

The better self in
ourselves



The influx of self-help books in today's ultra-modern world is by no means an accident. They are by-products of a world that has become more complicated and complex as the ways in which it has to be lived in. This complexity coincides with the development of more complex thought processes that seek to find meanings in life and how everyone fits into that life. That search for meaning and the process of meaning-making involve attempts to make sense of the existence of one's self as a tiny spot relative to the vastness of the cosmic universe.

This has led many social scientists to develop theories that attempt to explain ways through which the self can be understood in its multi-faceted contexts. John Locke underscored the importance of the "continuity of consciousness" through an enabled memory and imagination (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2007). He believed that a person can understand his/her self by examining the past and imagining the future. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on the other hand, stressed the significance of the society as a necessary and yet corruptible element in understanding one's self (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2008).

The former emphasizes the objective self-examination while the latter stresses the subjective self-expression. Sigmund Freud believed that human beings have irrational, primitive and animalistic instincts that should be repressed for the betterment of one's self and the society at large (Curtis, 2002); while Wilhelm Reich claimed that it is the repression of the society of the "original" forces and emotions within human beings that makes human beings irrational (The Wilhelm Reich Museum).

And quite contemporarily, Ian Hacking advances the practice of disciplinary psychology as a means to define selfhood in its socio-cultural contexts (Hacking, 2002). It has offered individuals the tools through which they can take a deeper look at their inner selves in relation to the society and the world they live in. Towards a Better Understanding of the Self in Ourselves All the psychological theories and practices cited thus far have only one aim: to make us understand ourselves more than how we understand ourselves now.

They provide us tools so we can acquire skills to help us learn more about ourselves and to nurture that self within ourselves for a better us. Their primary objective is to illuminate the existence of one's self and give us enlightenment to enable us to view that self in new and better perspectives and vantage points with the hope that we can be better for ourselves, the people around us and the society we live in. Disciplinary psychology posits that if we could understand our psychological self better, we can understand the kind of person that we are.

Doing so, we can be that person we aspire to be. We can be astronauts, airline pilots, NBA superstars, forensic scientists, geologists, etc. There are infinite possibilities of being who we want to be if we just indeed are able to understand ourselves better. Truly, while there are infinite possibilities of being ourselves, there are also infinite questions that needed to be answered about ourselves. As time changes and as the world becomes more modernized, the concepts of personhood and selfhood become even more complicated.

Questions about humanity become more apparent. When we question why we are driven by this desire to succeed and gain more material wealth, we turn to become pseudo-psychoanalysts in trying to understand this desire and how it can manipulate us if not tempered with reason. And as our consciousness is fed with the commercialism we see around us, engendered by the consumerism in the media, we are guided by the fact that advertisements use psychoanalysis to manipulate human minds to become infatuated with manufactured desires.

We are reminded of the “ police within our heads that needs to be destroyed” (Curtis, 2002). When we question our temperaments and attitudes towards love, life and work, we may turn to looking back at how we were brought up, the environment we grew up with and the kind of upbringing that we had. Disciplinary psychology guides us to look back and look forward and struggle to find meanings in those acts. Indeed, while disciplinary psychology offers us tools to gain better understanding of ourselves, the synthesis depends on our own willingness to analyze.

While it can provide us maps to where we could finally go, the choices of directions we take remain our own pre-occupation. And while it gives us patterns through which we could build our own conceptions about ourselves, our self-concept remains our own decision. In the final analysis, disciplinary psychology can provide us proper guidance, but the path towards better understanding of one’s self depends on our own will to tread that path forcefully and purposefully. And as always, that willingness can be questioned psychologically.