

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Knowledge and Personal Identity

What creates in me a consciousness of self is the consciousness I have of a not-self, of an external world from which I firstly distinguish myself, which next I observe objectively from without, and with which I enter into relationship. Psychologists have described this birth of self-consciousness in the infant. There is, then, a double movement, first of separation and then of relation, between the self and things.

Next, what creates in me consciousness of being a person is entering into a relationship with another person, the 'thou'. Here again, we find the double movement: the consciousness of being distinct from another person, and the possibility of entering into personal relationship with him.

*Paul Tournier<sup>1</sup>*

We are not who we think we are;

We are not who other people think we are;

We are who we think others think we are.

*Source Unknown*



## 1.The Social Context of Learning

It has been established that the affective domain plays a dominant role in all aspects of cognitive processing, including learning. During the course of development, purely conceptual relationships become increasingly important in the organisation and acquisition of knowledge, but always within the context of global affective responses, which they never entirely replace. The explanation for this is to be found in the social context in which schemata develop. The psychology of learning tends to concentrate on the cognitive, but social psychology deals with the sphere of relationships, in which it is affect which is the dominant factor.

In the previous chapter, learning was considered from the point of view of the psychological changes which take place in the individual learner. In the present chapter, the focus of attention will be the social context of learning. For the individual, mental schemata provide intrapsychological coherence through the formation of meaningful world models. But schemata or world models also both express and contribute to social and interpersonal cohesion by the provision of *shared* frames of reference. The psychological changes by which learning takes place are the outcome and reflection of social interaction.

Two men may work side by side, day after day, on the same assembly line or workbench. Although from the point of view of the non-involved observer, their situation is exactly the same, they may, in fact, be inhabiting vastly different mental worlds, not in the sense of the life of the imagination, but in terms of situational definition. One may see his skilled job as an end in itself, a source of satisfaction in its own right. The other may

see it as a means to a regular pay-packet and enjoyable leisure activities. Their attitude toward their colleagues, the authority of management or the prospects of promotion may all be quite different. "Situation" in this sense is a psychological construct. It consists of an interpretation of the work the individual is engaged in, which involves the memories, purposes, anticipations, hopes and fears each brings to the shared task and the social interaction generated by it. Each man's response is to the situation as he defines it.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the difference in the mental worlds of these two individuals, however, communication between them is regularly possible. This is because of the various means of socialisation operating both within and outside the workplace, which tend to produce not just an overlap between each man's situational definition but a common basis of consensus. These include:

a) The shared physical environment, not simply at the workbench and within the factory, but outside it, in the form of the physical and geographical conditions shared by the community.

b) The firm's definition of the purpose of the enterprise. Recent experience in some firms has demonstrated that the extent to which this definition is effectively communicated is an important factor in the commercial success of the business.

c) The Trade Union, or some other unofficial shop-floor definition of the purpose of the job. Again, recent experience has shown that a serious mis-match between this and the "official" definition can prevent effective communication and lead to hostility and mistrust.

d) Beyond these are various cultural definitions of work, money, family, the particular product of the factory and so on. In Japan, for example, such definitions are very different from those familiar in Western Europe or the U.S.A. and the pattern of working and family life consequently very different.

Such common definitions form the outline of shared schemata, while leaving gaps to be filled by the particular individual or social group. Thus, although one man may see his work as an end in itself while the other values it only as a means of earning a living, both these are options within an overall shared definition of working life.

The formation of such shared definitions or conceptual frameworks and communication with others whose definitions may be either slightly or vastly different from one's own, is dependent on the human ability to "take the stance of another". This is the aspect of human understanding previously referred to as *verstehen*.<sup>3</sup> It is the ability, not to enter another person's whole mental world, with all the implications of that for empathy with their own goals, hopes, fears and so on, but more simply, to construct another person's point of view for a given situation, and by doing so, to translate the terms of one's own situational definition into the terms of the other's. The extent to which this is possible varies from individual to individual and from situation to situation, so that the term "taking the stance of another" is to be understood not as full empathetic understanding, but only as the first step towards such an understanding. The ability of some individuals in some situations to move towards a full empathetic understanding is dependent upon a number of factors. All communication, however, involves the simplest levels of *verstehen*. Learning is not simply a process of psychological change, but also a process of socialisation.

The ability to construct the point of view of another is an indispensable part of learning from the earliest age. That this is the case has been demonstrated largely by experiments designed in response to the work of Jean Piaget, who denied it. Piaget was the dominant figure in the study of "cognitive development", particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s, since when both his experimental findings and his theoretical framework have come under increasing attack.<sup>4</sup> Piaget understood learning as the development of cognitive competence due largely to the gradual physiological maturation of the brain. Social factors, he believed, influenced only the speed, but not the course of cognitive change. Piaget viewed the young child as "egocentric", not in the moral sense, but in the sense that the child's capacity to interact is limited to interaction with the physical environment.<sup>5</sup> The child's ability to comprehend is limited by his or her existing cognitive structures. Cognitive development is a process of "decentering" away from these limiting structures to more adequate structures. The final stage to which the child "decenters" is that of complete objectivity, in which the child's constructions of the environment match reality. This, Piaget believed, was generally achieved at the stage of "formal operations", usually at about the age of 15 or 16. Socialisation is achieved at this stage, not by each person taking the point of view of others, but by all sharing a single, objectively valid, point of view.

