



## Review Article

### Dissociation and Confabulation in Narcissistic Disorders

Sam Vaknin\*

Visiting Professor of Psychology, Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia and Professor of Finance and Psychology in CIAPS (Centre for International Advanced and Professional Studies), Nigeria

#### Abstract

Narcissists and psychopaths dissociate (erase memories) a lot (are amnesiac) because their contact with the world and with others is via a fictitious construct: The false self. Narcissists never experience reality directly but through a distorting lens darkly. They get rid of any information that challenges their grandiose self-perception and the narrative they had constructed to explicate, excuse and legitimize their antisocial, self-centred and exploitative behaviors, choices and idiosyncrasies.

In an attempt to compensate for the yawning gaps in memory, narcissists and psychopaths confabulate: They invent plausible "plug ins" and scenarios of how things might, could, or should have plausibly occurred. To outsiders, these fictional stopgaps appear as lies. But the narcissist fervently believes in their reality: He may not actually remember what had happened-but surely it could not have happened any other way!

These tenuous concocted fillers are subject to frequent revision as the narcissist's inner world and external circumstances evolve. This is why narcissists and psychopaths often contradict themselves. Tomorrow's confabulation often negates yesterday's. The narcissist and psychopath do not remember their previous tales because they are not invested with the emotions and cognitions that are integral parts of real memories.

#### Paper

Feedback from other people regulates the narcissist's sense of identity, self-worth, boundaries, even his reality test (his correct

**\*Corresponding author:** Sam Vaknin, Visiting Professor of Psychology, Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia and Professor of Finance and Psychology in CIAPS (Centre for International Advanced and Professional Studies), Nigeria, Tel: +38 978319143 / +79 884640967; Email: samvaknin@gmail.com

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awareness of the world around him). The narcissist needs this constant input to maintain a sense of continuity. Thus, the narcissist's nearest and dearest-his sources of secondary narcissistic supply-serve as "external memories" and as "flux regulators" whose function it is to maintain a regular, stable flow of affirming and cohering data.

The narcissist was conditioned-from an early age of abuse and trauma-to expect the unexpected. His was a world in motion where (sometimes sadistically) capricious caretakers and peers often engaged in arbitrary behaviour. He was trained to deny his True Self and nurture a false one.

Having invented himself, the narcissist sees no problem in re-inventing that which he designed in the first place. The narcissist is his own creator.

Hence his grandiosity.

Moreover, the narcissist is a man for all seasons, forever adaptable, constantly imitating and emulating, a human sponge, a perfect mirror, a non-entity that is, at the same time, all entities combined.

The narcissist is best described by Sartre's phrase: "Being and Nothingness". Into this reflective vacuum, this sucking black hole, the narcissist attracts the Sources of his Narcissistic Supply.

To an observer, the narcissist appears to be fractured or discontinuous.

Pathological narcissism has been compared to Dissociative Identity Disorder (formerly the Multiple Personality Disorder). By definition, the narcissist has at least two selves. His personality is very primitive and disorganized. Living with a narcissist is a nauseating experience not only because of what he is-but because of what he is not. He is not a fully formed human-but a dizzyingly kaleidoscopic gallery of mercurial images, which melt into each other seamlessly. It is incredibly disorienting.

It is also exceedingly problematic. Promises made by the narcissist are easily disowned by him. His plans are ephemeral. His emotional ties-a simulacrum. Most narcissists have one island of stability in their life (spouse, family, their career, a hobby, their religion, country, or idol)-pounded by the turbulent currents of a dishevelled existence.

Thus, to invest in a narcissist is a purposeless, futile and meaningless activity. To the narcissist, every day is a new beginning, a hunt, a new cycle of idealization or devaluation, a newly invented self.

There is no accumulation of credits or goodwill because the narcissist has no past and no future. He occupies an eternal and timeless present. He is a fossil caught in the frozen lava of a volcanic childhood.

The narcissist does not keep agreements, does not adhere to laws and regards consistency and predictability as demeaning traits. The narcissist hates kiwi one day-and devours it passionately the next.

## Dissociative Gaps and Confabulation

Narcissists and psychopaths dissociate (erase memories) a lot (are amnesiac) because their contact with the world and with others is via a fictitious construct: The False Self. Narcissists never experience reality directly but through a distorting lens darkly. They get rid of any information that challenges their grandiose self-perception and the narrative they had constructed to explicate, excuse and legitimize their antisocial, self-centred and exploitative behaviors, choices and idiosyncrasies.

In an attempt to compensate for the yawning gaps in memory, narcissists and psychopaths confabulate: They invent plausible “plug ins” and scenarios of how things might, could, or should have plausibly occurred. To outsiders, these fictional stopgaps appear as lies. But the narcissist fervently believes in their reality: He may not actually remember what had happened-but surely it could not have happened any other way!

These tenuous concocted fillers are subject to frequent revision as the narcissist’s inner world and external circumstances evolve. This is why narcissists and psychopaths often contradict themselves. Tomorrow’s confabulation often negates yesterday’s. The narcissist and psychopath do not remember their previous tales because they are not invested with the emotions and cognitions that are integral parts of real memories.

