unexpected, that unexpected fact that changes the course of things. That is why I am optimistic at heart.

The world of intellectuals, which should be the most sympathetic, is a world entrenched by misunderstanding, ego hypertrophy, the need for consecration and the thirst for glory.

In fact, misunderstanding of self is a very important cause of misunderstanding of others. We hide our own shortcomings and weaknesses from ourselves, which makes us ruthless toward the shortcomings and weaknesses of others.

The mission of teaching is to encourage self-directed learning by arousing, arousing, and fostering the autonomy of the spirit.

The most important contribution of knowledge in the 20th century, has been the knowledge of the limits of knowledge.

The more we believe we are guided by reason, the more we should be concerned about the unreasonable character of that reason.

It is free love that is the essential of life, as well as free knowledge. Getting rid of the inessential, this is essential for man.

The philosopher is the unspecialized man, that is, specialized in what is general about man.

[Art] is an opium that does not numb but opens the eyes, body and heart to the reality of man and the world.

Sociology is always systematically overtaken by social facts.

The greatest illusion is to believe that we know the present because we are there.

Happy deviants turn those to whom they were deviant into deviants.

Evolution is drift, deviance, creation, and it is interruptions, disruptions, crises.

Emotional capacity is indispensable to the enactment of rational behavior.

Whatever phenomenon is being studied, it is first necessary for the observer to study himself, since the observer either disturbs the observed phenomenon or projects himself into it to some extent.

In fact, misunderstanding of self is a very important cause of misunderstanding of others. We hide our own shortcomings and weaknesses from ourselves, which makes us ruthless toward the shortcomings and weaknesses of others.

Quotes by Sigmund Freud

The ego is not master in its own house.

Si vis vitam, para mortem (if you want life, prepare for death).

The price of the progress of civilization is paid by the reduction of happiness.

The moment you ask yourself the meaning and true value of life, you are sick.

Religion is a narcotic with which man controls his anguish, but it dulls his mind.

The absolute hardest jobs are in order parent, teacher and psychologist.

Religion is an illusion that takes its strength from the fact that it matches our desires.

Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come out later in a worse way.

I cannot think of any childhood need as strong as the need for a father's protection.

The mass is a docile herd that cannot live without a master. It is so thirsty for obedience that it instinctively submits to anyone who proclaims himself its master.

All those who wish to be nobler than their constitution allows succumb to neurosis; they would have been healthier if it had been possible for them to be worse.

A man who has been his mother's undisputed favorite maintains throughout his life the inner attitude of a conqueror, that confidence in success that frequently leads to actual success.

the ego feels uncomfortable, encounters limits to its own power in its own home, in the psyche. These foreign guests even seem more powerful than the ego's submissive thoughts and hold sway over the means available to the will.

The feelings of the mass are always oversimplified and greatly exaggerated. The mass therefore knows neither doubt nor uncertainty. It immediately runs to extremes, the suspicion touched upon immediately turns into incontrovertible evidence, an incipient dislike into fierce hatred.

Although prone to all extremes, the mass can only be aroused by excessive stimuli. Those who wish to act on it need no logical consistency among their arguments; they must paint in the most violent colors, exaggerate and repeat the same thing over and over again.

The gathering of the masses is useful for this reason alone, that in it the individual, who in the beginning, being only on the verge of becoming a member of the young party, feels isolated and gripped by the terror of being alone, sees for the first time the spectacle of a great collectivity and is encouraged and strengthened by it.

The masses have never known the thirst for truth. They need illusions and cannot give them up. The unreal constantly takes precedence in them over the real; they are subject to the influence of what is not true almost as much as to that of what is true. They have an obvious tendency to make no distinction between the two.

The mass is extraordinarily influential and credulous; it is uncritical; for it there is no such thing as the improbable. It thinks in images, which recall each other by association as, in the individual, they adjust to each other in states of free reverie: these images are not evaluated by any reasonable instance as to their agreement with reality.

Since about the true and the false the mass knows no doubt and yet is aware of its great strength, it is at once intolerant and ready to believe authority. It respects strength and submits only moderately to the influence of goodness, which in its eyes constitutes only a kind of weakness. What it demands of its heroes is force or even brutality. It wants to be dominated and oppressed and to fear its master.

Psychoanalytic work has given us the thesis that people get neurosis as a result of frustration, that is, the frustration of the fulfillment of their libidinal desires. [...] For neurosis to be generated there must be a conflict between a person's libidinal desires and the part of his personality that we call his ego, which is the expression of his instinct for self-preservation and which also includes the ideals of his personality.

To judge the morality of the masses correctly, it is necessary to consider the fact that, in the togetherness of individuals united in a mass, all individual inhibitions disappear and all cruel, brutal, destructive instincts, which in the individual slumber as relics of primordial times, awaken and aspire to free drive satisfaction. By influence of suggestion, however, the masses are also capable of higher realizations, such as self-denial, selflessness, dedication to an ideal.

Religion [...] uniformly imposes on everyone its path to the attainment of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in belittling the value of life and deliriously distorting the image of the real world, things that presuppose the demeaning of intelligence. At this price, through violent fixation to a psychic infantilism and participation in a collective delirium, religion succeeds in sparing many people individual neurosis. But nothing more.

The mass is impulsive, changeable and irritable. It is governed almost entirely by the unconscious. Depending on the circumstances, the impulses the mass obeys may be generous or cruel, heroic or pusillanimous; they are, however, imperious to the point that self-interest, not even that of self-preservation, does not subsist. Nothing in it is premeditated. While it may desire things passionately, it never longs for them; it is incapable of enduring will. It tolerates no delay between its desire and the fulfillment of what it desires. It feels omnipotent, for the individual belonging to the mass vanishes the concept of the impossible.

Quotes by Bertrand Russell

Envy is a terrible source of unhappiness for a great many people.

What men really want is not knowledge, but certainty.

The lack of something desired is an indispensable part of happiness.

To fear love is to fear life, and those who fear life are already three-quarters dead.

Few people can be happy without hating some other person, nation or creed.

Power is sweet; it is a drug. As with the latter, desire grows with habit.

Those who have jobs work too hard, while others starve without wages.

Ethics is the art of recommending to others the sacrifices required to cooperate with ourselves.

The problem with humanity is that the stupid are overconfident, while the intelligent are full of doubt.

The average man's opinions are far less stupid than they would be if he thought for himself.

A marriage has some chance of success if neither spouse expects much happiness from it.

Moralists are people who give up all pleasure except that of meddling in the pleasures of others.

There are two reasons to read a book: one, because you like it, and the other, that you will be able to brag about having read it.

In everything, it is healthy, from time to time, to put a question mark on what had long been taken for granted.

It is the preoccupation with what one possesses, more than anything else, that prevents men from living freely and nobly.

Man is a gullible animal and must believe in something. In the absence of a good basis for his beliefs, he will settle for a bad basis.

One of the symptoms of the arrival of a nervous breakdown is the belief that one's work is tremendously important. If I were a doctor, I would prescribe a vacation to all patients who consider their work important.

The fact that an opinion is widely held is by no means proof that it is not completely absurd. On the contrary, given the stupidity of most humans, a widely held opinion is more likely to be foolish rather than sensible.

Never stop protesting; never stop disagreeing, questioning, questioning authority, clichés, dogma. There is no such thing as absolute truth. Do not stop thinking. Be voices outside the choir. Be the weight that tilts the floor. Always disagree because dissent is a weapon. Always be informed and do not close yourselves off from knowledge because knowledge is also a weapon. You may not change the world, but you will have helped tilt the plane in your direction and you will have made your life worth telling. A man who does not dissent is a seed that will never grow.

Quotes by Bruno Cancellieri

Everyone needs someone.

Our minds play with each other without our knowledge.

Emotional reactions (or responses) precede and influence semantic and cognitive ones.

To be part of the society we assume identities suitable for that purpose.

Everything we do, we do to meet needs. This applies to all living beings and their organs, starting with cells.

Every person, to every other person, is a potential collaborator and competitor.

Our well-being depends on the quality of our interactions with the people and things we interact with.

Society is an ecosystem where every human being would like to have a place that suits his or her temperament, character, limitations and abilities, so that he or she can satisfy his or her needs without too much difficulty. This desire can be fulfilled only if others allow us to do so and if we allow others to do so, because society is not an external entity, but is made up of each of us. In fact, being accepted by others is a primary need that conditions all others.

Every living being is a slave to its own needs.

Man's freedom is very limited, and wisdom consists mainly in knowing one's limits, obligations and prohibitions.

Man needs to share his visions with others.

Every human being, in order to survive and to meet his needs, needs the cooperation (willingly or unwillingly) of a number of other human beings, and everything that can be useful to obtain and maintain it. At the same time, he needs to avoid everything that can hinder or diminish such cooperation.

Life is a drama of which we are both protagonists and spectators.

Self-deception is normal. We all self-deceive because it is the unconscious that decides what we should be aware of and what we should not be aware of.

Life is interaction, and the quality of life depends on the quality of interactions. Therefore, it is important that these be investigated and studied. Such is the purpose of systemic philosophy.

Things are liked or disliked, not because of what they are intrinsically, but because of their connections and relations to other things that they like or dislike. In other words, what likes or dislikes about a thing is not the thing itself, but what it evokes.

Life is integration, death disintegration; life is interconnection, death disconnection; life is interaction, death isolation.

Everyone would like to dominate others but most remove this desire from consciousness.

Each elementary action is part of a larger game. So, before we ask ourselves what to do and what not to do, we should ask ourselves which games to participate in and which not to participate in.

The tragic side of human life is that everyone needs someone, but no one necessarily needs any particular person, because we are all replaceable. Therefore, each of us lives with the fear (conscious or unconscious) of being replaced. Some relief from that fear may come from being able to replace someone you are in a relationship with, in case you are wanted by more than one person.

The world is an ecology of needs.

Love (whatever it is) can be more or less exclusive or inclusive. The exclusive one limits the freedom to love other people or things, the inclusive one protects it; the exclusive one hinders mental development, the inclusive one promotes it.

When we cannot explain a phenomenon with science, we explain it with magic, religion or spiritualism.

In dialogues and conversations, society, with its forms, languages and rules, is always present as a reference and context that gives meaning and value to everything that is said. On the other hand, what is said also serves to demonstrate and confirm the speakers' membership and conformity to society in certain ranks and roles. In other words, we speak not only to tell real or alleged facts about ourselves as members of a society, but, at the same time, to confirm our social identity and dignity.

The misery of humanity is due to unresolved, mystified, hidden conflicts.

Free will (assuming it exists) consists in choosing which environment to be in and with whom and how to interact. During interaction, in fact, the automatisms of our mind prevail, and free will cannot be exercised.

One obeys to command and commands to obey.

Telling one's thoughts is dangerous because some people may not like them. To decrease the risk of making enemies, since it is almost impossible not to communicate our thoughts, it is better to adapt our ideas to the desires and expectations of the majority of the members of the community to which we belong. On the other hand, if we want to be free to think independently, we must defend ourselves against all sorts of dislikes, slanders and reprisals from those who feel offended or threatened by the irreverence of our ideas, especially when these directly or indirectly challenge their worldviews and self-styled motives and intentions.

This is how the unconscious reasons:

if your good involves my bad, or if your bad involves my good, then I want your bad;
if your bad involves my bad, or if your good involves my good, then I want your good.

It is virtually impossible to know why we like or dislike a certain thing. We can only perceive a connection between certain forms, symbols, words, concepts, ideas, objects, etc., and certain of our feelings. However, such a connection does not indicate a causal relationship, but only a co-presence. On the other hand, we can assume that we like

something when it satisfies some of our needs and dislike it when it frustrates them. The fact remains that logics of needs and their satisfactions are unconscious and involuntary.

We are all differently intelligent, and everyone evaluates others' intelligence using their own.

For me, meditating consists of listening to the wills of my demons, as the masters and stewards of my feelings, that is, my pleasures and sufferings.

Only when the degree of a disorder exceeds a certain threshold is the motivation to eliminate the causes triggered.

The conscious self must continually choose whether (and to what extent) to command or obey its unconscious, and whether (and to what extent) to maintain or change it, as far as possible.

Consciousness is the perception and cognition of one's body's time, caught between its past and its future.

The human mind, like any other mind, has all the characteristics of a cybernetic system, although it cannot be ruled out that it also has other characteristics not found in the definition of 'cybernetic system'.

Every human being is innocent and guilty at the same time. The degree of guilt depends on the kind of morality you want to apply.

At every moment our unconscious decides what (we) should not be aware of.

Passing off as objective what is subjective is a fraud.

A human being, in order to grant his favors to another le always something in return, something to satisfy some of his needs or desires, including the needs to give, to help, to care, to serve, to participate, to belong, etc.

A social context is like a musical scale. Any transaction out of context is out of tune like a note out of scale.

Approval or disapproval of something or someone can also be the subject of approval or disapproval by others. Therefore, we happen to approve or disapprove of something or someone in order to be approved. Approving or disapproving of certain things or people are important aspects of any conformity.

A thing (anything, object, machine, information, idea, person, meme, etc.) is all the more important and valuable the more effective it is in facilitating and making productive interactions among the people who use or share it, in terms of satisfying their needs and desires.

At every moment the unconscious influences its conscious self. At every moment the conscious self must decide to what extent and in what way to obey or resist its unconscious.

Feelings are caused by hormones (such as, for example, endorphins), and hormones can be stimulated by perceptions or thoughts. In this sense, so-called positive thoughts can contribute to happiness, although they are not sufficient.

Doing something (anything) is equivalent to interacting with something and/or someone.

