

SELFISM
Apologetics
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0. INTRODUCTION: THE NOTION OF “SELFISM”

- “The terminology used involves words like Self-belief, Self-worth, Self-esteem, Self-image, Self-love, Self-acceptance, Self-potential, Self-help, Self-improvement, Self-fulfilment and such like...”¹
- DESCARTES: the one certainty is “I exist” – identity of “self” as the absolute starting point of all knowledge...

0.1. THE SELF - THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY

- “What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me.”²
- Distinguish: (1) “Ego”-tism – the individual is the *object*, the *goal* of life and work, (2) “Self”-ism – the individual is the *subject-source*, the *creator* of values and the world.

“Who am I?” (1) The Greeks believed they were the playthings of fate, (2) Christians saw themselves as miserable sinners, (3) Descartes thought that man was a thinker, (4) liberals stressed self-determination, (5) Romantics self-expression, while (6) Freud invited you to go and lie upon the couch. The fundamental issue of identity has been endlessly posed by philosophers, poets, psychiatrists, and people at large. But if the question has stayed the same, the answers have changed over time.³

- [Ch.TAYLOR] “...define **the modern identity in describing its genesis**. I focus on three major facets of this identity: (1) first, modern inwardness, the sense of ourselves as beings with inner depths, and the connected notion that we are 'selves'; (2) second, the affirmation of ordinary life which develops from the early modern period; (3) third, the expressivist notion of nature as an

¹ www.bereanpublishers.com/the-glorification-of-self/ (11/05/2015)

² TAYLOR C. *The Sources of Self*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 12

³ PORTER, R. (ed.) *Rewriting the Self*, London : Routledge, 1997, p. 1.

inner moral source. The [1] first I try to trace through Augustine to Descartes and Montaigne, and on to our own day; the [2] second I take from the Reformation through the Enlightenment to its contemporary forms; and the [3] third I describe from its origin in the late eighteenth century through the transformations of the nineteenth century, and on to its manifestations in twentieth-century literature.”⁴

0.2. THE SELF REVEALED IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- AUGUSTINE (*Confessions*) → ROUSSEAU (*Confessions*) → GOETHE → NIETZSCHE (*Ecce Homo*)

1. TOWARDS THE MODERN “SELF”

- “mystery of iniquity”(?)

1.1. THE “IDEAL” MAN

- Theosis (Pico → Goethe → Stirner → Nietzsche → FOUCAULT)
- (1) PICO

[PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA 1484] I have given you, Adam, neither a predetermined place nor a particular aspect nor any special prerogatives in order that you may take and possess these through your own decision and choice. The limitations on the nature of other creatures are contained within my prescribed laws. You shall determine your own nature without constraint from any barrier, by means of the freedom to whose power I have entrusted you. I have placed you at the centre of the world so that from that point you might see better what is in the world. I have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that like a free and sovereign artificer you might mould and fashion yourself into that form you yourself shall have chosen.⁵

- (2) GOETHE *Das Göttliche* (1783)

Be the man that is noble,
Both helpful and good.
Unweariedly forming
The right and the useful,
A type of those beings
Our mind hath foreshadow'd!

Der edle Mensch
Sei hilfreich und gut!
Unermüdet schaff er
Das Nützliche, Rechte,
Sei uns ein Vorbild
Jener geahneten Wesen

- “If I can go on working to the very end”, GOETHE said to Eckermann when he was eighty, ‘Nature is obliged to assign to me another form of being when my present form of being is no longer able to contain my spirit.’⁶

(3) Max STIRNER *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (The Ego and his own 1845)

If God, if mankind, as you affirm, have substance enough in themselves to be all in all to themselves, then I feel that I shall still less lack that, and that I shall have no complaint to make of my "emptiness." I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything. Away, then, with every concern that is not altogether my concern ! You think at least the "good cause" must be my concern? What's good, what's bad? Why, I myself am my concern, and I am neither good nor bad. Neither has meaning for me. The divine is God's concern; the human, man's. My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., but solely what is mine, and it is not a general one, but is — unique, as I am unique. **Nothing is more to me than myself !**

- (4) NIETZSCHE *Ecce Homo* (1888)

[NIETZSCHE] Among my writings my Zarathustra stands by itself. With this book I have given mankind the greatest gift it has ever been given. This book, with a voice that carries over millennia, is not only the highest book that there is, the true mounta in-air book — the whole fact of man lies at a tremendous distance beneath it — it is also the deepest book, born out of the innermost abundance of truth, an

⁴ TAYLOR C. *The Sources of Self*, p. x

⁵ *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

⁶ TREVELYAN, H. *Goethe and the Greeks*, Cambridge : CUP, 1981, p. xxxviii.

inexhaustible well into which no bucket descends without coming up filled with gold and goodness. Am I understood?... The self-overcoming of morality out of truthfulness, the self-overcoming of the moralist into his opposite—me—this is what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth. (Versteht man mich? ...Die Selbstüberwindung der Moral aus Wahrhaftigkeit, die Selbstüberwindung des Moralisten in seinen Gegensatz - in mich - das bedeutet in meinem Munde der Name Zarathustra.)