The outcome of Piaget's theory, and the viewpoint of cognitive developmentalism generally, is a lack of attention to the social aspects of learning. On this account, the most important, causal, factors in learning are purely intrapsychological, the growth and development of internal structures. The supposed "egocentric" nature of

children's intelligence is the product of a theory in which there is no place for social interaction and socialisation as causative factors in children's learning.

One of the experiments by which Piaget hoped to demonstrate the child's lack of ability to construct the point of view of another involved a three-dimensional model of three mountains.<sup>6</sup> The child sits at a table on which the model is displayed, and the experimenter places a small doll at some other position around the table. The child is then asked to describe, or else to select from a number of alternatives a picture of what the doll can see. Below the age of eight or nine, children can rarely achieve this, and below the age of six there is a powerful tendency for the child to select or describe her own view of the scene. The "mountain task" appears adequately to confirm Piaget's hypothesis of childhood egocentrism. But this interpretation is open to question. In a variation of the mountain task, Martin Hughes replaced the mountain model with four walls arranged in the shape of a cross. The child sits at the table as before and two dolls representing a policeman and a "naughty boy" are introduced. The dolls are placed in various positions relative to one another and to the walls and the child is asked for each position whether the policeman can see the boy. With careful introduction and explanation, Hughes found that children as young as 3½ could answer correctly on up to 90% of occasions.<sup>7</sup>

The results of Hughes's experiment tend to call into question Piaget's interpretation of those he obtained from the mountain task. The main significance of the experiment, however, lies in its ability to suggest what and in what circumstances children *can* achieve. For this purpose, the differences between the two experiments need to be carefully noted.

1. The mountain task is much more difficult. It introduces difficulties in addition to that of simply taking the point of view of the doll. It is quite likely that for many of the children, the main difficulty they faced was not that of "decentering", but of understanding what they were meant to do.

2. The mountain task is an abstract problem, removed from the children's actual experience. In the policeman task, by contrast, while few if any of the children will actually have tried to hide from a policeman themselves, the ideas of authority, guilt and hiding provide a context of "human sense", within which the point of the problem is readily grasped. In contrast to the mountain task, the policeman task provides a comprehensible situation. It is a situation which, because it "makes sense", can be readily internalised and represented in the form of a schema, with the result that the supposed difficulty in co-ordinating the point of view of another evaporates.

3. The fact that the experimenter introduced and explained the task is not unimportant. For a young child, adults have a high degree of salience. In an experimental situation such as this, the intention of the adult, and the desire to comply is likely to be uppermost in the child's mind, heightening the child's ability to learn from the adult.

This explanation for the success of the policeman task highlights the importance of the role of others, and in particular of significant adults, in children's learning. Learning takes place in shared situations in which the child and the adult attend to the same thing, or in which the child helps the adult with a particular task, or the adult the child. In the learning of language, for example, John Macnamara and Jerome Bruner have argued for and demonstrated with experiments a process in which the young child first constructs a preverbal representation or schema for a given situation and then learns to fit



names to various elements of that situation by watching and listening to salient adults.<sup>8</sup> This process requires the child to recognise in the adult the intention to give a name to her actions or to objects in the shared environment, thus implying the ability of the child to recognise not only the point of view but also the intentions of another, and to differentiate these from her own.

Both this account of language learning and the comparison of the policeman task with Piaget's mountain task highlight the importance of what the Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, called the "zone of proximal development". This is used to designate those things of which a child is capable, given help from another. It lies in between the things a child can do without help and those things she is unable to do at all. From the teaching point of view, the concept is of vital importance. Vygotsky suggests that to be maximally effective, the level of instruction should aim at the zone of proximal development, at capacities which the child has not yet developed, but could develop with appropriate help.<sup>9</sup> In this view, what the child learns non-spontaneously, that is directly from others, is a particular way of describing, analysing or structuring a given situation, a schema for that situation or for a new element within it, which she then internalises or makes her own, by integrating it with the structure of her previous understanding. In the process the new schema begins to restructure previous understanding, giving access to wider applications and more powerful generalisations.<sup>10</sup>

Children learn by taking over the schemata of salient others. Schemata are learned in interpersonal joint action or, at a later stage, by engagement with a text, and are internalised to become part of the child's own cognitive apparatus.<sup>11</sup> From his

observations of the transactions of mothers and children engaged on a learning task together, James V. Wertsch has suggested a four-stage model of this process.<sup>12</sup> The task which the mothers and the children were asked to do together was to build a model of a truck and its cargo from pieces provided by reference to a model. The children were aged 2½, 3½ and 4½. The stages Wertsch describes are as follows:

1. The child fails to interpret the mother's instructions. She has no coherent definition of the situation, no schema by which to make sense of the individual directions. Two separate "language games" are going on and there is no common ground.

2. The child responds to specific instructions, such as, "Fit that piece here," or "Put the green one next to the red one." She realises that she and her mother are engaged in a common task, but has no understanding of the task itself. It is as she carries out her mother's instructions one by one that a schema for the task itself is gradually formed.

3. The child is able to respond to non-specific instructions, such as, "What do we do next?" (an implicit direction to look for the next part of the task). The transition from other-regulation to self-regulation has begun. The schema is shared to a limited extent.

4. The child does the task, but frequently repeats her moves out loud, asking and answering her own questions. The schema is taken over and the child has grown into the adult's perception of the situation. What began as an interpersonal, shared task has become an intrapsychological, internalised definition of the situation.