A mind essentially serves to process information, that is, to distinguish, recognize, and associate sensations, forms, ideas (i.e., perceptions), and actions. The latter are always reactions (physical or semantic) to some perception.

The above applies to both the mind of a living system (i.e., an organism) and that of a nonliving system (i.e., inorganic, such as a computer) with varying degrees of complexity, sensitivity and awareness.

Shared tastes are joyful, unshared tastes sad.

As for the way of thinking and knowing, there are two opposing tendencies: separating vs. uniting, differentiating vs. uniting, distinguishing vs. confusing, analyzing vs. synthesizing, etc. For me, knowledge consists of practicing and reconciling these extremes. In other words, for me it is impossible to know something without first breaking it down and then reassembling it after observing the relationships and interactions between its parts.

The less rational a person is, the less he or she appreciates the rationality of others.

It would be good if what is good was also good and true, and if what is bad was also bad and false. We would then know how to recognize good and truth easily.

So many things exist only in the minds of humans.

Logical connections between mental entities are constantly taking place in the mind, when this is not prevented by self-censorship or bias. To become more intelligent, creative and open-minded, it is necessary to break as many unwarranted isolations between mental entities as possible.

At every moment we have to choose whether to command or obey certain entities (people, things, ideas, feelings, drives, etc.) external and internal to our bodies.

Since man is an animal fundamentally imitating his fellows, he imitates both good and evil.

As for being and becoming, I assume that there is only becoming and that being is only a mental construction "in the making."

Believing is also a means of belonging to a community, thus fulfilling one of the most important human needs. Indeed, by believing in certain self-styled truths one automatically belongs to the community of those who believe in the same truths. But they do not have to be obvious truths, otherwise it would be like belonging to humanity at large, which is of little use for the purpose of solidarity.

The more certain we are that we are not deceiving ourselves, the more we deceive ourselves. And vice versa, the more certain we are of deceiving ourselves, the less we deceive ourselves.

Every living being (including humans) is the result of the interaction of its component parts.

There are no absolute positions (either in space or time), only relative to other positions.

It is impossible not to depend on some person or group. If anything, we can choose on whom to depend.

We cannot not imitate. If anything, we can choose whom to imitate.

A human being in the course of a day needs several things, and the frustration of one need cannot be compensated by the over-satisfaction of another.

We are so dependent on others that we are willing to believe in absurd things and have absurd feelings and desires if it is essential to be accepted by at least one community.

Every human is subject to a "double bind": on the one hand the duty to be truthful, and on the other the duty not to denounce the collective lies of the community to which he belongs. Indeed, if he did so, others would punish him to the point of excluding him from the community itself. The solution to this double bind (to avoid emotional distress and schizophrenia) is not to see others' lies nor one's own, that is, not to consider them lies.

The microcosm (i.e., a mind) and the macrocosm (i.e., the world outside it) are ecologies of needs and consequent wills. Therefore, the fundamental question at all times and places is: who is in charge?

Man tends to consider true what he likes and false what he does not like.

A negative emotional reaction (i.e., rejection) to a certain phenomenon (thing, person, event, situation, etc.) inhibits the possibility of understanding it and finding useful and even pleasant aspects in it.

We are freer and less free than we think. In other words, our real freedom is different from what we think we have. In fact, we are not free to need what we need, to want what we want, to desire what we desire, to love what we love, to hate what we hate, but we are free to achieve our ends in various ways, more or less effective, useful or harmful.

Since we are genetically the same as our ancestors 20000 years ago, it can be argued that our innate needs are the same as man then, and all other needs of man today are induced by the culture in which he lives.

Religions are the most widespread forms of mental manipulation.

Perhaps the main difference between us humans and other animals is our ability to live imaginary lives through the use of symbols capable of evoking emotions similar to those provoked by real situations.

Deception is a totally or partially false statement, illusion an improbable or impossible expectation, that is, unrealistic. Human beings deceive and delude each other out of ignorance, to exploit each other, to conform or to save face; they deceive and delude themselves out of ignorance and to suffer less. Indeed, the truth can be disarming, ridiculous, painful, atrocious, upsetting, unbearable.

The denial of cognitive bias is a product, and a confirmation, of the bias itself.

To know oneself? Impossible if one does not also know others, if one does not know man in general.

The most common mistake we often make is to assume that others think like us, react emotionally like us, have similar morals, similar interests, similar motivations and similar fears, that they know what we know, that we suffer and enjoy for similar reasons, that our minds are similar. It is like believing that all computers are similar. In fact, all computers are similar in general operating principles, but very different from each other in materials (hardware) and programs (software), i.e., "applications."

The social pressures we are subjected to can cause us to simulate (even to ourselves) needs that are not our own, but observed in others and deemed right or necessary by the community we belong to. These are what we call "induced needs." Who can say they do not have induced needs?

Wisdom is knowing the true causes, direct and indirect, of one's own and others' pleasures and pains.

Consciousness stretches between past, present and future. These three dimensions are not separable. In fact, what has happened affects what is happening, and what is happening affects what will happen. What is taking place would not make sense without a future perspective, even if only a few seconds. In fact, what we do, we do in order for something to happen (or not happen) in the future, that is, to cause (or prevent) some potential change, that is, some internal and/or external transformation.

Every culture is a mixture of truth and falsehood. Our task is to distinguish the former from the latter.

The pleasure conferred by an object may be due not so much to its special characteristics but to its social value, that is, to the fact that the subject feels part of a community that appreciates that type of object. Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish the pleasure emanating from an object from the pleasure of sharing the appreciation of that object with other people.

Every human being inwardly has a world map, a vocabulary, an encyclopedia, an epistemology, attractions, repulsions and motivations that are more or less original or copied from others.

Freedom of thought is an illusion, since thoughts are limited by pre-established mental schemas, which define possible contexts, the meanings of their constituent elements and their respective social valences. Breaking out of known patterns is difficult and dangerous because one does not know where such freedom might lead, nor how it might be interpreted and judged by others. Creativity requires courage and/or recklessness.

The mind is for solving problems. If it has no problems to solve, it atrophies. The more important and complex the problems it deals with, the more the mind develops and the more intelligence increases.

Science, philosophy and psychology should not be separated, but proceed jointly, feeding off each other. Otherwise what they produce is dangerously insufficient.

Man is a storytelling animal, the only animal capable of inventing and telling stories and believing them to be true.

My conception of the unconscious is much broader than the Freudian one in that it includes any involuntary, nonconscious mechanism, including biochemical ones, governed by algorithmic logic defined in DNA and other learned ones. In practice, for me the unconscious includes the whole body and its internal activities (except the conscious self), starting with cells and organs, which have a *mind* in the sense that they behave according to certain *logics*.

Why do we like what we like and dislike what we dislike? This question could be the foundation of a new pragmatic psychology.

We humans are so interdependent that we constantly need to rely on the cooperation of others on our behalf. Therefore, every sign to that effect reassures and cheers us, and every sign to the contrary distresses and saddens us.

Man does what he does because he needs to do it. Therefore, we should not ask why man does certain things, but why he needs to do them.

Human beings tend to imitate everything they see others doing, and the more of them doing the same thing, the stronger the motivation to imitate them. That is why TV is very dangerous.

Doing something together with someone is more prudent than doing it alone. In fact, in the former case you already have someone's implicit approval.

Fear makes obedient.

Every cause is also a consequence.

The philosophical and religious literary heritage is full of explanations that explain nothing and answers that answer questions other than those they purport to answer. We need to beware of non-explanations and non-answers.

The intensity of the need to imitate a certain pattern of behavior is proportional to the number of imitators of the pattern perceived by the subject.

Of all the ideas we have learned, we can at any given time think of only one or a few more, partly because all those ideas are not organized into a clear and known structure, but are scattered in our memory in no particular order.

We can think in a serial way (i.e., by stories) and in a parallel way (i.e., by maps).

The unconscious has a logic, but it is different from that of the conscious self. To know one's unconscious is to know its logic, that is, the programs according to which it makes its decisions.

Our unconscious has no sense of measure. In fact, for it a person is completely good or completely bad, completely sincere or completely false, completely stupid or completely intelligent. Only conscious rationality has a sense of measure and is able to understand that everyone is partially good and partially bad, partially sincere and partially false, partially stupid and partially intelligent. However, feelings are determined by the unconscious, not the conscious self.

Sciences correct themselves, religions do not.

The most insidious and common error is not believing something false to be true or something true to be false, but rather considering something incomplete as complete, something insufficient as sufficient, and something uncertain as certain—especially when it comes to the motivations and causes of behaviours.

The miseries of our society are not the result of the struggle between good and evil (won by evil), but of struggles between different stupidities and intelligences, between different intelligences and between different egoisms. Within this framework, alliances and cooperation are formed for competitive ends. Cooperation without competitive ends is rare and therefore noble.

Only what is random is free. Everything else is subject to non-random, that is, predefined, laws or logic. In this sense, free will is free only insofar as it is random, that is, in its random components.

One thing that makes a human being's existence difficult and painful is the conflicting nature of his feelings: Love and hate, attraction and repulsion, desire and fear toward the same object, even simultaneously.

When it comes to motivation, I don't believe anyone, not even myself.

Every cause is an effect of other causes, and every effect is a cause of other effects.

Our choices are either the result of algorithms, that is, logic, or they are random. Freedom understood as not being subject to constraints is therefore an illusion.

From needs arise drives, which "push" us to make certain choices. We oppose a drive only if an opposing drive of greater strength intervenes, for example, a moral inhibition, that is, the pause to do something for which we will be punished.

Free will does not exist, because we necessarily choose what we believe most and best meets our needs, that is, what most and best decreases our pains and increases our pleasures.

The wise man knows when it is appropriate to lead and when to be led, when to dominate and when to serve, when to work and when to rest, when to seek companionship and when solitude.

The self is responsible for its unconscious as it can cure it through the study of psychologies and the practice of psychotherapies.

It is not divine punishment that we need to fear (for God does not punish) but that of our superego. In fact, the welfare of our community is more important to him than that of our own person.

Others want or expect something from us, and we decide whom to please (or displease) and to what extent. On the other hand, others decide whether and to what extent to please us.

Those who challenge their superego must expect devious, hostile, and morbid reactions enacted "for good," that is, to protect the subject from being expelled from the community. Therefore, the challenger will have to be vigilant to recognize and reject any attempt by the superego to boycott his freedom.

For the unconscious to be different from others is a fault that sooner or later is discovered and punished.

For the unconscious, it is better to share falsehoods than to share nothing.

Those who do not question their free will do not exercise it.

We have such a need to interact with other human beings that if we cannot do it in reality we do it in imagination.

Every human being has, on the one hand, a need for the help of others and, on the other hand, the ability to help others.

The pleasure is in the doing, not the done.

It is difficult to lie to others without also lying to oneself. To be convincing we must believe in what we tell others, even if it is falsehood. In fact, if we cultivated two different versions of facts in our minds, one true for our own use and one false for others, we would end up either confusing between them and inadvertently revealing to others what we want to keep from them, or believing in some of the falsehoods we say.

Believing that one's family, one's community, one's nation is better than others is one of the most common and stupidest mistakes human beings make.

Evil is doubly evil when it is hidden, even more so when it is passed off as good.

Because of the increasing freedom of thought and behavior, and the resulting social diversification, two people are less and less likely to be compatible with each other. As a result, loneliness is increasingly prevalent.

Everything we do and don't do, say and don't say, think and don't think, know and don't know, feel and don't feel, desire and don't desire, socially qualifies us.

Our thoughts are influenced by what we are, and what we are is influenced by our thoughts.

Man is always busy imitating someone else, but he hardly admits it.

There are two kinds of madness: those that tend to inhibit and those that tend to liberate. For the "inhibited" madman, society is full of people without moral restraint; for the "liberated" madman, it is full of repressed people.

Psychotherapy takes a long time and a lot of practice, like learning to play a musical instrument or speak a foreign language. The further along you are in years, the more difficult it is.

A couple is the more stable the more there is mutual dependence such that each party belongs to the other.

Creativity requires a certain freedom of thought, that is, the ability and courage to connect any idea with any other, in any way.

Conscious self = feeling + consciousness + will. None of these three entities would serve any purpose, nor therefore have any reason to exist, without the other two. In fact, each of them cooperates with the others to exercise its function. The conscious self is not something different or separate from the other three entities, but the sum of them.

Knowing a thing is possible in two forms: externally and internally. In the first case it is a matter of finding out what systems the thing is part of and how it interacts with the other parts of each of those systems. In the second case, it is a matter of seeing the thing as a system itself, that is, as a set of interacting parts, and identifying those parts and their interactions.

Nothing and no one can be master of what he or she is a part of.

Human beings are genetically almost identical in their physiological and mental structures. What changes are mainly the contents of the structures themselves, that is, what they have "learned" through experiences.

Sometimes it is more useful to unlearn than to learn.

It is easier to learn than to unlearn.

Free will (if it exists) is exhausting, so it cannot be exercised for long.

Interacting with others is like a children's game. A game is chosen that all players know and feel like playing, and the relevant rules are adhered to, on pain of "disqualification."

Consistency constitutes a limitation of freedom. The freedom to be inconsistent.

Whoever wins is always right; whoever is right does not always win.

Religion has almost always arrogated to itself the exclusive right to administer violence and sexuality.

Man desires a common belonging in relation to others, and therefore tends to imitate them.

Guilt is the unconscious fear of being excluded from one's community internalized because of a breach of its rules.

Identity crises are actually crises of belonging.

To be means to belong.

Social belonging is based on imitation and reproduction of characteristic community forms.