## The Two Selves

We often marvel at the discrepancy between the private and public lives of our idols: Celebrities, statesmen, stars, writers and other accomplished figures. It is as though they have two personalities, two selves: The “true” one which they reserve for their nearest and dearest and the “fake” or “false” or “concocted” one which they flaunt in public.

In contrast, the narcissist has no private life, no true self and no domain reserved exclusively for his nearest and dearest. His life is a spectacle, with free access to all, constantly on display, garnering narcissistic supply from his audience. In the theatre that is the narcissist’s life, the actor is irrelevant. Only the show goes on. The False Self is everything the narcissist would like to be but, alas, cannot: Omnipotent, omniscient, invulnerable, impregnable, brilliant, perfect, in short: Godlike. Its most important role is to elicit narcissistic supply from others: Admiration, adulation, awe, obedience and in general: Unceasing attention. In Freud’s tripartite model, the False Self supplants the Ego and conforms to the narcissist’s unattainable, grandiose and fantastic Ego Ideal.

The narcissist constructs a narrative of his life that is partly confabulated and whose purpose is to buttress, demonstrate and prove the veracity of the fantastically grandiose and often impossible claims made by the False Self. This narrative allocates roles to significant others in the narcissist’s personal history. Inevitably, such a narrative is hard to credibly sustain for long: Reality intrudes and a yawning abyss opens between the narcissist’s self-imputed divinity and his drab, pedestrian existence and attributes. I call it the Grandiosity Gap. Additionally, meaningful figures around the narcissist often refuse to play the parts allotted to them, rebel and abandon the narcissist.

The narcissist copes with this painful and ineluctable realization of the divorce between his self-perception and this less than stellar state

of affairs by first denying reality, delusionally ignoring and filtering out all inconvenient truths. Then, if this coping strategy fails, the narcissist invents a new narrative, which accommodates and incorporates the very intrusive data that served to undermine the previous, now discarded narrative. He even goes to the extent of denying that he ever had another narrative, except the current, modified one.

The narcissist’s (and the codependent’s) introjects and inner voices (assimilated representations of parents, role models and significant peers) are mostly negative and sadistic. Rather than provide succour, motivation and direction, they enhance his underlying ego-dystony (discontent with who he is) and the lability of his sense of self-worth. They induce in the child shame, blame, pain, guilt, rage and a panoply of other negative emotions.

As Lidija Rangelovska notes, the paradox is that the child’s ego-dystonic shame and guilt emanate from the very primitive defenses that later comprise and underlie his False Self. Having been told repeatedly how “bad”, “worthless”, “disappointing” and injurious he is, the child comes to believe in his self-imputed delusional ability to hurt and damage family members, for instance.

Such imaginary capacity is the logical extension of both the child’s grandiosity (omnipotence, “I have the power to hurt mommy”) and his magical thinking (“I think, I wish, I hate, I rage and thereby, with the unlimited power of my mind, I cause real calamities out there, in the real world”). So, it is the child’s natural primary narcissistic defenses that enable him to feel so miserable! These defenses allow him to construct a narrative which corresponds to and justifies the judgemental, hateful appraisals and taunts of his abusers. In his young mind, he accepts that he is bad because he is all-powerful and magical and because he leverages his godlike attributes to act with malice or, at the very least, to bring misfortune on significant others.

To skirt this inner overwhelming negativity, the child “appropriates” precisely these defenses and bundles them into a protective shield, thus sequestering his vulnerable, fragile self. Occupied by the ongoing project of his budding pathological narcissism, the child’s defenses are no longer available to construct and buttress the narratives offered by the abusive voices of his tormentors. Moreover, by owning his fantastic grandiosity and harnessing it, the child feels as empowered as his abusers and no longer a victim.

Introjects possess a crucial role in the formation of an exegetic (interpretative) framework which allows one to decipher the world, construct a model of reality, of one’s place in it and consequently of who one is (self-identity). Overwhelmingly negative introjects-or introjects which are manifestly fake, fallacious and manipulative-hamper the narcissist’s and codependent’s ability to construct a true and efficacious exegetic (interpretative) framework.

Gradually, the disharmony between one’s perception of the universe and of oneself and reality becomes unbearable and engenders pathological, maladaptive and dysfunctional attempts to either deny the hurtful discrepancy away (delusions and fantasies); grandiosely compensate for it by eliciting positive external voices to counter the negative, inner ones (narcissism via the False Self and its narcissistic supply); attack it (antisocial/psychopathy); withdraw from the world altogether (schizoid solution); or disappear by merging and fusing with another person (codependence.)

