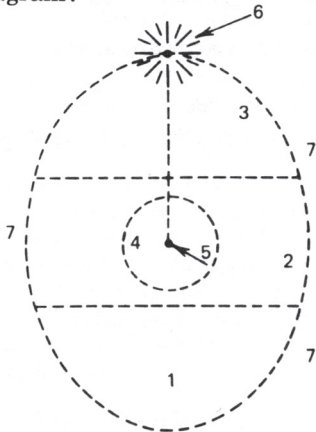


THE EGG DIAGRAM

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Assagioli summarized his view of the human psychological constitution in the following diagram which has come to be called the “egg diagram.”



1. Lower unconscious
2. Middle unconscious
3. Higher unconscious or super-conscious
4. Field of consciousness
5. “I” (Center of consciousness or Personal self)
6. Self (Transpersonal Self or Higher Self)
7. Collective unconscious

The area within the central circle is the field of consciousness, at the center of which is the “I” or personal self. The “I” is the point of pure awareness and will which is the subject of our field of consciousness and the integrating center of our personality. We can realize what is meant by the “I” if we step back to that place within us from which we can register and observe the various aspects of our experience. We can become aware, for example, that we are experiencing various sensations in our body, and that these sensations – the content of consciousness – are

something different from the source or subject of consciousness. These sensations are constantly changing; they may be pleasant one moment and unpleasant the next. The Observer, however – the one who is aware – remains the same. We can experience a center of stable identity within us which does not fluctuate with the changing contents of consciousness, with our momentary and transient experiences.

Just as we can register awareness of our physical experiences, so we can register awareness of emotional and mental experiences. If we observe our emotional states, we realize that these two are constantly changing. One moment we are happy, the next moment we are sad. We may experience fear, anger, love and joy all within the same day, but our center of identity, the Observer of these experiences, remains the same. In a similar way, we can observe the endless sequence of thoughts and images that flow by in our mind stream. Our mental life is full of movement; the mind finds it difficult to stand still for even a minute. Yet the “I” consciousness that underlies these experiences, remains the same. Like the projection screen on which a film plays, it provides us with a sense of permanence and stability in spite of the fact that the contents of our consciousness are ceaselessly in flux.

In the “egg diagram,” then, the central circle contains all the contents of consciousness which are experienced at any given moment. The point in the center of this circle represents the “I.” It can be seen that the “I” or personal self is connected by a dotted line to a point above it — the higher or transpersonal Self. This transpersonal Self, like the personal self, is a center of consciousness and of will with the difference that its domain is more inclusive. The transpersonal Self is able to extend its awareness to include the whole realm of the personal unconscious as well as the more limited field of consciousness. It is the center around which integration takes place at the stage of transpersonal or spiritual psychosynthesis.

Many people have had no direct conscious experience of their transpersonal Self, as this is something that generally comes in the more advanced stages of inner evolution. Assagioli’s inference of the existence of the transpersonal Self is based on the testimony of those who have experienced it. Reports have been given by the mystics who speak of a blissful, unitive experience of pure Being in which all polarities and contradictions seem to be resolved and which has a powerful integrating effect upon the personality (Bucke, 1923). Other persons who have practiced various psychological techniques such as mental imagery or meditation have reported similar experiences. We can also surmise the existence of a deeper center of identity within ourselves from the fact that the conscious “I” may disappear, as in sleep or under anesthesia,

without causing us to lose the sense of continuity of our existence.

The area of the egg diagram which falls within the oval represents the personal unconscious, or that part of the unconscious which relates specifically to the individual, to his life experience, and to the unfoldment of his inner qualities. Beyond this is what Jung has called the "collective unconscious" which is the psychic environment beyond the individual. The personal unconscious is divided into three levels: the lower unconscious or subconscious, the middle unconscious and the superconscious. The middle unconscious contains those elements which are similar to our normal waking state of consciousness. We can remember and experience these elements any time we choose. Other elements not easily accessible to the "I" reside at the upper and lower ends of the oval. Assagioli included the Freudian idea of the unconscious as the "lower unconscious." Then he expanded the concept of the unconscious to include what has since been called by Maslow "the farther reaches of human nature" (Maslow, 1972). That is, Assagioli distinguished between the primitive or lower unconscious – the repository of our basic biological drives and our unresolved complexes – and what he called the superconscious – a realm which he postulated as being above or beyond our normal level of conscious awareness.

The superconscious, as he viewed it, is the source of our higher human functions and activities. It includes the drive for purpose and meaning in life; our authentic values; our superior intuitions in the realms of artistic creation, scientific discovery, philosophical or spiritual insight; and our altruistic promptings to humanitarian service. He also thought of it as the realm of genius, of the contemplative states experienced by the great mystics, and of what Maslow refers to as "peak experiences" (Maslow, 1970). Assagioli's conception of the unconscious has much in common with teachings from the esoteric and spiritual traditions of both East and West. Like the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who spoke of the "prospective" or "forward-looking" unconscious, Assagioli believed that the superconscious is creative and that it bears those latent positive energies which have yet to emerge, that the future can bring into manifestation.

Assagioli, like the psychoanalysts and other depth psychologists, agreed with the view that an important goal of therapy is to "make the unconscious conscious," to extend the frontiers of our consciousness into areas that were formerly unconscious. He differed from the psychoanalytic position in that he believed we must have a "height" psychology as well as a "depth" psychology – that we must go "up" as well as "down" in the psyche. He developed techniques for evocation of the superconscious that helped people to directly contact the latent positive

and constructive energies within themselves. He found that contact with the superconscious often gave people the strength and inspiration to deal with the more disturbing aspects of themselves. He also considered it necessary, at least for those persons who wished to undertake a spiritual psychosynthesis, to look “upward” toward the transpersonal Self as a source of direction and meaning in their lives.

A further way in which Assagioli’s approach to the unconscious differs from that of psychoanalysis is the emphasis he places on the need to assume conscious responsibility for the contents of the unconscious and on the use of active approaches to do this. He did not agree with the assumption of most depth psychologies that making the unconscious conscious was sufficient in itself to effect change. He believed that awareness was only part of the picture and that awareness had to be balanced with will for the personality to become effectively integrated. He found that unless his clients established a connection with the source of will within themselves, their insights would tend to get lost and be wasted. There was a need to arouse the person’s motivation to take responsibility for his or her own life and to help the person “ground” the insights achieved through active techniques and by applying these insights in the course of day-to-day living.

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