

The Function of the Ego

Notes for Teleconference Tutorial on Ego
January 17th 2009 Teleconference Tutorial
Outline by Jan Rigsby

1. The Goal

The goal, as far as man is concerned, can only be one thing, and that is becoming his real self.

2. The Real Self

Whenever man functions out of his real self, he is in truth, he is in joy. The most creative and constructive contributions to life come from that inner self. Everything that is great and generous, everything that is life-expanding, beautiful, and wise comes from the inner or real self.

The inner person is an integral part of nature. The real self and creation, or nature, are one and the same. ... for nature can be wholly trusted. The inner self, or the real self, **is** nature; it **is** life; it **is** creation.

3. The function of the Ego

Man's problems and conflicts are always a result of either too big an ego or too small an ego.

4. EGO as BONE

There are only 2 land-based animals that have NO bone or skeleton of any kind: **slugs** and **leeches**. Even worms have a hydraulic stiffening system.

Increased size requires bones, leading to joints and ligaments and the myriad of skeletal issues that chiropractors help us deal with.

Smoothly functioning ego is like a healthy skeleton.

Underdeveloped ego cannot carry its weight.

Overdeveloped ego may attempt to carry more than it is able to handle.

5. Ego in the Real World: Freud's Structural Theory

Ego: the organized, realistic part of the psyche, a sense organ for perception of both external and internal stimuli

Id: uncoordinated instinctual trends, unconscious features responsible for repression and other defensive operations.

Superego: critical and moralizing function.

Ego instincts responded to the **reality principle** while sexual instincts obeyed the pleasure principle.

Heinz Hartmann; healthy ego includes a sphere of autonomous ego functions that are independent of mental conflict. **Memory, motor coordination, and reality-testing, for example, ought to be able to function without the intrusion of emotional conflict.** Psychoanalytic treatment aims to **expand the conflict-free sphere of ego functioning.**

Ego functions: Reality Testing, Impulse Control, Judgment, Object Relation, Thought Processes, Defensive Functioning and Synthesis.

Synthesis enables the individual to think, feel, and act in a coherent manner. It includes the capacity to integrate potentially contradictory experiences, ideas, and feelings; for example, a child loves his or her mother yet also has angry feelings toward her at times. The ability to synthesize these feelings is a pivotal developmental achievement.

6. The Paradox

“You first reach out with your ego faculties.”

Yet “only when the Ego is sufficiently developed can it be adequately dispensed with. While not developed, it cannot be dispensed with.”

“you use this ego in order to transcend it.”

Without the ego, it is possible to perceive this message from the real self quite clearly. But without the ego, the meaning of the message must be distorted.

“The ego is necessary to change its own mind and intent. The ego alone is capable of exchanging the false idea for a truthful one.”

7. Re-Baselining; going back one step further

[Man] has to come to terms with the fact and has to accept his limitations as a human being before he can realize that he has an unlimited fount of power at his disposal. You all have to accept your own imperfections, as well as this life's imperfections, before you can experience that absolute perfection is your destiny that you must ultimately realize.

The doing with the lesser is an acceptance of this reality, of this dimension. For that, the ego faculties are necessary. Only when your ego deals adequately with the realm in which your personality, your body, now lives can you then deeply comprehend your real faculties, potentials, and possibilities.

8. What limitations?

“Not only your body, but your life conditions are a result of what you are.” (=Your life does not lie)\

Self-Punishment is a substitute for giving up the guilt-producing attitudes. By doing so, you unconsciously believe that it is possible to maintain these attitudes yet absolve yourself of the guilt. Therefore you go on punishing yourself, believing that this makes up for the fact that you do not give up the destructive patterns. If you say often enough how bad you are, if you suffer enough from your guilt, you feel you are still a nice person in spite of maintaining what is, in actuality, of no conceivable advantage to you and to others. The specific realization of this level will come to the degree that you truly wish to find it. Your ego faculties will help you to shed the guilt-producing patterns. Even if something in you doubts, you may do so in the understanding that at any time you have the right to reassume them should you so desire. This will strengthen your ego. Then you will succeed. You will no longer be a helpless prey. You then take hold of yourself by using your ego in its proper way.