Once formed and functioning, the False Self stifles the growth of the True Self and paralyzes it. Henceforth, the ossified True Self is virtually non-existent and plays no role (active or passive) in the conscious life of the narcissist. It is difficult to “resuscitate” it, even with psychotherapy. The False Self sometimes parades the child-like, vulnerable, needy and innocent True Self in order to capture, manipulate and attract empathic sources of narcissistic supply. When supply is low, the False Self is emaciated and dilapidated. It is unable to contain and repress the True Self which then emerges as a petulant, self-destructive, spoiled and codependent entity. But the True Self’s moments in the sun are very brief and usually, inconsequential.

This substitution is not only a question of despair and alienation, as Kirkegaard and Horney observed, respectively. Following on the footsteps of the Danish proto-existentialist philosopher, Horney said that because the Idealised (=False) Self sets impossible goals to the narcissist, the results are frustration and self hate which grow with every setback or failure. But the constant sadistic judgement, the self-berating, the suicidal ideation emanate from the narcissist’s idealised, sadistic, Superego regardless of the existence or functioning of a False Self.

The False Self is a kind of positive projection: The narcissist’s attributes to it all the positive and desired aspects of himself, thereby endowing it with a quasi-separate existence. The False Self fulfils the role of a divinity in the narcissist’s obsessive-compulsive private religion: The narcissist worships it and adheres to ceremonies and rituals via which he interacts with it. The True Self, on the other hand, is ignored at best and usually denigrated. This process is akin to projective splitting: When parents project onto the golden child positive traits and talents even as they attribute to the scapegoat child negative, undesirable qualities. In this sense, the narcissist a parent with two offspring: His two selves.

There is no conflict between the True Self and the False Self. First, the True Self is much too weak to do battle with the overbearing False. Second, the False Self is adaptive (though maladaptive). It helps the True Self to cope with the world. Without the False Self, the True Self would be subjected to so much hurt that it will disintegrate. This happens to narcissists who go through a life crisis: Their False Ego becomes dysfunctional and they experience a harrowing feeling of annulment.

The False Self has many functions. The two most important are:

1. It serves as a decoy, it “attracts the fire”. It is a proxy for the True Self. It is tough as nails and can absorb any amount of pain, hurt and negative emotions. By inventing it, the child develops immunity to the indifference, manipulation, sadism, smothering, or exploitation-in short: To the abuse-inflicted on him by his parents (or by other Primary Objects in his life). It is a cloak, protecting him, rendering him invisible and omnipotent at the same time.
2. The False Self is misrepresented by the narcissist as his True Self. The narcissist is saying, in effect: “I am not who you think I am. I am someone else. I am this (False) Self. Therefore, I deserve a better, painless, more considerate treatment.” The False Self, thus, is a contraption intended to alter other people’s behaviour and attitude towards the narcissist.

These roles are crucial to survival and to the proper psychological functioning of the narcissist. The False Self is by far more important to the narcissist than his dilapidated, dysfunctional, True Self.

The two Selves are not part of a continuum, as the neo-Freudians postulated. Healthy people do not have a False Self which differs from its pathological equivalent in that it is more realistic and closer to the True Self.

It is true that even healthy people have a mask [Guffman], or a persona [Jung] which they consciously present to the world. But these are a far cry from the False Self, which is mostly subconscious, depends on outside feedback and is compulsive.

The False Self is an adaptive reaction to pathological circumstances. But its dynamics make it predominate, devour the psyche and prey upon the True Self. Thus, it prevents the efficient, flexible functioning of the personality as a whole.

That the narcissist possesses a prominent False Self as well as a suppressed and dilapidated True Self is common knowledge. Yet, how intertwined and inseparable are these two? Do they interact? How do they influence each other? And what behaviours can be attributed squarely to one or the other of these protagonists? Moreover, does the False Self assume traits and attributes of the True Self in order to deceive the world?

Let’s start by referring to an oft-occurring question:

Why are narcissists not prone to suicide?

The simple answer is that they died a long time ago. Narcissists are the true zombies of the world.

Many scholars and therapists tried to grapple with the void at the core of the narcissist. The common view is that the remnants of the True Self are so ossified, shredded, cowed into submission and repressed-that, for all practical purposes, the True Self is dysfunctional and useless. In treating the narcissist, the therapist often tries to construct and nurture a completely new healthy self, rather than build upon the distorted wreckage strewn across the narcissist’s psyche.

But what of the rare glimpses of True Self oft reported by those who interact with the narcissist?

Pathological narcissism is frequently comorbid with other disorders. The narcissistic spectrum is made up of gradations and shades of narcissism. Narcissistic traits or style or even personality (overlay) often attach to other disorders (co-morbidity). A person may well appear to be a full-fledged narcissist-may well appear to be suffering from the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)-but is not, in the strict, psychiatric, sense of the word. In such people, the True Self is still there and is sometimes observable.

In a full-fledged narcissist, the False Self imitates the True Self.

To do so artfully, it deploys two mechanisms.

## Re-Interpretation

It causes the narcissist to re-interpret certain emotions and reactions in a flattering, socially acceptable, light. The narcissist may, for instance, interpret fear as compassion. If the narcissist hurts someone he fears (e.g., an authority figure), he may feel bad afterwards and interpret his discomfort as empathy and compassion. To be afraid is humiliating-to be compassionate is commendable and earns the narcissist social commendation and understanding (narcissistic supply).