Nothing is irrational because everything, every behavior has its reasons. If something seems irrational to us, it is because we do not understand its reasons because of our ignorance or low intelligence.

Not only do most people not question their behavior or question their nature, but they view those who do such things with suspicion or hostility.

We are systems that interact according to programs that we can partially modify.

Happiness is not freedom from needs, but having needs and the ability to meet them.

It is difficult to usefully address (and even more so to solve) social problems if there is no minimal agreement among those involved about human nature, that is, the structure and functioning of human beings in general.

To improve the world, we need to improve psychology.

One can be a slave to the need for freedom.

The important thing is to understand what is important.

Just as the body destroys unused neurons, the psyche removes needs whose continued frustration is excessively painful.

Man has such a fear of meaninglessness that he tends to give meaning even to what does not have it and, having to invent a meaning that does not exist, he invents the one that is most comfortable for him. This is the most widespread form of deception and self-deception.

A mother does not feed her young because she loves them, but because she needs to feed them and, as with all needs, she feels pleasure when she can satisfy it and pain when she cannot. What is often called love is but a need, innate or acquired.

The impatient patient is a bad patient.

Empathy is inversely proportional to distance.

The conscious self is progressive, but the unconscious is conservative.

There is not the true and the false, the good and the bad, but the satisfactory and the unsatisfactory.

We are never mentally alone because even in solitude our mind prepares for upcoming encounters or confrontations with others. Everything is done for others, with them, to serve us or defend us from them.

Every life form is a reproduction strategy.

Everyone adopts the moral principles that absolve him or her.

Miscellaneous articles by Bruno Cancellieri

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On the need for positive recognition

Every human needs to be positively recognized by other humans, that is, to receive demonstrations of respect, attention, esteem, value, ability, affection, love, interest in cooperating, etc.

In other words, every human needs to hear from a number of others: you are okay, I like you, I value you, and I wish to cooperate with you, that is, to establish a relationship with you for mutual satisfaction of needs and/or desires, to do useful and/or pleasant things that we could not do alone, to complement and help each other.

It is a genetically determined and inescapable need due to the interdependence of human beings.

Prolonged dissatisfaction of this need can cause suffering and mental disorders, in the sense that it may cause the individual to establish painful, unproductive and/or violent relationships with others, or cause him to isolate himself, making it increasingly difficult or impossible to satisfy any of his other needs.

A major problem related to the need for positive recognition is the fact that it is neither a right nor a duty, but is conditional on the recognized person's liking in the eyes of the recognizer. In other words, to be positively recognized, an individual must "be" or behave as the recognizer desires and expects.

Positive recognition therefore comes at a price, which some may be unwilling to pay, so much so that they give up recognition themselves, and put themselves in an antisocial or isolated position in relation to others.

The human mind as a cooperative system, or why we do what we do

That part of the human mind not found in any other animal species, that is, the uniquely human part of our mind, has evolved, in my opinion, as a tool to handle the problem of absolute interdependence of us humans. In fact, none of us can survive without the cooperation of other humans.

The human mind therefore has, in my opinion, a fundamental motivation from which all other uniquely human motivations derive: to obtain the cooperation of others.

To this end, a human being's mind can follow various conscious and unconscious strategies. In fact, I would say that what distinguishes the personalities of human beings are the particular strategies each adopts to gain the cooperation of others.

Strategies for obtaining others' cooperation are more or less peaceful or violent, honest or dishonest, and more or less leverage cooperation, competition, selection, imitation, sharing, trade, economics, ethics, aesthetics, competitive coalition, gregariousness, false religious promises, etc.

Therefore, to the question: why do we do what we do? I would answer without hesitation: to gain others' cooperation according to a certain conscious or unconscious personal strategy. This implies, among other things, being accepted by others as cooperators, that is, not being rejected when we propose symbiotic cooperation.

What greatly complicates this issue is the identification, which is not always stable, of "cooperating others," i.e., people with whom one wishes or agrees to cooperate, and "undesirable others," i.e., those with whom one does not wish to interact, and from whom one must distance oneself and/or defend oneself.

Behavior patterns, needs, and sentimental homeostasis

A human being's behavior, when not voluntarily random, follows certain conscious and/or unconscious logics. Logics of behavior consist of the reproduction (copying, imitation, repetition) of certain patterns of behavior learned by the subject at some stage of his or her life.

Behavior patterns constitute strategies of need satisfaction, in the sense that through their reproduction, and only through it, the individual succeeds in satisfying his or her needs by obtaining the necessary cooperation from others.

Humans spontaneously learn patterns of behavior out of a genetically determined need for imitation. In fact, social life would not be possible without the learning and reproduction of patterns.

An individual does not directly copy the behavior of other individuals, but does so indirectly and unconsciously, through patterns that the individual constructs in his or her own mind by observing the behavior of others.

As children we are rewarded when we reproduce the patterns desired by our educators, punished when we do not reproduce them or do not do so faithfully enough. Thus, we learn a number of behavior patterns to which we attribute values that depend on the culture in which we were raised.

Every human being continuously reproduces (consciously or unconsciously) patterns of behavior that are at the same time patterns of interaction, participation, social integration and thinking.

Behaviors, actions, gestures, thoughts that do not follow some socially shared pattern are possible, but very rare and difficult to implement as they require an effort of will and self-control in this regard. On the other hand, human learning is based on imitation of patterns, and everything we have learned is part of patterns.

Every social transaction is given meaning by referring to some shared pattern. When no corresponding pattern is found, the transaction is perceived as strange or violent.

The mass media present ready-made role models to be reproduced, imitated, and worn, with predetermined roles to be assumed, promising satisfying social participation and/or satisfaction of individual needs

We are so dependent on patterns of behavior that we have a structural concern about it. We always live, consciously or unconsciously, in fear that we are reproducing wrong patterns, that we are not reproducing the patterns we have adopted well enough, or that we are not reproducing any patterns at all. In other words, we are afraid that we have not learned shared patterns, or that we have not learned them well enough, or that we are not able to reproduce them well enough.

When our degree of imitation of a certain pattern (i.e., our quantitative and qualitative performance with respect to its reproduction) is below a certain threshold, anxiety and motivation to improve the reproduction of the pattern is generated in us. Anxiety is also generated when the models to be imitated are not well defined. On the other hand, when we feel that we have reproduced our favorite models well enough, we experience satisfaction, joy and a sense of security.

I suppose that in the psyche of every human being there is an unconscious homeostatic system that monitors at all times the degree (quantitative and qualitative) of imitation of adopted social patterns and triggers feelings of pleasure or pain to urge the individual, respectively, to maintain reproduction if good, and to correct it if bad or deficient. Since this homeostasis leverages feelings, I like to call it sentimental homeostasis.

The sentimental homeostasis described above (which I call "mimetic") is not the only process that regulates the individual's behavior. In fact, it is flanked by a homeostasis (also sentimental) of a higher functional level, which oversees the satisfaction of all needs and triggers pleasant feelings when needs are satisfied, unpleasant feelings when they are unsatisfied. I will use the adjective motivational to distinguish this homeostasis from mimetic homeostasis.

Mimetic homeostasis may be more or less consistent or contrasting with motivational homeostasis. This depends on the extent to which a certain pattern of behavior is able to satisfy the subject's needs.

At the conclusion of the above, I make the following points.

- We should seek to know the general characteristics of our own and others' behavior patterns rather than detailed or particular aspects of them.
- We should ask ourselves to what extent our own and others' behavior patterns meet our own and others' needs.
- A behavior pattern can be modified at the individual level through psychotherapy or a process of self-improvement, at the societal level through explicit negotiation of changes so as to improve the satisfaction of the needs of those involved.
- If we want to improve society, we must improve the behavior patterns that govern social interactions.

Meta-behavior

In the coming days I will meet a number of people, some known to me, some unknown to me. How will I behave with them? Will I be guided by my unconscious mental automatisms or will I exercise voluntary control? What will I offer and ask of them? How will I present myself to them? What will I hide from them? What will I propose to them? What games will I play with them? With what rules? In what roles? With what restrictions?

It is evident that the behavior of others toward me *also* depends on my behavior toward them.

Meta-behavior is the behavior of reflecting on and questioning one's own behavior (especially toward other humans), and seeking ways to improve it in the sense of greater satisfaction of one's own and others' needs.

Conscious vs. unconscious interactions

Every living being is constantly interacting with the outside world and its internal organs. Probably man is the only living being who can be aware of interacting with something, of the rules with which he interacts, and of the effects of his own interactions. However, such awareness is in my opinion generally rare.

I mean that a human being, while interacting with something or someone, rarely realizes that the process in which he is involved is an interaction, that is, an exchange of information, objects, substances, and/or energies. In fact, his awareness is generally reduced to a feeling of presence with respect to something or someone, to a perception of spontaneous behaviors, and to experiencing feelings and emotions aroused by that presence and those behaviors, without analyzing them.

Perhaps only when two people are engaged in combat, competition, or play, do they have an awareness that they are interacting. When they are, on the other hand, in a companionship with no particular rules and no definite goals, their behavior toward each other is generally spontaneous and perceived as a continuous flow of automatic, that is, not consciously calculated, actions.

Conscious interaction involves analyzing one's own and others' behaviors in a systemic sense, that is, in terms of actions and reactions, i.e., stimuli and responses, according to certain logic, where a response to a stimulus may itself constitute a stimulus.

A person engaged in a conscious interaction is firstly aware that he is engaged in a systemic interaction with a certain thing or person. Second, he is aware of the way he is interacting, that is, the logics by which certain stimuli are associated with certain of his responses. Third, he is aware of the results of the interaction with respect to his own motivations (i.e., his needs and desires) or goals. Fourth, he is able to consciously decide whether to continue or stop the interaction, or to change the logics of his own responses to the stimuli received.

In conclusion, I believe that when you are not satisfied with your unconscious interactions, it is good to try to make them conscious so that you can improve them.

Life, needs, feelings, ends and means

Every living being is characterized by a particular complex of needs that are more or less satisfied, and, in sentient species, by feelings that express the related satisfactions and dissatisfactions.

We humans associate our feelings with particular ideas, shapes, things or people toward which we feel attraction or repulsion, often without knowing why, that is, without knowing the needs from which our feelings arise.

As a result, we often pursue what we associate with our feelings rather than trying to rationally meet the needs from which our feelings arise.

We also tend to confuse means with ends, that is, to regard certain means as ends (for example, money). As a result, we develop (secondary) needs for things that are only means to satisfy primary needs, forgetting what the primary needs themselves are.

For it may happen that what in a certain situation was an effective means of satisfying a certain primary need, in another situation is no longer effective in that sense. If we were aware of the fact that that means was only a means and not an end, that is, that it has no value in itself, we could replace it with another more adequate means, but if we have forgotten what was the need that means enabled us to satisfy, that need is likely to remain unsatisfied and we will continue to pursue a means that has become useless or counterproductive.

How to solve problems

To effectively solve a difficult problem, I find it useful to view it as a series of interconnected problems, to be investigated with a systemic, socio-ecological and complex approach.

First, it is necessary to detect the causes, effects, and cause-effect relationships that characterize the problem to be solved by examining the behaviors of all interacting parties in the system in which the problem occurs. That is, it is necessary to investigate the mechanisms by which the system (as a whole) responds in undesirable or unsatisfactory ways to certain causes, that is, to certain events.

Second, it is necessary to devise one or more changes in the system such as to avoid and/or modify the causes of the problems or to inhibit or modify the system's response mechanisms to those causes. However, the changes must be compatible with the structure of the affected parts of the system.

Third, it is necessary to actually implement the conceived changes by overcoming any resistance to change on the part of one or more parts of the system. Overcoming resistance is especially important in living systems. For organisms and their organs have a self-preservation instinct that normally opposes any attempt to change their structure, an instinct that causes them to reject any insertion of foreign or heterogeneous components.

It is obvious that the problems will not be solved (or may even worsen) if the remedial changes are not feasible, are insufficient or counterproductive, or if the analysis of the causes and/or response mechanisms of the system is incorrect or insufficient.

The most common mistakes we make in dealing with problems are, on the one hand, not using a systems and social-ecological approach, and on the other hand, underestimating the complexity of the problems and systems involved.

In fact, we sometimes ignore some of the parts and some of the mechanisms at play in the system. Moreover, we often overlook the fact that every cause is a consequence of another (more or less known) cause, and we do not consider that a system's response to a certain cause can retroact on the cause itself, changing it and making the solution ineffective. For example, this is what happens with the use of antibiotics that cause mutations in pathogens such that they become immune to the antibiotics themselves.

In my opinion, what makes problem solving more difficult is, in addition to the characteristics of the problem itself, the failure to recognize its complexity in a systemic sense. Added to this is the fact that often the problem to be solved is ill-defined, or that it is a "false" problem behind which real ones are hidden.

Once the problem has been properly defined, before beginning to hypothesize solutions, it is useful to ask a series of questions whose answers may indicate in which directions to look for solutions.

In conclusion, it is difficult to solve a problem that has not been fully investigated and understood.

Need and difficulty of doing things together

We humans have an innate and structural need to do things together with our fellow human beings, such as play, work, exchange ideas, goods, services, eros, etc.

The problem is that in order to do things together we have to agree on the things to do and how to do them.

In fact, everyone would like to "play" the "game" that is most congenial to them, in which they are most competitive or favored, or which they most need or desire.

It therefore frequently happens that conflicts arise among those who intend to do things together regarding the choice of types of interaction and the rules to be followed. These include the goals to be achieved, the obligations, the prohibitions, the logical, ethical and aesthetic principles to be applied, the epistemology to be based on, and the roles (functional and hierarchical) that each should assume within this framework.

