



## On an Ego without "Ego" - The Psychology of Krishnamurti

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### Summary

The purpose of this is to clarify an apparent contradiction. How can there be an ego without an egoic core? The answer Krishnamurti gives is that the ego without 'ego' is a silent state where the conflict and separation between the observer and the observed is absent. Absence of conflict also means absence of time. This finding raises the next reasonable question. How can virtue, beauty and love being timeless become attainable in space-time? With awareness that is instantaneous, the Indian thinker will "teach" us. Krishnamurti was influenced by the ancient thinkers mainly of the 6th BC. century and in turn inspired important contemporaries, including systemic therapists.

### Keywords

Conflict, division, time, order, difference, awareness, harmony of opposites, opposition, death of memory, union of observer and observed, circular causality, semantic polarity, self, ego

### Introduction

Jidu Krishnamurti (May 11, 1895 – February 17, 1986) was an American-Indian intellectual and poet. He was born in Madanapal, India. Orphaned by his mother, he was adopted by Annie Besant, president of the Theosophical Society, as the president regarded him as a world teacher. He made many trips to Europe and America and in 1969 took over as director of the institution that bears



his name in California. He did not consider himself to belong to any nationality, creed or caste and taught until his death in 1986.

To speak of Jiddu Krishnamurti is a heretical act par excellence, as he himself left a unique testament, not to be understood as a "teacher" or "authority" and therefore his work not to be considered a "teaching". He did not want to leave descendants. Already from early youth, he renounced the position destined for him as the next leader of the Theosophical Society. He devoted his whole life to speaking around the world and to meditation, as he understood it, and not as taught from a position of power by various - enlightened and not so much so - gurus of the East.

Allow me, however, to make a comparative reference to some central concepts of his discourse, to influences that he received and in turn bequeathed. Among other things, it is interesting to see the parallels between Krishnamurti's psychology and the modern movements of systemic psychotherapy. What is listed here in accordance with the preface should not be understood as a "commentary on his teaching" and the content of the text reflects strictly personal opinions, for which I take full responsibility.

### Literature review

I admit that if Socrates called Heraclitus' book "On Nature" a text for mighty swimmers, the concept of an "Ego" without an "Ego" surprised me, not to mention alienated me. The reason is twofold.

I consider it obvious that the reader of the present work is familiar with the Freudian concept of the ego, as a balancer between the value system of the superego and the impulses of the id. Without power, the ego is crushed between these millstones and the mental body suffers. The ego is the conscious center of decision-making, the center of choices, the center of the whole self, regardless of whether the self is perceived as a solid and uniform entity, a core called upon to assimilate the individual subpersonalities, which come to light by the conclusion of relationships (Assagioli) or a formation of incoherent and disconnected relationships, without internal coherence and stability, the result of contradictory social dynamics (Gergen).

The second reason has to do with metaphysical considerations. Briefly, in the Proclonian Progress (incarnation) beings leave the Stay, i.e. a state of unity in the divine, and incarnate as an ego, endowed with an initial information, which they are called to explore in the physical world. Then enriched with new information they return to the original state, as a feedback carrier of the divine creative imagination. And, still, according to Proclus, the egos aim to structure and realize their personality in order to preserve the memory of their being in the next incarnation.

At this point it may prove useful albeit bold to draw an analogy with modern conceptions of the self.

Henry James (1890) famously distinguishes between the Ego or 'self as knower' and the Me or 'self as known'. Hermans and Konopka refer to Marcuso and Sarbin (1983, 1986), who place this distinction in a narrative context. Thus "Ego" turns into a writer and "Me" into an actor. The



author-ego imagines a story in the future, reflects on the past, and finally tells the story about Me as the protagonist.

Would it be tantamount to taking a very big risk to claim that the En, the Unit, the Divine, or whatever undertakes to imagine the creation and evolution of the World, in which the individual selves-actors, the Egos' main role, according to Proclus, is to provide feedback to the Self-knower with information about the progress of the Project? And as the author-self, the Unit exists in living nature only through the protagonists, therefore not subject to determinism.

I had, therefore, thus nurtured, a difficult riddle to solve. The path to this destination passes through a second concept, time or the timeless. Therefore, a digression is necessary.

Krishnamurti's entire work moves in the timeless. No virtue, love, peace, meditation etc. can be achieved within time.

This is the first key finding. The Cosmos, the entire created Universe, is born simultaneously and moves through space-time. In this field, however, other laws prevail, the main one of which is the struggle of opposites and contradictions.