From Moira Shaw:

What value does the Ego Personality have in Enlightenment?

Weak Ego = incapable of coping with life;
too small; 100/100

Overgrown Ego = hinders reaching towards the real self;
ego too big; 100/100

Healthy Ego = it ‘knows’ it’s ‘place’. The Healthy Ego
a) chooses to accept life
b) choose to want to understand itself;
knows there’s a ‘package’ inside.

Integrated Ego = the Ego is integrated with
divine consciousness and moves out into life
as the **Real Self**.

Ego Lectures:

132 The Function of the Ego in Relationship to the Real Self

152 Connection between Ego and Universal Power

158 The Ego’s Cooperation with or Obstruction to the Real Self

161 Unconscious Negativity Endangers Surrender of Ego to Involuntary Processes

199 The Meaning of the Ego and Its Transcendence

216 Connection between the Incarnatory Processes and the Life Task

Key points within each of these lectures are listed below.
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Full text all lectures may be downloaded from www.pathwork.org

The Function of the Ego in Relationship to the Real Self, pl 132:

Real Self = spontaneous creation, nature, ‘everything great and generous... life expanding, beautiful and wise’ “the inner person is an integral part of nature... for nature can be wholly trusted. The inner self, or the real self, **is** nature; it **is** life; it **is** creation.”

Ego’s function is paradoxical; “only when the Ego is sufficiently developed can it be adequately dispensed with. While not developed, it cannot be dispensed with.” “you use this ego in order to transcend it.” “You first reach out with your ego faculties.”

Spiritual Principle: “you have to reach a certain state and fully be in that state before it can be abandoned for a further state”. “You first have to shed these desires or strivings before you can realize them and come to them all over again.”

Accepting our own imperfections, as well as this life’s imperfections... the doing with the lesser is an acceptance of this reality, of this dimension. For that, ego faculties are necessary.

“Awakening to truth is possible only when you have found and then let go of the childish distortions”

Spiritual Principle: “working out of abundance produces abundance, but working out of poverty and need produces more poverty and need. The weak ego considers itself annihilated when its wishes for omnipotence remain unfilled. Therefore the wish is negative.”

“The ego is necessary to change its own mind and intent. The ego alone is capable of exchanging the false idea for a truthful one.”

“Not only your body, but your life conditions are a result of what you are.” (=Your life does not lie)

“Self-punishment is a substitute for giving up the guilt producing anxieties. If you say often enough how bad you are, if you suffer enough from your guilt, you will feel you are still a nice person in spite of maintaining what is, in actuality, of no conceivable advantage to you and to others.”

THE FUNCTION OF THE EGO IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE REAL SELF

Quotes from Pathwork Guide Lecture No. 132

Full text all lectures may be downloaded from www.pathwork.org

Blessings and guidance are extended so that each and everyone of you finds his path easier and reaches the goal with less struggle and resistance. The goal, as far as man is concerned, can only be one thing, and that is becoming his real self. ... Let us briefly recapitulate the essence of the real self.

The inner person is an integral part of nature. The real self and creation, or nature, are one and the same. ... Whenever man functions out of his real self, he is in truth, he is in joy. The most creative and constructive contributions to life come from that inner self. Everything that is great and generous, everything that is life-expanding, beautiful, and wise comes from the inner or real self.

Man's problems and conflicts are always a result of either too big an ego or too small an ego. ... In this way, nature tries to reestablish balance. The overdevelopment may be an attempt on the part of nature to straighten out the disturbance resulting from too weak an ego.

