

BOOK REVIEW

The Elusive SELF

Reflections of an Internal Family Systems Therapist

by Marcel Duclos

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ppropriately for an Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapist, Marcel Duclos' book is made up of many different parts. It references people and topics as diverse as William James, Antonio Damasio, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, the Chiron body psychotherapy school, and the Kabbalah of Jewish mysticism. It looks at advanced old age, affect regulation, and alchemy.

This diversity has a central idea at its core: the self. The self is one of the key concepts in IFS, alongside the need to welcome all "parts" (equivalent to subpersonalities, aspects, etc.) of the client. To better understand and connect with our many parts, IFS encourages access to our "Self" – a coordinating center that brings healing and "can and should lead the individual's internal system (IFS Institute, n.d.)."

Duclos wants to go a step further with this concept. His search for the elusive Self divides it into three interrelated aspects with differing quantities of capitalization: the self, the Self, and the SELF.

If you read this book, you'll see a lot of these varying capitalizations, and quite a few definitions of them, too. They serve as ways into something that is necessarily difficult to define in any concrete way. But, for Duclos, this trinity is worth looking for, or drawing out, as it adds a new level of insight beyond the use of the singular self.

So, what do the three terms mean? One of his more straightforward explanations is:

- self = "the me, the ego, the I"
- Self = "the self that functions through the wisdom-qualities of the SELF"
- SELF = "the archetypal Imago Dei, the Other, the Source, that transcends the multiplicity manifest in the trinity of mind, brain, and body" (p. 201).

Or, following a discussion of Jung and mystical Judaism, there's:

"Through awareness, the self consciously transforms into a Self, existing through and by the SELF's energies. It is the person's life's task to effect a separation from the self's original unconscious identification to an eventual conscious relationship with the SELF that creates a third entity, the Self. A trinity within" (p. 65).

Or the more esoteric:

"As the SELF gives birth to the self, the self enters the crucible of transformation and becomes the Self who incarnates the SELF into the post-paradisiacal world, thus giving the ALL, the IT, God, an opportunity to heal the broken and burdened by experiencing the cost of healing the IT's OWN CREATION." (p. 126).

Like the IFS practitioner, you can perhaps get a flavor of some of Duclos' other parts from these explanations. They include the young New England theology graduate student enthused by the work of Jung, the professor of psychology and philosophy, and the Core Energetics-trained prac-

tioner working with soma as well as psyche. Looking back at over fifty years of study and practice, Duclos' aim in this book is to examine how his three-self model, and IFS itself, can be seen to connect with, be informed by, or further inform, the work and concepts of practitioners and theorists, past and present. He also reflects on own work and life, with autobiographical asides on some of the at times painful learning experiences that have informed who he is today.

Both these shared experiences and the range of thought and subject matter covered help give this book a wider audience than just IFS practitioners. Those without an IFS background might do well to brush up on some of the basic terminology of the practice, as we're quite quickly dropped into a fairly deep end. But, while Duclos obviously sees IFS as something of a pinnacle in terms of current therapeutic modalities, he also notes it as one of many, and his insights have relevance to other practitioners working in a similarly aligned way.

While some of the territory and nature of this inquiry felt new to me, my reading soon settled into its own rhythm. I found myself interestedly following down the many paths presented, encountering some fascinating books and new angles on established thinkers. These are quoted frequently alongside Duclos' comments in a form of exegesis or critical interpretation, and many times I found myself highlighting authors, and wanting to take my own extended journeys into some of the works he mentions. The way individual sections fit together occasionally felt confusing or fragmented, but the bigger picture, the felt sense of the work, seemed cohesive, led by the warm spirit of Duclos' generous, inclusive inquiry.

The sheer number of different topics covered and quoted makes this a difficult work to summarize, but readers of this journal may be particularly interested in what Duclos has to say about body psychotherapy. In Chapter 12, "Somatic Psychotherapy and the Self," he selects a few of his many influences to discuss in this context.

He sees an "amicable, creative relationship" between IFS and body psychotherapy, something that is being made more explicit by the Somatic IFS of Susan McConnell, which is concerned with the embodiment of self as part of the healing process.

He discusses John Pierrakos and his concept of the Core: "the source of our being... our divine connection to universal forces," which gives access to our "higher self" (p. 156). There is a commentary (p.164) on some of the more "enigmatic" statements from Stanley Keleman's book *Your Body Speaks Its Mind: Expanding Our Selves* (1975), praising his "anti-dualistic" understanding of human nature, musing on pulsation, and considering connections with religious experience as explored by William James.

A brief look at Linda Hartley's writing in *Contemporary Body Psychotherapy: The Chiron Approach* (2009) connects Reich's trust of the organism's inherent capacity for self-regulation and wellbeing with the IFS trust in the regulatory nature of the Self, and the inherent positive intent of our various parts.

Particularly resonant was an analysis of John Conger's book, *The Body in Recovery: Somatic Psychotherapy and the Self* (1994). Conger is a Jungian analyst and body psychotherapist, and this book helped Duclos "bridge the psychosomatic world" in his personal and professional life while in Core Energetics training (p. 178).

For Conger, embodiment means "not perfect health but rather a consciousness of wholeness and relatedness, a standing in the center of many polarities as an inventive curious presence in a state of spontaneous play." In response to the "psychic injury" of interpersonal trauma (essentially a "crushed rebellion, a voice of protest reduced to silence"), therapists need to foster the client's "embodiment, [that] capacity to bring diverse internal and external elements into an organization called the Self" (Conger, 1994, p. 199). This sense of Self becomes something that can be trusted to endure, no matter the difficulties of the present, which knows that it is related to others, and knows that it is part of nature and life itself.

In Conger's writing, Duclos says that he can hear "the strains of Jamesian music, Jung's symphonic elegance, the Jazz of body-psychotherapy modalities, the IFS sonatas." It's an apt description of Duclos' book as a whole, too. It contains many different styles of music perhaps, but music all the same.





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