

Book Review

Subpersonalities: The People Inside Us. John Rowan.
London & New York: Routledge. 1990.

This is a remarkable and important book, presenting what I think will become a significant new paradigm in psychology. The author offers a comprehensive and delightfully clear and readable review of the idea that it is more useful to view personality as the product of a variety of parts of the self.

Rowan generously cites the work of a wide range of other workers in psychology, ranging from Freud's topological model of ego, id, and super-ego through Jung's work on active imagination with archetypal images and Eric Berne's three ego states to more contemporary object relations theories in psychoanalysis, with their ideas about "internalized object representations." The author acknowledges psychodrama and the work of Moreno and notes that this approach may well be the best therapeutic method for helping these parts of self become more integrated. Still, I felt that he did not fully appreciate the implications of Morenean role theory, namely, that the role concept applies to phenomena beyond the social role—psychosomatic and psychodramatic roles, for example. Also, I would have liked to have seen more of a recognition of the use of the "multiple ego" technique, with illustrations regarding its application.

After reviewing a variety of contributions to this emerging perspective, Rowan describes some of his own group experiments in bringing out the various subpersonalities in the psyche. It seems obvious that if one cultivates these "roles," they can easily and quickly become clothed in more complex elaborations and seem to take on a semi-autonomous personification. In other words, as in dreams, the psyche will naturally generate richer imagery if it is given free rein and attention.

The author goes on to offer a developmental schema that partakes of a variety of psychodynamic theories and yet reveals Rowan's own originality. Near the end of the book, he addresses the work of Ken Wilber and recent ideas about transpersonal psychology, which reveals the scope of Rowan's thinking.

I was especially pleased with the book because it complements my own efforts to generate an integrative meta-theory based on the concept of "role." I think this is a better term than the others (i.e., subpersonalities,

parts of self, complexes, ego states, functions, attitudes, de-integrates, areas of the mind, part-selves, subphases, psychic “dramatis personae,” etc.) for a number of reasons, such as relative popularity of or familiarity with the terminology, lack of implied pathology, capacity to address different levels of psychosocial organization, and so forth. In other words, if readers substituted “role” for a term such as “subpersonality,” they would be helped to appreciate the theoretical foundations of psychodrama and related therapeutic approaches (Blatner, 1991).

Other recent books (Samuels, 1989; Braude, 1991) address related issues that indirectly complement this emerging pluralistic paradigm, but Rowan’s book is far and away the most complete review of the subject. There are extensive and current references. I think this is an outstanding book, and I recommend it highly.

REFERENCES

- Blatner, A. (1991). Role dynamics: A comprehensive theory of psychology. *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry*, 44(1), 33–40.
- Braude, S. (1991). First person plural: Multiple personality and the philosophy of mind. London: Routledge.
- Samuels, A. (1989). The plural psyche: Personality, morality and the father. London: Routledge.

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