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No need to change the egg diagram

I found it very interesting to read the articles “A suggested change in the egg diagram” by John Firman (Psicosintesi - October 95), “Why change the egg diagram?” by Enrico e Sofia Marabini (Psicosintesi - April 96) and “The oval diagram and psychosynthesis dogma” (Psicosintesi - April 97) by John Firman. Here is my contribution to that discussion:

1. Understanding the Egg Diagram

According to the Oxford dictionary, a diagram is by definition: “a sketch or figure showing the features of an object needed for exposition, rather than its actual appearance”. Therefore our understanding of the egg diagram depends upon an accompanying explanation.

To understand a diagram we must have:

a/ a clear definition of the concepts related to the diagram (e.g. a definition of the Self)

b/ an explanation of the symbols used in the diagram (e.g. why the Self is represented by a “star”).

2. The Egg Diagram

The egg diagram is “a crude and elementary picture” (Assagioli), because it is only a static and two dimensional picture of our psyche, which in actuality is dynamic in time and much more complex in space. But even so, the egg diagram fulfils the necessary criteria for a good diagram:

a/ it is clear and simple, which are the most required qualities for any diagram,

b/ it shows the main elements of our psyche, their relationships, and their fundamental differences. Therefore, the diagram fulfils its purpose of illustrating the psychosynthesis understanding of the human being,

3. Graphic representation of the Self

The Self is understood as the source of energy, and also as the field of energy. Whenever the Self is discussed, it is very important to always view the Self as *energy*. If the Self is not interpreted in terms of energy then there can be a misunderstanding of the egg diagram. In the diagram the Self is illustrated by a “star” (the source of energy) and its radiation of light (energy).

4. Transcendent-immanent nature of the Self

The diagram illustrates that the Self is *distinct* (transcendent), while at the same time *not separate* (immanent) from any level of consciousness:

Transcendence - The Self is understood as a field of energy of a superconscious nature. However, it is different from the superconscious (higher unconscious) - it is contentless and, as such, transcends superconscious experience which always has a content (feelings, ideas, visions). With this concept of the Self, its graphic representation as a star at the apex of the higher unconscious can illustrate that the Self is our permanent centre - distinct, and unaffected by conscious experience.

Immanence - The energy of the Self pervades all levels of consciousness (higher, middle, and lower), regardless of our awareness. Therefore, the Self is present and active within any content or process of any of the levels. In the diagram, this is illustrated by the light (energy) of the star penetrating all levels of the egg diagram. The dotted lines show the permeability of our psyche.

If the Self is seen as energy, then the position of the Self in the upper part of the diagram does not imply its existence solely in the higher unconscious.

5. I-Self relationship

The 'I' is a reflection of the Self or, rather, a projection of the Self in the field of the personality. The 'I' is therefore essentially of the same nature as the Self. In the diagram, the I-Self line illustrates that the 'I' is closely related to the Self.

6. Realisation of the Self

The realisation of the Self refers to the more or less temporary awareness of the Self. Our direct awareness of the Self comes about only if we disidentify from the various psychological elements - when we are at the place of the 'I'. In the diagram, the I-Self link can be used to illustrate that the realisation of the Self comes only from the 'I', or that for the realisation of the Self the disidentification from any aspect of the personality is the essential factor.

The position of the Self in the upper part of the diagram does not imply that the realisation of the Self is restricted only to the higher unconscious. In fact, we can contact the Self from any level of consciousness if we disidentify from its content. Indeed, to have a true experience of the Self it is also necessary to disidentify from the higher unconscious.

7. Self-realisation

Self-realisation is the process whereby the Self is expressed through the personality, with the 'I' acting as the director. In other words, the energy of the Self is channelled by the 'I' and expressed by the personality. In the diagram, this energy path is illustrated by the I-Self link, which is essential for Self-realisation.

The Self in the upper part of the diagram does not illustrate a point to be reached, but rather represents a synthesising Centre of our whole being. Similarly, Self-realisation is a path to our wholeness, and not 'a place to get to'.

The Self in the upper part of the diagram is an effective symbol of our evolutionary path. From a symbolic perspective, Self-realisation often adopts the image of an upward journey, or a journey towards the light (Dante's "Divine Comedy", or Plato's "The Simile of the Cave"), which depicts the sense that as we evolve we are raising our consciousness.

Conclusion

The original egg diagram is "far from perfect and final" (Assagioli). However, the proposed change in the diagram, without the Self illustrated, would make the "new diagram" less informative - the concept of the Self, its transcendence-immanence, the I-Self relationship, the realisation of the Self and Self-realisation would not have their graphic representation in this "new diagram".

I believe that, as it stands now, we can improve the egg diagram only by improving our understanding of it.

References:

- 1) Assagioli, R (1990) "Psychosynthesis - A Manual of Principles and Techniques", London: Mandala
- 2) Whitmore, D (1992) "Psychosynthesis Counseling in Action", London: Sage