The problem is compounded by the fact that typically such conflicts are not handled explicitly, through frank and clear negotiations. Instead, covert maneuvers, disguised and mystified in the name of a phantom subjective and arbitrary common sense, or common custom, are generally enacted to get what is wanted.

Doing Together

Man needs to do things together with his fellow human beings, any things, useful, rational, but also useless or senseless, as long as they are not obviously harmful.

The need to "do together" is innate and generative, in the sense that additional needs, instrumental to the first, arise from it.

Play, or the need to play, is one such need. Other forms of doing together include performances, theater, film, dance, music, sports, religious and civic rites, literature, folklore, traditions, customs, conversation, etc.

Interaction between two human beings, if not violent, always follows social rules, that is, conventions about what is forbidden and what is obligatory, forms and meanings, limits and freedoms.

Sociality is not an option, but the foundation of the psyche and morality.

Doing together serves to confirm membership in a group, as well as to cooperate for common purposes and against common enemies. It serves to establish relationships of cooperation, mutual aid, trade, friendship and love.

To do together means to interact, that is, to constitute a system of which one is or becomes a part.

Man cannot live without being part of some social system, and his memberships in this sense need to be continually confirmed. Confirmation occurs through social or socializing acts, no matter whether purely symbolic or material. I mean that what is exchanged may consist of symbols, information (true, fictitious or false), goods, substances or energies.

Having ascertained the impossibility of doing without social interaction, all that is left for man is creativity, that is, the possibility of inventing new forms and new rules of interaction that are more functional, that is, more suitable for the satisfaction of his own and others' needs.

Cooperation, competition and selection

Social life is governed by, among other things, two opposite motivations: cooperation and competition, which sometimes negate each other and sometimes intertwine. In fact, we often cooperate with some in order to compete with others, and conversely, we compete with some in order to cooperate with others. On the other hand, we often cooperate and at the same time compete against the same person.

Cooperation can involve either the convergence of individual strengths for a common goal or mutual help in times of need.

Competition can be either about winning an unshareable resource or hierarchical position, or about one person's domination or control over another.

A particular form of competition, related to competition, is selection, understood as the ability an individual has to choose the people with whom to interact, how much and how to do so. The phenomenon of selection involves a particular kind of competition, which consists of trying to create the conditions for being chosen by someone as a partner (friend, comrade, coworker, colleague, lover, spouse, etc.) instead of others, or before others.

Within this framework, Christian-like morality, in the name of an illusory hoped-for purely cooperative sociality, induces us to remove from consciousness our competitive and selective spirit, which nevertheless continues to act unconsciously and in hidden, mystified and disguised ways.

The mind (also called the psyche) is always busy managing, consciously or unconsciously, relationships with others by appropriately dosing cooperation and competition with each one.

In such a perspective, considering the structural interdependence of human beings, happiness depends on successful mutual cooperation among people, where all interactors gain in terms of satisfying their own needs, at the expense of no one or someone outside the "happy group."

Deception and self-deception

In my opinion we are generally worse than common ethics and aesthetics allow us to be. By "worse" I mean more selfish, more competitive, more vile, meaner, uglier, less intelligent, less capable, less sensitive, etc.

The gap between our being, our having to be and our wanting to appear is such that we are forced to lie to others and to ourselves, that is, to live in permanent mystification and self-mystification.

Social life implies an unspoken agreement whereby everyone renounces seeing and denouncing the mystifications of others. We thus end up, through habit, systematically and unknowingly deceiving others and ourselves as to our own nature.

Social deception is generally accompanied and supported by self-deception. In fact, an actor is all the better the more he or she identifies with the character he or she plays, the more he or she believes in what he or she is trying to make others believe.

The gap between truth and mystification about our person, and thus the inauthenticity of our reputation, is a cause of anxiety for us because of the unconscious fear that deception will be discovered.

This social anxiety prevents us from being happy as it makes us fake, neurotic and victims of mental and psychosomatic disorders.

Becoming aware of this issue could help us make our relationships with others more authentic.

The two souls of man

Every human being has two souls: one cooperative and one competitive. The former tends to help others, the latter to subdue them in order to satisfy their own needs and desires.

The two souls are often at war with each other to direct the body in which they act. Each would like to silence the other.

In cultures imbued with religion, the competitive soul normally tends to hide or disguise itself in order to act undisturbed; the cooperative soul tends to show off in order to reassure others and gain their benevolence.

In fact, each of us tends to show our souls to others and ourselves by emphasizing the cooperative one and minimizing the competitive one. In this sense we are all manipulators and manipulated, consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily.

On human groups

Human groups are constituted on the real or assumed sharing of certain cognitions, certain feelings and certain motivations, that is, on a common ethics and aesthetics.

Once established, the group tends to reject those who do not sufficiently share the group's characteristic cognitions, feelings and motivations (i.e., ethics and aesthetics). In other words, the group tends to reject those who criticize it.

This dynamic, combined with the need to belong to a community, causes both conformity and cultural nomadism.

By cultural nomadism I mean the tendency to migrate from one group to another more satisfying group.

Conformity prevails in some personalities, cultural nomadism in others.

The pleasure of submission

In my opinion, man has an innate tendency to submit to "others," meaning by this word not individuals, but what George H. Mead defines as the "generalized Other." This is a mental entity that we could also call "community spirit," referring to the subjective and ideal community to which everyone would like to belong, characterized by particular cultural, intellectual, economic, aesthetic, ethical, religious, etc. aspects.

Indeed, man cannot exist or satisfy his needs outside a community, and everyone's existential drama is to find and maintain a sustainable place in a sustainable community, that is, a community and place such that he can stably and inexhaustibly satisfy all his needs.

Submission is thus functional to membership; indeed, it is an indispensable condition of it. Indeed, in systemic terms, it can be said that an entity cannot be part of a system unless it is accepted by the system itself, that is, unless the other parties agree to interact with the entity in question in a cooperative manner.

The entity that would like to become part of a system must therefore adapt to the system (and not vice versa), even though a party may, under special conditions and to a certain extent, modify the system itself. This is also true for an individual who aspires to be part of a community.

Since modern communities are very numerous and fluid in terms of prerequisites, an individual has some freedom of choice both with regard to the communities to which he or she belongs and the roles to be played in them. However, once that choice has been made, the individual has only to submit to it, in order to enjoy the benefits of community membership and not to risk losing them. That is to say, the individual, having exercised the freedom of choice, must give up the further exercise of that freedom by virtue of the stability acquired. On the other hand, submission is a source of pleasure (of which the individual is more or less aware) as a source of satisfaction and security.

However, an individual may find himself or herself submissive to communities and/or roles that do not sufficiently meet his or her needs. In this case, submission is a cause of frustration, conflict, or fear and may give rise to a search for new communities or new roles in the community to which one belongs.

To sum up, a human being's need satisfaction and security are normally linked to his or her submission to certain communities and roles in them. When the communities and roles sufficiently satisfy the individual's needs, he takes pleasure in submission. If not, he fears it.

Agreement and disagreement

To disagree with someone is always a cause of problems. In fact, human beings, being interdependent, always need the cooperation of others, and this is hindered or made impossible by disagreement.

In case of disagreement between two individuals on important issues, there are generally three options:

- the two stop cooperating and peacefully go their separate ways
- one of the two adapts (willingly or unwillingly) to the wishes of the other
- the two go to war (unilaterally or bilaterally)

Before choosing one of the above options, each tries to force the other to adapt to his or her "tuning fork," that is, to his or her own mindset or will.

This attempt may be accompanied by more or less explicit threats of punishment, including the termination of cooperation, moral and/or intellectual devaluation of the other, or the use of violence (physical or psychological).

Therefore, it often happens that people agree (or hide their disagreement) out of fear of the loneliness or hostility that blatant disagreement might cause.

I suppose concealed disagreement is a cause of psychological stress and dissatisfaction.

Critical and uncritical spirit

In my opinion, the social life of every human being is governed by two spirits that control his mind: the critical and the uncritical.

Regarding what others say and do, the critical spirit is distrustful, the uncritical confident.

The critical spirit causes us to guard against errors, deceptions and hidden or disguised competitive intentions on the part of others; the uncritical spirit causes us to imitate others, to take what they say at face value and not doubt their sincerity, cooperative intentions and feelings.

Both critical and uncritical spirit are normally directed toward others, but one can also be critical or uncritical toward and self. In this case we speak of self-criticism and non-self-criticism.

The critical spirit and the uncritical spirit are always in conflict with each other and criticize each other. The former considers the latter to be stupid, naive, conformist, conservative and dangerous. The latter considers the former a nuisance and an obstacle to peace, harmony, sharing, love, understanding and cooperation.

Every human being is characterized by a certain propensity to use critical rather than uncritical spirit (or vice versa), and a certain degree of self-critical capacity (or resistance to it). People in whom critical spirit prevails are generally in the minority; even fewer are those capable of self-criticism.

Usually the more intelligent a person is, the greater his or her critical spirit, although the tendency to criticize or not criticize may be influenced by particular life experiences and emotional pressures.

It goes without saying that everyone more willingly associates with those who have similar tendencies regarding criticism and self-criticism, as well as resistance to them.

A predominantly "critical" person and a predominantly "uncritical" person hardly understand each other, and they normally criticize each other. Indeed, it is paradoxical that "uncritical" people are often fiercely critical of those who criticize them directly or indirectly. In other words, an "uncritical" person will not tolerate being criticized as such.

For example, atheists tend to attribute to believers a lack of critical spirit, while, for their part, believers tend to attribute to atheists destructive intentions toward them.

In conclusion, it is good to be aware of the conflicting dynamics between the critical and uncritical spirit present at both personal and interpersonal levels in order to avoid unnecessary clashes and tears and to pursue constructive mutual "critical understanding."

Feelings of social insecurity

Ever since I was a child, I have always had a feeling of social insecurity, that is, the idea that if others knew what I thought of them and how I felt about them, they would exclude me from their circle.

This idea kept me in a state of alertness, and caused me to offer others an acceptable (and for that purpose mystified) image of me, my feelings, ideas, motives, history and habitual behavior.

This mystification has been, and continues to be, in turn, an additional source of apprehension about the risk of discovery.

As a result, I prudently tend to hide the most authentic part of me.

Economics of good and evil

From others we should expect good and evil, according to conscious and unconscious logics written in everyone's minds, analogous to computer software.

Such logics, which trigger feelings, cognitions and motivations, consider various factors, including the behavior of others in general, and in particular the more or less favorable behavior toward the subject in the past and present.

In other words, others treat us according to how they perceive us and how we treat them, that is, according to the good and bad we exert toward them (or they perceive as such).

Of course, the dynamics are reciprocal. In fact, interactions between human beings are characterized by bidirectional feedback, that is, transactions from A to B are influenced by transactions from B to A, and vice versa.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to know the logic by which we and others decide (consciously or unconsciously) the good and evil to be exercised toward others.

Such knowledge enables us to correct and improve our "software" in order to optimize our relationships with others in terms of mutual satisfaction.

When reason deals with feelings

In mass culture, and in almost all cultures, the concepts of reason and feeling are generally considered antithetical and mutually exclusive. In other words, most people believe that the more rational one is, the less sentimental one is, and vice versa.

This belief is so widespread that those who try to analyze and explain feelings with a systems approach, that is, try to uncover the unconscious logics that produce or inhibit them, are seen by most as one who cannot live their feelings in a healthy way, and cannot love or "let go." In other words, he is seen as unhappy, deluded, repressed, heartless, non-empathetic, little-human, one who does not live fully, etc.

It is because of such a general belief that psychology (which is the discipline that more than any other should deal with the phenomenology of feelings) is on the one hand poorly practiced by the masses, and on the other hand fragmented into discordant and ineffective schools. Their ineffectiveness, in my opinion, is due to the fact that almost none deals frankly, with a rational and systemic (i.e., causal and cybernetic) approach, with the nature of feelings, on which human happiness and unhappiness depend.

For example, when it comes to love, it is generally spoken of as a sacred and immaterial thing that escapes all physical laws, an absolute, ineffable and unquestionable good, but at the same time as an obvious and intuitive concept, so much so that to speak of it rationally is considered almost a sacrilege, an affront to common sense, a pedantic provocation, and an indication of the inability to love.

I have wondered about the reason for the hostility toward a systemic study of feelings, and I speculate that it is due to an unconscious refusal to take responsibility for one's feelings.

I mean that although feelings are in themselves involuntary, they are provoked by concrete causes and circumstances that man can, to a certain extent, voluntarily modify.

Returning to the example of love, we cannot choose to love or not to love someone or something, but we can make choices that will cause us to love or not to love, so we are somewhat responsible for the love we feel or do not feel.

In other words, if we knew the logic that determines love and its opposite, we could choose to behave in such a way as to feel the feelings we deem desirable and socially correct, and not to feel the others.

On the other hand, I believe that knowledge of the logic of feelings is censored by the superego, as they are largely selfish.

Humans are born with an innate capacity to love and hate, which consist of feelings functional to the survival of the individual and his species. Understanding the "reasons," that is, the logic of such feelings would help us more easily achieve what we are inclined to love, and avoid what we are inclined to hate.

In any case, I rule out, from personal experience, that systemically analyzing feelings inhibits them. On the contrary, I believe that such analysis enhances them, both because it frees them from self-censorship and because it promotes the satisfaction of the needs on which the feelings themselves depend.

Conditional love

Premised on the fact that love (in a broad sense) is a feeling and that, like any feeling, it is involuntary, in my opinion we love a person only if that person matches certain criteria and prerequisites of ours (conscious or unconscious).

