USE OF THESES

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AN ANALYSIS OF SELF CONSTRUCTS AND SELF VARIABLES

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DERIVATION AND STATEMENT OF THESIS
The notion of self, with its accompaniments of recognition of self and others, is one of biological significance. No animal is solitary throughout its life cycle. It must meet with another member of the same species in order to reproduce and must be able to distinguish its enemies in order to attack or avoid them. Some form of recognition of other members of the species, race or social group of which the animal is member is necessary for the survival of that group, and survival of the individual is dependent on the accuracy of the estimation of his own defence potential. An evaluative self-concept involving attitudes to others is then a biological necessity.

The means for recognition are best developed in the primates who make primitive use of language, consisting of nine meaningful sounds in the howling monkey or of movements of facial musculature in the Old World monkey. Such signs are used to express rage, surprise or pleasure. Through observance of these forms of behaviour the feelings of the monkey towards others may be inferred and, by his subsequent behaviour, the concept he has of himself in relation to these others. The next step in the evolutionary hierarchy is man. It follows that a notion of self should have significance for psychology. Human behaviour suggests that the individual forms some estimate of and attitudes towards his own capacities,
interests and the concepts others have of him, through his interaction with the environment. His speech patterns indicate that he is aware of his individual identity. The more complex nature of man, however, makes the examination of self-recognition and self-attitudes in man more difficult.

If a notion of self is instrumental in the description and control of human behaviour, then it is of particular interest to workers in the field of abnormal psychology. Extensive use of the notion in this field was intended in this presentation, in the form of discrimination between various groups of abnormals by certain measures of self variables. It was predicted, for example, that the self-concepts of delinquents would prove to be distinctive and might cast light on the problems of delinquent behaviour. Attempts to test this hypothesis, however, were met by insurmountable difficulties in defining the area of study and selecting appropriate measures. An investigation aimed at establishing the status of the self in psychology appeared to be pre-requisite. This presentation, then, is concerned with the meaning of the notion of self, theoretically and empirically. A search for a common element within and between these two approaches is made.

Throughout the presentation a certain form of expression is used to enable the reader to assess the theoretical or
empirical value of the notion under discussion. The term 'self construct' is used to represent a notion which is chiefly theoretical in origin and employment. In other words, it is a hypothetical construct which is thought of as existing and giving rise to measureable phenomena which are not necessarily those which suggested the self construct. 'Self variables' have the more rigorous meaning of having been empirically established to represent the relationship between the control conditions and dependent variables in a certain experiment. 'Self variables', generally, may have one of two meanings. They may refer to the phenomena which the individual recognises as his own (self-concept) or to his attitudes towards these phenomena (self-assessment).

When such definitions are made clear, the thesis may be stated:

That the validity of a construct or variable of self as determined by, or as a determinant of, human behaviour has not been established by psychologists.

The presentation in support of the thesis is in four parts, the first of which is concerned with the major self constructs from that of Plato up to those of contemporary psychological theorists. The constructs are described and compared by content analysis. Secondly, a brief survey of
the conclusions of the experiments concerning the self is given. These conclusions lend some support to the theories of self and apparently indicate the existence of some self variable or variables which influence the behaviour of the individual. Thirdly, an examination of the measuring instruments underlying these conclusions is made by discussion and experiment. This section is concerned with whether, operationally speaking, there is a self. The results are difficult to interpret and there is no agreement among conclusions. Finally, a similar doubtful status of the notion of self is revealed in the field of abnormal psychology.