It is a fact that only when the ego is sufficiently developed can it be adequately dispensed with. Whereas, so long as it is not developed, it cannot be dispensed with. Now, this may sound like a contradiction, my friends, but it is not. Only when man is fully in possession of his outer self, his ego, can he then dispense with it and reach his real self. ... This is a law. It is a logical law, for then man acts out of strength and abundance, not out of weakness, need, and poverty. Only when you are in possession of a strong and healthy ego -- not overgrown, not overemphasized -- can you use this ego in order to transcend it. Only when the ego is healthy and strong can you know that it is not the final answer, the final realm of being. You then use it in order to pass it, to transcend it, to reach a further state of consciousness. ... To put it in very practical terms, in your work on this path, you learn, for instance, through your meditations to use all the faculties of your ego in order to reach beyond it. ... You first reach out with your ego faculties. You first use them in order to state truths that you later experience on a deeper level of consciousness.

The law that you have to reach a certain state and fully be in that state before it can be abandoned for a further state is extremely important to understand, my friends. ... The little child, at birth, does not yet possess an ego. Without the ego, it is possible to perceive this message from the real self quite clearly. But without the ego, the meaning of the message must be distorted. ... When there is no ego, these strivings are unrealistic, even destructive. You all have experienced in your pathwork that you first have to shed these desires or strivings before you can realize them and come to them all over again.

In other words, every one of you, my friends, who is on this path has to come to terms with the fact and has to accept his limitations as a human being before he can realize that he has an unlimited fount of power at his disposal. You all have to accept

your own imperfections, as well as this life's imperfections, before you can experience that absolute perfection is your destiny that you must ultimately realize. ... The doing with the lesser is an acceptance of this reality, of this dimension. For that, the ego faculties are necessary. Only when your ego deals adequately with the realm in which your personality, your body, now lives can you then deeply comprehend your real faculties, potentials, and possibilities.

Awakening to truth is possible only when you have first found and then let go of the childish distortions of the message of utter perfection, utter power, and utter pleasure. In the underdeveloped ego, these desires are not only illusory, but selfish and destructive. They have to be abandoned before they can be attained.

This is the very same law that working out of abundance produces abundance, but working out of poverty and need produces more poverty and need. The weak ego considers itself annihilated when its wishes for omnipotence remain unfulfilled. Therefore the wish is negative. The healthy, strong ego knows the reality of being, without fearing that this state may not yet be realizable because of existing obstructions to the real self. The weak ego will clutch to laws and conditions of the little ego and thereby distort the greater laws. Out of need and weakness, it foregoes the strength and fullness that comes when ego faculties deal adequately with the immediate now and thereby transcend this immediate now. ... When you feel and experience this, you will not fear and therefore, overemphasize ego faculties. Nor will you leave important underdeveloped ego faculties slumber and untended.

QUESTION: Isn't the ego connected with self-will? ANSWER: Indeed. False ideas, as well as self-will, are naturally a result of the ego world and not of the real self. But it is also the faculty of the ego to give up both. Only the ego can do so. The ego is necessary in order to change its own mind and intent. It is necessary in order to understand that it has a false idea, that it does not have self-will. It is up to the ego to maintain or abandon either of these two destructive facets. The ego alone is capable of exchanging the false idea for a truthful one. This means to let go of the tense, anxious self-will and replace it with a relaxed, free-flowing, flexible will functioning based on discriminating reasoning power, the call upon the intuitive levels of self, the choice for higher inner guidance of the real self.

Perhaps the best way for you to perceive these principles would be to think that the human body is a direct result of the personality, which of course exists previous to the baby's birth. The personality's thinking, attitudes, emotions, actions, all of these have their result in effects. The body with its environment, the life and life situation, the personal "fate" -- all these are effects of the mentality and personality and character. Not only your body, but your life conditions are a result of what you are. If you look at the question from this point of view, you will avoid a great deal of confusion.