The importance of others, and particularly of adults and their understandings in the child's appreciation of the situation, offers a clear example of the way in which cultural definitions are passed from generation to generation, not simply by formal

education, but also in a great deal of informal learning. But the transmission of culture is itself only one example of a something more general. Learning takes place in a social context. In the course of learning, schemata are taken over from others and internalised. As a result, the schemata by which an individual constructs his own individual world model are, to a large extent, derived from the shared conceptual framework of his culture and society.

## 2. Psychosocial Development

For the young child, the process of learning consists chiefly of taking over schemata or frameworks of comprehension from others. The child works within the frameworks provided by adults and learns to make those frameworks her own and to "indwell" them. The consequence is that the young child experiences the world largely as *given*. She grows up in a world already structured by others. Her parents or other immediate influences are the representatives of the wider and more impersonal society or culture, although as individuals, they give this their own distinct interpretation.

Primary socialisation consists of the internalisation of the world of others. The child's father represents fatherhood in general, her mother becomes her pattern of womanhood and specifically motherhood. Significant others later extend to include siblings, teachers and perhaps a favourite adult relation or friend. The earliest matrix of socialisation, the family, is a context of high power and high affectivity, in which the child is both physically and emotionally dependent. It is within the family that her basic needs, for food, warmth, security and love, are satisfied, and within which she also experiences the command of others over rewards and punishments.<sup>13</sup>

The role of the family in primary socialisation emphasises the importance of affectivity in knowledge. Behind attitudes, which are affectively structured schemata, are the basic values and goals which express a person's relationship with the world, or with aspects of her experience. These fundamental values and orientations are learned at a stage of affective openness and dependence. "Give me a child until the age of seven," Ignatius Loyola is reported to have said, "and he is mine for life." Learning from others

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involves the ability to "take the stance" of others, to infer from their behaviour the meaning for them of a wide range of aspects of a given shared situation. Since attitudes and values are the fundamental units by which the world is comprehended and represented, these are readily internalised to form the basis for the child's own values and motivations. The existence of "achievement motivation" in particular individuals, for example, can usually be traced back to the expectations of their parents, whether expressed overtly or not, and the evaluations of their performances derived from their parents' comments and other behaviour.<sup>14</sup> The corollary of this is that fundamental attitudes and values can usually only be *relearned* in situations of high power and high affectivity, such as prisons and other "total" institutions.<sup>15</sup> The fundamental changes which take place in the course of religious conversion also involve an element of resocialisation. If it is to be thorough and lasting, conversion may be expected to involve a high degree of affectivity and some degree of dependence.<sup>16</sup>

The relationships between the child and other members of her family, especially with her mother, are extremely important for the course of future learning. The relationship between the child and her mother may work well or badly. In the ideal situation, mother and child establish successful mutual regulation and the child develops an immediate and lasting sense of security. The worst possible outcome is where the child is neglected to such an extent that she dies. In between these extremes is a continuum of possible outcomes, as a result of which the child's sense of the regularity or trustworthiness of the world in general and security about her own place within it may develop well or badly. The acquisition or failure to acquire a sense of basic trust then

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becomes the foundation for the ability to cope with future stages of development. The ability of the mother to provide a satisfactory nurturing relationship depends largely on her own childhood experience and upbringing, as well as on the support of society in general, both in terms of material provision and social support, which represent the worth accorded to the experience and role of motherhood.<sup>17</sup>

The "crisis" of basic trust or basic mistrust is the first of the stages of "psychosocial" development as explained by psychologist, Erik Erikson. Psychosocial theory represents an attempt to place the insights of Freudian psychoanalysis in a wider, social context. It draws attention to the ongoing interaction between personal identity and culture or society. Both the immediate family and the wider society whose institutions support the family, are necessary for the psychological growth of the individual. Without the support of the social matrix, the fully functioning person is an impossibility. A stage of development is not simply a function of psychological maturation, nor is it simply the product of social integration. Every stage represents an interaction between the potential of the maturing individual and the opportunity provided by society for the expression of that potential.

The principle governing psychosocial development is "epigenesis", or development according to a ground plan. The original Freudian ground plan was psychosexual, and its theme the resolution of sexual conflict, but in psychosocial theory the principle of epigenesis is extended to include a much broader range of interaction between the person and society. The stages described by Erikson, each with an accompanying "crisis", are as follows:

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- |                    |                                 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Infancy         | basic trust v. basic mistrust   |
| 2. Early childhood | autonomy v. shame and doubt     |
| 3. Play age        | initiative v. guilt             |
| 4. School age      | industry v. inferiority         |
| 5. Adolescence     | identity v. identity diffusion  |
| 6. Early adulthood | intimacy v. isolation           |
| 7. Adulthood       | generativity v. self-absorption |
| 8. Old age         | integrity v. despair            |

The first five stages are based on the psychosexual stages of orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis, the "oral", "anal" and "genital" stages, followed by the periods of latency and adolescence. But Erikson has interpreted the task of each of these stages in broader social terms, rather than concentrating exclusively on sexual conflicts. In addition, three stages of adult life are included. In the first of these the task is the establishment of stable adult relationships, traditionally through marriage. The next is the stage of productivity, whether in a career or in raising a family. Finally, in old age, the imminence of death brings the need to evaluate the outcome of one's life.

