

# INTRAPERSONAL AUTOPOIESIS

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## Introduction: What is Intrapersonal Autopoiesis?

Maturana and Varela introduced the idea of autopoiesis as a form of system organization where the system as a whole produces and replaces its own components in an on-going structural coupling with the surrounding environment. The autopoietic system is autocatalytic - it not only establishes but also maintains a unique boundary with the surrounding world - a boundary which simultaneously separates and connects the system.

Human beings are examples of autopoietic systems - they reproduce themselves in an on-going co-evolution with the environment: people respond (react, adapt) to the changes in their environment, and the environment responds (reacts, 'adapts') to human intervention.

Each individual has specific characteristics reflecting his/her unique inner structure. This structure is open for changes: we inevitably evolve in the course of our lives.

As people share with one another what they experience and what they know (or think that they know) about themselves and the environment, many common similarities arise in the ways they see, interpret and understand the life phenomena. And yet, each individual expresses *the self as a unique personality* - from childhood to old age. In every physical, emotional, mental or spiritual act, the self of each specific person reproduces itself, maintaining a unique boundary with the surrounding world, and 'evolves' in structural coupling with its environment.

The reproduction and evolution of the individual self in a vital coupling with its environment is what we call INTRAPERSONAL AUTOPOIESIS.

Intrapersonal Autopoiesis represents an application of the original concept of autopoiesis, introduced by Maturana and Varela in biology and by Luhmann in social systems, to the individual self, its realization and evolution.

## Individual Self

According to the ancient Vedic scriptures, the self is the ultimate and supreme genius in nature that mirrors the wisdom of the cosmos. This genius is inside each of us, a part of our inner blueprint that cannot be erased.

A scientific definition of *self* can be based on semiotics: ***individual self* emerges as a conceptualized choice of indices pointing to the best resemblance in the sense of feeling at home with one's thoughts and feelings.** By studying this choice in relation to the spatial

and temporal conditions under which it has been made, the individual is searching for his(her) identity and authenticity.

The search for identity and authenticity leads to an *icon* which is a sign of one's self. This icon evolves in time. To understand what the icon means in each moment constitutes the essence of the process of self-knowing - a core process in the Intrapersonal Autopoiesis.

### **Self-knowing**

Self-knowing includes three streams of knowledge:

1. Knowledge About the Ideal (KAI). This type of knowledge pursues answers to the following question:

*What kind of ideal personality would I like to develop (nourish, grow, realize) in myself?*

2. Knowledge About the Obstacles (KAO) on the way to the Ideal. This type of knowledge pursues answers to the following question:

*What kind of obstacles (both external and internal) prevent me from achieving (developing, realizing) my ideal?*

3. Knowledge About the Energy (KAE) of an individual. This type of knowledge pursues answers to the following question:

*How can I increase and use better my energy potential (strengths, willpower, determination) to deal with (or overcome) the obstacles on the way to my ideal?*

Like the three '*gunas*' - a Sanskrit name for the fundamental qualities of human nature, described in the ancient yoga philosophy of Patanjali - the three streams of self-knowledge are never in equilibrium - they always move so that in each moment a specific stream can prevail.

If KAI prevails, we often are in a contemplating or dreaming mood - either actively generating ideas, plans, visions and scenarios about the future, or passively imagining ourselves in some desirable ideal states and conditions.

If KAO prevails, we could feel depressed: we might be aware of how difficult it would be to achieve the ideal state (seen in our dreams, plans, and visions) and how much effort, knowledge and vigilance would be required to maintain this state.

If KAE prevails, we are usually in an active and creative mood - we act in order to realize our ideas, plans and dreams about the ideal.

As usual, the above three streams interact with one another through various positive and negative feedback loops.

Most promising for self-realization and personal growth seems to be the positive feedback between KAI and KAE: the image of the ideal stimulates human actions, the actions make the ideal more real, more close and achievable.

A negative feedback loop between KAE and KAO seems to act against individual self-realization and growth: the less active we are, the more obstacles appear on the way to our ideals; when seeing the increasing number of obstacles, our activity goes down.

The self-knowledge streams and their interactive patterns emerge in structural coupling with the environment where the human experience takes place. We call this environment Human Experiential Space.