...self-punishment is a substitute for giving up the guilt-producing attitudes. By doing so, you unconsciously believe that it is possible to maintain these attitudes yet absolve yourself of the guilt. Therefore you go on punishing yourself, believing that this

makes up for the fact that you do not give up the destructive patterns. If you say often enough how bad you are, if you suffer enough from your guilt, you feel you are still a nice person in spite of maintaining what is, in actuality, of no conceivable advantage to you and to others. The specific realization of this level will come to the degree that you truly wish to find it. Your ego faculties will help you to shed the guilt-producing patterns. Even if something in you doubts, you may do so in the understanding that at any time you have the right to reassume them should you so desire. This will strengthen your ego. Then you will succeed. You will no longer be a helpless prey. You then take hold of yourself by using your ego in its proper way.

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Connection between Ego and Universal Power, pl 152:

The ego says "look - it manifests." The reality is that "man begins to notice."

Universal life principle is always spontaneous.

“Man finds himself in the ironic position of, on the one hand, deeply yearning for the manifestations of these unvolitional processes and, on the other, fearing and battling against them. This is a terrible and a tragic conflict. It can only be resolved when the fear is being given up. The yearning can only be fulfilled when the fear is being given up.”

“it is not a question of first having to have removed the defects so that then something else can happen. It is a question of being able to quietly see oneself in the defect.”

Universal life principle: “the more they give of their energy, the more renewed energy is generated within.”

“The unmoving seems safe, the moving perilous. This is why life is feared, for life is eternally moving. When the moving is found to be safe because it carries you, you have found the only real security there is. All other security -- trust in and leaning on the static -- is illusory and breeds forever more fear.”

“The law of gravity parallels, or expresses on the physical level, the emotional reaction and the apprehension of falling and crushing when the ego is being given up as the sole form of individual existence.”

The Ego's Cooperation with or Obstruction to the Real Self PL 158

Fear of pleasure:

Pleasure can only happen when you are connected and identified with the Real Self, with the eternal, creative substance of your being. This necessitates letting go of the direct ego controls. The heightened moments in your life... was precisely due to this letting go and

being animated by something other than the usual faculties under the direct determination of the outer self.

Fear of letting go:

If one's sense of self derives exclusively from the ego, the personality is unable to let go. Letting go would then mean annihilation. Feelings can never respond to any must, issued either by other people or by the self. They come about indirectly and seem to have their own independent life, their own laws, their own logic and wisdom.

Real Self = life force, denial of the pleasure supreme of life = death.

Function of the ego is to deliberately seek contact with the greater self within. It must know its position. It must know that it's strength, possibility, and function is to seek contact, to request the help from the greater self to establish contact permanently with it.

After its task is fulfilled of deciding to pay the price of truthfulness, integrity, honesty, efforts, and good will, it must step aside and allow the real self to come forth with its intuition and inspiration that set the pace and direct the individual path.

It must know its limitation... and call upon the unlimited resources of the real self. The ego can be likened to 'arms', arms that move toward the source of life and stop moving when their function is no longer anything else but to receive.

The Ego's Cooperation With or Obstruction To the Real Self

Worksheet for Lecture #158

1. Are you afraid of dying? What do you imagine will truly be lost from **you** by your own death? (as opposed to what others might feel about your death, or have to manage because of your absence)
2. Are you afraid of living? Can you even imagine your own fear of living? If you are not afraid of living, what stops you from pursuing your heart's dreams? Are your excuses real, or a disguise for your fear of living?
3. What would 'pleasure supreme' look like for you? What would happen to you if you received everything you ever dreamed of?
4. What does the phrase 'letting go' bring up for you? Are you excited at the idea? Frightened? Depressed?
5. We all carry our past into the present and future. We also carry the hopes and expectations of others, plus some sense of obligation to family, friends, co-workers, authority figures, and even of national identity and pride. Do you have any sense of who you are in your Real Self, away from all these images and obligations?

Spend some time contemplating: Who Am I?

Note how many times titles and external descriptions appear as answers; wife, husband, mother, son, provider, professional, Catholic, Italian.