At the same time, we are loved by a person only if we match his or her certain criteria and prerequisites.

It has been this way since we were born, and this logic applies (consciously or unconsciously) to all our relationships, starting with the one with our parents.

Unconditional love exists only as a childish desire or ideological precept. We would all like to be loved without conditions or preconditions, just as we are and whatever we do, but this is almost never possible.

The wise man knows that love is relative and selective, that it must be earned, and that we cannot be loved while remaining free to be and do what we want.

For example, one of the most common prerequisites for feeling love is that it be perceived as mutual.

Therefore, we must be something and do something to be loved, but it is not always possible. There are in fact conditions that are too difficult or too costly to meet, which is why we need to understand when it is appropriate to repress the desire to be loved by certain people.

On the other hand, we have neither the duty nor the ability to love any person unconditionally as Christianity and other ideologies would have us believe.

It is therefore convenient to have intimate relationships only with people whose willingness to love is within our reach and whom we are able to love, avoiding, as far as possible, close relationships with all others.

The logic of the unconscious

The unconscious functions according to a logic, that is, not at random and not by a free internal or external will. If we do not know or understand its logic, it is not so much because it is unconscious, but because it is very different from that of our conscious self.

If we expect to understand the logic of the unconscious according to the paradigms of our conscious logic, we will always be disappointed, confused and frustrated. Indeed, unconscious logic is much more rudimentary and archaic (in evolutionary terms) than conscious logic.

The unconscious, in fact, is not analytical and has no sense of measure, but reacts in a coarse way to certain perceptions by activating univocal, though sometimes conflicting, emotions and feelings of attraction or repulsion.

To the unconscious, a thing is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, true or false, absolutely, without half measures, always or never, anywhere or nowhere.

The unconscious functions as a software that has as its goal the satisfaction of its bearer's basic needs, including that of surviving, reproducing, and being part of a society, with whatever strategy possible.

Share, share, share!

I assume that human beings have a strong innate need to share ideas, experiences, knowledge, beliefs, narratives, motivations, feelings, objects, tools, spaces and times, etc. In short, everything that is useful and/or important to them.

The need for sharing is deep and often unconscious, hidden. Man does so many things for the purpose of satisfying his need for sharing, deluding himself that he has other motives, as if the need for sharing does not have its own sufficient dignity and justification.

If I ask someone why he does a certain habitual social activity he will probably answer that he does those things because he likes doing them, or because he is interested in the content of that kind of activity. But these are not the real reasons, that is, the "prime" reasons.

In fact, if I ask that person why he or she likes that particular social activity or why he or she is interested in it, he or she may not be able to say anything other than "I like it because I like it" or "I am interested in it because I am interested in it." Well, I believe that we like and are interested in social activities to the extent that they allow us to share with others things that we care about, or any things as long as they are shareable. Because sharing something is a way to be together, to relate, to interact, to be part of a community, which is the thing we most like and care about.

So, if you can't understand why some people do certain things together with others, probably the reason is that they want to share something with others to join them, and that activity is a good excuse, a good justification. In short, it is about sharing to interact, and interacting to belong, no matter what is shared, even meaningless things, as long as there is sharing.

It seems to me impossible to understand many social activities without this key to understanding: sharing to belong.

Knowing longer

Who knows the longest? This question (conscious or unconscious, overt or covert, more unconscious than conscious, more covert than overt) is always alive and implied in every human expression. This is because its answer determines the role and hierarchical position of each human being in the society or community to which he or she belongs, in a certain field of knowledge, which may be more or less specialized or general.

Indeed, it is assumed that those who know best deserve a higher hierarchical position (in a certain field of knowledge) than those who know least. And so, since everyone would like to be higher (as far as possible) in any social hierarchy, everyone tries to prove that he or she does not know less than others, except in fields in which he or she does not consider himself or herself competent.

There is one field of knowledge that is not specialized and does not correspond to any academic discipline: "knowing how to live," or wisdom, which includes knowledge of the world, life, man, society, politics and morality. In this field, the competition to know best is particularly intense and fierce, since almost everyone thinks that to learn how to live, to become wise, there is no need for any special education, let alone a university course.

And so, we resent those who claim (or assume) to know more than us in the field of knowing how to live, and we say those people are "opinionated," "conceited," "arrogant," etc.

As a result, there is a widespread categorical imperative that no one is allowed to assume that he or she knows better than someone else in knowing how to live, let alone try to teach others how to live.

The result is that many do not know how to live except rudimentarily, but refuse any teaching or help to learn more.

The beatitudes according to me

Blessed are the stupid, for they know not that they are stupid.

Blessed are the rich because happiness is expensive.

Blessed are the beautiful because beauty convinces.

Blessed are the cheerful because cheerfulness melts tension.

Blessed are the free because they can choose from more options.

Blessed are the beloved because love is the engine of life.

Blessed are the wise because they know how to suffer less and enjoy more.

Blessed are the healthy, for sickness shortens life.

Blessed are the strong, for they are more respected and know better how to defend themselves.

Blessed are the curious, for they are never bored.

Blessed are the creative people, for they can change the world.

Blessed are the skeptics, for they get cheated less.

Blessed are the educated, for they can talk to the most diverse people.

Blessed are the intelligent, for they can understand more things.

Blessed are the confident, for they do not let criticism and offense get them down.

Blessed are those who meet their own needs by meeting the needs of others.

Governors governed

Every human being is both ruler and ruled, in the sense that each governs himself, others and the rest of the world, and is ruled by himself (i.e., his unconscious and genetic program), others and the rest of the world.

Governing an entity means trying to get it to behave in a certain way to certain ends, after determining what ends to try to achieve with, and for, the entity.

Governing also means adapting ends to circumstances, that is, to possibilities.

Those who govern an entity should be aware of the reciprocity of governance, that is, the fact that the entity they are trying to govern is in turn trying in some way to govern them.

In other words, in the interaction between A and B, A seeks to govern B and at the same time B seeks to govern A, that is, each seeks (consciously or unconsciously) to obtain something from the other, something that may be a tangible or intangible good, a certain behavior or a certain feeling, in order to satisfy some need.

This is a systemic/relational way of considering interactions between entities, especially with regard to social, biological and ecological interactions.

The choice of memes

Any meme (artifact, gesture, verbal or figurative expression, writing, symbol, concept, organization, game, moral rule, etc., recognizable by more than one person and as such transmissible and shareable) can be a factor of belonging and social cohesion. In fact, social groups and categories can be defined by the sharing of certain memes.

On the other hand, membership in a certain group or category of people may imply non-membership in certain other alternative or incompatible groups or categories.

Therefore, a human being is continually busy (consciously or unconsciously) choosing appropriately which groups and categories of people to belong to and which not to belong to, that is, with whom to interact cooperatively and with whom not to, and consequently to assume, incorporate, display or represent the memes (as signals) characteristic of preferred memberships.

Reorganization of memory

I suppose that during sleep the memory reorganizes as the short-term one is processed and emptied, transferring the parts that are considered significant to the long-term one and erasing the others.

In this process I assume that a mutual adaptation occurs between the new experiences and the previous ones, an adaptation that may result in a distortion or removal of the former and/or the latter so that the whole thing is cognitively coherent and morally (i.e., socially) acceptable, and does not create too much distress.

Mental dictionaries, psychotherapies and philosophical practices

Our minds contain a repertoire of words that we need to think, reason, and communicate (activities that include questioning, asking, answering questions, commanding, narrating, teaching, etc.).

Each word is defined through combinations of other words, is associated with shapes or images, and can arouse or evoke feelings and obligations. In this sense, every human mind contains a different cognitive and affective dictionary, more or less similar to that of every other person.

The mental dictionary is formed by learning, as a result of experiences and interactions with those who already "know" certain words. The richness and distinctiveness of an individual's mental dictionary is a constitutive element of his or her personality and way of thinking and acting.

Therefore, psychotherapies and philosophical practices should deal with the subject's mental dictionary in order to know, correct, improve and enrich it, that is, to make it more suitable for the satisfaction of one's own and others' needs.

Moral engine and egoic engine

The 'moral engine' is an unconscious sentimental algorithm that is always active.

It calculates at every moment the extent to which we are satisfying others' desires and makes us feel pleasure or pain in proportion to that satisfaction.

Simultaneously with the moral engine, another unconscious sentimental algorithm, the 'ego engine,' is active, which calculates at any given moment the extent to which we are satisfying our desires and makes us feel pleasure or pain in proportion to that satisfaction.

If the results of the two algorithms agree, we experience consistent feelings; if the results disagree, we experience mixed feelings.

Consistent feelings decisively motivate us to action for the maintenance of pleasure and/or the removal of pain; conflicting feelings immobilize us and make us anxious and indecisive.

In the second case we are in the presence of a double bind, in the sense that the fulfillment of others' desires causes the frustration of one's own and vice versa.

Pleasure and the virtuous circle of perception

I hypothesize that, in addition to the fact that neurotransmitter hormones facilitate communications between neurons, an inverse process may also occur, namely, that continuous stimulation of communications between neurons achieved through appropriate perceptions may increase the secretion of the neurotransmitters themselves, including endorphins, in that case resulting in feelings of pleasure or euphoria.

This would explain the pleasure that can be caused by perceiving particular configurations of images, texts and sounds. The effect could be long-lasting, analogous to the development of muscles through muscle training.

Thus, it would involve training communications between neurons by reading, viewing and listening to particular objects, shapes and information in order to make neural interconnections more effective and efficient (with positive effects on creativity and intelligence), and to enjoy the pleasure associated with the resulting secretion of endorphins.

Error vs. gap

Contemporary humanities academic disciplines do not say wrong things, but they say things that are deficient.

For example, the sociologist says that certain social phenomena are caused by certain mindsets, but he is not concerned with how certain mindsets are established in the individual and whether and how they can change.

For his part, the psychologist says that certain mentalities are caused by certain social situations, but he does not bother to know how the social situations were established and whether and how they can be changed.

It is a stalemate that can only be broken out of by unifying sociology and psychology. Social psychology is a timid and reductive attempt at this.

When psychology was individualistic, G. H. Mead was considered a sociologist. Now that psychology is increasingly relational, there is no reason not to consider Mead a first-rate psychologist in his own right. Even the title of his book, "Mind. self and society," says so.

Is man a computer?

Is man a computer? It depends on what is meant by "computer." If one means an electronic calculator of current technology, then obviously neither man nor any other living being can be equated with a computer.

But if by a computer we mean a cybernetic system, regardless of its degree of complexity and the materials of which it is composed, then we can say (with von Foerster, Gregory Bateson, Daniel Dennett and others), that every living being is (also) a computer, that is, a cybernetic system, indeed, a system of systems, since the cell is also a system.

A cybernetic system is basically an information processor that governs its behavior according to the results of the processing itself. Man also has consciousness, feelings and will, which remain a mystery, but this does not mean that he is not nevertheless (also) a system of cybernetic systems. Nor can it be ruled out that the cybernetic part influences consciousness, feelings and will, and vice versa.

Rationality vs. sentimentality

People who are more rational are often disturbing to those who are less so. This happens, in my opinion, because the latter perceive the former as more competitive and more capable of self-control, and because the latter have difficulty following the former's thoughts and understanding their worldview, ethics, and tastes.

Moreover, less rational people often try to discredit more rational people by claiming that the more rational one is the less capable of feelings. This is a false and slanderous idea. In fact, there is no scientific evidence for this.

The truth is that feelings are innate and do not require special skills, while rationality is learned through study and experience, and is related to the capacity for abstraction, which not everyone possesses to the same degree.

The most common mistake

The most common mistake we often make is to assume that others reason as we do, that they react emotionally as we do, that they have similar morals, similar interests, similar motivations and similar fears, that they know what we know, that we suffer and enjoy for similar reasons, that our minds are similar.

This is like believing that all computers are similar. In fact, all computers are similar in general operating principles, but very different from each other in materials (hardware) and programs (software), i.e., "applications."

Maps and models of reality

Throughout our lives we unconsciously construct maps and models of reality and use them to orient ourselves and choose how to behave, that is, how to interact with the world.

This is knowledge: a quantity of maps and models more or less complex, more or less accurate, more or less consistent with each other, and more or less corresponding to reality.

These maps and patterns are especially and especially about other human beings, the relationships between them, ourselves, and the relationships between ourselves and others.

Associated with the details of the maps and patterns we have constructed for ourselves are feelings of pleasure or pain, attraction or repulsion, and the corresponding motivations for seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. On the basis of such maps and patterns we unconsciously devise our behavior strategies and plan our future.

As a result, the more incorrect or inaccurate our maps and models are in relation to reality, the more incorrect or inaccurate our behavior is, that is, the less effective it is in satisfying our needs and those of others.

What is introversion

Foreword

Introvert and extrovert are terms coined by C. G. Jung in his book "Psychological Types" published in 1921. The same terms have been used in the works of other scholars with various definitions more or less similar to Jung's. There is no universally recognized academic definition of introversion/extroversion.

This should not surprise us because psychology in general, despite the intentions or claims of most of its scholars, cannot be considered a science, as is also true of philosophy and religion. Which is not to say that it should not benefit from the contributions of sciences such as medicine and genetics.

Only one part of psychology can be approached by the scientific method, and personality theories (the area in which the concept of introversion falls) cannot be because they are concerned with what in humans is least measurable and objectively verifiable. It follows that any definition of introversion can only be seen as the opinion of one scholar with a greater or lesser number of supporters.

