

Lecture 5 – The Self

Overview

This lecture explores the concepts of **personality** and **the self** through psychological and philosophical lenses. The discussion weaves through historical definitions, trait models, and William James's conception of the self. It ends with reflections on narrative identity and the Hero's Journey.

Personality vs. Self

- **Personality** comes from *persona* (Latin for “mask”). It refers to the consistent patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving across time and situations.
 - **Self** is derived from Old English, meaning “one’s own.” It’s more about ownership, awareness, and internal narrative.
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Personality Traits: The Big Five (OCEAN)

Psychologists reduced ~4,500 trait adjectives into five broad factors via **factor analysis**:

1. Openness to Experience

- Traits: Curiosity, imagination, aesthetics, creativity.
- TIPI Example: *Open to new experiences, complex* vs. *Conventional, uncreative*.

2. Conscientiousness

- Traits: Organization, industriousness, responsibility.
- TIPI Example: *Dependable, self-disciplined* vs. *Disorganized, careless*.

3. Extraversion

- Traits: Sociability, assertiveness, high energy.
- TIPI Example: *Extraverted, enthusiastic* vs. *Reserved, quiet*.

4. Agreeableness

- Traits: Compassion, respectfulness, trust.
- TIPI Example: *Sympathetic, warm* vs. *Critical, quarrelsome*.

5. Neuroticism

- Traits: Anxiety, depression, emotional instability.
- TIPI Example: *Anxious, easily upset* vs. *Calm, emotionally stable*.

Note: These traits exist on **continua**, not fixed types. Both extremes have pros/cons depending on context.

Heritability and Change

- Personality traits are **~40% heritable**.
 - Traits can change over time — a shift of ~1 standard deviation (e.g., a 1–2 inch height change).
 - Personality leaves **behavioral traces** in environment, social media, dress, etc.
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William James: The Structure of the Self

The 'I' vs. the 'Me'

- **I** = the perceiver, conscious agent.
 - **Me** = the self-concept, the observed.
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Components of the Self (According to William James)

1. Self-Esteem

- Evaluation of self-worth.
- James's formula:
Self-Esteem = Success / Pretensions
- Modern views:
 - As a **resource** against depression.
 - As a **sociometer** (social belonging).
 - As a **status gauge**.

2. Material Self

- Includes possessions (clothes, car, etc.).
- Marketing leverages this through **symbolic self-completion**.
- Identity is extended via personal belongings.

3. Social Self

- A person has many selves depending on the social context.
- Tied to the **Looking Glass Self**: > “We learn who we are by how others respond to us.”

4. Spiritual Self

- The internal subjective being: values, conscience, creativity, intelligence.
- Sometimes renamed **psychological self** in textbooks.

5. True Self / Authenticity

- Living in alignment with one's values.
 - Authenticity involves:
 - Self-knowledge
 - Unbiased processing
 - Acting on values
 - Genuine relationships
 - **Impostor Syndrome** is common during transitions and growth.
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Narrative Identity

“The self is the ‘I’ telling a story about the ‘Me.’” – Dan McAdams

- We make sense of life through **stories**.
- The self is a **Narrative Center of Gravity** (Daniel Dennett).

Common Narrative Forms

- **Hero’s Journey**: Call to adventure → Trials → Return with wisdom.
- **Rags to Riches**: Overcoming adversity through perseverance.
- **Tragedy**: Downward spiral with no return.
- **Redemption**: Suffering leads to transformation.

“Everyone wants to be a hero; no one wants to take the journey.”

Conclusion

The self is not merely a sum of traits but a **story** in progress. While psychological models help explain behavior, **integration**, **authenticity**, and **meaningful narratives** give life coherence.

“To find one’s truest, strongest, and deepest self, one must review the list carefully and pick the one on which to stake one’s salvation.”

– **William James**

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