

KNOWING THE OTHER

1. As human beings we know about each other. We know about the other's existence. Eventually some dates. We know a little bit who, how the other is. Mostly only a little bit and even that very often mistaken. More coming out of our old experiences with other people, out of our dreams and our fears, than out of the real being of the other. Or, much better, out of the real possibilities of the other. Anyway there are several possibilities to know, or to misunderstand. I try, in this paper, to find some clearness in this complicated matter.

2. First of all: Real knowledge of the other and real knowledge of ourselves is growing in the same time. Learning about the other presupposes the openness, the freedom to learn about ourselves. This can be put, again, another way round: We only know about ourselves as far as we are known by others, whom we let know us. This means in the same time, that there only are possibilities to change, when we learn to know the other, so learning to know us ourselves and, the reverse, when we let the other know us, so, in this knowing finding ourselves. This finding ourselves, in being found by the other means already that I am changing.

3. This means again that if I see myself as a stable character, "ready", finished, I preclude all real learning. Out of whichever reason I have this opinion about myself, I make life sterile. I do not know about the others in a really personal manner. I have my ideas about them, my dreams, my fears, which have to do with myself in the first place. I enrich myself with them, using them, at least I have the fantasy I do, or I am their victim, always or this time losing, but in both cases the other is, the others and myself are used. She, he is, the others are not known.

In fact this is the common way of knowing each other in our nowadays culture. We rival, we defend ourselves (which precludes all learning), we come, in this rivalling relationship, to a mutual understanding for the time being. When this rivalling has a hetero- or homo-erotic colouring we call it love.

4. We have to distinguish the knowing of the other from knowing about the mechanisms, working between humans and using them. In that case there is not a human relationship. The human being against which we use the mechanism is made into an object. These mechanisms are always used to seduce. The seducer tries, by using the mechanisms, to be the stronger. If the seducer does not reach her, his goal, then, at least this time, she, he is, or remains the weaker.

This is true for the relationship (or "relationship") of two or some persons, both in the erotic and in the non-erotic field. One of the strategies of the using of mechanisms of seducing each other in fact is to eroticize nearly everything, so bringing the other in all forms of regression.

The knowledge of these strategies is very often, in the life of each of us very old, learnt already very early from the parents, unconscious. But of course there are now the books and the pamphlets, from: "How to seduce.....", till: "How to get along with a neurotic dog..."

This is true too for the "macro-field". The world of advertising, the world of Saddam Hussein, of politics and business. The world of all big organisations, the churches included (although they mostly are bad performers).

5. Knowing about the other, and so knowing about ourselves, only is possible in a relationship. A relationship only is possible when there is freedom, trust, the freedom (which is not the same as the courage) to take risks. Being open for a relationship is always risky. You don't know the other and the possibilities of the other. She is a woman, I am a man. Or the other way round. The other comes out of another, more or less unknown world. And I don't know, as long as I do not know the other and her (or his) possibilities, my own ones. They could be frightening too.

Because a relationship only is possible in freedom, and because really meeting is risky, it is very important to have a common transcendence. A transcendence in which both, you and the other, trust, feel at home. Christianity. Having one Lord. Having the same ideals etc. And we all know, that too can be tricky.

6. Learning to know the other (better) is always enriching. The world becomes bigger, richer, more differentiated. By learning to know the other (better) I learn to know myself better and I get more possibilities to see, to perceive everything around me in a new and discovering manner. My own possibilities, until now undiscovered, slumbering, only existing as possibilities, become realities, belonging to my very being. In the mimesis with the other, whom I begin to know, possibilities awaken in me, which I never would discover without this meeting. They are possibilities, belonging to me, coloured by my history, doming into shape in my being and so with their own, personal character. In the same time they never would be extended, present, without the other, without the recognizing of the other as a fellow-human being.

7. Knowing about the other is very deeply a mimetic process, happening without our consciousness. Trusting in the relationship, we know. This might even be the safest manner of knowing. Knowing consciously, as far as we can know consciously at all, very quickly is becoming a power-game or being used in a power-game. Anyway, the beginnings of knowing the other and possibly quite a part of the possibility to know the other come into being from the conception on into the first years of our childhood. This does not mean, that nothing fundamentally can be learnt afterwards. In fact, childhood nowadays being as it is, less and less a period of life in which is real love and freedom, most people have to learn much, or nearly everything, in later life. And hopefully then too it very often is a "process", going on unconsciously.

8. There is only the possibility to know the other, when I am free, moving in a space of freedom, in which the other is taken or when she, he is free, giving this freedom to me. Freedom gives the space in which the risk to meet, to make oneself problematic, by letting the other as she, he is and so giving her, him entrance in our life, can be taken. To be free means too, that we show to the other in our very being, respect, reverence, the clear intention not to penetrate, not to judge. Only so we give (and, again, the other way round,

we receive) the possibility to come, to really be with us, to open up and show her-, himself to us.

9. We all are extremely complicated beings and most of ourselves we will never know consciously. What we more or less know about ourselves depends very much on the meetings we have, the possibilities to meet and to open up. Even so we mostly only will get to know "aspects", "layers" of ourselves and of the other. Really to know ourselves as we are is a promise.