## Emulation

The narcissist is possessed of an uncanny ability to psychologically penetrate others. Often, this gift is abused and put at the service of the narcissist's control freakery and sadism. The narcissist uses it liberally to annihilate the natural defences of his victims by faking empathy.

This capacity is coupled with the narcissist's eerie ability to imitate emotions and their attendant behaviours (affect). The narcissist possesses "emotional resonance tables". He keeps records of every action and reaction, every utterance and consequence, every datum provided by others regarding their state of mind and emotional make-up. From these, he then constructs a set of formulas, which often result in impeccably accurate renditions of emotional behaviour. This can be enormously deceiving.

## Psychodynamic View

The narcissist's True Self is introverted and dysfunctional. In healthy people, Ego functions are generated from the inside, from the Ego. In narcissists, the Ego is dormant, comatose. The narcissist needs the input of and feedback from the outside world (from others) in order to perform the most basic Ego functions (e.g., "recognizing" of the world, setting boundaries, forming a self-definition or identity, differentiation, self-esteem, and regulating his sense of self-worth). This input or feedback is known as narcissistic supply". Only the False Self gets in touch with the world. The True Self is isolated, repressed, unconscious, a shadow.

The False Self is, therefore, a kind of "hive self" or "swarm self". It is a collage of reflections, a patchwork of outsourced information, tidbits garnered from the narcissist's interlocutors and laboriously cohered and assembled so as to uphold and buttress the narcissist's inflated, fantastic and grandiose self-image. This discontinuity accounts for the dissociative nature of pathological narcissism as well as for the narcissist's seeming inability to learn from the errors of his ways.

In healthy, normal people ego functions are strictly internal processes. In the narcissist, ego functions are imported from the surroundings, they are thoroughly external. Consequently, the narcissist often confuses his inner mental-psychological landscape with the outside world. He tends to fuse and merge his mind and his milieu. He regards significant others and sources of supply as mere extensions of himself and he appropriates them because they fulfil crucial internal roles and as a result, are perceived by him to be sheer internal objects, devoid of an objective, external and autonomous existence.

Forcing the narcissist's False Self to acknowledge and interact with his True Self is not only difficult but may also be counterproductive and dangerously destabilising. The narcissist's disorder is adaptive and functional, though rigid. The alternative to this (mal) adaptation would have been self-destructive (suicidal). This bottled up, self-directed venom is bound to resurface if the narcissist's various personality structures are coerced into making contact.

That a personality structure (such as the True Self) is in the unconscious does not automatically mean that it is conflict-generating, or that it is involved in conflict, or that it has the potential to provoke conflict. As long as the True Self and the False Self remain out of touch, conflict is excluded.

The False Self pretends to be the only self and denies the existence of a True Self. It is also extremely useful (adaptive). Rather than risking constant conflict, the narcissist opts for a solution of "disengagement".

The classical Ego, proposed by Freud, is partly conscious and partly preconscious and unconscious. The narcissist's Ego is completely submerged. The preconscious and conscious parts are detached from it by early traumas and form the False Ego.

The Superego in healthy people constantly compares the Ego to the Ego Ideal. The narcissist has a different psychodynamic. The narcissist's False Self serves as a buffer and as a shock absorber between the True Ego and the narcissist's sadistic, punishing, immature Superego. The narcissist aspires to become pure Ideal Ego.

The narcissist's Ego cannot develop because it is deprived of contact with the outside world and therefore, endures no growth-inducing conflict. The False Self is rigid. The result is that the narcissist is unable to respond and to adapt to threats, illnesses and to other life crises and circumstances. He is brittle and prone to be broken rather than bent by life's trials and tribulations.

The Ego remembers, evaluates, plans, responds to the world and acts in it and on it. It is the locus of the "executive functions" of the personality. It integrates the inner world with the outer world, the Id with the Superego. It acts under a "reality principle" rather than a "pleasure principle".

This means that the Ego is in charge of delaying gratification. It postpones pleasurable acts until they can be carried out both safely and successfully. The Ego is, therefore, in an ungrateful position. Unfulfilled desires produce unease and anxiety. Reckless fulfilment of desires is diametrically opposed to self-preservation. The Ego has to mediate these tensions.

In an effort to thwart anxiety, the Ego invents psychological defence mechanisms. On the one hand the Ego channels fundamental drives. It has to "speak their language". It must have a primitive, infantile, component. On the other hand, the Ego is in charge of negotiating with the outside world and of securing a realistic and optimal "bargains" for its "client", the Id. These intellectual and perceptual functions are supervised by the exceptionally strict court of the Superego.

Persons with a strong Ego can objectively comprehend both the world and themselves. In other words, they are possessed of insight. They are able to contemplate longer time spans, plan, forecast and schedule. They choose decisively among alternatives and follow their resolve. They are aware of the existence of their drives, but control them and channel them in socially acceptable ways. They resist pressures – social or otherwise. They choose their course and pursue it.

