

The Ego

The Ego Defined.

The ego is the subconscious psychological "self" aspect of our humanity that maintains: (1) the sense of "me" and (2) the sense of existential value. It is probably a survival mechanism humanity has passed on from generation to generation from our "lesser-evolved" days, its sole purpose being the maintaining of one's position in the tribe.

Two Manifestations of the Ego

The ego manifests itself in two ways: *craving and aversion*. **Craving** is the desire for that which increases self-worth; whereas, **aversion** is the wish to remain distant from that which decreases self-worth. We all have the same ego, but it may manifest itself differently in different people, depending on biological predispositions and environment/upbringing.

The Influence of the Ego on Thought and Behavior.

The ego lies by telling us:

1. There is a "me" or a "self," and it is what we see in the mirror; we are the corporeal existence we experience/perceive and nothing more. We (and others) must value this "me"; and the sense of "me" must be reinforced and grounded through attachment to transient, impermanent things and ideas.
2. To be considered important and of great value (to maintain or even *advance* our place in the tribe) is the most important goal in life. It must, therefore, take precedent over all other matters.
3. Our self-worth is not adequate; and if we are unable to convince ourselves and others of our worth, we are inferior.
4. We must *increase* our self-worth by:
 - a. Convincing ourselves of increased self-worth through self-deceptive thoughts, words, and actions.
 - b. Convincing others of our self-worth through thoughts, words, and actions that make us look important.
5. Others have the ability to diminish our self-worth; and, therefore, we need to *defend* it by:
 - a. Retaliating when it is threatened
 - b. Retreating from the threat

The Nature of the Ego.

The ego is the source of all human discontent, insecurity, and psychological suffering (with the exception, of course, of those who are mentally ill due to brain chemistry imbalances). All negative thoughts, words, and actions can be traced back to the ego and its desire to either defend or increase the sense of self-worth.

Examples of the Ego's Influence. (Note: Some of these examples should probably be listed in more than one category.)

The Ego Attempting to Increase Self-Worth

1. Augmented Physical Appearance - penis/breast enlargement; hair transplants, tattoos, cosmetics, plastic surgery, over-concern for hair appearance, tanning, anorexia, etc.
2. Taking Self-Worth from Others - bullying, ridiculing/insulting, child molestation/abuse, gay bashing.
3. Self-Deceptive Thoughts and Beliefs - older men dating/having sex with young girls, racial supremacy, class superiority, fantasies and infatuations, adulterous affairs, status symbols, "little man" complex, porn.
4. Showing Off - boasting about ourselves, the African-American over-complementing-each-other mentality.

The Ego Attempting to Defend Self-Worth

1. Retaliation - road rage, violence and/or harsh words in response to a perceived insult to a loved one or ourselves, the tendency of some parents to defend their kids even when the kids have done wrong, revenge.

2. **Retreat** - shyness (going into a "shell" so to speak), the husband/wife who simply gives up on a marriage when they feel disrespected, substance abuse/addiction, suicide

Ego Fantasy

The ego encourages the mind to fantasize or daydream for the purpose of existential value augmentation or restoration. Even though that which is going on during the fantasy is not real, the ego doesn't care; it believes that existential value is being increased. Common ego fantasies are:

1. Lust
2. Revenge
3. Agreeing with another person's view/opinion
4. The center of attention who everyone likes

Lust. Men often fantasize about screwing some female. Often, they rent porn or watch it on the internet. This is the desire of the ego to overcome or dominate the female. The ego believes that if we dominate another person, we will be able to take some degree of existential value from them and somehow add it to our own, thus increasing our self-worth and importance.

Revenge. We sometimes remember a wrong done to us and feel degraded. In the revenge fantasy, our ego motivates us to cook up a scenario in which the one who did us wrong is gotten even with, thus enabling us to settle the score. Even though the person who wronged us isn't even present, the ego tells us that the temporary mental imagery in our heads is somehow "settling the score" and restoring our existential value.

Agreeing with another person's view/opinion. In this fantasy, the ego cooks up a scheme in which we are having a hypothetical conversation with someone and we agree with them. Agreeing with them, the person with which we agree has high regard for us. The ego again feels a temporary sense of self-worth improvement even though the situation isn't even real.

The center of attention who everyone likes. We have, in this fantasy, some type of ability or have done something to bring about positive opinions about us on the part of other people. We can be the hero who saves the day or the guy who has some type of ability or physical trait that impresses everyone.

There are probably more ego fantasies and some that could be placed into more than one category.

Social Manifestations of the Ego

1. **Competition** - U.T. football is to some people a representation of the collective self-worth of the state. Therefore, when U.T. wins, there is much love for the team and coach; when they lose, it's "We need a new coach" and "I don't care if I ever watch another game."
2. **The "Pecking Order" Mentality** - Our system of assigning human value in regard to rank or time (older people are supposedly entitled to more "respect" than are younger people).
3. **The "In-Crowd" Mentality** - Commonly seen in high school, kids tacitly assign value to each other based on appearance and participation in school culture.
4. **The "Them Versus Us" Mentality** - nationalism, Serbs vs. Muslims in the Balkans, the English-as-the-official-language movement in the United States, Islamic fundamentalism/extremism, the slaughter of the blacks in Darfur, Sudan.
5. **Mob Mentality** - the crucifixion of Jesus when he proclaimed the end of religion as they knew it, the small town tendency to expect everyone to accept the community's standards and become a "drone" in the collective.

The Ego's Use of Impermanence to Define the "Self"

The ego uses impermanent objects and concepts to ground consciousness to a sense of "self." Examples are: the body and its five senses through which the mind produces perceptions and judgments; environment; culture,

class, and race; property; concepts such as patriotism, religion, honor, etc.; and other people such as family and friends.

Overcoming the Ego.

We are all, in various degrees, slaves to the ego; but it can be overcome. The ego can be overcome through understanding the Four Noble Truths and following The Eightfold Path. More specifically, the ego and its manifestations are overcome by transforming thoughts and feelings:

1. Recognition - We must first recognize a thought or feeling when it arises. When we feel anger due to an insult, we must say to ourselves, "This is anger."
2. Acceptance - Secondly, we must accept the thought or feeling as it is and resist the temptation to begin beating ourselves up because we have strayed off the Path. We should think to ourselves, "Ok. I'm angry, but I must not allow this anger to lead to frustration with myself."
3. Understanding - Finally, we must look within ourselves and discover why it is that we experienced that particular thought or feeling in the first place. In other words, we must find out why the ego gave us the instruction to produce the thought or feeling in the first place. Discovering this motivation will help us learn not to react in a similar fashion again and weaken the ego's influence on us.
4. Release - Once we have accepted the thought or feeling, we must then relax and let it go.