In popular common parlance, on the other hand, the term "introvert" is widely used with a generally shared negative connotation that is as unfair as it is ignorant and superficial, basically as a synonym for shyness and lack of sociability, which is perhaps the greatest source of suffering for introverts.

The following text is a summary of the information I have gathered on introversion from various sources, including, primarily, the writings of [Luigi Anepeta](#), whom I consider the most authoritative Italian scholar on the subject.

As I am an introvert, my exposure is affected by conflict of interest.

Definition of introversion

Introversion and extroversion are opposite personality types that differ in a number of more or less subjective behavioral, emotional, and intellectual aspects. Granted that the same person may manifest characteristics of both types simultaneously or cyclically (albeit with a greater or lesser imbalance in favor of one of the two) the typical characteristics of the introvert can be summarized as follows.

Characteristics shared by almost all scholars

- greater interest in inner reality than in outer reality, greater tendency for reflection and introspection, exploration and critical examination of one's thoughts, ideas, fantasies, feelings, conflicts, inhibitions, fears etc. greater interest in thoughts and abstractions than in concrete people and things;

- Less need for companionship; need to recharge in solitude after some time spent in company; greater ability to feel good and have fun even alone;
- Tendency to have fewer but deeper friendships
- Lower need for external stimulation; lower tolerance to excess external stimulation; greater capacity for self-stimulation;
- Calmer, docile and patient temperament

Characteristics shared by fewer scholars

- Tendency, before speaking, to think about the things to be said; tendency to listen more than to speak, except for topics he knows very well;
- more critical and less tolerant attitude toward the ills of society and the people who cause them; tendency to judge and judge oneself;
- greater need for approval;
- marked interest in ethical and moral issues; more disinterested sense of justice, that is, felt even when the victims of injustice are people with whom he has little to do; ethical idealism; greater tendency to develop feelings of guilt; greater capacity for self-criticism;
- motivation for civic progress and the betterment of society, to which it strives to contribute in some way rather than trying to adapt to society as it is;
- greater empathy for others, greater sense of responsibility and duty, respect for others, concern for not displeasing or harming others; greater ability to sense others' moods and expectations;
- impatience with superficiality, triviality, conformity and mass phenomena; preference for deeper, creative and less conformist communication;
- greater selectivity in social relationships with preference toward people who are related or who show appreciation for his or her peculiarities; greater reserve toward people he or she does not perceive as related;
- Tendency to invest a lot of psychic energy and moral commitment in social relationships; expects equal behavior from others, often being disappointed;
- Tendency to speak seriously and take what others say seriously, resulting in frequent disappointment;
- difficulty speaking in public spontaneously without sufficient preparation and without knowing the topic well; preference for conversations with a few people;
- marked sensitivity to poetry, art and philosophy; increased curiosity and intellectual vivacity;
- Greater dependence on parental expectations and less dependence on peer group expectations;
- tendency not to reveal one's ideas and feelings (especially the nobler ones) in order to avoid being made out to be arrogant, conceited, self-righteous, a pain in the ass, a buzzkill, or anti-social; the need to hide one's true nature results in a conspicuous expenditure of psychic energy in social situations, where therefore one quickly tires and soon wishes to withdraw from company in order to recharge;
- tendency to appear arrogant and conceited in the eyes of most extroverts, unless he shows signs of shyness that can otherwise justify his reluctance to others;
- Tendency to appear phlegmatic, indifferent and passive even while feeling strong emotions;

- Tendency to work in depth rather than breadth; tendency to perfectionism;
- Tendency to underestimate oneself;
- Increased self-learning skills;
- greater susceptibility to shyness, due to the bad consideration the introvert is subjected to by the extrovert majority, who consider him or her psychologically inferior, socially inept and/or antisocial; such negative consideration can easily result in the unconscious introvert feeling a sense of inferiority and inadequacy that may lead him or her to be ashamed of being who he or she is;
- Risk of developing one of the following syndromes:
- diligent introversion: continuous effort to be appreciated and loved by others by sacrificing one's misunderstood individuality and originality, resulting in possible neurosis;
- Oppositional introversion: permanent state of hostility toward society resulting in isolation and/or psychosis;
- accentuated neoteny (neoteny = preservation of youthful physical and mental characteristics and slower and psychologically richer and more complex sexual and intellectual maturation).

NOTE: All of the above characteristics could be derived to some extent from increased neoteny and/or other yet unknown genetic factors. The relationship between neoteny and introversion is a discovery of Luigi Anepeta.

Quotes from "Psychological Types" by C. G. Jung.

"...the first (the extrovert) orientates himself according to external facts as they are given, the other (introvert) reserves an opinion that stands between him and objective reality. [...] When one thinks, feels and acts, in a word, he lives in a manner directly corresponding to objective circumstances and their requirements [...] he is extroverted. His life is such that the object, as a determining factor, manifestly possesses greater importance in his consciousness than his subjective opinion. Therefore, he never expects to come across any absolute factor in his inner world, since factors of this kind he detects only on the outside. [...] in the introvert between the perception of the object and the behavior of the individual a subjective point of view is inserted which prevents the behavior from taking on a character corresponding to the objective datum. [...] The introvert's consciousness does indeed see external conditions, but it elects the subjective element as the determining factor. [...] Whereas the extrovert type relies mainly on what comes to him from the object, the introvert relies rather on what the external impression puts into action in the subject."

References web

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- Luigi Anepeta: Introversion as a way of being (Vademecum on introversion)
- Luigi Anepeta: Shy, docile, ardent... Handbook for understanding and accepting values and limits of introversion (one's own or others')
- Personality Theories (George Boeree)
- Carl Jung (George Boeree)
- Hans Eysenck and other temperament theorists (George Boeree)
- Trait Theories of Personality (George Boeree)
- The Ultimate Theory of Personality (George Boeree)

- Critical commentary on the essay "Personality Theories" by C. G. Boeree (Luigi Anepeita)
- How you can tell that you are an introvert (about.com)
- Extraversion and introversion (wikipedia.org)
- Caring for your introvert (theatlantic.com)
- Introversion and the Energy Equation (psychologytoday.com)

Psychological and philosophical theories

The following summarizes the main ideas of psychological and philosophical theories I have drawn on to construct the Psychology of Needs.

- Structural-dialectical theory (Luigi Anepeta)
- Symbolic Interactionism (George Herbert Mead)
- Systemic-relational theory (cybernetics) (Gregory Bateson)
- General Semantics (Alfred Korzybski)
- Epistemology of complexity (Edgar Morin)
- Psychoanalysis (Dynamic or Depth Psychology) (Sigmund Freud)
- Individual Psychology (Alfred Adler)
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- Exposure therapy (systematic desensitization) (J. Wolpe et al.)
- Pragmatics of communication (P. Watzlawick et al.)
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- Cognitive dissonance theory (L. Festinger)
- Analytical psychology (C. G. Jung)
- Lacanian psychoanalysis (J. Lacan)
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- Empiricism (J. Locke, G. Berkeley, D. Hume)
- Associationism (John Stuart Mill et al.)
- Romanticism (J. J. Rousseau et al.)
- Psychological analysis (F. Herbart et al.)
- Structuralism (W. M. Wundt, et al.)
- Evolutionism (C. Darwin, H. Spencer)
- Behaviorism (B. F. Skinner et al.)
- Cognitivism (G. Boole, et al.)
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) (A. Beck, A. Ellis et al.)
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- Object relations theory (M. Klein, D. Winnicott)
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- Attachment (or parental deficit) theory (J. Bowlby et al.)
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- Phototherapy (J. Wiser)

- Cyberpsychology (W. P. Brinkman)
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- Multimodal therapy (A. Lazarus)
- Humor Therapy, Laughter Therapy (Humor Therapy, Laughter Therapy) (b. L. Seaward, N. Cousins)
- Reality Therapy (W. Glasser)
- Blog Therapy (M. Boniel-Nissim, A. Barak)
- Functional Autonomy of Needs (G. W. Allport)
- Theory of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) (M. Rosenberg)
- Integrated/eclectic psychotherapy (J. C. Norcross et al.)
- Comparative psychotherapy (L. Luborsky, J. Frank)

Structural-dialectical theory (*intrinsic needs theory*)

Luigi Anepeta

Psychopathological disorders are expressive of psychodynamic conflicts that are generated and act predominantly at the unconscious level. The structural-dialectical model traces conflicts to a **cleavage of the inheritance of intrinsic, genetically determined needs**, which represent the programs underlying the evolution and organization of human personality. **Intrinsic needs theory** represents the pedestal on which the structural-dialectical model is built. It is based on the assumption that human nature originates as a result of an evolution that, at some point in the transition to man, brings together in the same genetic makeup two different evolutionary lines: that of **social animals**, such as apes, which live in groups and in perpetual face-to-face interaction with their fellows, and that of **solitary animals**, such as some felines, which, outside of the estrous period and the rearing of their young, manifest no need to share their experience with their fellows. **Man has a dual nature**: a radically social animal, he is also predisposed to achieve an individual identity that differentiates him from all others and enables him to be able to gather and communicate with himself. He can live, in short, and in fact does **live in society, but he also needs to feel free**, autonomous and, to some extent, master of himself. Where a conflict situation takes place, dialectical therapy aims to **recover the potential of needs, which has become trapped in the conflict** itself in such a way as to restart evolution where it has stopped. [Source]

Symbolic interactionism

George H. Mead

Human beings act toward "things" (physical objects, human beings, institutions, ideas...) according to the **meaning** they attribute to them. The meaning attributed to such objects arises from the **interaction** between individuals and is thus shared by them (meaning is a social product). Such meanings are constructed and reconstructed through an **"interpretive process** enacted by a person in **dealing with the things he or she encounters.**" The mind is formed through the individual's learning of the **processes of social interaction** in which he or she is involved from the earliest years of life. The self is formed solely by the way the individual believes he or she **is judged** by others. Social action is regulated and guided by the meaning individuals give to the situation in which they find themselves. **Language** is the main means of communicating symbols, meanings, etc. Action is not a fixed response to stimulus, but **is formed** one step at a time in the **course of its development.** [Source]

In summary: the mind is constructed through social interactions, as a tool for managing social interactions.

Systemic-relational theory (cybernetics, "ecology of mind")

G. Bateson

Psyche is an open system of autonomous agents, i.e., "organized complexity." Need for a comprehensive ecological approach that includes mental agents. Man has an absolute need to interact with the outside world and particularly with other human beings. Information (i.e., "the difference that makes the difference") is the basis of life and interactions between living beings or organs of living beings, at all levels.

Mental distress is almost always related to relational problems, which must be the subject of therapeutic analysis. The Batesonian

theory of double bind (to explain schizophrenias) can be used extensively to explain all mental discomforts and disorders as caused by the frustration of primary needs due to a conflict between them.

Concordant with Alfred Korzybski's "General Semantics," we can assume that many mental disorders are due to confusion between "map" and "territory" and an inability to think with reference to logical contexts and types that are not rigidly defined but vary according to circumstances.

Humanistic Psychology (Third Force)

A. H. Maslow, C. Rogers, R. W. Emerson, J. L. Moreno, K. Lewin, J. Haley, G. Bateson, E. Fromm

Note: The term *third force* denotes the fact that humanistic psychology is proposed as an alternative orientation to the two main *forces* in clinical psychology, namely dynamic psychology and cognitive-behavioral psychology.

Psychology is a means of **improving the human condition** both personally and socially; the individual is **responsible** for his or her own personal formation and self-realization. Fundamental importance of **human needs**. **Nonconformism** and cultural relativism. The individual as therapist of self. Importance of **individuation and social needs**. Quest for **change**. Impatience with academic psychological and philosophical thinking that has often proved abstract and distant from concrete life. Man is not only driven by environmental or instinctual drives in the face of which he lacks sufficient capacity and will to choose his own behavior, but is also driven by an **inner drive toward self-realization**. The therapist is an ally who accompanies the client in understanding the meaning he or she gives to his or her own experience, and helps him or her gain clarity in existential issues in order to make **conscious choices**.

Transactional analysis

Eric Berne

The three states of the self (child, adult and parent) correspond to the need for freedom, the conscious self and the need for belonging (i.e., the superego). Transactions occurring in human interactions express tactics and strategies of primary and secondary need satisfaction. "Healing" coincides with an empowerment of the *adult self*, which coincides with an empowerment of the conscious self and its greater ability to handle conflicts between needs. "Problem solving" consists of accurately and clearly identifying one's wants and needs, and acting appropriately (i.e., as an adult) for their satisfaction. "Script" consists of the repetitive pursuit of need-satisfying strategies developed during childhood.

Functionalism, Pragmatism

W. James, C. S. Peirce, I. M. Cattell, H. Münsterberg, G. H. Mead, J. M. Baldwin, C. H. Cooley, J. R. Angell

A psychological theory or technique has value only if it achieves **improvements for human beings**. Knowledge has meaning only because of its **practical effectiveness** and its **ability to solve the problems** in which it is applied. In fact, it bases its validity on its effectiveness in helping the individual **satisfy his or her basic needs in the best way possible**. The reality fashioned in the psyche is a function of the individual's relationships with the outside world and the possibilities of **satisfying his needs through interactions with other individuals**.

Epistemology of complexity

Edgar Morin

The analytical approach alone is insufficient to understand human problems; it needs to be supplemented with a systems approach. A complex system cannot be understood by examination of its separately studied components alone. In fact, the causes of a complex problem in a system cannot be found in its parts, but in the interaction between the parts. The "emergent behavior" of a system is more than the sum of the behaviors of its parts.

Empiricism

J. Locke, G. Berkeley, D. Hume

Personality is formed through sensations and experiences. Through the perceivers of real and virtual forms, the individual acquires information on the basis of which his unconscious mental agents develop behavioral strategies designed to satisfy needs.