The weaker the Ego is, the more infantile and impulsive its owner, the more distorted his or her perception of self and reality. A weak Ego is incapable of productive work.

The narcissist is an even more extreme case. His Ego is non-existent. The narcissist has a fake, substitute Ego. This is why his energy is drained. He spends most of it on maintaining, protecting and preserving the warped, unrealistic images of his (False) Self and of his (fake) world. The narcissist is a person exhausted by his own absence.

The healthy Ego preserves some sense of continuity and consistency. It serves as a point of reference. It relates events of the past to actions at present and to plans for the future. It incorporates memory, anticipation, imagination and intellect. It defines where the individual ends and the world begins. Though not coextensive with the body or with the personality, it is a close approximation.

In the narcissistic condition, all these functions are relegated to the False Ego. Its halo of confabulation rubs off on all of them. The narcissist is bound to develop false memories, conjure up false fantasies, anticipate the unrealistic and work his intellect to justify them.

The falsity of the False Self is dual: Not only is it not “the real thing”—it also operates on false premises. It is a false and wrong gauge of the world. It falsely and inefficiently regulates the drives. It fails to thwart anxiety.

The False Self provides a false sense of continuity and of a “personal centre”. It weaves an enchanted and grandiose fable as a substitute to reality. The narcissist gravitates out of his self and into a plot, a narrative, a story. He continuously feels that he is a character in a film, a fraudulent invention, or a con artist to be momentarily exposed and summarily socially excluded.

Moreover, the narcissist cannot be consistent or coherent. His False Self is preoccupied with the pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissist has no boundaries because his Ego is not sufficiently defined or fully differentiated. The only constancy is the narcissist’s feelings of diffusion or annulment. This is especially true in life crises, when the False Ego ceases to function.

From the developmental point of view, all this is easily accounted for. The child reacts to stimuli, both internal and external. He cannot, however, control, alter, or anticipate them. Instead, he develops mechanisms to regulate the resulting tensions and anxieties.

The child’s pursuit of mastery of his environment is compulsive. He is obsessed with securing gratification. Any postponement of his actions and responses forces him to tolerate added tension and anxiety. It is very surprising that the child ultimately learns to separate stimulus and response and delay the latter. This miracle of expedient self-denial has to do with the development of intellectual skills, on the one hand and with the socialisation process, on the other hand.

The intellect is a representation of the world. Through it, the Ego examines reality vicariously without suffering the consequences of possible errors. The Ego uses the intellect to simulate various courses of action and their consequences and to decide how to achieve its ends and the attendant gratification.

The intellect is what allows the child to anticipate the world and what makes him believe in the accuracy and high probability of his predictions. It is through the intellect that the concepts of the “laws of nature” and “predictability through order” are introduced. Causality and consistency are all mediated through the intellect.

But the intellect is best served with an emotional complement. Our picture of the world and of our place in it emerges from experience, both cognitive and emotional. Socialisation has a verbal-communicative element but, decoupled from a strong emotional component, it remains a dead letter.

An example: The child is likely to learn from his parents and from other adults that the world is a predictable, law abiding place. However, if his Primary Objects (most importantly, his mother) behave in a capricious, discriminating, unpredictable, unlawful, abusive, or indifferent manner—it hurts and the conflict between cognition and emotion is powerful. It is bound to paralyse the Ego functions of the child.

The accumulation and retention of past events is a prerequisite for both thinking and judgement. Both are impaired if one’s personal history contradicts the content of the Superego and the lessons of the socialisation process. Narcissists are victims of such a glaring discrepancy: Between what adult figures in their lives preached - and their contradictory course of action.

Once victimised, the narcissist swore “no more”. He will do the victimizing now. And as a decoy, he presents to the world his False Self. But he falls prey to his own devices. Internally impoverished and undernourished, isolated and cushioned to the point of suffocation—the True Ego degenerates and decays. The narcissist wakes up one day to find that he is at the mercy of his False Self as much as his victims are.

Elsewhere (“The Stripped Ego”) I have dealt with the classical, Freudian, concept of the Ego. It is partly conscious, partly preconscious and unconscious. It operates on a “reality principle” (as opposed to the Id’s “pleasure principle”). It maintains an inner equilibrium between the onerous (and unrealistic, or ideal) demands of the Superego and the almost irresistible (and unrealistic) drives of the Id. It also has to fend off the unfavourable consequences of comparisons between itself and the Ego Ideal (comparisons that the Superego is only too eager to make). In many respects, therefore, the Ego in Freudian psychoanalysis is the Self. Not so in Jungian psychology [1-24].

“Complexes are psychic fragments which have split off owing to traumatic influences or certain incompatible tendencies. As the association experiments prove, complexes interfere with the intentions of the will and disturb the conscious performance; they produce disturbances of memory and blockages in the flow of associations; they appear and disappear according to their own laws; they can temporarily obsess consciousness, or influence speech and action in an unconscious way. In a word, complexes behave like independent beings, a fact especially evident in abnormal states of mind. In the voices heard by the insane they even take on a personal ego-character like that of the spirits who manifest themselves through automatic writing and similar techniques.”