Allow these external labels to fall away, and consider: Who Am I?

6. Can you identify your ego as separate from your inner self? From the list of functions that the ego provides, can you sense a central place that is not ego?

7. “[The Ego’s] main function is to deliberately seek contact with the greater self within”. Can you “request the help from the greater self to contact permanently with it?” Spend some quiet time considering this. What did you sense?

Ego can	Ego cannot (and the Real Self CAN)
Memorize	Feel, Produce deep feelings
Learn	Deeply experience
Collect creative knowledge	Give a deep flavor to living
Repeat / Copy	Deeply know
Remember	Be creative
Sort out	Be spontaneous
Select	Reconcile all apparent opposites
Make up the mind	Always have answers
Move towards a certain direction	Always have solutions
Die	Render man more alive, fulfilled

Worksheet Questions © Jan Rigsby: 2004

Unconscious Negativity Endangers Surrender of Ego to Involuntary Processes, pl 161:

Whenever the ego is in predominant control of the business of living and of the life functions, it dries up, it starves, it withers. For it cannot replenish itself at the life source (= the universal divine self within each individual being, the real self)

Ego is unconnected from the total being. Unconnectedness causes the ego state, thus material life, thus the cycle of life and death. If a human being overcomes the separation then the process of dying must equally be overcome. It is a state of consciousness.

Overactive ego prevents

- sleep = rest from the ego tensions and ego chores.
- mutual involvement and love between the sexes = total accepting of, the transcending good will toward, and the consequent melting into another human being.
- deep, profound mediation. All of these replenish through melting the ego with the universal forces, giving up the mind to the divine.

When the distorted and fearful personality hinders this natural process, then unnatural processes are looked for. This is why people yearn for the sensations that drugs give... self-destructive aims... courting death. Death is unconsciously longed for to the precise degree that it is feared! the longing is there because the perpetual wakefulness of an isolated ego becomes unbearable.

There is a lawfulness that makes it indeed hazardous for the ego to let go of itself as long as the ego is attached to attitudes which are incompatible with the laws of the greater reality. ... perpetual unpleasantness may lead to unhealthy ego liberation and to insanity because the thus liberated ego is unsupported by anything that can give it real sustenance.

It is absolutely necessary to see yourself in this destructiveness. See yourself in that way for a while with the detached, objective self-evaluation that comes from a deep self-acceptance and the determination to do away with self-glorification and illusions about self.

Without the ego, there is no will if either the greater divine will is negated or unconsciously defeated... this is why there is such a deep fear of letting go.

This activity of catching one's own little hidden dishonesties is the kind of constructiveness that is compatible with the divine substance. Saying "I want to give my very, very best to the process of living, to every aspect of my life and contribute the very best forces that are within me. Wherever I do this and am too blind to be aware of it, I wish that the universal intelligence in me guide me to this awareness. I wish to pay attention to it." Puts something new in motion. In that moment!

Therefore fear of letting go of the ego diminishes proportionately because man has then something much larger and more reliable to trust in. This undivided intelligence and inexorable fulfillment is deeply safe and trustworthy.

The Meaning of the Ego and Its Transcendence, pgl 199 (often nicknamed '*Ego Tricks*')

Man's average state of mind is a fragmented piece of consciousness. The split off ego consciousness fears that going beyond, expanding this limited state, will dissolve his life and annihilate his existence. He ardently protects this limited state of consciousness, while it is this very limitation that creates fear and suffering.

It is his task, in the cycle of reincarnations, to reintegrate this split off ego consciousness and to regain forever wider and deeper portions of his real self, his cosmic existence with its unlimited, infinite possibilities for life experience, joy, and creation of the self.

Awareness has to be fought for. It does not come easily nor gratuitously. Remaining in the isolated ego state may appear safe and easy, but it leads to stagnation and death – ever recurring death.

The ego uses any number of tricks in order to maintain its separated, limited state:

Negativities and faults of every conceivable kind, summed up in the triad of pride, self will and fear (pgl 30).

