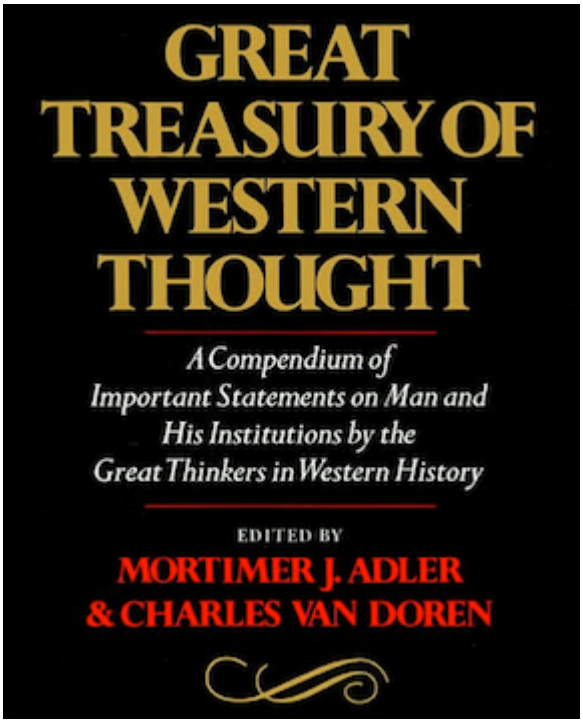
THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

May '11 Nº 621



SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-LOVE

The fact that man is a self-conscious or self-regarding animal underlies the two main themes treated in this section. One is the injunction first uttered by one of the seven wise men of ancient Greece—"Know thyself!" That commandment gets repeated in one form or another century after century, as a counsel of perfection or as the key to wisdom. Clearly, the task to be performed is not an easy one, since by implication it is one that few men discharge adequately.

Illusion and self-deception stand in the way of an honest, penetrating, and fearless self-appraisal. Though it would appear that we have access to the innermost core of our individual being, and that there is nothing in the world with which we are on more intimate

terms than our own self, the self remains an elusive object of knowledge and understanding. Different reasons for this are given or suggested by different writers; and they also recommend different ways to overcome obstacles. For all these differences, the basic insights about the desirability and the difficulty of self-knowledge remain very much the same from Socrates and the Roman Stoics to Thoreau and Emerson, and to the psychoanalysts and existentialists in our own day.

According to many of the passages quoted in Chapter 3 on LOVE, the proper objects of love are God, other human beings, one's country, and such ideals as truth, beauty, and goodness. Yet one of the most famous of all statements about love—the Christian precepts of charity—commands us, first, to love God, and second, to love our neighbor as our self. And the same injunction is implied in Aristotle's conception of the ideal friend, the proper beloved, as an *alter ego*—another self. Self-love is in a sense the basis of true love of another.

Self-love, then, far from being castigated as a misdirection of the benevolent impulse, is conceived as inseparable from benevolence toward others. There are other terms for what is being discussed here—"self-esteem," "self-respect," *"amour propre,"* and even "pride," when that term is used to signify a well-founded and well-deserved approval of one's self. Yet the fact that pride is also condemned as an overestimation of one's worth suggests that self-love can become so excessive or perverted that it excludes or subordinates all other loves. Whereas the passages dealing with the first theme in this section—self-knowledge—tend to be of the same tenor, the passages dealing with the second—self-love—are often ambivalent.

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1 Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.

Proverbs 27:2

2 The gods help him who helps himself.

Euripides, *Fragment*

3 *Critias.* Self-knowledge would certainly be maintained by me to be the very essence of knowledge, and in this I agree with him who dedicated the inscription, "Know thyself!" at Delphi.

Plato, *Charmides,* 164B

4 *Socrates.* The wise or temperate man, and he only, will know himself.

Plato, *Charmides,* 167A

5 *Athenian Stranger.* The excessive love of self is in reality the source to each man of all offences. . . . Wherefore let every man avoid excess of self-love, and condescend to follow a better man than himself, not allowing any false shame to stand in the way.

Plato, *Laws*, V*,* 731B

6 Everyone has the obligation to ponder well his own specific traits of character. He must also regulate them adequately and not wonder whether someone else's traits might suit him better. The more definitely his own a man's character is, the better it fits him.

Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1, 31

7 Every animal is attached to nothing so much as to its own interest. Whatever then appears to it an impediment to this interest, whether this be a brother, or a father, or a child, or beloved, or lover, it hates, spurns, curses: for its nature is to love nothing so much as its own interest; this is father, and brother and kinsman, and country, and God. . . .

If a man put in the same place his interest, sanctity, goodness, and country, and parents, and friends, all these are secured: but if he puts in one place his interest, in another his friends, and his country and his kinsmen and justice itself, all these give way being borne down by the weight of interest.

Epictetus, *Discourses*, 11*,* 22

8 How much trouble he avoids who does not look to see what his neighbour says or does or thinks, but only to what he does himself, that it may be just and pure.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, IV*,* 18

9 Look within. Within is the fountain of good, and it will ever bubble up, if thou wilt ever dig.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, VII, 59

10 I have often wondered how it is that every man loves himself more than all the rest of men, but yet sets less value on his own opinion of himself than on the opinion of others.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, XII, 4

11 Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line

lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine.

Plotinus, *First Ennead,* VI, 9

12 Man is a great deep, Lord. You number his very hairs and they are not lost in Your sight: but the hairs of his head are easier to number than his affections and the movements of his heart.

Augustine, *Confessions,* IV, 14

13 If I am deceived, I am. For he who is not, cannot be deceived; and if I am deceived, by this same token I am.

Augustine, *City of God,* XI, 26

14 For the most part, the human mind cannot attain to self-knowledge otherwise than by making trial of its powers through temptation, by some kind of experimental and not merely verbal self-interrogation.

Augustine, *City of God*, XVI, 32

15 It is a very ordinary and common thing amongst men to conceive, foresee, know, and presage the misfortune, bad luck, or disaster of another; but to have the understanding, providence, knowledge, and prediction of a man's own mishap, is very scarce, and rare to be found any where.

Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* III, 15

16 If, as we who study ourselves have learned to do, each man who hears a true statement immediately considered how it properly pertains to him, each man would find that it is not so much a good saying as a good whiplash to the ordinary stupidity of his judgment.

Montaigne, *Essays*, 1*,* 23, Of Custom

17 This capacity for sifting truth, whatever it may amount to in me, and this free will not to enslave my belief easily, I owe principally to myself. For the firmest and most general ideas I have are those which, in a manner of speaking, were born with me. They are natural and all mine. I produced them crude and simple, with a conception bold and strong, but a little confused and imperfect. Since then I have established and fortified them by the authority of others and the sound arguments of the ancients, with whom I found my judg-

ment in agreement. These men have given me a firmer grip on my ideas and a more complete enjoyment and possession of them.

Montaigne, *Essays,* II, 17,
Of Presumption

18 It is a rare life that remains well ordered even in private. Any man can play his part in the side show and represent a worthy man on the boards; but to be disciplined within, in his own bosom, where all is permissible, where all is concealed—that's the point.

Montaigne, *Essays,* III, 2,
Of Repentance

19 It was a paradoxical command that was given us of old by that god at Delphi: "Look into yourself, know yourself, keep to yourself; bring back your mind and your will, which are spending themselves elsewhere, into themselves; you are running out, you are scattering yourself; concentrate yourself, resist yourself; you are being betrayed, dispersed, and stolen away from yourself. Do you not see that this world keeps its sight all concentrated inward and its eyes open to contemplate itself? It is always vanity for you, within and without; but it is less vanity when it is less extensive. Except for you, O man," said that god, "each thing studies itself first, and, according to its needs, has limits to its labors and desires. There is not a single thing as empty and needy as you, who embrace the universe: you are the investigator without knowledge, the magistrate without jurisdiction, and all in all, the fool of the farce."

Montaigne, *Essays*, III, 9,
Of Vanity

20 It is an absolute perfection and virtually divine to know how to enjoy our being rightfully. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet there is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our own legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own rump.

Montaigne, *Essays*, III, 13,
Of Experience

21 *Polonius.* This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* I, iii, 78

22 *Iago*. O villainous! I have looked upon the world for four times seven years; and since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never found a man that knew how to love himself.

Shakespeare, *Othello,* I, iii, 312

23 It hath been well said that the arch-flatterer, with whom all the petty flatterers have intelligence, is a man's self.

