COMMUNING AND RELATING

PART V—SEPARATENESS AND TOGETHERNESS

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As there are many steps on the way to communing, paths to it and forms of it, so there are many theoretical guides and feeling experiences to aid in its happening. The concept relationship and the experience relating are of such help. It is via them that we finally come to communing, and that is what we have in the evolution of psychoanalysis. It has been my main thesis that relating is an aspect of communing and a special case of it. Only after having had long experience with relationship and relating do we become aware of the more comprehensive process of communing and the need for it.

SCIENTIFIC METHODS

Some recapitulation and filling in may help us move along the continuum transference, relationship, relating to communing. Science, from Galileo on, was based on the notion of an object that would remain the same and could be examined without being influenced—changed—by the observer. A human being was considered as an object and so viewed. As the scientific method evolved, it became apparent that only isolated aspects of human beings could be examined. To describe aspects laws were formulated, but they applied to ideal situations which, in fact, did not obtain. The law was a concept, an idea. Of a human being, of an I, concepts were formed. Here we have the beginning of the concept of an ideal I, of an ideal human being.

As the social sciences came into being, the importance of environment became apparent and had to be taken into account. Of environment another object was made. We now had the individual as object and the environment as object being examined by what we now call non-participating observers. Here again hypothetical ideal cases were used: an ideal human being and an ideal environment. Because of the nature of western thinking, they had to be seen as a dualism and as in opposition. Regarded as two separable and separated objects when juxtaposed, they had to be seen as irreconcilably opposed. The formulation always was individual versus environment, nature versus nurture.

The next step in a deeper and wider understanding of these two hypothetically separated objects was through the use of the concept relationship. As I stated in Part I, relationship is a concept, a logical genus. It is a noun that can refer to a logical genus or to an experience concerning persons. We must always clearly distinguish in what sense we are using it.

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When the limits of productive usage of relationship as a logical genus are clearly seen, then we must avail ourselves of the logical genus system. Relationship used to mean a human experience has been widely and loosely used to include relating and communing. I feel, in keeping with the ongoing nature of processes in human experiencing, that the word relating is more communicative than relationship or relatedness and that the verb communing be used to point at those specific human situations I have so identified.

When the concept relation was used, whether it referred to simple, comparative, complex, or causal relations, it implied separate objects, with or without an in-between area which, when present, served merely for disjunction of the relata. That was when relation was used in a logical sense. However, when it was used in the sense of an experience, an area, an in-between space was implied in which many happenings were believed to take place. Also when so used the direction of reference was explicitly totally outward and other-directed. Implied was self-directedness, but it was not explicitly stated. Also implied in using the concept relationship and the experience of relationships were system thinking and what I have called communing. I feel some evidence for this was Sullivan’s interest in Dewey’s transactional approach, and the directions of development taken by some of those who have been influenced by him.

To follow what I am now going to develop, it might help to make some diagrams as I go along. Nineteenth century science operated with the notions of matter, entities, permanence, the uninvolved observer, and the atomistic method. As a first diagram draw a circle to stand for an entity, a bit of inanimate or animate matter or an atom. Using the experimental method and hypothetical ideal cases, scientists formulated laws which allegedly were exact.

In the twentieth century, as science moved into subatomic and astrophysics, it became apparent that the observer was not uninvolved, but was influenced by what he was observing, by the fact of his observing, and by the instrumentalities with which he did that observing. Laws now could only be expected to be approximate. Instead of the concepts force and matter being predominant, energy and behavior became the guiding notions. It had become necessary to think in new categories.

Up to this point a circle could stand for what was being observed, as though it existed in vacuo or out of context with everything else. Now the observing process had to be included—the environment of what was being observed and being influenced. This second step, the observing process, could be depicted by an ellipse; a circle in it, that which was being observed. However, you will note that the observer is still left out.

About Step 3 in science, where the observer is also included, much has been written, some of which I described in Part 1. I referred to the observer being confronted by his own mind, which in the East had always been its main interest, namely, consciousness. Scientists began to admit that with their methods they could only experiment with and formulate laws about a small segment of reality and only physical reality, at that. Also they began to question the mathematical pictures they drew of that reality. Was it reality they saw or was it an illusion of their own mind?

Step 3 in the evolution of scientific methodology might be indicated by the circle, namely, what was being observed; the ellipse around it, as the observing process; and a second larger ellipse around that to indicate the observer or, more accurately, the observing mind of the observer, observing the process of observing what was being observed. This is difficult to follow, but is an accurate description of the total process up to this point. It is difficult because it points up the complexities we get into in the West as long as we remain caught in dualistic thinking—of an observer and an observed, the subject/object dualism.

Until the advent of twentieth century