### And further

“I use the term ‘individuation’ to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological ‘in-dividual,’ that is, a separate, indivisible unity or ‘whole’.”

“Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being and in so far as ‘individuality’ embraces our innermost, last and incomparable uniqueness, also implies becoming one’s own self. We could, therefore, translate individuation as ‘coming to selfhood’ or ‘self-realisation’.”

“But again and again I note that the individuation process is confused with the coming of the Ego into consciousness and that the Ego is in consequence identified with the self, which naturally produces a hopeless conceptual muddle. Individuation is then nothing but

egocentredness and autoeroticism. But the self comprises infinitely more than a mere Ego... It is as much one's self and all other selves, as the Ego. Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to oneself."

To Jung, the self is an archetype, THE archetype. It is the archetype of order as manifested in the totality of the personality and as symbolised by a circle, a square, or the famous quaternity. Sometimes, Jung uses other symbols: The child, the mandala, etc.

"The self is a quantity that is supraordinate to the conscious Ego. It embraces not only the conscious but also the unconscious psyche and is therefore, so to speak, a personality, which we also are.... There is little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self."

"The self is not only the centre but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the Ego is the centre of consciousness."

"The self is our life's goal, for it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality..."

Jung postulated the existence of two "personalities" (actually, two selves), one of them being the Shadow. Technically, the Shadow is a part (though an inferior part) of the overarching personality (one's chosen conscious attitude).

### The Shadow develops thus

Inevitably, some personal and collective psychic elements are found wanting or incompatible with one's personality (narrative). Their expression is suppressed and they coalesce into an almost autonomous "splinter personality".

This second personality is contrarian: It negates the official, chosen, personality, though it is totally relegated to the unconscious. Jung believes, therefore, in a system of "checks and balances": The Shadow balances the Ego (consciousness). This is not necessarily negative. The behavioural and attitudinal compensation offered by the Shadow can be positive.

### Jung

"The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly—for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies."

"The shadow is that hidden, repressed, for the most part inferior and guilt-laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors and so comprise the whole historical aspect of the unconscious... If it has been believed hitherto that the human shadow was the source of all evil, it can now be ascertained on closer investigation that the unconscious man, that is, his shadow, does not consist only of morally reprehensible tendencies, but also displays a number of good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic insights, creative impulses, etc." (Ibid.)

It would seem fair to conclude that there is a close affinity between the complexes (split-off materials) and the Shadow.

Perhaps the complexes (also the result of incompatibility with the conscious personality) are the negative part of the Shadow. Perhaps they just reside in it, on closely collaborate with it, in a feedback mechanism. Perhaps whenever the Shadow manifests itself in a manner obstructive, destructive or disruptive to the Ego—we call it a complex. They may really be one and the same, the result of a massive split-off of material and its relegation to the realm of the unconscious.

This is part and parcel of the individuation-separation phase of our early childhood development. Prior to this phase, the infant begins to differentiate between self and everything that is not self. He tentatively explores the world and these excursions bring about a differentiated worldview.

The child begins to form and store images of his self and of the World (initially, of the Primary Object in his life, normally his mother). These images are distinct. To the infant, this is revolutionary stuff, nothing short of a breakdown of an erstwhile unitary universe and its substitution with fragmented, unconnected, entities. It is traumatic.

Moreover, these images in themselves are split. The child has separate images of a "good" mother and a "bad" mother, respectively associated with the gratification of his needs and desires and with their frustration. He also constructs separate images of a "good" self and a "bad" self, linked to the ensuing states of being gratified (by the "good" mother) and being frustrated (by the "bad" mother).

At this stage, the child is unable to see that people are both good and bad (that an entity with a single identity can both gratify and frustrate). He derives his own sense of being good or bad from the outside. The "good" mother inevitably and invariably leads to a "good", satisfied, self and the "bad", frustrating mother always generates the "bad", frustrated, self.

But the image of the "bad" mother is very threatening. It is anxiety provoking. The child is afraid that, if it is found out by his mother, she will abandon him. Moreover, the "bad" mother is a forbidden subject of negative feelings (one must not think about mother in bad terms!).

Thus, the child splits the bad images off and uses them to form a separate collage of "bad objects". This process is called "object splitting". It is the most primitive defence mechanism. When still used by adults it is an indication of pathology.

This is followed by the phases of "separation" and "individuation" (18-36 months). The child no longer splits his objects (bad objects to one, repressed side and good objects to another, conscious, side). He learns to relate to objects (people) as integrated wholes, with the "good" and the "bad" aspects coalesced. An integrated self-concept inevitably follows.

The child internalises the mother (he memorises her roles). He becomes his own parent (mother) and performs her functions by himself. He acquires "object constancy" (he learns that the existence of objects does not depend on his presence or on his vigilance). Mother always comes back to him after she disappears from sight. A major reduction in anxiety follows and this permits the child to dedicate his energy to the development of stable, consistent, and independent senses of self and introjects (internalized images) of others.