The principle of epigenesis means that the various elements of personality can be understood only in relationship to the individual as a whole. Each element is present as a factor in personality throughout one's life. The need for self-evaluation, for example, is not confined to old age, nor is the need to establish basic competences solely the concern of the school years. Each element, however, has its own time of ascendancy, the time when the potentialities for significant interaction centre around that particular aspect of

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the personality. A stage of development is defined by the particular interactions and the related element of personality which is dominant. Stages must occur in a proper sequence, each of which prepares the ground for the succeeding stage. Each stage involves a "crisis", a time at which the enduring effect on the personality of the experience of the significant interaction will be settled. The term "crisis" refers to the crucial period during which the lasting effects of the stage of development will begin to take root. It does not necessarily mean a time of turmoil or disruption. In this sense, the "crisis" of adolescence may be smooth and uneventful. According to psychosocial theory, adolescent crisis of identity is universal, whether or not it is accompanied by psychological "crises", such as rejection of parental authority, violent fluctuations in mood, etc. A crisis may be successfully surmounted, providing a firm basis for the next stage of development and tending toward the growth of a healthy personality, or the crisis may be less satisfactorily resolved, leaving a deficiency in a particular area of personality likely to affect the individual's ability to cope with all the succeeding stages.<sup>18</sup>

Knowledge of oneself involves a double movement of separation and relation. A boundary is created by means of which one defines oneself over against others, but the presence of such a boundary is tolerable only so long as satisfactory relationships with others across the boundary remain possible.<sup>19</sup> The creation of this boundary and consequent definition of oneself is the task of the second stage of development and takes place in early childhood, although the maintenance and progressive definition of the self-concept continue throughout the whole of life. The developmental crisis of this stage is described as "autonomy" v. "shame and doubt". From the complete dependency of infancy, the individual's task is to achieve an area of autonomy or self-determination. It is



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the period of the "terrible twos", in which the most commonly used word seems to be, "No!" The young child must separate herself from her parents, by defining and achieving her own area of self-determination, without thereby severing herself from them entirely. The establishment of a tolerable boundary requires satisfactory self-other relationships. If the child and her parents are unable to create sufficiently good relationships such as to allow the child to define herself separately over against them, there will be a tendency for the boundaries of self to collapse, leading to a sense of doubt or shame. The very definition of a boundary creates not only the awareness of separateness, but the possibility of invasion, and consequent fear of exposure, sometimes expressed in adult life in dreams of being found naked or otherwise exposed.<sup>20</sup>

The second main stage in the development of the self-concept is the "crisis of identity" during the period of adolescence. This is the stage of social and psychological changeover from the largely dependent relationships of childhood to the measure of independence and self-determination expected of the adult. Mature adult identity is based on a successful resolution of the "crisis of autonomy" during early childhood, when the boundaries of the self, within which identity is to crystallise, take shape. From that time, the child begins to accumulate the unformed elements of personality, partial identifications with significant others, whether peers or those in positions of authority, interests and achievements, as well as typical emotional responses and defences in a range of situations. The task of adolescence is to integrate these into a mature self-image. Often, this requires a social moratorium, a suspension of the relationships characteristic of childhood, often experienced as an attempt to distance oneself from parents and to identify instead with the peer group. The adolescent may need to "drop out" of society

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temporarily, in order to cope with the re-emergence in more powerful form of the social and sexual struggles of early childhood, played out this time in relation not simply with parents and siblings, but with society as a whole. Within the relative security of the social moratorium, the individual must shed the reflexive and dependent role identifications of childhood in order to re-integrate them into a greater whole, a new gestalt, which is the emergence of coherent, independent identity.<sup>21</sup>

Although relatively stable in adulthood, identity is far from fixed or static. In terms of psychosocial development, there are still three adult stages left to surmount after the achievement of identity, each one requiring further change and reintegration. Nor are these developmental crises the only possible turning points for the realisation of new aspects of the self. Experiences such as the meeting of a particular challenge, requiring the discovery of new talents or resources, the possibility of failure, the need to express commitment, the performance of a new role, divorce, bereavement or betrayal are all self-involving, calling for reflection and evaluation of oneself and the possibility of a change in self-concept. Even without the effects of unexpected or decisive events, many lives follow a pattern of regularised status passage. A person in employment may progress from raw recruit to employee with potential, through promotion, the realisation of having reached the limit of one's of achievement to eventual retirement and reorientation away from work. Parents progress from the care of young children, to that of teenagers, through the time the children leave home to the role of grandparents.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Self and Others

Knowledge of oneself is a developmental achievement. It emerges as a result of a process of development in the context of relationships with significant others. From the time in early childhood when the boundary is defined between self and others, within which identity is to take shape, the self-schema, which expresses such knowledge of self as has emerged from previous experience, becomes the dominating schema for interaction and learning. The sense of identity imposes coherence and direction upon experience, establishes a relationship between past, present and future and between separate areas of experience. But identity is not given ready-made. It emerges and develops in the course of social interaction.

Identity is not only a developmental achievement; it is also a social construct. The schemata which go to make up the individual's world model are taken over from others. The same is true of the elements which make up the self-schema. Knowledge of oneself emerges in relationship with others, in particular such significant others as parents, spouse, employer or friends, but including also those less direct, more impersonal relationships with society in general, the outcome of one's social background or occupation. The ability to "take the role" or stance of others, to understand and respond to another's point of view, including the values, goals, attitudes and opinions of others, allows the child to infer others' evaluation of herself, expressed as much in pre-verbal, affective communication as in language and conscious actions.