"War father of all," claims Heraclitus. As also: "Opposites have a single direction - from opposites the most beautiful harmony is born." Incidentally, Krishnamurti had a high regard for the Ephesian philosopher.

The dialectic of opposites is creative. For example, a child is born from the union of a man and a woman. Then the dyad becomes a trinity. (A comparison with Pythagorean numerology would be interesting, but would be beyond the scope of this paper).

In today's terms, the opposites must be perceived as two mutually fertilizing, different and not conflicting elements.

I will give, in a very simplified way, some more examples: The creation of the universe came from the union of spirit and matter, or by analogy, mind and body give birth to the soul, and thus the triune man exists. In turn, according to Plato, the soul is also tripartite (rational, emotional and volitional), acting as a mediator between mind and body. The connection of the left and right cerebral hemispheres enables the richness and complexity of human functioning. Jay Lombard states that the left hemisphere of the brain evaluates relationships in terms of their usefulness to us. At the same time, the right hemisphere perceives individual existence as part of a much larger and interdependent landscape.

Contradictions, however, lead to conflict and division until one prevails over the other. According to Aristotle, light and darkness are the opposites that define the ends of the transparent element. One does not fertilize the other.

The concept of conflict as a generative factor of anxiety occupies a central position in Freud's theory of the ego. Canadian psychiatrist Eric Berne also in the mid-20th century created the theory of transactional analysis as a way of explaining human behavior. Berne believed that therapists' insight could be enhanced by analyzing patients' social transactions. According to Berne, the human soul is also threefold: Adult (ego), parent (superego) and child (id). And in this approach, the transaction of two people from the position of the Adult mitigates misunderstandings and conflicts.



Contemporary theorist and therapist Valeria Ugazio examines phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, eating disorders, and depression in the context of the family, using an intersubjective approach to personality. Its basic idea is that of semantic polarity.

Semantic polarity brings conflict and division. In depression, for example, the person is torn between a sense of belonging and isolation, a sense of grandeur and decrepitude, to name just a few polarities.

Polarity should be replaced by the concept of difference, introduced by Gregory Bateson. And how is difference defined? Starting from Korzybski's claim that the map is not the place, Bateson concludes that, in contrast to the positive sciences, where everything is defined by forces and actions, in the world of communication and organization "consequences" are caused by differences, i.e. from "things" that belong to the place and can be registered on the map.

Thus, if the concept of difference is exploited, the individual can synthesize the various aspects of his personality and avoid division (Manolis Tsagarakis).

This understanding comes to replace the now outdated Hegelian dialectic: thesis and antithesis lead to synthesis. Very useful for this purpose is to avoid, when referring to mental phenomena, the use of the contrastive conjunction "but" and to replace it with the adverbial conjunction "and".

Example: "When I am with my friends I am happy and at work, I am stressed", instead of the divisive and torturous "why am I happy when I am with my friends, but stressed when I am at work"?

Returning to Krishnamurti, virtue is order emerging from dis-order. A prerequisite is to learn the whole nature and structure of dis-order. In division and conflict, which is the consequence of fear of sorrow and anger, of every kind of ambition, desire etc., lies the beginning of dis-order. And virtue is not the result of division. Order means beauty.

Where effort is needed, there is a conflict between the subject and the intended. Effort means struggle and friction. The beauty of order or the order of beauty is not achieved by struggling but by awareness that leads to instant action, transformation and change.

And order can only exist when there is complete denial of the self, when the "Ego" has no meaning.

How is this to be understood?

Krishnamurti asserts that the mind in meditation is silent.

This position of his does not correspond to the usual meditation practices, as practiced today and in the West, where the goal is either the repetition of a mantra (a short sequence of words) or the cessation of thought through concentration and monitoring of the breath.

The edict of silence indicates the absence of internal dialogue. Internal dialogue in turn presupposes the existence of different opposing voices, whether it is between internal positions of the self, between internal and internalized external positions, and between external positions of the self (Hermans), and the conflict that this entails, at least as much as Krishnamurti realizes.



I do not think that Krishnamurti's request for silence refers to the length of time. Such a thing would be impossible. I am convinced that the great Indian means periods of time or limited periods of time. Isn't it the same with happiness?

After all, Hermans, with the idea of the dialogic self, intended to describe the smoothest possible transition from the inside of man to the social becoming and vice versa, which would also mean the radical mitigation of the conflict.