Instinct of Self-Preservation (pgl 85 & 86) to preserve its present awareness.

Living for the sake of appearance rather than for the sake of truth, real feelings, interests.

Pride includes all attitudes of mask and defense, pretense and false shame

Self-Will includes stubbornness, resistance, spite, defiance, rigidity, expressing 'I will stay where I am' including staying isolated, separate and in status quo positions.

Fear includes all worry, anxiety, apprehensiveness so that any movement appears threatening and life-annihilating. These ego-tricks prevent joy, peace, freedom.

Negative Intentionality (pgl 195) to preserve the limited present state, and deny all desirable life experience.

'Safety' through denying pleasure, bliss joy, expansion, creative movement into life

Inattentiveness, lack of power of concentration, abstractedness, absent mindedness. To transcend it's present limited state, the ego requires a good deal of one-pointed focusing.

Laziness, tiredness, passivity make movement impossible, undesirable, exhausting.

Fear of exposure, denial of showing real feelings perpetuate isolation and deny oneness.

Distrust and suspicion to remain in the unmoving, present state.

Connection Between the Incarnatory Process and the Life Task, pl 216

Fragmented consciousness is a result of the total consciousness spreading and filling every nook and cranny of 'space'. It is the task of every fragmented, apparently disconnected aspect of consciousness to realize its true identity and connection with the real self.

These fragmented aspects of consciousness, of divine light which have lost their connection, float around in space. These aspects become personalities. The fragmented aspect of consciousness needs purification on many levels such as feelings, understanding, knowledge. It needs to spread its awareness to its full capacity.

You are all total entities, but your manifest consciousness with which you identify is an aspect that you total entity, your total being, seeks to reunite with.

Life, in its broader sense, is very much concerned with the process of spreading divine consciousness and reuniting with apparently disconnected aspects. That process is often called the divine plan or the evolutionary plan or the plan of salvation.

In order to follow through the process of spreading and reunification, the aspect to be purified is 'sent out' into a realm of consciousness that is commensurate with its own state. And that is the material level of life, as you know it in your conscious being.

The flow of energy rigidifies and makes things and people fixed. The flow becomes visible. The same with the entity itself. It is invisible and only the grossly condensed form of its essence appears as the sole reality.

There are unalterable basic common denominators such as love, wisdom, beauty. Each entity makes different dispositions, deals differently with its fragmented aspect.

The task always lies where the personality is still separate from the essence. The decision to integrate must be made by the conscious ego. The higher self will not and cannot force it upon the conscious mind. This would be against all spiritual law.

The gauge with which to measure the completion of the task is inner peace and fearlessness and organic living and dying.

First, the disconnected, conscious mind must make a deliberate effort and be ready for other possibilities. The conscious mind, as it is now available to you, contains possibilities to widen its scope to see more; to think in different ways; to expand its present limited circumference. This is its task.

Why understand Reason, Will and Emotion Personality Types PL 43?

Compiled from Pathwork Guide Lecture #132 and #216

- They are clues to your own personal misconceptions
- They are clues to the whole structure of the human personality
- They are clues to your personal transformation process
- They are clues to knowing what your task is in order to be enlightened.

When you are connected to what your essence is, and you know what your personality type is, you know what your task is to be enlightened.

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TRICKS OF THE EGO Lecture #199

*The tricks of the ego are every conceivable negativity known to mankind: any fault, any violation of integrity, truth, love and divine law. They can be summed up in the triad of **PRIDE, SELFWILL and FEAR PL 30***