This is the juncture at which personality disorders form. Between the ages of 15 months and 22 months, a sub-phase in this stage of separation-individuation is known as "rapprochement".

The child, at this stage, is exploring the world. This is a terrifying and anxiety-inducing process. The child needs to know that he is protected, that he is doing the right thing and that he is gaining the approval of his mother. The child periodically returns to his mother for reassurance, affirmation, and admiration, as if making sure that his mother endorses his newfound autonomy and independence and accepts his separate individuality.

When the mother is immature, narcissistic, or suffers from a mental pathology, she withholds from the child what he needs: Approval, admiration, and reassurance. She feels threatened by his independence. She feels that she is losing him. She does not let go sufficiently. She smothers him with over-protection and indulgence. She offers him overpowering emotional incentives to remain “mother-bound”, dependent, undeveloped, a part of a mother-child symbiotic dyad.

The child, in turn, develops mortal fears of being abandoned, of losing his mother’s love and support. His unspoken dilemma is: To become independent and lose mother-or to retain mother and never have a self?

The child is enraged (because he is frustrated in his quest for his self). He is anxious (fearful of losing mother), he feels guilty (for being angry at mother), he is attracted and repelled. In short, he is in a chaotic state of mind. Whereas healthy people experience such eroding dilemmas now and then-to the personality disordered they are a constant, characteristic emotional state.

To defend himself against this intolerable vortex of emotions, the child keeps them out of his consciousness. The “bad” mother and the “bad” self plus all the negative feelings of abandonment, anxiety and rage-are “split-off”.

But the child’s over-reliance on this primitive defence mechanism obstructs his orderly development: He fails to integrate the split images. The Bad parts are so laden with negative emotions that they remain virtually untouched throughout life (in the Shadow, as complexes). It proves impossible to integrate such explosive material with the more benign Good parts.

Thus, the adult remains fixated at this earlier stage of development. He is unable to integrate and to see people as whole objects. They are either all “good” or all “bad” (idealisation and devaluation cycles). He is terrified (unconsciously) of abandonment, actually feels abandoned, or under threat of being abandoned and subtly plays it out in his/her interpersonal relationships.

Is the reintroduction of split-off material in any way helpful? Is it likely to lead to an integrated Ego (or self)? To ask this is to confuse two issues. With the exception of schizophrenics and some types of psychotics, the Ego (or self) is always integrated. That the patient cannot integrate the images of objects, both libidinal and non-libidinal, does not mean that he has a non-integrated or a disintegrative Ego.

The inability to integrate the world (as is the case in the Borderline or in the Narcissistic Personality Disorders) relates to the patient’s choice of defence mechanisms. It is a secondary layer. The crux of the matter is not what state the self is in (integrated or not)-but what is the state of one’s perception of the self.

Thus, from the theoretical point of view, the reintroduction of split-off material does nothing to “increase” the Ego’s integration.

This is especially true if we adopt the Freudian concept of the Ego as inclusive of all split-off material.

But does the transfer of the split-off material from one part of the Ego (the unconscious) to another (the conscious) in any way affect the integration of the Ego?

Confronting split-off, repressed material is still an important part of many psychodynamic therapies. It has been shown to reduce anxiety, cure conversion symptoms and generally, have a beneficial and therapeutic effect on the individual. Yet, this has nothing to do with integration. It has to do with conflict resolution.

That various parts of the personality are in constant conflict is an integral principle of all psychodynamic theories. Dredging split-off material to our consciousness reduces the scope or the intensity of these conflicts. This is so by definition: Split-off material introduced to consciousness is no longer split-off material and therefore, can no longer participate in the “war” raging in the unconscious.

But is it always recommended? Not in my view.

## Consider Personality Disorders

Personality disorders are adaptive solutions in the given circumstances. It is true that, as circumstances change, these “solutions” prove to be rigid straitjackets, maladaptive rather than adaptive. But the patient has no coping substitutes available. No therapy can provide him with such a substitutes because the whole personality is affected by the ensuing pathology, not just an aspect or an element of it.

Bringing up split-off material may constrain or even eliminate the patient’s personality disorder. And then what? How is the patient supposed to cope with the world then, a world that has suddenly reverted to being hostile, abandoning, capricious, whimsical, cruel and devouring-just like it was in his infancy, before he stumbled across the magic of splitting?

## A Life Disowned

The narcissist experience his own life as a prolonged, incomprehensible, unpredictable, frequently terrifying and deeply saddening nightmare. This is a result of the functional dichotomy-fostered by the narcissist himself-between his False Self and his True Self. The latter-the fossilised ashes of the original, immature, personality-is the one that does the experiencing.

The False Self is nothing but a concoction, a figment of the narcissist’s disorder, a reflection in the narcissist’s hall of mirrors. It is incapable of feeling, or experiencing. Yet, it is fully the master of the psychodynamic processes which rage within the narcissist’s psyche.

