

- a) Faith in human nature - the belief that human beings are basically good and trustworthy.
- b) Belief that people have some power over their own lives, rather than being controlled by the environment, or luck.
- c) Desire to think for oneself, rather than accepting the opinions of others as to what is right.
- d) Belief in the validity of the experiences and opinions of others - they have a right to be different. High tolerance and low dogmatism.
- e) Belief that the rights of other people are to be respected, just because they are human beings.

References

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 6. Rogers, Carl '*Encounter Groups*' Harper & Row 1970 p.5.
 7. Biddle, William W. *The Community Development Process: The rediscovery of local initiative* Rinehart & Winston 1965.
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The Reality of the Other Person

The ability to see through things, which Nietzsche called 'the art of mistrust,' has always been a normal function of intelligence, even among primitive people, because we usually can't see people at all unless we are able to penetrate their disguises.

One of the ways of getting to know a person (though not very well) is through analysis and the integration of particular things about her, studying what behaviourists call the 'psychological events' - i.e. what is observable.

You listen to a person's words, but you also study the way a person moves, smiles, frowns and so on, the non-verbal language which is often more reliable than words. Words say one thing; the body may say something quite different. A person says 'I'm all right' when the shoulders are hunched, the body is sagging and the eyes look sad

A person may be afraid of the other's look. She's afraid of rejection. So she rejects herself. If you're 'not there', no-one can reject you because there's nothing to reject.

It may be more true to say that a person is what she hides than to say, as many do, that she is what she does. In other words, a person is what she cannot bring herself to

say or feel. . . 'I cannot cry, I cannot laugh, I cannot be loving, can't get close to anyone, can't get angry...'

What she really means is, 'I won't cry, I won't be loving, I won't be angry. . . I won't get close to anyone. I'm afraid of my feelings. I'm afraid people will laugh at me. . . they won't understand. It's more comfortable to keep my feelings to myself'

This is the sickness of our time. Alienation from myself and from others. The covering up or avoidance or denial of feelings. And this is what Oscar Wilde meant when he said, 'Your real life is the one you do not live.' On the same theme Kahlil Gibran wrote

The reality of the other person is not in what he reveals to you but in what he cannot reveal to you.

Therefore, if you would understand him, listen not to what he says but rather to what he does not say.

To understand anyone usually you have to do a lot of de-coding. Take, as an example of how you usually see someone, something simple like poking a fire. If it's no-one you know who is poking the fire, you don't usually see the person at all: you just see the fire being poked. But if it's your husband or wife who is poking the fire, then the act may have some special significance for you. To the wife, the way the poker is being held or used expresses something of the personality of the husband. (What is revealed about the whole person in a single act is described by Maslow as a 'personality syndrome'). The poker becomes a part of the husband: it is what has been described as an *exosomatic* limb, an extension of the hand.

Thus what the wife sees is integrated with everything she knows about her husband - about his inner life, his fears, hopes, obsessions and so on. For instance, she may decide that he is poking the fire (a) for the obvious reason that he is cold and the fire is dying out or (b) out of concern for her well-being because at that moment she may be wearing a thin dress and looks cold; or (c) because he is fidgety and embarrassed; or (d) he likes pampering himself; although it's really quite warm, he wants to create a bigger blaze to make the room look cosier; or (e) he is drawing attention to his wife's neglect of him: she may be close to the fire while he is further away and feeling cold. His wife may understand what her husband is trying to tell her in the way he pokes the fire, though he himself may not be fully aware of what he is doing: in other words he doesn't understand himself; and his wife, though she knows what upsets her husband, does not really understand him either. The husband's behaviour has become automatic; and sometimes his wife may be afraid to tell him what she sees for fear of offending him, and in this way people go on behaving and thinking automatically, living as robots and never communicating at a deep level.

Many people do the same things for the same reasons, and so through observation over a number of years you tend to link certain ways of behaving with certain types of

personality. You give someone a label and she's stuck with it - and you call that understanding her. And this is what we normally mean by 'seeing through' people or 'weighing them up.' It may be helpful if we are able to see what the pressures are - at work or in the home - that lie behind a person's behaviour: seeing the way a person has tried to adjust to his environment or failed to adjust.

But it is ridiculous to say that a person is the way he adjusts. The way he adjusts may tell us something very important about him, about his fears, his values and so on, but even so, we are often mistaken and sometimes we are confused. And body language, although it is often more reliable than words, is not always an accurate guide to someone's feelings. What, for instance, does it mean when a person smiles as tears come into the eyes, giving the appearance of being happy and sad at the same time?

We often tell a person what she is instead of asking her how she feels or giving her the chance to say how she feels. As a matter of fact, usually when we tell a person what she is we are, as Laing said, giving an instruction. It is more effective telling a person what she is than telling her what to be. A mother who tells her child that she is good is giving her an order to be good.

We are constantly making 'you' statements - *you* are this, *you* are that. It's an order to be someone different or to stay as you are. And how I describe the other person is usually something I am projecting onto her, often some quality I despise in myself. Similarly, when I say, 'It's your fault, you're to blame,' I am not accepting responsibility for my own actions, my own part in a relationship. It's *me* doing the blaming. Whatever I see is *me* seeing it. Whatever I say about someone else I am also saying something about myself.