- (5) FOUCAULT *The Order of Things* (Les mots et les choses 1966)

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area – European culture since the sixteenth century – one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it. It is not around him and his secrets that knowledge prowled for so long in the darkness. In fact, among all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order, the knowledge of identities, differences, characters, equivalences, words – in short, in the midst of all the episodes of that profound history of the Same – only one, that which began a century and a half ago and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear. And that appearance was not the liberation of an old anxiety, the transition into luminous consciousness of an age-old concern, the entry into objectivity of something that had long remained trapped within beliefs and philosophies: it was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

1.2. TENSIONS → MEANINGLESSNESS

- The notion that there is a certain dignity and worth in this life requires a contrast...⁷
- "...we can in principle control everything by means of calculation. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world. Unlike the savage for whom such forces existed, we need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control the spirits or pray to them. Instead, technology and calculation achieve our ends. This is the primary meaning of the process of intellectualization."⁸
- the conflict between divine expectations from one self and earthy reality of daily reality
- meaning always comes *from the outside* of the sign, from someone *using* it, *interpreting* it...

Few works in modern literature are more widely read than DOSTOEVSKY'S *Notes from Underground* (Zapiski iz podpol'ya) or so often cited as a key text revelatory of the hidden depths of the sensibility of our time. The term "underground man" has become part of the vocabulary of contemporary culture, and this character has now achieved—like Hamlet, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Faust—the stature of one of the great archetypal literary creations. Most important cultural developments of the present century—Nietzscheanism, Freudianism, expressionism, surrealism, crisis theology, existentialism—have claimed the underground man as their own or have been linked with him by zealous interpreters; and when the underground man has not been hailed as a prophetic anticipation, he has been held up to exhibition as a luridly repulsive warning. The underground man has thus entered into the very warp and woof of modern culture in a fashion testifying to the philosophical suggestiveness and hypnotic power of this first great creation of DOSTOEVSKY'S post-Siberian years.⁹

2. LIFE UNDER SELFISM

2.1. SELFISM IN THE POPULAR MIND

- [CHESTERTON] "Everything matters except everything."¹⁰
- transvaluation (NIETZSCHE); creating values (SARTRE) →

ATKINSON & HILGARD'S *Introduction to Psychology*, (15th Edition): (1) Biological psychology, (2) Cognitive psychology, (3) Developmental psychology, (4) Social and personality psychology, (5) Clinical and counseling psychology, (6) School and educational psychology, (7) Organizational and engineering psychology

- Psychology → self-understanding (Personality psychology)

⁷ TAYLOR, C. *The Sources of the Self*, p. 23.

⁸ WEBER, M. *The Vocation Lectures*, Indianapolis : Hackett, 2004, p. 13.

⁹ FRANK, J. *Dostoevsky, A Writer in His Time*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 413.

¹⁰ CHESTERTON, G. K. *Heretics*, New York : John Lane, 1919, p. 13.

2.2. SELFISM IN ETHICS

2.2.1. THE CULT OF THE HEART (SELF-EXPRESSION)

- [SHAKESPEARE] “This above all: to thine ownself be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.”¹¹
- “If the heart was the centre of humanity, its truest fullness was to be found in what was simple, genuine, honest, unaffected. All men and women were heir to this simplicity...”¹²
- [TOZER] “Conformity to ourselves, even our better selves, can lead only to ultimate tragedy.”¹³

2.2.2. CULTURE – SELF-DEFINED IDENTITY

- [SZASZ] “In the animal kingdom, the rule is, eat or be eaten; in the human kingdom, define or be defined.”¹⁴
- “...this is an expression of Enlightenment hopes taken one step further: not just upholding the liberty of the individual, but the freedom to be absolutely oneself; not just placing cardinal value on the right to life, but the right to enjoy life to the fullest.”¹⁵
- “...create ‘desubalternizing knowledges’...”¹⁶
- [LIPOVETSKY] “**Moderní ideál podřízenosti individuálních zájmů racionálním pravidlům zájmů kolektivních byl rozprášen.** Proces personalizace postavil do popředí osobní realizaci a respektování subjektivní zvláštnosti a jedinečné osobitosti jakožto základní hodnotu (a to bez ohledu na nové formy ovládání a homogenizace společnosti, které samozřejmě zároveň přináší). Právo být naprosto sám sebou a co nejvíc si užívat je totiž neoddělitelné od společnosti, která svobodu člověka povýšila na základní hodnotu, a je pouze nejzazším projevem individualistické ideologie.”¹⁷
- emic ↔ etic

