

The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development. Robert Kegan. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982, 318 pages.

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Believing that people construct their own realities and that they evolve through a succession of selves "according to regular principles of stability and change," Robert Kegan identifies himself as a constructive-developmental in his philosophical and psychological orientation. His excellent book articulates the process by which the succession of selves evolve and indicates the kind of therapy that the evolutionary movement seems naturally to suggest.

In the first part of the book, Kegan pays tribute to his inspiration and major influence—Piaget. It was Piaget who discovered a way to unite the themes of construction (a philosophical theme) and development (a biological theme). Kegan's application of these ideas leads to the interesting notion that the psychological self evolves in ways that parallel the development of the physical self. The different manifestations of the psychological self may be better understood by examining the process by which persons, at different times in their lives, know. The process involves, in other words, understanding how persons make meaning in different stages of their lives. In Chapter Two of Part I, Kegan discusses the evolution of moral meaning-making, using Kohlberg's moral stages and articulating points of likeness between Kohlberg's sociomoral and Piaget's physical meaning-making orientations. In the important final chapter of Part I, Kegan presents in summary form the six selves he believes a person successively constitutes: the incorporative, the impulsive, the imperial, the interpersonal, the institutional, and the interindividual selves. In Kegan's own view the self, in each of these stages, sees itself as embedded in a nurturing or supportive environment. The self and its environment constitute that self's reality—its "truth." Through a greater awareness of "the other," however, the self gradually comes to conflict and the person's psychological balance is temporarily lost. Most persons attain a new balance as the new self (supported by a new environment in which it now sees itself as embedded) gradually constitutes itself. Should the person wish to retain the old self, however, the conflict may not be resolved because the newer "reality" is less hospitable to the old self. The person's refusal to accept the newer yet truer "reality" and to acknowledge the new self that is trying to emerge simply perpetuates the conflict in which the individual finds him or herself. Kegan sees this conflict not as a sign of a disturbed person only, then; he sees it as a sign that a new self needs to be recognized by the person him or herself—its emergence or evolution facilitated. Such facilitation is one of the functions of the therapist, who in effect provides a new environment (a new embeddedness) while assuring the person that the old support is not totally lost.

The major portion of the book, entitled "The Natural Emergencies of the Self," discusses in detail the growth and loss of the six selves. Kegan illustrates his notions by discussing representative cases of persons having difficulties making the transitions

from old to new selves. He also presents some of the inadequacies that other theories of personality have in trying to help people with such conflicts and suggests that the constructive-developmental approach is generally preferable, stressing opportunity for development rather than elimination of or correction of a psychological deficiency. In his discussion of the growth and loss of the "Imperial Self," to cite only one example, Kegan finds behavior modification therapy ineffective, for, he argues, it fails to respond to "interpersonal psychology." He observes that "in shaping the superficial behaviors of good citizenship without any self-conscious attention to the organization of the person giving rise to these behaviors, the behavior modification approach comes close to the notion that the living of one's life is comparable to an activity like bowling where the behavior is identical with the thing itself." Inmates from correctional institutions who have been treated with the behavior modification approach return to their former ways "with no less frequency than other inmates," which suggests either that the person has not changed or that behavior modification theory is inadequate.

The constructive-developmental approach, however, may be more effective than the behavioristic or other approaches because it sees the conflict in a person as to some extent natural, as a signal that a new self that will be more effective in a new reality must be constituted, must be fully realized. The conflict, then, is natural, and when it is seen in this way it may become a source of wisdom. The most effective therapy for the person having trouble with constituting his or her new self is "natural therapy," the subject of the ninth and last chapter of the book. The constructive-developmental therapist who believes in natural therapy helps a person by becoming the "holding environment" the person believes he or she has lost or is losing. The therapist thus helps the person to continue to differentiate this new self from the old without total loss of the old environment and consequently facilitates the integration of the new. One more point. Kegan effectively answers those who would argue that since our constitutions of reality are subjective any view is as good as any other. He agrees that our notions of reality are subjective. His point, though, is that more evolved notions of reality, if not "true," are "truer" than less developed ones. "Truest" for him is the reality constructed by the interindividual self.

The projected audience of this book—teachers of psychology, researchers in personality, counsellors, teachers (generally), ministers, and "professionals who concern themselves with another's growth"—will welcome Kegan's work. More, the book has interdisciplinary implications and applications, as any reader with a Jungian approach to literature or a mentalist approach to language will see. Many readers will enjoy Kegan's style, too. He writes with grace and clarity, enhancing many of his ideas with interesting and helpful analogies and with insightful literary allusions, those from Blake and Eliot being especially effective. The bibliography contains titles of both published and unpublished works and many of the entries are annotated. The index is to subject and to person. The book, the product of ten years of work, is good from the first page through the last. It promises a "conceptual itinerary" of the evolution of the self. It delivers and deserves the high praise that appears on its dust jacket.