The best way to get to know people is not by guesswork, but by trying to establish a relationship in which each feels perfectly safe in saying exactly how she feels. Nothing is hidden. Understanding does not mean giving someone a label: it means being in tune with the other person and listening with the eyes as well as the ears: there can be understanding without talking.

Martin Buber wrote about how the observer is intent of fixing the observed person in her mind. She sees the other person in terms of weaknesses, traits, habits and so on and keeps a list of these things in the mind: she is timid, keeps herself to herself, lives with her mother, reads romantic novels. . . the list goes on and on and may be summed up in the observer's mind in one word such as 'dull' or 'stupid'.

But Buber described a perception of an entirely different kind:

It is a different matter when in a receptive hour of my personal life a man meets me about whom there is something, which I cannot grasp in any objective way at all, that 'says something' to me. That does not mean, says something to me what manner of man this is, what is going on in him, and the like. But it means, says something to me, addresses something to me, speak

something that enters my life.

Buber described this kind of relationship as an 'I-Thou' relationship as distinct from an 'I-It' relationship which places people in categories. The 'I-Thou' relationship acknowledges the special unique qualities of the other person that defy classification.

In the 'I-It' relationship the other becomes an object in my world and I project all my fears and fantasies onto her. Andras Angyal wrote about this tendency:

One does not recognise the otherness of a person as a reality by projecting into him one's fantasies, however flattering they may be. And when one sees in a person one's mother or father or anyone else, one ignores the person as he really is. In the last analysis this is a fundamental disregard for and destructive attitude toward the other person. The understanding of the other person - as we are now using this expression - is not some sort of shrewd 'practical psychology' which has a keen eye for the weakness of people, but a deep perception of the core, of the essential nature of the other person.

You cannot see the other person through analysis. Analysis means taking something to pieces, examining the parts and looking for what is wrong, and as soon as you start taking anything to pieces, which is an endless process, it stops functioning. Krishnamurti is right when he says that analysis is the postponement of action or denial of action.

Analysis means asking why. In other words looking for a cause, how one *thing* led to another *thing* - it ignores the way the other person experiences herself and does nothing to improve relationships - in fact, it may provide a person with an excuse for not changing.

Every moment of every day we are faced with the unknown; and we are constantly looking for something familiar to hang on to, looking for causes.

Nietzsche writes about this as follows:

To trace something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and gives moreover a feeling of power. Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown - the first instinct is to eliminate these distressing states. First principle: any explanation is better than none, because it is at bottom only a question wanting to get rid of oppressive ideas, one is not particular about what means one uses to get rid of them: the first idea which explains that the unknown is in fact the known does so much good that one 'holds it for true'. Proof by pleasure (by potency) is criterion of truth. - The cause-creating drive is thus conditioned by the feeling of fear.

Fritz Perls taught us not to ask why, but to observe how things are happening in the here-and-now. 'Each time,' he said, 'you ask the question *why* you diminish in stature.

You bother yourself with false information. You only feed the computer, the intellect’.

To take the first example that comes to mind. Someone might say, ‘I have an inferiority complex.’ Instead of analysing what she is telling you in terms of the past, looking for a cause, your reply might be, ‘I’m afraid the term inferiority complex doesn’t mean anything to me, but obviously it does to you. What do *you* mean? I don’t want a text-book answer. I don’t want a definition. It would help to understand what you mean if you could tell me how you feel at the moment when you say, ‘I have an inferiority complex’.

Then you might get the reply, ‘Well, I feel you might make me look a fool because you are clever and I’m not.’

‘So you see clever people as people who make others look foolish? Is that how you would like to be yourself?’

‘No, it’s not that. It’s just that I feel I’ve got nothing to say. I feel a fool when I’m with you. You make me feel I don’t know anything.’

‘Well, if that’s how you feel, I can’t be getting through to you, and I’m sorry. I don’t feel clever at all myself, but I know how you feel. I use unfamiliar words sometimes - and they’re a barrier; they push people away. People tell me that I’m always trying to win arguments, and I’m hurt by that. But *they* not me, see what I am saying as an argument - playing the one-upmanship game because everybody does it. But I’m not interested in winning arguments. Maybe it’s because I’m impatient sometimes. I don’t try hard enough to make myself understood. I try to make my words say everything and don’t show my feelings. I hide behind words. I become pedantic. I hate myself when I’m like that. Someone once said my words were a smokescreen....’

‘Yes that’s how it feels to me. I can’t get through to you....’

‘You mean *won’t*....’

That’s just a beginning. By staying with your feelings and accepting yourself as you are, you start saying something real to the other person, and it’s wonderful when the other person responds in the same way. When he abandons himself - his image of himself. Then the words go and there’s laughter and tears and you come alive.

But is there a dialogue going on now, at this moment, between you the reader and me the writer? Are we both escaping into the printed word? At least, I am not being interrupted and there is someone ‘out there’ listening to me, I hope.