As Bateson perceives the mind as an entity that is not limited to the human brain but instead includes the ever-present context or environment in which the person moves (let us recall for a moment the image of the blind man wandering in a forest with his stick. His mind inhabits the total Whole), so Hermans considers the dialogic self as extended. The idea of the dialogical self places the external world (the natural environment and society) within the individual and vice versa. The other exists not only externally but also as an internalized voice or position of the external other. The issue is for the dialogue to be equal and polyphonic, which means that certain voices do not dominate over others, which necessarily in this case will be weakened. In the first case, the extended self becomes more dialogical and functional; in the second case, it becomes monologic and one-sided.

For Krishnamurti, a sufficient and necessary condition for silence is the elimination of the separation between observer and observed, If the observer, who in modern man has the characteristics of an internal stern judge (imagine for just a moment a situation in which only the voice, the monologue of the stern prosecutor, and the absence of a defense attorney and a lenient judge is heard), disappears, then he identifies with the object of his observation and finally unity with the physical and social environment is achieved; peace and silence. And this becomes possible because the Ego-actor, as mentioned above, is undivided from the Ego-writer, both being in a silent connection, exactly as the Ego-actor is guiding the ego (here seen from the view of psychology). Philosophically the Ego-actor does not possess an "ego". Krishnamurti invites us to impose silence to our daily ego, so that it can be brought in unity with the Ego-actor and the Ego-writer.

Another view of silence was introduced by the mystic Dimitrios Semelas in the early 20th century through his idea of single-ideal meditation, that is, examining a single thought from all its possible angles. Contrary to the usual state of the mind, which like a monkey jumps from thought to thought, here the mind remains focused and therefore silent.

If we again bring to mind the systemic theory from radical constructivism onwards, we will automatically find a truly wonderful analogy. The therapist ceases to be considered outside, opposite or otherwise as opposed to the system, being but a part of it. This is an analogy because the therapist even as part of the system does not cease to hold his position, his feelings and his inner dialogue. The position of not knowing takes a further step in Krishnamurti's direction, as the therapist is left to be guided by the client. But it is still not an identification. That would be disastrous for both sides. After all, the goals are different.

Krishnamurti, whose speech is one of self-awareness rather than didactic or therapeutic, trying to clarify the death of the ego, questions whether the observer (the ego) is different from the object of his observation (Nature-Divine Unity). He gives the example of an angry man. As long as the person confronts his anger, which means that he denies it or attributes it to factors outside of



himself, the division and consequently the anger is maintained, or even flare up. If the person ceases to separate from his anger, i.e. accepts it, he becomes his anger and eventually the anger instantly disappears.

Here I think it is appropriate to interject a story from Zen. Once, two monks after a long absence decided to return to their monastery. At a river, they encountered a young woman who implored them to help her cross to the other side. The first monk willingly carried her across and then they continued on their way. After several hours, the second monk asked disapprovingly: "Brother, don't you know it is a sin to touch a woman"? Then the first replied disarmingly: "I carried her on my back until we crossed the river. But you still carry her inside you!"

Fritz Perls is known as the founder of Gestalt psychotherapy, which is based on experience and observation, seeks to teach man to become the center of a productive creative life and to use his innate abilities to the fullest. As Despo Kovaïou notes in her preface to Fritz Perls' book, "The Gestalt Approach," Gestalt therapy provides a philosophy, a view of life, and above all, a practice of constant awareness of what is happening moment by moment within and around us.

Thus, Fritz Perls practiced his innovative approach to dream analysis, if for example the patient had seen a train in his dream, he urged him to "become the train".

Thus, in Krishnamurti's terms, Perls moved towards bridging the gap between the "observer" and the "observed."

Taking all of the above into account the idea of an ego without an "ego" can be understood.

As I said all of Krishnamurti's speech refers to the timeless. But how is it possible to approach the timeless in the given and inevitable framework of space-time?

The first consequence is not to treat Krishnamurti's discourse as a closed and strict philosophical system, with rules and principles, which must comply with (Jewish Christianity) or cultivated (Confucianism) reverently and inexorably. Because such a thing would mean effort, struggle, expectation for development. And evolution can only be conceived in time.

What Krishnamurti is talking about is an Art. And like any art, it cannot be taught. It is important to learn from our own observation - always in unity with the object of our observation - to be self-illuminated.

The arrow of physical time cannot be stopped. Doing so would violate the second law of thermodynamics. Psychological time, however, is established in memory. Krishnamurti invites us to the death of the ego, which means erasing memory, beliefs, prejudices, desires (not knowing position). Thus the Timeless or in other words the connection with the Ego-writer can be achieved.

