

THE TRUE AND INNER YOU

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[Assignment: In response to our readings and discussion on personal identity, think about how *you* go about defining yourself. You may choose to agree with the authors or to disagree, but you should support your position with examples, real or hypothetical.]

(1) Many a person has asked, "Who is the real me?" Frequently, confused adolescents will ask this question as they wonder about their identities. As a member of this group, I too have wondered and been confronted by uncertainties. In fact, I have almost avoided the difficult question because I did not feel I was ready to tackle such self-examination. But now in reading William Gaylin's essay entitled "What You See Is the Real You," I am prompted to examine the question and deal with it.

(2) Gaylin, a psychoanalyst, writes in his essay: "You are what we [all of us] perceive you to be, not what you think you are . . . The inner man is a fantasy." I disagree with his theories. Having considered the issue carefully, I have come to the conclusion that a person's true self is his or her inner self. I believe that the true self is reflected in inner thoughts. Thus, the person that people see is not always who he or she is. In fact, the person that others see is rarely the true self. It may be a part of the inner self, but in very few cases is it the entirety.

(3) One of the few times we display this true self is when we are in an extremely close, long-lasting relationship. The old man and his wife who have been married for 55 years and have never kept anything from each other probably have a decent grasp of the other's true self. Perhaps, most of us don't have the opportunity to fully reveal ourselves. The closest that I have come to revealing my inner self is with my mother. However, though she knows about my goals, my fears, my relationships, my faith, and more, she knows very little about my inner (nasty) sense of humor. She does not believe, and she has told me so, that I would ever swear loudly and purposefully (which I have done). Obviously, she does not know my true identity entirely.

(4) Honesty, they say, is the best policy, but I would disagree if this meant letting one's entire inner self be known to others. We reveal different parts of ourselves to different people. For example, a drill sergeant in the army would not show his loving, emotional side to his recruits if he wanted to be an effective disciplinarian. Some of his more perceptive recruits might be able to reconcile his tender, emotional side with his tough exercise of authority, but many would not.

(5) Many believe that the true self is a combination of all the roles we play. One can be a best friend, an acquaintance, a father, a son, a nephew, an uncle, a teacher, and a pupil simultaneously. And so people believe that the "selves" that are seen in each of these relationships combine to make up the true self. I disagree, to some degree, with this theory also. The way in which others see us is usually part of what we really are, but the sum of everyone's evaluation does not complete the picture.

(6) Rarely do others actually know us better than we know ourselves. Sometimes we may not even know ourselves. Perhaps, only God knows our real identity. Occasionally, people will repress something such as a deep wound from a bad relationship. Later, an event will force them to face this wound, and they will discover something about themselves that they did not previously know or acknowledge. Maybe John Doe had recently been so unsuccessful at making friends with members of the opposite sex because he was afraid of getting hurt again. He may have "forgotten" (actually repressed) his bad experience and not understood why he was managing relationships poorly. This wound was nonetheless a part of his true self, helping shape his decisions. It was buried in his subconscious. Others may not have realized this about him nor he himself, but this was nevertheless a part of his true identity.

(7) I do not believe, as Gaylin does, that people are what others see them to be. Gaylin gives an example of a man who lives his whole life being kind, courteous, and generous, but who is at heart an evil person. Gaylin says that this man is not evil and would be readily accepted into heaven. I believe that the man's inner thoughts and motives are his true identity. Let me offer a counter-example: a boy helps an old woman cross a busy street only in the hopes of getting a tip from her. This boy's true self is not necessarily kind and helpful, as it appears to others, but greedy and selfish.

(8) Solomon, who is synonymous with wisdom, stated in Proverbs 27:19, "As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man." He believed that the condition of the heart indicates true character. To see the true identity of a person, one must look at his or her heart. Indeed, it is one of the problems of our society that we value appearance too much--what we think of others depends on their appearance. A classmate recently told me that she was once fat and "radical" looking--shaved head, black lipstick, army boots. People automatically assumed things about her character and avoided her. She had since changed her appearance to a more conservative look and has become much more accepted by the people around her. She said that although her inner self had not changed greatly, people think of her much differently. I do not believe her true self has changed drastically just because her appearance has changed. The people who judged her were wrong in their evaluation.

(9) I believe that one's inner self is the true self. Rarely is this self known completely by others. Sometimes the inner self is not even fully grasped by the individual. Appearance does not necessarily reflect character. To know someone's true identity, one must know his or her heart.