

Egotism vs. Maturity

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Egotism and its effects on human life

All persons are concerned with self. We grow up with much focus on self by parents and other adults. In most persons the eventual differentiation between self and others takes place as the child realizes the need to function in family and society. In some cases this differentiation is not made or is made to a lesser degree than would be useful for normal, cooperative living.

Maturity is about learning that we are not the center of the world.

Life experiences often force us to recognize the need for cooperation and the need to value the contributions of other people to our lives. Sometimes, however, even forceful experiences do not have this effect. Sometimes maturity does not result from life experiences.

Fears can prevent us from seeing ourselves as valuable and valued. Events of early life may have injured us and now we are afraid of more injury. The resultant effect is that we become defensive. We build walls around our heart for protection. We cannot allow ourselves to be vulnerable enough to accept another's point of view. We need to control all persons and all discussions. Even when we appear to be listening we cannot hear because we only hear the self-reinforcing words. We do not hear the words of truth that need to find their way into our heart.

We go from person to person looking for someone to side with us but never allowing those persons to speak into our lives. We do all the talking and we control every situation. We have addictions but primarily we are addicted to enablers and so go from enabler to enabler never finding long-term friendship. We can find enablers everywhere and we steer away from persons who will hold us accountable and so we never grow.

We have never come to the end of ourselves. We are in control. Even our prayers are self-centered. In a word, we have never grown up. We are immature – little people in big bodies.

“Kleine gerne gross” is a German phrase used by the Russian Mennonites. It is used as a term to describe a person who is small but acts like and wants to be a person of importance and influence.

Maturity means the ability to value other people as important and as having an important role in my life. For this to happen I have to value that person as an individual of worth. In 1923 a man named Martin Buber wrote a book on *“I and thou.”* He emphasized that humans have two

options in relating – either “*I and thou*” or “*I and it*.” In the “*I and thou*” relationship the *I* values the *thou* as a whole, integrated person and the relationship is between two complete persons who value each other as individuals. In the *I and it* relationship the *I* sees the other person as *it* and then the *it* is valued as *it* can benefit the *I*. Buber says that this concept originates in one’s view of God. Is the view of God an *I and Thou* or an *I and it* relationship? He further generalizes the concept to include one’s relationship with societies, nations and the environment.

Buber was a Jew who grew up in Germany so he speaks from that perspective. While he is not explicitly Christian, he makes valid points about the need for maturity in relationships. His view calls people to transcend ideologies and immaturity and relate as complex but valued individuals. Many lessons can be learned from his writing.

It is important that we relate to other persons as real individuals. To do so we must have a sense of who we are. That sense is derived from being valued by God and others. If that value is not there or is there in fragmented form or if we do not feel that value we will not be strong enough to allow others persons to be real persons. We will always be begging for attention. It will never be enough. When we do not get it we will curl up or lash out or display any of the many of the possible responses in between those extremes.

What could be some reasons for this lack of maturity?

1. Extreme, early doting. The child grows up as the center of attention and all adults cater to his/her whims. This is not out-grown and the person “grows up” to believe that everyone owes him/her whatever their whims demand.
2. Family unity. This can be good or can be harmful.
Unity is good but if it is exclusive it can create an ethnocentric concept in which no other family or person is good enough for “our fine family.”
3. Fear. Fears can be totally controlling. Fear of rejection, etc.
4. Control. Persons typically find ways to control or manage their environment. Self centeredness is a control option that will not relinquish autonomy even if it means complete isolation.
5. Self-image. Image maintenance can be all engrossing. It will consume the person to the extent of not being able to see other persons as real people.

Possible cures

1. Self perception must be self denial – meet needs of others and trust God to meet your needs.
2. Self forgetfulness – think of what will bless the other person.

3. Think in terms of *"I and thou"* not *"I and it"* – people are not things to be exploited and/or used.
4. Think of people as whole persons. People are not to be fragmented into bodies to be employed or body parts to be used, or minds to be controlled, or votes to be counted, or "sounding boards" used to reflect our ideas off of or manipulated... .