The basic values and orientations which are to become the foundations of identity are learned in the context of the family. In particular, it is parents' evaluation of

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oneself which have greatest significance. In the course of development, the experience expressed, "I am loved," comes to be generalised as, "I am lovable." Unfortunately, the reverse is equally true. Lack of the experience of being loved in early life can lead to the inability to receive love as an adult. But the family unit as the original matrix of socialisation very quickly becomes part of the child's wider experience. In modern society, where children are exposed to institutional and peer group influences from an early age, not to mention those of the media of mass communication, the family is much less of a "total" institution than it might once have been. Peer group influence begins virtually as soon as the child meets others of her own age, but reaches its greatest importance during adolescence. School teachers become significant others, with powers of reinforcement and personal influence. The school itself imposes a particular set of values by institutional means rather than by direct personal influence. Television provides a wide variety of possible adult or peer group models.<sup>23</sup>

All these relationships, whether personal or impersonal, mediated or direct, give the child the opportunity to observe a particular value or set of values or a particular way of experiencing the world in action and to try these out for herself by taking the role of the other, reconstructing their values and applying them to her own experience. The plurality of relationships in which the child is involved presents the problem of inconsistent socialisation. The values of home may differ from those of school or friends. The tactics used to cope with inconsistent socialisation may have a considerable effect on the development of personality. Depending on her own strength of will and character and the attractiveness of the various groups, the child may adopt one pervasive loyalty, or compartmentalise her loyalty, taking on different value systems in different situations.

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She may attempt to balance the various roles and loyalties demanded, maintaining a psychological distance from any particular one, or she may begin to reject the authority of all or some others. The ideal adult solution is the integration of the various roles demanded into a secure identity, which enables reciprocal influence in most, if not all, reference groups, but this solution is rarely available to the child and is by no means uniformly successful even in adulthood.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most important ways in which the development and internalisation of values takes place is through play. In play, the child is able to try out the role of parent, friend or some other model, as far as she is able to grasp it, vicariously expanding her experience of life. George Herbert Mead drew attention to an important step forward in the transition from "play" to "the game". Whereas in "play", as he defined it, the child takes on or interacts with one role at a time, in "the game" the participant must construct the role of all the players simultaneously. She must respond to the game as such, rather than to any one player individually. To achieve this requires the construction of a *generalised other*, which embodies both the rules and the purpose of the game.<sup>25</sup>

Ability to engage in the "game", governed by a corporate role, is the foundation for one of the most important features of adult life, membership of a variety of "reference groups".<sup>26</sup> Reference groups may be large or small, temporary or permanent. They include the family and the state, regular workmates or the occupants of a railway compartment. Some reference groups, such as history or "posterity", may not even exist in the present. One individual plays many roles. He may be husband and father, employee, committee member, club or church member, citizen or sports enthusiast. Each

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role is corporately defined by the members of the appropriate reference group, who through the appropriate channels of communication, be it direct personal communication, journal or mass media, define a generalised other for the particular group. The generalised other is the representation of the collective role, to which the individual responds. Like all schemata, the generalised other includes certain elements as mandatory, definitive of the role, others to be filled in according to the preference of the individuals involved. A waiter, for example, has a job to do, but the relationship he attempts to cultivate with the patrons may be less tightly defined. Similarly, the role of a committee chairman is made up partly of mandatory expectations, partly of a range of options. He may be easy-going or a stickler for procedure, authoritarian or democratic.

A reference group has two components:

- a) the people who belong to the group,
- b) the perspectives which they share.

Membership of a particular reference group involves sharing a certain definition of the relevant situation, at least to the extent necessary for participation in the group. This definition forms the foundation for the personal relationships which develop within the frame of reference thus provided. A committee must share a definition of its task, a club exists for the benefit of those who share the same interests and the stability of a state requires a certain degree of consensus. As a reference group, membership of the church involves these two components, the members and the shared perspectives. Belonging to the church means both sharing fellowship with a particular group of people and sharing the perspective of Christian commitment. Through the provision of a shared perspective, to which all the members can relate, reference groups contribute to the formation of

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individual identity. A person may express his knowledge of himself as "The best 400 metre runner in my athletics club", "A valued member of the church choir", or "An up-and-coming young executive".<sup>27</sup>

Each individual is the unique intersection of a number of reference groups. Each person has many roles, each one defined by the perspectives shared within a particular group. The fragmentation of a pluralist society allows the possibility of social mobility and the relative independence from all-pervasive social norms afforded by a choice of roles and reference groups. It also introduces the possibility of role and group conflict, similar to the problem of inconsistent socialisation in childhood, but here a potentially disruptive factor for adult identity. The task of maintaining a coherent identity involves the resolution of potential conflict between the norms or the demands of different groups. Reference groups differ in power and attractiveness, with respect to both the shared perspectives and the affective ties between the members. The degree of dependence of a particular individual on the opinions of others will depend upon the overall security of his identity and self-esteem.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Identity Formation as the Motivation for Learning

Each individual is a member of a number of reference groups, each with its distinct frame of reference. Each group comprises what Wittgenstein called a "form of life". The group's frame of reference is what he called a "language game". The meaning of terms is defined by their role in that particular language game or frame of reference.<sup>29</sup> One of the questions raised by the recognition of the existence of distinct forms of life is whether and, if so, how the terms of one language game may be translated into those of another. The translatability of terms between language games is not achieved by means of explicit rules but by the synthesis of frames of reference in the identities of individuals. The relationship between language games and social worlds is unique to each individual. As the unique point of intersection of many channels of communication, each individual inhabits a personal "universe of discourse", and establishes a unique relationship between frames of reference within his own identity.<sup>30</sup> A person's universe of discourse is the equivalent of his world model. It comprises the totality of his knowledge, organised by means of typical roles or situations.