2.3. SELFISM IN MASS CULTURE

- theory: you are absolutely autonomous in your values...
- reality: you are manipulated into false identity by mass culture (“Serious involvement with culture produces facility, while the consumption of mass culture leaves no lasting trace; it affords a kind of experience which is not cumulative but regressive.”¹⁸)

2.3.1. VISUAL CULTURE (FILM IDENTITY)

- contemporary spiritual attitude:

[FEUERBACH] But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence, this change, inasmuch as it does away with Illusion, is an absolute annihilation, or at least a reckless profanation; for in these days illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.¹⁹

- surrogate identity through visual culture

[GABLER] When life itself is an entertainment medium, however, this process is obviously altered. Lewis Carroll, commenting on a vogue among nineteenth-century cartographers for ever larger and more detailed maps, once cautioned that the maps might get so large they would interfere with agriculture, and waggishly suggested that the earth be used as a map of itself instead. Carroll’s is an apt analogy for the new relationship between entertainment and life. By conflating the two and converting everything from the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby to the marital misadventures of Elizabeth Taylor into entertainments that transport us from

¹¹ SHAKESPEARE, W. *Hamlet* [Polonius to Laertes]

¹² JOYCE, P. *Democratic Subjects*, Cambridge : CUP, 1994, p. 60.

¹³ TOZER, A. W. *The Root of the Righteous*, Harrisburg : Christian Publications, 1955, p. 59.

¹⁴ SZASZ, T. *The Second Sin*, New York : Anchor Press, 1973, p. 20.

¹⁵ NIEZEN, R. *A World Beyond Difference*, Malden : Blackwell, 2004, p. 113.

¹⁶ NIEZEN, R. *A World Beyond Difference*, p. 160.

¹⁷ LIPOVETSKY, G. *Era prazdnoty*,

¹⁸ HABERMAS, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge : MIT Press, 1993, p. 166.

¹⁹ FEUERBACH, L. *The Essence of Christianity*, New York : Calvin Blanchard, 1855, p. 8.

our problems, we need never leave the theater's comfort. We can remain constantly distracted. Or, put another way, we have finally learned how to escape from life into life.²⁰

- [DEBORD] "In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation."²¹
- "Whether we focus on "the mirror of nature" metaphor in philosophy with Richard Rorty or emphasize the prevalence of surveillance with Michel Foucault or bemoan the society of the spectacle with Guy DEBORD, we confront again and again the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern era."²²

2.3.2. SELF=BODY (QUEST FOR THE PERFECT BODY)

- "Your body is not itself. Nor, I should add, is mine. It is under siege from the pharmaceutical, aerobic, dietetic, liposuctive, calorie-controlled, cybernetic world of postmodernism. The body has become a central concern both in academia and the wider culture, providing one of the few points of direct contact between these often divorced spheres. ...nor does it allow the modern subject to bypass the limits of body in a quest for identity. The body cannot be known or understood without visual representation, yet both the body itself and its image seem inevitably flawed."²³

2.3.3. CONSUMERISM

- consuming ↔ giving (more blessed to give...)
- BAUDRILLARD ("...to be yourself under the terms of consumer society is to be what you are not."²⁴)
- [FROMM] "Only to the extent that we decrease the mode of having, that is of nonbeing—i.e., stop finding security and identity by clinging to what we have, by "sitting on it," by holding onto our ego and our possessions—can the mode of being emerge. ...The "identity crisis" of modern society is actually the crisis produced by the fact that its members have become selfless instruments, whose identity rests upon their participation in the corporations (or other giant bureaucracies), as a primitive individual's identity rested upon membership in the clan."²⁵