Human Experiential Space (HES) provides a milieu where the Intrapersonal Autopoiesis manifests itself. Let us focus on the main characteristics of HES.

### **Human Experiential Space (*HES*)**

#### *1. HES is chaotic:*

- we cannot predict what experiential patterns will emerge in our life even in the nearest future;
- tiny little changes in the narratives we have about ourselves and the world we live in can bring forth dramatic changes in our daily experience;
- seemingly simple and routine modes of behavior can lead to extremely complicated experiential patterns.

#### *2. HES is multidimensional:*

- an almost infinite number of 'external' and 'internal' interrelated factors contribute in experiential dynamics;
- out of the turbulence and vorticity of these dynamics, self-organizing forces emerge: they are responsible for human evolution.

#### *3. HES does not obey linearity of time:*

- both past and future meet in the present patterns of experience;
- the nature of an experiential event directly reflects human perception of its time span.

#### *4. Strange (chaotic) attractors appear and disappear in HES:*

- human life bifurcates from one attractor to another;
- the attractors of our sensory experience are dissipative formations: they shrink with time, converging to the last attractor represented by the physical death.

#### *5. Human life has a tendency to 'get stuck' on a specific strange attractor in HES:*

- often this is an 'acquisition-oriented' attractor related to pursuit of material welfare (or pursuit of fame, power, pleasures, knowledge, etc.);

- the self-organizing force emerging from such a type of attractor keeps constantly one and the same direction - towards more and more acquisitions (money, fame, pleasure, knowledge, etc.);

- with the natural dissipation of the attractor, the intensity of its self-organizing force decreases.

Two factors - Inspiration and Intention, which play a crucial role in the process of self-knowing, are indispensable for both 'external' and 'internal' manifestations of Intrapersonal Autopoiesis.

## **Inspiration**

Inspiration energizes HES. It prolongs the life of the attractors pulsating in HES. It can also inject energy enough for a sudden jump (bifurcation) to another attractor to occur.

The crucial impact of inspiration on HES is that it can bring forth emergence of new attractors in the experiential space. In this sense, inspiration is a powerful stimulator of human creativity.

Similarly to creativity, inspiration occurs spontaneously in HES. 'Trying to be inspired' or 'to impose inspiration' is like 'trying to be spontaneous' - it does not work. On the contrary, it creates obstacles for the 'flash of inspiration' to be ignited. But there are many powerful catalysts of inspiration - external (like beautiful scenery, personality, picture, music, reading, etc.) or internal (related to individual achievements, self-realization, will-power, experience of love, faith, hope, etc.). Different catalysts can have different inspiring effects on different individuals.

The dynamics of any acquisition-oriented attractor in HES (even those related to 'knowledge-accumulation') can be reinforced but never inspired. Attachment can never be inspired - its reinforcement usually hastens exhaustion of the attractor. However, a genuine act of inspiration can help a person to resist the pulling forces of some attractor detrimental for the body or mind, and thus to become free from attachment. (Alcoholic Anonymous is an example of spiritual inspiration helping people to deal with the detrimental power of the alcoholic addiction.)

Any genuine spiritual endeavor needs a flash of inspiration, otherwise it loses sincerity and wilts quickly. Inspiration is needed to energize the human search for identity and authenticity, for self-realization, enlightenment and wisdom.

Inspiration is not a 'logocentric' phenomenon, that is, it is not based on any logically consistent 'system of thought' that claims legitimacy by reference to external, universally truthful propositions. It is grounded in self-constituted human logics which are circular and self-referential and, therefore, paradoxical.

Being a stimulator of creativity, inspiration needs intermittency (discontinuity) of causality: the chains of cause-effect melt under lucidity of inspiration. Any *a posteriori* analysis of how inspiration works can possibly reveal some relations of geometrical (or topological) similarity in experiential trajectories, rather than congruence of physical causes. Therefore, geometrical

mechanisms appear to be suitable for 'mapping' events of inspiration into experiential dynamics (See McNeil and Dimitrov).

## **Intention**

In contrast to inspiration, intention is a logocentric phenomenon. Logical thinking, cause and effect analysis, accumulation of theoretical and practical knowledge help us set our goals, purposes and objectives, and select approaches for achieving them.

