



From Super-ego to Super-se

Sergio Caruso

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Human psyche is a sense-making machine. How does it work? Dialogue and intersubjective relation are the only means we have to „make sense” of situations, compare meanings, produce new ones, and learn from experience: not only when together (which is only too obvious) but also when alone (which is less evident). Therefore any human subject may be conceived of as „polyphonic” (Bachtin), namely as an internal dialogue between *ego* and *alter* (Mead, Lacan and so many others). I call it „intra-subjective inter-subjectivity”, and consider this *ego-alter* relation the basic *a priori* structure of consciousness, and of „moral sentiments” in particular (Smith). Both *ego* and *alter* are native functions of our mind created in the progress of evolution and, in a sense, void forms in a Kantian sense.

Within this perspective, history should not be regarded as less important, rather *more* important (as to how personalities take shape). In fact, while the functional form of *ego* and *alter* is natural, their content depends on one’s personal history (*ego*) and the socio-historical background (*alter*). Actually, the latter largely determines what kind and type of object-relations are precociously internalized and, consequently, what kind and type of *alter* is bound to take shape as a result. Being re-shaped by its actual content, the form *alter* (much more than the form *ego*) should be considered as a variable liable to assume different values depending on epochs and the socializing context. Namely, we

find that:

ALTER in archaic Greece is an	ALTER-VOS
ALTER in the classical Greco-Roman age	ALTER-NOS
ALTER in the Middle Age Christianity	ALTER-TU
ALTER in proto-modern age	ALTER-ILLE
ALTER in modern times	ALTER-EGO
ALTER in our post-modern days	ALTER-SE.

Of course, I cannot provide here any demonstration of this scheme. It obviously requires that we largely resort to cultural studies and *Kulturgeschichte*, to reconstruct what the psyche of past ages might be like. I am working on it, but it would take too long time to give here even a *resumé*. So I will take it for granted, and only stress some implications.

- (1) Freudian *Super-ego* is the historical specification of something more general, just one variant of a multiform instance (call it *Super-Alter*): the only one Freud could observe in clinical practice, living in modern times. We should now regard it as *a particular case*, relating to the modal personality prevailing at that time.
- (2) This way of considering modal personality may have much to do with Fromm’s theory of social character.
- (3) We seem to be, nowadays, at the end of a historical transition from one modal personality to the following, *i.e.* from the modern form of subjectivity (morally centred on the *alter-ego* image and psychologi-



cally responding to the *Super-ego*) to the post-modern form (morally centered on the *alter-se* and psychologically responding to the *Super-se*). The former experienced feelings of loss and guilt, while the latter experiences feelings of bereavement and shame mainly.

- (4) The emerging structure of personality very much resembles what is currently called „narcissistic personality” by such authors as Kohut and Lasch. It is not necessarily coincident with narcissistic personality *disorders* in the psychiatric sense, but obviously re-

lated to the growing occurrence of such disorders.

- (5) The outcome of this *ego-to-self* transition within the internal *Alter* seems to have much to do also with Fromm’s account for the „marketing orientation” social character, and even more with other attempts to develop and adjourn Fromm’s typology of social characters such as the „other-directed personality” in Riesman’s *The lonely crowd*, and the „postmoderne Mensch” in Funk’s *Ich und Wir*.