PRIDE Creating artificial conflict between self and others. Better/worse than	Maintaining a separate state by the trick of creating an “I versus you” and a spirit of one-upmanship. “I’m better than you, I must outdo you”, etc. creating separateness
PRIDE Living for the sake of appearances	Trick is in believing its more important to create an impression, and appearance, rather than rely on truth, real feelings and interests.
PRIDE Shame of exposing real feelings and spiritual self	Ego trick to maintain the limited state by creating attitude of pretense, false shame of exposure, mask, embarrassment.
SELF WILL Stubbornness, resistance, spite, defiance, rigidity	These cause stiffening up against change. Stating “I will stay where and as I am”. Trick is to make this rigidity desirable and to make open, flexible movement appear threatening or humiliating.
SELF WILL Negative intentionality	Whatever the negative intentionality is, it indicates spite which always blurs the real view and falsifies the situation so that all desirable life experience is denied
FEAR / SELF WILL Laziness, tiredness, passivity	Trick is to make it appear as if movement was undesirable and exhausting. In actuality, the stagnation is more exhausting as its holding back the natural inclination towards growth.
FEAR Instinct of self-preservation is displaced	The FEAR of losing ones present state of awareness, the ego trick displaces the instinct of self-preservation, using it in the battle to preserve the present awareness
FEAR Worry, anxiety and apprehension	Trick of the ego is in making movement appear threatening.
FEAR Distrust and suspicion	Ego trick that creates suspicion and lack of trust, creating wish to remain unmoving and in present limited state.
Creating fear of positive states	Ego trick of maintaining “safety” by denying pleasure, bliss, joy, expansion, creative movement, etc. Ego creates fear of these states.
Inattentiveness, lack of concentration, abstractedness, absent-mindedness	Trick is to deny the one pointed focus necessary for the ego to transcend itself.

“make the ego flexible, teach it, bend it, change it, make it receptive and vibrant by IDENTIFYING and ABANDONING the TRICKS. The searchlight must be ruthlessly turned onto the little self. Use the healthy part of the ego to shed light on the unhealthy part. Then transcendence takes place in the safest possible way”.

Chart by Andi Kiva

Movie Suggestions for studying The Function of the Ego PL 132:

Learning to surrender to what is:

Michael J. Fox interviews

1. The Actor's Studio 2005

Interview

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXJXNus-_Kg

2. Frontline 2008

Michael J. Fox talks with FRONTLINE producer Dave Iverson about living with Parkinson's disease, a diagnosis Iverson also shares with his older brother and departed father. "My Father, My Brother, and Me"

<http://www.pbs.org/frontline/parkinsons>

Trailer http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGeMX_h67ml

Characters with weak egos tend to be used as exposition. They may disguise their weakness by banding together (as mobs or entrenched bureaucracy), dramatizing resistance to change and avoidance of personal responsibility. In bit or cameo roles, they personalize the negative consequences of not being able to take action.

Overblown ego

A Face In The Crowd 1957

A female television executive turns a folk-singing drifter into a powerful media star.

Cast: Andy Griffith, Patricia Neal, Walter Matthau. Dir: Elia Kazan.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJGUm9e_BLU

Any story which focuses upon over-identification with a positive cause (ignoring or denying negative consequences), such as:

Running on Empty 1988

The Pope family is on the run again. Tomorrow it will be a new town, a new house, a new hair color, a new identity. For the Pope boys, 17-year-old Danny and ten-year-old Harry, it will be a new school, a new name and new friends. Knowing they would lose custody of their two-year-old son, Danny, if they surrendered to the authorities, the Popes became fugitives, living "underground" in order to keep the family together. The Popes have sacrificed a "normal" life together for their political belief. Now, those beliefs have led them down a dead end street. Director: Sidney Lumet

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nvqoh79MMIc&list=PL3F21F1905525A720>

Dismantling an Idealized Self Image:

Witness Protection 1999

Tom Sizemore is marked for extermination by his "business associates," so he turns in evidence and is put -- along with his wife (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) and kids -- into the Federal Witness Protection Program. The film is an exhaustive, gripping look at the sacrifices witnesses and their families make -- changes that affect every corner of their "new" lives. With Forest Whitaker, River Phoenix

Available through Netflix (DVD only)