Associationism

J. Locke, G. Berkeley, D. Hume, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, A. Bain

Each conscious or unconscious idea tends to automatically recall a series of other ideas related to it according to associative chains determined by experiences. The sensations, combined with each other, give rise to the cognitive and emotional mental maps that organize our ideas. Each complex idea is the result of the aggregation of simpler ideas. Ideas are associated according to criteria such as similarity (analogy), contiguity (proximity) and cause-and-effect relationship. Such associations are used by unconscious agents in the development of need satisfaction strategies.

Romanticism

J. J. Rousseau, I. Kant, J. G. Fichte, F. Schelling, F. Herbart, A. Schopenhauer, W. v. Goethe, G. Leopardi, R. Wagner, G. Byron, U. Foscolo, F. v. Schiller, V. Alfieri, L. v. Beethoven

The needs for individuation as well as social needs express needs typical of the Romantic spirit. The same applies to the recognition of the supremacy of irrational (unconscious) forces over rational (conscious) ones. Feelings and passions, which the Romantics regard as the most important human values, enable them to assess the degree to which basic needs are satisfied and drive the individual to satisfy them.

Psychological analysis

F. Herbart, K. Reichenbach, W. Carpenter, H. Taine, M. Benedikt, T. Ribot

The psyche is understood as the interplay of energies between unconscious processes that condition consciousness and behavior (psychodynamic conception). The unconscious prevails over the conscious. Libido is a psychic force (corresponding to the set of primary needs) that determines, depending on its degree of satisfaction, health and illness, both physical and mental. One can speak directly to the unconscious through suggestive

communication to direct it toward therapeutic improvement. Conflicting affective charges can relegate painful memories to an unconscious level.

Structuralism

W. M. Wundt, E. B. Titchener

The psyche is seen as an organized system of simple elements. Disciplined and controlled introspection (self-observation) is useful for analyzing sensations, perceptions, feelings, emotions, mental images, and ideas.

Evolutionism

C. Darwin, H. Spencer

Importance of genetic factors (such as basic needs). Genetic mutations to explain differences in intensity of different primary needs from person to person.

Psychoanalysis (dynamic or depth psychology)

S. Freud

Conscious-unconscious dualism, prevalence of the unconscious over the conscious ("the ego is not master in its own house"), drives as the effect of primary needs that serve the preservation of the species, psychotherapy as word-based suggestion capable of reactivating removed cognitive and emotional connections. Presence of superego as "demon" i.e., autonomous agent curator of the need for social belonging. Pleasure principle = drive to satisfy one's basic needs.

Analytical psychology

C. G. Jung

I-unconscious dualism. Correspondence between collective unconscious and forms of social belonging. The process of individuation (=self-realization) is to bring to consciousness and accept the repressed contents of the unconscious. Importance of symbols, metaphors and myths to stimulate and bring into expression the unconscious and its issues.

Individual psychology

Alfred Adler

Importance of the primary need for stability and security, social context, and strategies for relating to others. Some secondary needs are developed by unconscious agents as means to compensate for physiological inferiorities and become more competitive. Mental distress is due to inadequate social strategy or lifestyle.

Psychology of inhibition

Henri Laborit

Human behavior is strongly influenced by the need to avoid pain and seek pleasure. When people find themselves in situations of stress or conflict in which they can neither fight nor escape, they may develop a range of negative physiological and behavioral responses, such as depression. Importance of social and cultural environment in shaping behavior and emotions.

Human behavior is determined by the interaction between two opposing forces: action and inhibition. Action is a natural impulse of humans, driving them to satisfy their needs and desires. Inhibition, on the other hand, is a force that limits action, preventing the individual from engaging in behavior that could be harmful or dangerous.

The balance between action and inhibition is critical to an individual's mental and physical health. Excessive inhibition can lead to psychosomatic disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular disease. Excessive action, on the other hand, can lead to aggressive and destructive behavior.

Epicureanism

Epicurus, Lucretius

"For Epicureans, happiness is pleasure, and pleasure can be moving (joy) or stable, catastematic (absence of pain). Only the total absence of pain (aporia) and disturbance (ataraxia) are ethically acceptable and therefore 'natural needs' (e.g., hunger). The qualitative and quantitative limitation of pleasures is the very problem of ethical virtue, as a clear sign of the human condition. This is precisely why pleasures are divided into natural necessary (e.g., eating), natural unnecessary (such as overeating), and vain, i.e., neither natural nor necessary (e.g., getting rich): the former must be indulged, the latter may be granted occasionally, while the third must be avoided at all costs." [From Wikipedia]

Main ideas of Epicureanism:

- The world is made up of atoms (which have always existed) immersed in a vacuum, in particular variable combinations that constitute objects, which obey deterministic laws with certain margins of randomness.
- Sensory stimuli are produced by "simulacra" of perceived objects (films of atoms with the same shape as the source objects) that strike the sense organs.
- On the basis of past experiences (feelings) we can predict (anticipate) what may happen in the future under the same conditions.
- From common "linguistic atoms" that every human possesses, different languages are formed through social conventions to express universal rational concepts. There are no "barbaric" languages.
- Knowledge of nature is possible only through simplified models of thought (theories, canons, rules) that can be experimentally verified.
- Ethics should aim at the reduction and avoidance of pain rather than the pursuit of maximum pleasure.
- The soul (like the body) is also composed of atoms that dissipate with the death of the individual. Therefore, there is no reason to fear death itself, since when it comes the individual is no longer there.
- Gods do not intervene in human affairs.
- Happiness consists in the absence of fears and desires for superfluous things.
- Philosophy should serve to alleviate suffering and achieve happiness through the removal of errors of the mind and fallacious ideas.
- The highest good is "static" (lasting) pleasure, not "dynamic" (passing) pleasure.
- Friendship (understood as solidarity) is one of the main sources of happiness.

Lacanian Psychoanalysis

J. Lacan

The unconscious is structured as language. Hence the importance of the choice and use of words in psychotherapy.

Behaviorism

I. Pavlov, B. F. Skinner, J. B. Watson, E. L. Thorndike, C. Hull, E. Hilgard, H. J. Eysenck, J. Wolpe

Importance of conditioning and analysis of responses to stimuli. Human being is a kind of automatic machine with interference from consciousness, language and feelings.

Importance of feed-back. Variations in individual personalities are variations in learning histories. Pathologies are the product of inadequate learning to meet basic needs, requiring re-conditioning of the individual to appropriate behaviors that replace previously learned inadequate ones.

Psychology of Form (Gestaltpsychologie)

F. Brentano, C. v. Ehrenfels M. Wertheimer, K. Koffka, W. Köhler, K. Lewin, F. Perls, F. Heider, W. Metzger, R. Arnheim, S. Asch

Importance of perceptions and subjective recognition of forms based on personal experiences. Relationship between perceived forms and primary and secondary need satisfaction, i.e., perceptions can determine behaviors and the feeling of the state of need satisfaction. Importance of a holistic and phenomenological approach. Importance of isomorphism, i.e., correspondence of structure between the physical world and the psychic world. The psyche contains a model of the external world (more or less faithful to reality), on the basis of which secondary needs and satisfaction strategies are developed. Importance of "poignancy" that drives the individual to perceive incomplete and ambiguous forms in a complete and meaningful way.

Cognitivism

G Boole, A. Turing, C. Shannon, N. Chomsky

Human being is viewed as a computer, with input, response processing and output, according to behavioral algorithms developed over experiences. Importance of feed-back to modify behavioral algorithms.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

A. Beck, A. Ellis, J. Wolpe, A. Bandura, A. Lazarus

Eclectic approach incorporating principles of behaviorism and cognitivism.

Relational psychology

S. Mitchell, S. Ferenczi, E. Fromm, H. Sullivan, J. Benjamin

Importance of individual's relationships and interactions with others, analysis of compatibility of respective needs. Importance of social needs.

General semantics

A. Korzybski

Humans are limited in their knowledge by the structure of their nervous system, and the structure of their languages. Humans cannot experience the world directly, but only through their abstractions (nonverbal impressions, which are derived from the nervous system, and verbal indicators derived from and expressed by language).

A. K. helps us question our thinking and avoid the traps into which it frequently falls, especially in the use of the verb "to be" when the context and logical level to which an expression refers is not defined, so its meaning cannot be defined while giving rise to particular "semantic reactions."

A very common cognitive error is the confusion between \"map" and "territory."

To avoid such an error, it is necessary to develop "consciousness of abstracting" and "logical types." A. K.'s general semantics also warns us against Aristotelian logic when it says that if a statement is true, its opposite cannot be true ("tertium non datur"). Korzybski invites us to use a "non-Aristotelian" logic in which seemingly contradictory realities are dialectically considered whose terms can both be true depending on the circumstances and logical contexts of reference.

Many mental disorders may be due to confusion between "map" and "territory" and an inability to think by reference to logical contexts and types that are not rigidly defined but vary according to circumstances.

Pragmatics of human communication

P. Watzlawick, J. H. Beavin, D. D. Jackson

In the text of the same name, human communication is analyzed according to the following five axioms:

(1) One cannot fail to communicate; in fact, even silence constitutes a message, to which must be added gestures that are interpreted in some way by those who perceive them;

(2) communication occurs at two levels: that of content and that of the relationship between the parties (desired, affirmed or rejected) implied in the message;

(3) in cases of conflict, communication is analyzed and interpreted according to a certain punctuation, i.e., assuming an initial unwelcome message that is followed by a reaction message that is also unwelcome; sometimes there is no agreement as to which message is the initial unwelcome message;

(4) communication can be analog (metaphorical) or numerical (digital, logical, factual)

(5) Communication can be symmetrical or complementary; in symmetrical communication the parties place themselves as equals, in complementary communication one party assumes a dominant position over the other.

Communication pragmatics is useful for understanding and improving communication and thus interaction between people.

Fourfold communication theory

F. Schulz von Thun

F. Schulz von Thun's model of interpersonal communication analyzes the messages exchanged between two people according to four distinct planes:

- content: what is it about? (speaker exposes facts);
- Implicit relationship (the speaker implicitly assumes an equal relationship or his dominance or submission over the other);
- Self-revelation (the speaker implicitly reveals something about himself, his state of mind or his problems);
- request (the speaker implicitly asks the other to do on not do certain things).

Cognitive dissonance theory

L. Festinger

A person who has inconsistent ideas or behaviors experiences emotional distress that prompts him or her to overcome the inconsistency in one of the following ways:

- Abandoning or correcting contradictory ideas and behaviors until they become logically and emotionally compatible
- altering the cognitive perception of contradictory ideas or behaviors so as to make them logically and emotionally compatible with other ideas and behaviors, going so far as to falsify reality.

Theory of mimetic desire

R. Girard

We imitate from others our desires, our opinions, our lifestyle.

Who exactly do we imitate? We imitate people we esteem and respect, while we counter-imitate people we despise, that is, we try to do the opposite of what they do and develop opposite opinions. So, our behavior is always imitation, because it is always a function of the other, for better or worse. Typical role models in a man's life are, for example, parents, best friend, group leader, loved one, politician, singer, spiritual leader or even the masses in general.

Why do we imitate others? Our desire is always aroused by the spectacle of another's desire for the same object: the sight of the other person's happiness arouses in us (whether we realize it or not) the desire to do like him to obtain the same happiness, or, even more intensely, arouses in us the desire to be like him. The desires of people we esteem "infect" us. Therefore, the object of desire takes on an entirely relative and functional value only for achieving the same condition as the other person.

But then are we puppets without freedom? No. Imitation is the basis of our ability to learn (think of children); without it, the transmission of culture, the learning of language, etc., would not be possible. Man is what he is because he intensely imitates his fellows. From the mimetic desire comes all the best and worst (as we shall see) of human beings. Indeed, imitation should not be understood as a passive (as in Plato) and depersonalizing process, but as a powerfully creative activity. All this means that the relationship between subject and object is not direct and linear, but is always triangular: subject, model, desired object. Beyond the object, it is the model (which Girard calls "the mediator") that attracts. In particular, at certain stages of intensity, the subject directly aspires to the being of the model. For this reason, René Girard speaks of "metaphysical" desire: it is by no means a simple need or appetite, because "all desire is a desire for being," it is aspiration, longing for a fullness attributed to the mediator.

[Source]

Bioenergetic analysis

A. Lowen, W. Reich

There are continuous relationships and interactions between psychological tensions and somatic tensions. Chronic muscle tensions represent the physical counterpart of psychic conflicts between needs; through them, conflicts are structured in the body in the form of breath restriction and limitation of motility. There is a muscle armor that corresponds to resistance to psychotherapeutic change (character armor) and a protection against displeasure. Sexual frustration is central to the etiology of neurosis. Recovery from psychic distress corresponds to a newfound general and broad capacity to experience pleasure

Strategic brief therapy

P. Watzlawick, G. Nardone, F. Alexander D. Fisch J. Weakland

Psychotherapy should study the patient's environment, not just the patient, and have a "problem solving" approach, with first a definition of the problem (the dissatisfaction of a primary need) and then the search for a solution (correction of the satisfaction strategy). The therapist should ask the patient questions to help him or her determine what his or her problems and their causes are. In psychotherapy there should be a phase in which the patient, with the help of the therapist, sets therapeutic goals and defines a strategy for achieving them, which may also involve "homework." The therapist may induce the patient to devise paradoxical behaviors in order to bring about effective change in the patient's life, including in the people with whom the patient interacts. Therapy seeks to create a "corrective emotional experience." That is, it is done in such a way that the patient, through the application of new rationally prescribed strategies (even outside the therapeutic sessions), can have new experiences that can make reality feel differently from how it has always been perceived, laying the foundation for the resolution of his or her problem. Therapeutic strategies and stratagems combined with suggestive communication

techniques (including through recorded information) are used to decrease resistance to change.