[DOSTOEVSKY] Show him with all earthly blessings, plunge him so deep into happiness that nothing is visible but the bubbles rising to the surface of his happiness, as if it were water; give him such economic prosperity that he will have nothing left to do but sleep, eat gingerbread, and worry about the continuance of world history. Да осыпьте его всеми земными благами, утопите в счастье совсем с головой, так, чтобы только пузырьки вскакивали на поверхности счастья, как на воде; дайте ему такое экономическое довольство, чтоб ему совсем уж ничего больше не оставалось делать, кроме как спать, кушать пряники и хлопотать о прекращении всемирной истории, - так он вам и тут, человек-то, и тут, из одной неблагодарности, из одного пасквиля мерзость сделает. Рискнет даже пряниками и нарочно пожелает самого пагубного вздора, самой неэкономической бессмыслицы, единственно для того, чтобы ко всему этому положительному благоразумию примешать свой пагубный фантастический элемент. Именно свои фантастические мечты, свою пошлейшую глупость пожелает удержать за собой единственно для того, чтоб самому себе подтвердить (точно это так уж очень необходимо), что люди все еще люди, а не фортепьянные клавиши, на которых хоть и играют сами законы природы собственноручно, но грозят до того доиграться, что уж мимо календаря и захотеть ничего нельзя будет. Да ведь мало того: даже в том случае, если он действительно бы оказался фортепьянной клавишей, если б это доказать ему даже естественными науками и математически, так и тут не образумится, а нарочно напротив что-нибудь сделает, единственно из одной неблагодарности:

²⁰ GABLER, N. *Life the Movie*, New York : Vintage Books, 1998, p.

²¹ DEBORD, G. *The Society of the Spectacle*,

²² FOSTER, H. (ed.) *Vision and Visuality*, Seattle : Bay Press, 1988, p. 3.

²³ MIRZOEFF, N. *Bodyscape*, London : Routledge, 1995, pp. 1, 51.

²⁴ GENOSKO, G. *Jean Baudrillard*. In: RITZER, G. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, Thousand Oaks : Sage, 2005.

²⁵ FROMM, E. *To Have or to Be?* New York : Continuum, 2008, pp. 72, 121.

собственно чтоб настоять на своем. А в том случае, если средств у него не окажется, - выдумает разрушение и хаос, выдумает разные страдания и настоит-таки на своем!²⁶

- “Consumer objects have their effect in structuring behavior through a linguistic sign function.”²⁷
 - [BOURDIEU] “...‘identity’, in the current phrase, is inscribed in things - in the form of objective structures, de facto separation, economic or spatial, etc. - and in bodies - in the form of tastes and distastes, likes and dislikes, which are sometimes called visceral. ...there is no worse dispossession, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity.”²⁸

[CHESTERTON] “Let us leave all these arbitrary standards and embrace liberty.” This is, logically rendered, “Let us not decide what is good, but let it be considered good not to decide it.” He says, “Away with your old moral formulae; I am for progress.” This, logically stated, means, “Let us not settle what is good ; but let us settle whether we are getting more of it.”²⁹

- [ROBBINS] “...the subject-matter of Economics is essentially a relationship — a relationship between ends conceived as tendencies to conduct, on the one hand, and the technical and social environment on the other. Ends as such do not form part of this subject-matter.”³⁰

2.4. SELFISM IN THE CHURCH

2.4.1. SELF-ESTEEM MOVEMENT

- SCHULLER – “*Self-esteem – the New Reformation*”
 - [SCHULLER] “Self-esteem then, or “pride in being a human being,” is the single greatest need facing the human race today. ...I strongly suggest that self-love is the ultimate will of man that what you really want more than anything else in the world is the awareness that you are a worthy person. ...Do not fear pride: the easiest job God has is to humble us. God’s almost impossible task is to keep us believing every hour of every day how great we are as his sons and daughters on planet earth.”³¹

2.4.2. THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

- [GUINNESS] “Consumer religion is an unholy amalgam of convictions and consumption that creates a sacramental materialism in the name of God.”³²

3. A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

- preach the *principle of sacrifice* (against self-creation)
- “Without doubt the greatest need of the human personality is to experience God Himself. This is because of who God is and who and what man is.”³³
- Antichrists in the world (1John)
- Deception in the church → arrogance parading as faith

3.1. THE SOURCE OF IDENTITY: CREATION

- (1) Biblical anthropology → (2) hamartology → (3) soteriology (in that logical order)

[CHAMBERS] No man who thinks and faces life as it actually is, can be other than pessimistic. There is no way out unless he finds it by his religious faith or is blinded by his temperament. The summing up of all practical life is that **the basis of things is tragic**. Sum up your life as it actually is, and, unless you look at

²⁶ ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ, Ф. М. *Записки из подполья VIII*,

²⁷ POSTER, M. *Introduction*. In: BAUDRILLARD, J. *Selected Writings*, Stanford : SUP, 2002, p. 2.

²⁸ BOURDIEU, P. *Pascalian Meditations*, Stanford : SUP, 2000, pp. 180, 241.

²⁹ CHESTERTON, G. K. *Heretics*, New York : John Lane, 1919, p. 33.