Intention *directs* the energy flow in HES. The individual will-power is directly responsible for sustaining human intention. Without will-power (and all the mental and physical efforts emanated by it) the energy of inspiration irreversibly dissolves in HES.

Inspiration gives birth to new attractors in HES, but it is the intention which selects towards which of them to focus human activity. The mere generation of many attractors, without concentrating enough efforts to assimilate their purposes and understand their nature can be very destructive. In the ancient fable, the donkey is dying from starvation being unable to make a choice between two attractive sources of food. In the fable of our time, the human kind is killing its environment (and thus killing itself) being unable to understand the dangerous nature of many of the attractors created by to-day's prevailing linear thinking and strongly oriented (in an exhaustive competitive manner) towards accumulation of material goods, prestige and pleasure.

Understanding the attractors in HES needs efforts; but before efforts, it needs an *intention to be aware* of what happens in our lives. Most of the events occurring in human life are extremely subtle, related to delicate spheres of emotional, mental or spiritual worlds of human individuality. In order to feel and understand what happens in these spheres we need an extreme awareness, vigilance, watchfulness - these qualities must be *intentionally* revealed in ourselves *by ourselves*. No one from 'outside' can inject them in us, make us aware of what happens in our inner experiential space. This space is sacred. Only we have an access to it.

***The sacred inner space of an individual is where the Intrapersonal Autopoiesis works.***

## **'Follow Not Me But You'**

This famous quotation belongs to Nietzsche. It strongly relates to the functioning of the Intrapersonal Autopoiesis. Intrapersonal Autopoiesis that manifests itself in an individual cannot be transplanted into the inner space of another individual.

If you follow others, instead of being yourself, you quickly lose your sparkle and stop reflecting the light of your unique individuality. Without that light, there is no self-awareness, no personal growth, no progress in life.

To follow another person (mentally, emotionally or spiritually) means to copy, imitate or identify with another's mechanism of Intrapersonal Autopoiesis, forgetting your *real* self. This can result in fatal conflicts between the self and mind (confusion in thinking), the self and heart (confusion in feelings), the self and spirit (confusion in the search for identity).

Intrapersonal Autopoiesis needs freedom for its functioning. The moment we surrender ourselves to some other self, the freedom is lost and we become unable to express ourselves.

The lack of freedom makes individual self-awareness impossible and results in missing individual opportunities for self-knowing, self-realization and growth

### **Ability to Learn**

Individual ability to learn is crucial for establishing, whether spontaneously or intentionally, connections and interdependence between the experiential events, patterns and processes. By seeing events and processes as interconnected, we can extract meaning from their occurrence and thus use them as personal *lessons of life*.

Unfortunately, our ability to grasp the meaning of the experiential events is quite limited: we can ruminate only the 'global' turning points in our lives. And they are but very few. A plethora of tiny, difficult-to-notice events permanently occur, influencing strongly the way we live. Can we learn to see these events? The positive answer relates again to the awakening of awareness.

Human awareness is endless. Once open, it extends and helps to see more and more things happening in our everyday life - not as isolated insignificant events, but as vital constituents of an integral and dynamic web of life pulsating through each of us, through all animated and non-animated creatures of the universe.

We are born to be aware of ourselves. What is needed is to learn how to reveal this inherent property, how to uncover it from the layers of prejudice, stereotypes, habits and ignorance accumulated through years of blindly following the instructions of others or of a robot-like activity in the basin of some acquisition-oriented attractor.

The techniques of Concentration, Contemplation and Meditation, specially adjusted to each individual nature, can help tremendously in honing our ability to learn from the events of life, no matter how tiny they seem to appear.

### **Conclusion**

Of all the experiences we can have, the experience of our inner self is the most important. Our physical bodies are ever-changing; our minds with their thoughts, feelings and desires, also come and go. They are both experiences locked in time and space; they are not the experiencer.

"The one who is having the experience is beyond time and space - it is the timeless factor in every time-bounded experience, the feeler behind the feeling, the thinker of thoughts, the animator of our bodies and minds." (D. Chopra).

It is our self. Its reproduction and evolution in an unbreakable coupling with the universe is at the focus of the Intrapersonal Autopoiesis. The understanding of Intrapersonal Autopoiesis is understanding of ourselves. And this is the highest understanding.

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