And this, may either be a trauma or a happy moment. Attachment or repulsion of trauma causes pain and unhappiness, nostalgia for the past keeps us captive in the past time and above all closes our horizon to happier and stronger experiences. Projecting goals and desires into the future creates fear, which always accompanies the unknown.

Here let me quote a relevant passage from "The Art of Meditation" verbatim.

"Truth [...] is not an experience and that's the beauty of it; because it's always new, it's never something that happened yesterday."



The Swiss thinker Manuel Schoch, influenced by one of the most important mystics and founder of the Classical Indian school of yoga, Patanjali, develops a similar reflection. He suggests that we move neither in the past, nor in the future, nor of course in the now. Simply because the now does not exist, it is an illusion because the brain gives the sense of continuity. And this continuity concerns not only time but also the perception of "ego". Schoch introduces the concept of pre-future, that is, a fraction of time after now.

The now is actually the pre-future. It is precisely in this pre-future that the process of memory is based.

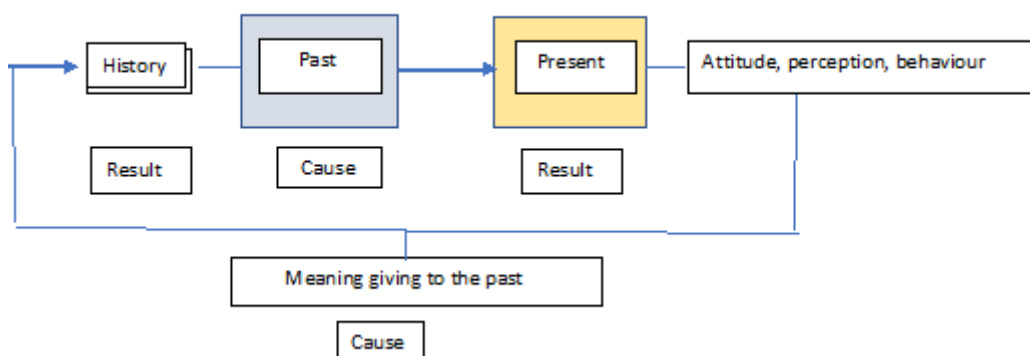
This is an extremely interesting claim. We usually associate memory with the past time, and this is because the now in the next moment will be the past, a bottomless reservoir of memory accumulation. But if memory is established in the pre-future, it follows that one of Krishnamurti's basic demands, the erasure of memory, would be possible, since this pre-future is a fraction of time. So let's let this moment, this sub-multiple of the unit of time, and the mnemonic entries it carries, go. Let's trust the cellular memory, which, like a neuronal kidney, will separate the important from the unnecessary.

The final hurdle to overcome is overcoming the illusion of psychological time continuity, which arises from the brain's need to bridge the gaps. And how is the gap filled? With thoughts, anxiety, desires, projections. Inevitably we come back to the need for a mind that is as silent as possible.

Schoch, in his book "Gifts Heal," quotes verbatim from Patanjali's sutras. Therefore, I do not consider it necessary to paraphrase.

"When there is a single mind, when there is only one thought, then, at that moment, past and future are the same thing. When there is awareness, without words, past and future melt into each other."

In order to understand Schoch's thought, we must focus on his basic postulate, that the present (and consequently the future) affects the past. This is initially strange, as we are familiar with linear causality. But if we remind ourselves of circular causation, as we now understand it, and apply it to the feedback circuit below,







where then, now, which constantly affects the past, and the past are the same thing, all that remains is this minimal movement forward, into what Schoch calls the pre-future.

This movement is quite different from a giant leap into the future, in which desires are usually projected. Worrying about the future causes fear.

The pre-future is not a thought process. The pre-future occurs through awareness and therefore does not cause fear. If we do not dwell on the past, then we do not build a false structure of "cause and effect" (linear causality).

We will close this section with Patanjali's assertion that meditation is the art through which we can see that as long as our personality is based solely on time, and this will continue to be the case as long as we analyze the past, our gifts will never be possible to activate.

A final brief reference to a third factor, so as to make it fully clear that Krishnamurti has in mind not reality but its momentary transcendence, would be helpful. And this is the distinction between truth, reality and actuality.

Michel Foucault claims that "truth" is a derivative of the power structures that prevail in each historical period and is perceived differently in each linguistic community that recognizes and shares its validity. This is the dominant view of "truth" in the post-modern, post-structural philosophical school of thought.

For Krishnamurti, reality (from the Latin root *res* = thing) includes all the results of thought, even illusions, as they can have consequences if acted upon.