Identity, or the "self-schema", is the dominating schema which brings cohesion to all the separate roles, reference groups or language games in which the individual is involved. The "self-schema", which includes various items of information, one's appearance, personal characteristics, capabilities, background, social roles, likes and dislikes, motives and goals, is implicit in all cognition, but it is the affective factors which dominate and provide its coherence.<sup>31</sup> A person may be only dimly aware of the tacit and



affective presuppositions of his own behaviour, of the underlying causes of his reactions to particular situations.

Like any other schema, the self-schema is an item of tacit knowledge. No schema is an inert body of knowledge waiting to be drawn upon, like some kind of cognitive reference library. Schemata are actively organised, such that evaluations and inferences are already implicit within them. Knowledge of one's appearance, abilities, preferences and so on, is not simply recorded but referenced to relevant situations, such as relations with the opposite sex, job, and leisure activities. The self-schema enters cognitive interaction in the form of the self-segment of the particular schema being deployed, according to the situation. In general, then, self-knowledge remains specific to social role. Knowledge of the self is a complex of cognitive, affective and volitional elements arising within the framework of personal interaction.<sup>32</sup>

This personal interaction is the social context for a complex, intra-psychological process of self-relation in which identity is formed and maintained, which was termed, by George Herbert Mead, the "I-me" relationship.<sup>33</sup> "Me" is the socially constructed "self" or *persona*, the complex of others' attitudes assumed by the self in the process of self-definition. "I" is the response of the individual to those attitudes. In order to be a member of society, the individual must take up certain roles, for which the standards of acceptable performance are socially defined. He must accept, for the purposes of performing the role, the perspective of the particular reference group within which the role acquires its meaning. But a role is not necessarily a rigid set of expectations. More often, there is a continuum of acceptable responses. The waiter may be friendly or formal, the committee

chairman authoritarian or democratic, the teacher strict or easy-going, the father aloof or involved. By selecting a particular response, an individual not only takes but simultaneously makes a role. The decision as to how to play the role is that of the "I". Role-taking is a practical example of the response of the "I" to the socially organised "me". A person is "I" and "me" in relationship.<sup>34</sup>

The "I-me" relationship is essentially an evaluative relationship. The "I" evaluates the social self expressed in the "me" and responds accordingly. The way in which a role is taken up expresses an evaluation of the role. We may identify with it wholeheartedly or attempt to distance ourselves from it as a necessary but distasteful part of social obligation. The "I-me" relationship is an expression of self-evaluation. It is as if the presence of others automatically calls out an evaluation of oneself. Since the "generalised other" is an ever-present feature, at least of adult life, self-evaluation is potentially continuous and all-pervasive.<sup>35</sup>

It is this evaluative relationship, lying at the heart of self-relation, which is the matrix of the learning process. The two related aspects of learning are the development of a psychological world-view or world-model and the formation of identity or a self-model. Of these two related aspects it is the formation and maintenance of identity which acts as the principal motivating factor in learning. The priority of the maintenance of self-esteem, or evaluative coherence, has been illustrated from the study of attitudes.<sup>36</sup> Attitudes are affectively organised schemata, which unify cognitions of a given aspect of experience by means of an evaluative gestalt. They are, moreover, resistant to change, and the source of this resistance lies in the need to maintain and defend identity. The

flexibility of a person's psychological world-model, his ability to learn, depends on the degree to which his identity is capable of change and readjustment. If the accommodation of new information requires an adjustment of identity which is regarded as too costly to evaluative coherence, the new information may be rejected or distorted.<sup>37</sup>

Another example of the influence of self-worth and the priority given to its defence is given by Richard Ecker in his account of the sources of stress.<sup>38</sup> Stress, he contends, is not directly caused by circumstances but indirectly, by the person's interpretation of the circumstances. When a person interprets a particular situation as likely to cause a threat to his stability or self-worth the result is a stress response, in which the body prepares itself to combat the imagined threat. The reason for the faulty interpretation which gives rise to the stress response is the perceived threat to conditions which the person believes, either consciously or unconsciously, to be necessary to self-esteem. Such a condition is most often the need to maintain the control of an interpersonal situation. Very frequently, it will be the attainment of a standard of achievement necessary for positive self-evaluation. The way to avoid stress, Ecker contends, is to identify the condition for self-worth which is the source of the faulty perception of the situation and seek to change or remove it. Ecker's account of stress is an example of the fundamentally affective nature of the "me" or self-schema and an indication of the deep level of personality at which the "I-me" relation takes place.