³⁰ ROBBINS, L. *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, London : Macmillan, 1932, p. 37.

³¹ quoted: www.equip.org/PDF/DS210.pdf

³² GUINNESS, O. *The Gravedigger File*, London : Hodder & Stoughton, 1983, p. 135.

³³ TOZER, A. W. *That Incredible Christian*, Harrisburg : Christian Publications, 1964, p. 83.

actual things from a religious or a temperamental or an intellectual standpoint, everything is to be said for this philosophy: Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die. If Rationalism is the basis of things, that is undoubtedly the most reasonable thing to do. But if the basis of things is tragic, then the Bible standpoint comes nearer the solution, and NIETZSCHE is nearer the truth than any rationalist. NIETZSCHE declares that the basis of things is **tragic**, and that the way out is by the merciless Superman; the Bible reveals that the basis of things is **tragic**, and that the way out is by Redemption. We say that man is in process of evolution—a magnificent promise of what he is going to be! The Wisdom of the Hebrews looks at man's history and attainments and says—What a magnificent ruin of what he was created to be!³⁴

- Man – the image of God → to know *man* we have to know *God* first
 - C.S. LEWIS: two ways of viewing the self (1) as *created*, i.e. valuable, (2) as *corrupted*, i.e. in need of redemption (by killing and resurrection)
- The only *normal* man is Jesus → to compare with Christ

[CHESTERTON] A modern morality, on the other hand, can only point with absolute conviction to the horrors that allow breaches of law; its only certainty is a certainty of ill. It can only point to imperfection. It has no perfection to point to. But the monk meditating upon Christ of Buddha has in his mind an image of perfect health, a thing of clear colours and clean air.³⁵

3.2. THE SOURCE OF MEANING: SERVING THE MASTER

[CHAMBERS in *Baffled to Fight Better*]:

Man is not God but hath God's end to serve,
 A master to obey, a course to take,
 Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become.
 Grant this, then man must pass from old to new,
 From vain to real, from mistake to fact,
 From what once seemed good, to what now proves best.
 Robert Browning³⁶

- Important thing is not: *what* you do but *for whom* you do it!
- **Gal 2:20** It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- **2Cor 5:14-15** For the love of Christ controls us (*συνέχει ἡμᾶς*), because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

3.3. THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS: FORGETTING SELF

- forget happiness...

[CHAMBERS] The end and aim of human life is not happiness, but "to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." Holiness of character, chastity of life, living communion with God—that is the end of a man's life, whether he is happy or not is a matter of moonshine. Happiness is no standard for men and women because happiness depends on my being determinedly ignorant of God and His demands.³⁷

- The paradox of the Beatitudes! (WATSON: **There is a Blessedness in Reversion**)

[WATSON Thomas]...(2) Having shown wherein blessedness does not consist, I shall next show wherein it does consist. Blessedness stands in the fruition of the chief good.

(i) It consists in fruition; there must not be only possession, but fruition. A man may possess an estate, yet not enjoy it. He may have the dominion of it, but not the comfort, as when he is in a lethargy or under the predominance of melancholy. But in true blessedness there must be a sensible enjoyment of that which the soul possesses.

(ii) Blessedness lies in the fruition of the chief good. It is not every good that makes a man blessed, but it must be the supreme good, and that is God. Happy is that people whose God is the Lord' (Psalm 144:15). God is the soul's rest (Psalm 116:7). Now that only in which the soul acquiesces and rests can make it blessed. The

³⁴ CHAMBERS, O. *Shade of His Hand*.

³⁵ CHESTERTON, G. K. *Heretics*, p. 25.

³⁶ *A Death in the Desert*.

³⁷ CHAMBERS, O. *Biblical ethics*.

globe or circle, as is observed in mathematics, is of all others the most perfect figure, because the last point of the figure ends in that first point where it began. So, when the soul meets in God, whence it sprang as its first original, then it is completely blessed. **That which makes a man blessed must have fixed qualifications or ingredients in it, and these are found nowhere but in God the chief good.**

In true blessedness **THERE MUST BE MELIORITY**; that which fills with blessedness must be such a good as is **better than a man's self**. If you would ennoble a piece of silver, it must be by putting something to it which is better than silver, as by putting gold or pearl to it. So that which ennobles the soul and enriches it with blessedness, must be by adding something to it which is more excellent than the soul, and that is God. The world is below the soul; it is but the soul's footstool; therefore it cannot crown it with happiness.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Selfism is the problem of identity
- Human identity without an infinite source has no anchor. The self must be known through God.
- The self in Christianity is infinitely valuable only if freely and knowingly lost in Jesus Christ, the paradigmatical MAN (human being).