This inner battle is so fierce that the True Self experiences it as a diffuse, though imminent and eminently ominous, threat. Anxiety ensues and the narcissist finds himself constantly ready for the next blow. He does things and he knows not why or wherefrom. He says things, acts and behaves in ways, which, he knows, endanger him and put him in line for punishment.

The narcissist hurts people around him, or breaks the law, or violates accepted morality. He knows that he is in the wrong and feels ill at ease on the rare moments that he does feel. He wants to stop but knows not how. Gradually, he is estranged from himself, possessed by

some kind of demon, a puppet on invisible, mental strings. He resents this feeling, he wants to rebel, he is repelled by this part in him with which he is not acquainted. In his efforts to exorcise this devil from his soul, he dissociates.

An eerie sensation sets in and pervades the psyche of the narcissist. At times of crisis, of danger, of depression, of failure and of narcissistic injury-the narcissist feels that he is watching himself from the outside. This is not an out-of-body experience. The narcissist does not really “exit” his body. It is just that he assumes, involuntarily, the position of a spectator, a polite observer mildly interested in the whereabouts of one, Mr. Narcissist.

It is akin to watching a movie, the illusion is not complete, neither is it precise. This detachment continues for as long as the narcissist’s ego-dystonic behaviour persists, for as long as the crisis goes on, for as long as the narcissist cannot face who he is, what he is doing and the consequences of his actions.

Since this is the case most of the time, the narcissist gets used to seeing himself in the role of the protagonist (usually the hero) of a motion picture or of a novel. It also sits well with his grandiosity and fantasies. Sometimes, he talks about himself in the third person singular. Sometimes he calls his “other”, narcissistic, self by a different name.

He describes his life, its events, ups and downs, pains, elation and disappointments in the most remote, “professional” and coldly analytical voice, as though describing (though with a modicum of involvement) the life of some exotic insect (echoes of Kafka’s “Metamorphosis”).

The metaphor of “life as a movie”, gaining control by “writing a scenario” or by “inventing a narrative” is, therefore, not a modern invention. Cavemen narcissists have, probably, done the same. But this is only the external, superficial, facet of the disorder.

The crux of the problem is that the narcissist really feels this way. He actually experiences his life as belonging to someone else, his body as dead weight (or as an instrument in the service of some entity), his deeds as a-moral and not immoral (he cannot be judged for something he didn’t do now, can he?).

As time passes, the narcissist accumulates a mountain of mishaps, conflicts unresolved, pains well hidden, abrupt separations and bitter disappointments. He is subjected to a constant barrage of social criticism and condemnation. He is ashamed and fearful. He knows that something is wrong but there is no correlation between his cognition and his emotions.

He prefers to run away and hide, as he did when he was a child. Only this time he hides behind another self, a false one. People reflect to him this mask of his creation, until even he believes its very existence and acknowledges its dominance, until he forgets the truth and knows no better. The narcissist is only dimly aware of the decisive battle, which rages inside him. He feels threatened, very sad and suicidal-but there seems to be no outside cause of all this and it makes it even more mysteriously menacing.

This dissonance, these negative emotions, these nagging anxieties, transform the narcissist’s “motion picture” solution into a permanent one. It becomes a feature of the narcissist’s life. Whenever confronted

by an emotional threat or by an existential one-he retreats into this haven, this mode of coping.

He relegates responsibility, submissively assuming a passive role. He who is not responsible cannot be punished – runs the subtext of this capitulation. The narcissist is thus conditioned to annihilate himself-both in order to avoid (emotional) pain and to bask in the glow of his impossibly grandiose fantasies.

This he does with fanatic zeal and with efficacy. Prospectively, he assigns his very life (decisions to be made, judgements to be passed, agreements to be reached) to the False Self. Retroactively, he re-interprets his past life in a manner consistent with the current needs of the False Self.

It is no wonder that there is no connection between what the narcissist did feel in a given period in his life, or in relation to a specific event-and the way he sees or remembers these later on. He may describe certain occurrences or phases in his life as “tedious, painful, sad and burdening”-even though he experienced them entirely differently at the time.

The same retroactive colouring occurs with regards to people. The narcissist completely distorts the way he regarded certain people and felt about them. This re-writing of his personal history is aimed to directly and fully accommodate the requirements of his False Self.

In sum, the narcissist does not occupy his own soul, nor does he inhabit his own body. He is the servant of an apparition, of a reflection, of an Ego function. To please and appease his Master, the narcissist sacrifices to it his very life. From that moment onwards, the narcissist lives vicariously, through the good offices of the False Self. Throughout, the narcissist feels detached, alienated and estranged from his (False) Self. He constantly harbours the sensation that he is watching a movie with a plot over which he has little control. It is with a certain interest- even fascination-that he does the watching. Still, it is mere, passive observation.

Thus, not only does the narcissist relinquish control of his future life (the movie)-he gradually loses ground to the False Self in the battle to preserve the integrity and genuineness of his past experiences. Eroded by these two processes, the narcissist gradually disappears and is replaced by his disorder to the fullest extent.

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