A particularly good example of the relation between learning and identity formation is the case of bereavement. The bereaved person, particularly the bereaved spouse, has lost a part of his or her identity with the death of the partner. In the months

which follow, a great deal of what Colin Murray Parkes calls "grief-work" must take place, by means of which the bereaved person readjusts to life on their own by recovering those aspects of identity lost with bereavement. The bereaved wife may have to take on the role of bread-winner, learn to drive a car, fill in tax forms and provide as much as possible of what her children now lack in the absence of a father. All these learning tasks contribute to and arise from the need to discover a new identity - both socially, in regaining a satisfactory complex of roles in society, and psychologically, in learning to do without the support of friend, provider and sexual partner. The loss of a partner is, moreover, only one type of bereavement. Other kinds of loss, including the loss of a limb, the loss of a job and moving house, require similar responses. The learning of new skills, new roles and new identity is interwoven.<sup>39</sup>

The influence of identity formation can be seen most clearly in the difference between adults and children in regard to learning. Children typically learn much faster and more efficiently than do adults, a finding which has puzzled many researchers. Most children acquire their first language quickly and naturally at a very early age, and yet the ability to speak a language is so complex that it defies analysis. Throughout their schooling, children continue to learn quickly, but with the arrival of adolescence, many begin to display a marked reluctance to learn, and a questioning of the value of the information offered them. Although adults, especially those in occupations which require them to do so, may continue to learn throughout their lives, many fail to do so. Their learning becomes predominantly task-related, limited to what is necessary to enable them to fulfil social roles and occupations.<sup>40</sup> The reason for these differences between adults and children can readily be seen to be attributable to the difference in regard to identity

formation. For children, not only is there an overwhelming need to comprehend the environment in order to cope with it, but the role of learner is part of the identity of a child. A child is willing to learn what parents and teachers tell her she needs to learn, because she defines herself as an aspiring adult, and her goal is to learn to be like them. The adult, however, learns easily only those things required for the maintenance and extension of her identity in those areas clearly seen to be relevant to her. If the demands of occupational advancement or of social role, such as having a baby, make it necessary, learning can be just as quick and efficient as for the child. For both adults and children, the extent of the ability to learn is dependent on the process of identity formation and maintenance.

Identity is more than the formal link between the processes of cognitive and of social interaction. Not only is identity the means of psychological coherence and of social cohesion, it is the formation of identity which is the principle motivating factor in both processes. It is the quest for identity, and the need to maintain and defend identity which gives rise to the learning process. It is not simply that learning and identity formation are two sides of the same coin. It is identity which has the priority.

## Notes

1. *Meaning of Persons*, 1973, p.123.

2. A further example of this point is given by John Wisdom, *Other Minds*, p.225-228.

The statement, "A fire is now raging in Fleet Street," means different things to different people, not simply because one observer may be actually in Fleet Street and another in Brighton, but because the memories, fears, goals, purposes and anticipations which provide the context for the impact of this fire on each one, will also be different. There is no single, "objective" meaning, valid for all observers, regardless of context or standpoint. The nearest we can come to this is the agreed definition of the context of a given statement.

3. See above, p.25f.

4. There is a tendency among educationists and child psychologists to treat Piaget simply as a theorist of child development. In fact, Piaget's interest was very much broader. He believed that there was an equivalence of "structure" underlying the realms of mathematics, physics, biology and psychology. Piaget intended the study of the "structures" of psychological development as the key to an overall theory of evolution. These broader theoretical assumptions underlie his approach to research with young children, the design of the experiments, their interpretation and Piaget's confidence in the cultural universality of results obtained with middle-class Swiss school-children. Since the mid-1970s, the shortcomings in Piaget's theory and method have increasingly been exposed, and a shift of the pendulum away from his version of "cognitive development" has begun. See M.Donaldson, *Children's Minds*; Long, McCrary and Ackerman, "Adult

Cognition" p.3-18; Piaget, "Intellectual Evolution", p.1-12; Siegel and Brainerd, *Alternatives to Piaget*; Mussen (ed.), *Carmichael's Manual of Child Psychology* (4th.edition)

5. "Egocentrism" is also a stage in Piaget's account of the moral development of children. It lasts roughly between the ages of 3 and 5, and is characterised by a tendency to play games with and for oneself, to make up rules to suit oneself alone and the lack of a clear concept of an eventual winner. There is no co-ordination of interests with others. Other children and adults act as stimulus to activity, but not as partners. Most of these observations are incorporated in alternative accounts of social development in childhood. Piagetian structural development is by no means necessary as an explanation. The experiments recorded by Donaldson, *Children's Minds*, show clearly the ability of children to understand the point of view of another.

6. Piaget, *The Child's Conception of Space*, p.210f.

7. Donaldson, *op.cit.*, p.19-25.

8. Macnamara, "Language and Learning", p.1-13; Bruner, "Ontogenesis", p.1-19.

9. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, p.103-105; *Mind in Society*, p.84-91.

10. *Thought and Language*, p.82-118.

11. *ibid.*, p.45-51; *Mind in Society*, p.57.

12. Wertsch, "Social Interaction", p.1-22.

13. John Hull draws attention to the need for Christian educationists to recognise the truth of Sigmund Freud's central proposition, that religious images and concepts develop from the experiences and conflicts of early childhood. The adult believer brings with him to

the understanding of his faith a set of images deriving from childhood. Part of the work of adulthood is to understand and to cope with these childhood images. (Hull, *Christian Adults*, p.150f.)

14. Brim and Wheeler, *Socialisation after Childhood*, p.16.

15. *op.cit.*, p.24-27.