Client-centered therapy

C. Rogers

Client-Centered Therapy, designed by Carl Rogers, is based on the importance of the therapist-client relationship, emphasizing acceptance, understanding and authenticity. Key principles include unconditional positive regard, which encourages total acceptance of the client without judgment; empathy, to deeply understand the client's feelings and thoughts; and congruence, which requires the therapist to be genuine and transparent. This non-directive approach allows the client to lead the therapy process, exploring their own thoughts and feelings with the support of the therapist who facilitates self-discovery and personal growth through active listening. The goal is to help the client achieve self-actualization by becoming more open to experience, confident in themselves and able to live congruently with their values. Client-Centered Therapy places the client at the center of the therapeutic process, emphasizing each individual's inherent ability to face his or her own challenges and promote personal growth.

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT)

A. Ellis, W. Dryden

An individual is not affected emotionally by objects or events external to him as they are objectively, but by how he perceives them (consciously and unconsciously). Such perception, which also depends on unconscious agents, may be inadequate for the satisfaction of basic needs. The patient is also asked to do therapeutic exercises on his own outside of sessions with the therapist, which include desensitization activities based on confronting (confronting) the things he is afraid of. Importance of emotions and difficulties in the present, rather than those in the past. The therapist helps the patient question his secondary needs and satisfaction strategies. Thought, feelings, and behavior are closely related.

Object relations theory

M. Klein, D. Winnicott

There are no drives without objects. Unconscious agents are deputed to define, identify and recognize the objects of drives, i.e., needs. These objects (corresponding to secondary

needs) may be of different levels of intermediation with respect to primary needs, more or less complex, real or symbolized, external or internalized. Psychic distress may be caused by a mother who has not responded satisfactorily to the child's needs.

Positive psychology

M. Seligman, A. Maslow

Need to investigate and make conscious not only the negative (i.e., counterproductive) aspects of the psyche, but also the positive potential of each individual and anything that can increase his or her well-being through the effect of something positive, as well as (or rather than) by eliminating or correcting something negative. Therefore, the identification and enhancement of the patient's strengths, virtues, talents, sources of pleasure and well-being, positive experiences and relationships is important. Importance of the concept of happiness as a goal to be achieved to the highest possible extent. The study of what makes individuals happy and causes positive emotions in them is very useful in assessing the validity of an individual's secondary needs.

Constructivism, Psychology of personal constructs

G. Kelly, G. H. Mead, J. Piaget, H. Maturana, K. Lewin, G. Bateson, L. Wittgenstein, E. v. Glaserfeld, P. Watzlawick

An individual's life and well-being depend on his interactions with others. Reality as an individual knows and experiences it is a "construction" that has occurred and evolves in his or her mind. One person is different from another not only because he or she has had different experiences or faced different events, but, more importantly, because he or she attaches different meaning to the same experiences and events. Human interactions are an expression of personal constructs, that is, the constructions of meaning with which each person confronts his or her world. The personal representation of reality has, as a result, a determining role in the perception of well-being and in the genesis and maintenance of psychological distress. Meanings have a social matrix, and intersubjective relationships are central in the formation and development of identity. The person is a self-organizing system responsible for his or her own choices. The psychotherapeutic goal, which is agreed upon with the patient, is the identification and testing of perspectives and actions that promote effective change in the direction of greater awareness and improved decision-making capacity (through an adjustment of one's cognitive and emotional constructs with respect to reality).

Attachment (or parental deficit) theory

J. Bowlby, A. Miller, A. Vitale

An adult's mental distress may be a consequence of the dissatisfaction, suffered when he was an infant and child, of his natural need for attachment (to his mother or other *caregiver*), which is genetically determined. This need undergoes evolutions and object changes throughout life, and its satisfaction is always important for mental health.

Existential psychology and psychotherapy

R. D. Laing, E. v. Deurzen, O. Rank, L. Binswanger, R. May, M. Boss

The person's internal conflicts are due to his or her confrontation with four fundamental data of existence: inevitability of death, freedom and consequent moral responsibility, isolation of each individual, and lack of meaning; These data constitute the source of predictable tensions and paradoxes that can be divided into four existential dimensions: physical, social, personal and spiritual. Although individuals are essentially alone in the world, they have a strong need to be interconnected. Everyone would like to mean something in the lives of others, but must resign himself to the idea that he cannot depend on others for his own validation, and must essentially accept his own loneliness. In other words, man must find his own validation in himself. Psychic distress consists of the refusal to accept the data of existence (death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness). The aim of existential therapy is to help the patient courageously face existential problems and accept the human condition by taking full responsibility for his own free choices and making his life a creative adventure.

Cognitive Analytical Therapy (Cognitive Analytical Therapy -- CAT)

A. Ryle, A. L. Brown, L. S. Vygotsky

Combining concepts from the different cognitivist-based therapies and psychodynamic approaches results in an integrated therapeutic modality that is easy to practice and effective. The therapeutic practice is collaborative in that it involves the patient in a very active way. It uses concepts from personal construct theory and applies G. Kelly's "repertory grids." Therapeutic work is focused on understanding the forms of inappropriate behavior in relation to the patient's needs. It involves making the patient able to recognize these forms, understand their origin and finally learn more appropriate alternative strategies.

Phototherapy

J. Wiser

People's reactions toward postcards, magazine photos, and photos taken by others can provide revealing keys to their inner lives and secrets.

Cyberpsychology

W. P. Brinkman

Computer-generated virtual reality can help patients overcome their phobias and anxieties through a phenomenon of desensitization caused by repeated exposure to specially prepared virtual reality content that evokes similar real-life situations. The most sophisticated form of virtual reality is a high-quality video; a form of intermediate quality is a photograph; the simplest is a written word or phrase.

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP)

R. Bandler, J. Grinder, J. DeLozier, R. Dilts

There is a connection between neurological processes ("neuro"), language ("linguistic") and behavioral patterns learned through experience ("programming"); these patterns can be organized to achieve specific goals in life. The goal of psychotherapy is to instruct people in self-awareness and effective communication, and to change their mental and emotional behavior patterns more effectively (with respect to meeting basic needs). This should lead to a better, fuller and richer life. Human beings are literally programmable. Man is the only machine that can self-program. The totality of the individual interacts in its components ("language," "beliefs," and "physiology") in creating perceptions with certain qualitative and quantitative characteristics: the subjective interpretation of this structure gives meaning to the world. By changing meanings through a transformation of the perceptual structure (called the map, i.e., the symbolic universe of reference), the person can undertake changes in attitude and behavior. The perception of the world, and consequently the response to it, can be modified by applying appropriate change techniques.

Multimodal therapy

A. Lazarus

Humans are beings who think, feel, act, have sensations, imagine and interact. Therapy should deal with all these "modalities," represented by the concepts of behavior, affect,

sensation, imagination, cognition, interpersonal relationships and biological/physical/pharmacological/drug factors. The specific tools of multimodal psychodiagnosis are: The Interview, Multimodal Life History Inventory, Mode Profiles, Structural Profiles and Tracking. The psychologist must carefully assess the patient's behavior in each of the seven dimensions mentioned above. The use of simple and original clinical tools (interview, clinical observation, questionnaires...) makes the exploration phase already pragmatically oriented toward psychotherapy and allows the psychologist to enhance the patient's resources.

Humor Therapy, Laughter Therapy

B. L. Seaward, N. Cousins

Humor can help relieve stress associated with illness. It serves as a diversionary tactic and as a therapeutic tool for hardships such as depression, and for coping (confronting). Humor is also a natural remedy for caregivers trying to manage the stress and challenges of their occupation.

Reality therapy

W. Glasser

Humans have four basic psychological needs (in addition to immediate survival): (1) the most important is the need to love and be loved by another person or group, to have a sense of belonging; (2) the need to gain power through learning, achieving goals, feeling useful and worthy, winning and being competent; (3) the need for freedom, which includes independence and autonomy, while exercising personal responsibility; and (4) the need for fun, enjoyment, relaxation, which are also important for physical health. Human beings are constantly seeking the satisfaction of these needs, which must be balanced and complete for a person to be healthy and efficient. Reality therapy affirms the importance of choice and change, in the belief that although humans are often a product of their past, they do not have to remain hostage to it forever. "Responsibility" is the key concept of reality therapy, which prefers to substitute the term "irresponsibility" for "mental illness or distress." The healthy man is the one who can consciously and responsibly manage the satisfaction of his own needs. The therapist's task is to help the patient become stronger in such a way as to sustain the necessary pain of a full life, as well as to enjoy the rewards of a deeply responsible existence that enables him to give and receive love. Another characteristic of reality therapy is the focus on the present rather than the past, in part because the responsibility that is sought to be established is not about the past but about the present and the future.

Theory of motivation (hierarchy of needs)

A. H. Maslow

There are needs that are stronger than others and whose dissatisfaction makes others negligible. It is the unsatisfied needs that motivate man, not the satisfied ones. A satisfied need is not motivating. For practical purposes, it is as if it no longer exists. The dissatisfaction of basic needs can cause neurotic behaviors and the development of compensatory needs. A particular act of an individual can be explained (but not always) as a tactic for the satisfaction of one or more needs of a different kind. Everyday conscious desires must be considered symptoms and superficial indicators of deeper and more important needs. Any theory of the genesis of psychopathologies must be based on a theory of motivation. Conflict or frustration are not necessarily pathogenic. They become so only if they threaten or suppress primary needs, or secondary needs closely related to primary needs. A healthy person is motivated primarily by his need to develop and realize his full potential and abilities. If she has other unmet needs acutely or chronically, then we must consider her sick. Man is an animal who continually seeks to satisfy his needs, some of which are similar to those of other animals, and some of which are uniquely human. Any obstacle to the satisfaction of an individual's needs constitutes a problem for him to solve and a threat to his mental health.

Blog Therapy

M. Boniel-Nissim, A. Barak

Keeping a blog can be effective in relieving social anxiety, even more so than a traditional diary. Describing one's difficulties and allowing others to read and comment on them can have a beneficial effect on mood. [Source] Through blogging, patients can express their needs and feelings to work on in psychotherapy.

Exposure therapy (systematic desensitization)

J. Wolpe, G. Taylor

The therapist and patient identify the cognitions, emotions, and physical arousals that accompany a fear-inducing stimulus in an attempt to neutralize that response by exposure to progressively more intense stimuli until a stable change in response is achieved, with no more fear. The patient is exposed to the feared situation (in real, virtual, or imaginary situations), and the gradual, progressive stimulus causes the patient to learn to control his or her fears. Exposure stops when the patient cannot control his anxiety and resumes when he has calmed down. Gradually he can hold out for longer periods and loses his fear.

Functional autonomy of needs

G. W. Allport

An activity undertaken for a reason can, over time, become an end in itself, acquiring an autonomous value, completely independent of the original need. In the first months of life, motivation is the expression of biological processes regulated by the principle of tension reduction: the child is motivated by the need to reduce or eliminate pain and to maintain or achieve a state of pleasure. The functional autonomy of needs is closely related to the functions of the proprio, which allow a certain physical activity to be sustained and perpetuated to the point where it becomes a purpose in itself that is independent of original situations and conditioning. [Source]

Theory of Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

M. Rosenberg

The theory of nonviolent communication (NVC) is based on the idea that all human beings have capacities for understanding and empathy, and resort to violence and behaviors that harm or offend others only if they cannot find more effective strategies to meet their own needs. Habits of thinking and speaking that lead to the use of violence (physical and psychological) are learned through culture. NVC assumes that all human behavior stems from attempts to satisfy universal human needs, and that these needs are never in conflict as such. Rather, conflicts arise when strategies for satisfying them collide. The NVC proposes that if people can identify their needs, the needs of others and the feelings associated with those needs, harmony can be achieved. The basic principles of NVC can be summarized as follows:

- all human beings have the same needs
- the earth provides sufficient resources to meet everyone's basic needs
- all human actions are attempts to satisfy needs
- feelings are indicators of the degree to which needs are satisfied
- all human beings are capable of understanding and empathy
- human beings take pleasure in giving
- human beings meet their needs through relationships of interdependence
- human beings can change
- every human being can choose to change
- the most direct path to peace is through connecting with oneself

Integrated / eclectic psychotherapy

J. C. Norcross, M. R. Goldfried, K. Wilber, M. D. Forman S. Palmer, R. Wolfe

Many comparative studies of psychotherapeutic interventions according to different models have found no significant differences in their effectiveness. In fact, there are essential factors for successful psychotherapy that are common to different psychotherapeutic orientations. There are theoretical differences between the various approaches that can be integrated into a larger theory, as they are all valid and not incompatible with each other. Depending on the type of mental distress, one theory may be more effective than another. Needs Psychology offers a general framework that is compatible with most known psychological and psychotherapeutic theories. The therapist's task is to choose and apply one, or a combination of them, appropriate to the case being treated, together with the specific principles and methods of Needs Psychology

Comparative psychotherapy

L. Luborsky, J. Frank

Appropriate tests have shown that almost all types of psychotherapy are equally effective, suggesting that what "heals" is not a particular therapeutic technique or theoretical-scientific principle, but the moral support offered by the therapist who encourages the patient to confront his problems and change something about himself, and/or a placebo effect whereby the patient convinces himself that the therapist or therapy will help him heal.