Throughout time, cultures have searched for "truth" philosophically or theologically, in order to live within it. In their effort to reveal the truth, they worked, used and finally projected forms, symbols, images and imaginations, the product of their minds or hands. So far, there is agreement with modern views.

Now, in order to avoid even the slightest misunderstanding, I am quoting Krishnamurti's definition of "truth" verbatim:

"Truth appears when your mind and heart have been cleansed of all sense of struggle and you are no longer trying to be someone; it is there when the mind is very quiet and listens ceaselessly to what is happening"

I have underlined the verb listen because if he said e.g. I know we would be involved again with Foucault's dialectic of knowledge and power. Also worth noting here is the etymology of the word truth ("alitheia") in Greek, from the negative *a* and the verb "lanthano", which means something escapes my attention.

And Krishnamurti continues by saying that "what really exists and what really happens is actuality".

I will close with the remark of Nikos Pilavios, official translator of the Krishnamurti Library in Athens, that the essential present comes from the ancient Greek *ypar*, that is: alert, indeed, indeed, truly.





## Conclusion

The key to understanding Krishnamurti (always according to my reading, which may be wrong) is to study, understand, realize the synergy and coupling between the concepts. One is intertwined with the other. Example: to understand silence we invoke the timeless and eternal. To understand the unity of beings we are led to the negation of "ego" and vice versa.

And this should be done in proportion to the therapeutic session. Are we not inviting the client to test certain skills there? So let us proceed, "trying to apply" the demands or virtue, if you will, that Krishnamurti handed down to us as we study him. By approaching his word with love and tenderness, in complete silence and swiftness, and "united" with the text, which does not mean with blind obedience but with critical thinking, which means with an open, innocent mind and with trust. Then, always in laboratory conditions or in the protected and free condition of focused study, we will experience, even if only for a while, uplifting, peace and beauty. Then comes real life.

As Bateson (1972) wrote "...An idea is a difference that makes a difference..."

This is how we open the door to awareness, as Krishnamurti calls for. Then there will be no more needed. The "new" life is ready to welcome us.

So hard and so simple.

## Epilogue

To whom is Krishnamurti's speech addressed?

In principle, to all who are ready to listen to him regardless of age, gender, nationality, religious, political or sexual preferences.

What does the Krishnamurti scholar stand to gain?

What else but Socratic questions, curiosity and, according to Gianfranco Cecchin, irreverence, beauty and serenity.

And additionally a steep but far-working path on the lifelong path to self-knowledge wisdom and enlightenment.

It goes without saying that simply reading a book is not enough. Critical thinking and research is required. And of course as with any book, each time we read it, we discover new levels of understanding. And while in the interim our minds subconsciously process Krishnamurti's ideas, each reading equals death and rebirth. It is like reading a new book.

Because according to Bateson "difference" seen in time equals change.

Many will be quick to say that Krishnamurti's speech is a utopia. I want to respond to this claim in three ways.

- a) All great visions are utopian. In these I include Plato's State, Giacomo Campanella's City of the Sun, communism and the free state (anarchy) that lives in small self-organized



communities. The no land, that is, the asymptotic path of union with higher categories, God or universal wisdom, however you want to express it, as well as the dream, yet they always strengthen our mood to fight for a better world.

- b)** How utopian an idea appears to us depends on the starting point. Something that appears relatively easy to someone, for example the idea of Hermans dialogical self, can be considered unattainable and insurmountable by another.

And to express it with some amazing verses of Odysseus Elytis from "The Little Mariner":

"And Poetry is always one as the sky is one.

The question is where one sees the sky.

I have seen him from the middle of the sea."

- c)** Man differs from other animals because he is aware of his death, his cerebral hemispheres and limbs are connected in a cross arrangement, because he has an individual spirit, and finally because he is endowed with free will.

If man decides to activate his will, everything is possible (Roberto Assagioli).

If a criticism could be made - and this is not directed at Krishnamurti himself, who at every opportunity emphasized that he is not an authority nor is his discourse a closed philosophical system - it is that many people, instead of healing whatever their issues are with psychotherapeutic methods, they resort to "authorities" i.e. gurus and follow them blindly.

Years ago I was visited by a client in a higher governmental position who was in an open delirious psychosis. When I urged him to also see a psychiatrist, he refused and discontinued treatment. This man trusted a "guru".

In any case Krishnamurti is considered by many to be one of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century and a worthy successor to Pythagoras in Lower Italy, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Lao Tzu as well as of Socrates that he so admired.



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