16. See Gillespie, *Conversion*, p.187f.

17. Erikson, *Life Cycle*, p.55-65.

18. *ibid.*, p.52-55.

19. Tournier, *Meaning of Persons*, p.122-138.

20. Erikson, *op.cit.*, p.65-69; *Insight*, p.118-120.

21. *Life Cycle*, p.88-94, 110-121.

22. A.Strauss, "Transformations of Identity", *Human Behaviour*, ed.Rose, p.63-85.

23. A.Bandura, "Social Learning Theory of Identificatory Processes", *Handbook of Socialisation Theory*, ed.Goslin, p.213-262.

24. R.Lippitt, "Improving the Socialisation Process", *Socialisation and Society*, ed.Clausen, p.345-348.

25. Mead, *op.cit.*, p.149-160.

26. For an introduction to the theory of reference groups, see T.Shibutani, "Reference Groups and Social Control", Rose, *op.cit.*, p.128-147. For the general theoretical background, see Rose, "A Systematic Summary of Symbolic Interaction Theory", same volume, p.3-19.



27. See above, chapter 1, note 10, for a description of a particularly specialised reference group, a scientific community.

28. Brim and Wheeler, *op.cit.*, p.24-33.

The theory of reference groups provides the sociological complement to Festinger's observations on the influence of relationships in cognitive dissonance. A highly valued cognition shared by a highly valued other is relatively secure. A highly valued cognition not shared by a highly valued other introduces potential dissonance. (*Cognitive Dissonance*, p.177-259) See also p.246-259 and *When Prophecy Fails*, for an account by Festinger and his associates of the "flying saucer" sect given as an example of the interdependence of beliefs and social support.

29. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II.xi, p.220f.

30. Shibutani, *op.cit.*, p.134-138; Mead, *op.cit.*, p.253-260.

31. Schlenker, "Actions into Attitudes", p.194-195.

32. The self cannot become an object of experience without being severed from its roots in experience, the form of which is interaction. This accounts for the perplexity expressed by David Hume.

"There are some philosophers," he writes, "who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF...For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the

perception...If anyone upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can no longer reason with him...He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd which he calls himself; tho' I am certain there is no such principle in me. But setting aside such metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are *nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions*, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."(*Treatise*, vol I, p.238-239)

The denial of any reality to the self or subject follows from Hume's characterisation of perception as passive reception. Although he is at pains to make this denial appear empirically based, it is, in fact analytical. It is required by a philosophical standpoint which denies any active involvement in perception. The self, however, is not to be looked for as an object. It cannot be isolated from the process of self-relation within which it arises.

33. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p.xxiv, 173-178, 200-213, 331-335. Mead's theory forms the basis of the approach of symbolic interactionism, and is implicit in other approaches to social psychology.

34. R.H.Turner, "Role-Taking: Process v. Conformity", *Behaviour*, ed.Rose, p.20-40.

Even complete identification with a particular role may not be quite so "inauthentic" as Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, seems to think. There could not be a much greater difference in standards of role-performance between, say, a British waiter and an American one. Part of the problem with existentialism is that it sets the social self and the

personal self in opposition instead of mutual interaction. Social self and personal self, *personage* and person, are distinct, but bound together. "Me" is created by "I", and "I" responds to "me". Tournier, *Meaning of Persons*, p.7f.

35. Schlenker, "Actions into Attitudes", p.197-199; *Impression Management*, p.18-22, 69-75. The theory of impression management is based on the control of identity images in the presence of others through the presentation of self, whether conscious or unconscious. It assumes a basic need to maintain and defend self-esteem.

Another important account of the status of the self is that given by Gordon Allport. Asking the question, "Is the Concept of Self Necessary?", Allport came to the conclusion that the "self" is best described as *proprium*. The components of Allport's *proprium* include bodily sense, identity (in the sense of continuity over time), rational process, self-image, ego-enhancement, ego-extension, that is the sense of ownership of those things, possessions goals and people, that we particularly love, and "propriate striving", similar to what Maslow calls self-actualisation. (*Becoming*, p.36-56, esp. p.39-41) The *proprium* is the region which is "peculiarly ours". It is the region of matters of *importance* to us as distinct from matters of fact, the kind of thing we keep inside the boundary which distinguishes us from other people. The *proprium* is the source of salience, of attitudes, goals and purposes. Within the boundary, it is evaluation which provides the sense of unity and integrity, and self-esteem the paramount requirement for the maintenance of that integrity. In his original presentation, Allport included "the knower" as an aspect of the *proprium*. When the essay was reprinted in 1968, he explained in a preface that he had changed his mind on this point. Of the other aspects, he commented,

All these functions can be, and are, objects of knowledge. In this sense they comprise what James called the "empirical me"...But the nature of "the knower" - the process of knowing that we know - is still elusive, and is not itself an object of knowledge...Hence, in my book *Pattern and Growth in Personality* I have separated the problem of the knower (and consigned it to philosophy)...

(Gordon and Gergen, p.25)

36. See above, p.102-105.

37. See also p.101 on cognitive dissonance. As an explanation of behaviour, cognitive dissonance theory also relies on the assumption that self-related premises form the context in which dissonance arises.

38. Ecker, *Stress Myth*.

39. Parkes, *Bereavement*.

40. See Knowles, *Modern Practice*, especially Exhibit 4, p.43-44.