Bacon, *Of Love*

24 For a long time I had remarked that it is sometimes requisite in common life to follow opinions which one knows to be most uncertain, exactly as though they were indisputable, as has been said above. But because in this case I wished to give myself entirely to the search after Truth, I thought that it was necessary for me to take an apparently opposite course, and- to reject as absolutely false everything as to which I could imagine the least ground of doubt, in order to see if afterwards there remained anything in my belief that was entirely certain. Thus, because our senses sometimes deceive us, I wished to suppose that nothing is just as they cause us to imagine it to be; and because there are men who deceive themselves in their reasoning and fall into paralogisms, even concerning the simplest matters of geometry, and judging that I was as subject to error as was any other, I rejected as false all the reasons formerly accepted by me as demonstrations. And since all the same thoughts and conceptions which we have while awake may also come to us in sleep, without any of them being at that time true, I resolved to assume that everything that ever entered into my mind was no more true than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately afterwards I noticed that whilst I thus wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the "I" who thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth "*I think, therefore I am"* was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy.

Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, IV

25 Whosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, etc., and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon the like occasions. I say the similitude of passions, which are the same in all men,—desire, fear, hope, etc.; not the similitude of the objects of the passions, which are the things desired, feared, hoped, etc.: for these the constitution individual, and particular education, do so vary, and they are so easy to be kept from our knowledge, that the characters of man's

heart, blotted and confounded as they are with dissembling, lying, counterfeiting, and erroneous doctrines, are legible only to him that searcheth hearts. And though by men's actions we do discover their design sometimes; yet to do it without comparing them with our own, and distinguishing all circumstances by which the case may come to be altered, is to decipher without a key, and be for the most part deceived, by too much trust or by too much diffidence, as he that reads is himself a good or evil man.

Hobbes, *Leviathan,* Intro.

26 One must know oneself. If this does not serve to discover truth, it at least serves as a rule of life, and there is nothing better.

Pascal, *Pensees,* II, 66

27 Man is to himself the most wonderful object in nature; for he cannot conceive what the body is, still less what the mind is, and least of all how a body should be united to a mind. This is the consummation of his difficulties, and yet it is his very being.

Pascal, *Pensees,* II, 72

28 The nature of self-love and of this human Ego is to love self only and consider self only. But what will man do? He cannot prevent this object that he loves from being full of faults and wants. He wants to be great, and he sees himself small. He wants to be happy, and he sees himself miserable. He wants to be perfect, and he sees himself full of imperfections. He wants to be the object of love and esteem among men, and he sees that his faults merit only their hatred and contempt. This embarrassment in which he finds himself produces in him the most unrighteous and criminal passion that can be imagined; for he conceives a mortal enmity against that truth which reproves him and which convinces him of his faults. He would annihilate it, but, unable to destroy it in its essence, he destroys it as far as possible in his own knowledge and in that of others; that is to say, he devotes all his attention to hiding his faults both from others and from himself, and he cannot endure either that others should point them out to him, or that they should see them.

Truly it is an evil to be full of faults; but it is a still greater evil to be full of them and to be unwilling to recognise them, since that is to add the further fault of a voluntary illusion.

Pascal, *Pensees,* II, 100

29 If we do not know ourselves to be full of pride, ambition, lust, weakness, misery, and injustice, we are indeed blind. And if, knowing this, we do not desire deliverance, what can we say of a man . . . ?

Pascal, *Pensees,* VII, 450

30 Since reason demands nothing which is opposed to nature, it demands, therefore, that every person should love himself, should seek his own profit,—what is truly profitable to him,—should desire everything that really leads man to greater perfection, and absolutely that every one should endeavour, as far as in him lies, to preserve his own being. This is all true as necessarily as that the whole is greater than its part.

Spinoza, *Ethics*, IV*,* Prop. 18, Schol.

31 We must consider what *person* stands for;—which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it: it being impossible for any one to perceive without *perceiving* that he does perceive. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything, we know that we do so. Thus it is always as to our present sensations and perceptions: and by this every one is to himself that which he calls *self.*

Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding,*
Bk. II, XXVII, 9

32 Suppose I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life, beyond a possibility of retrieving them, so that perhaps I shall never be conscious of them again; yet am I not the same person that did those actions, had those thoughts that I once was conscious of, though I have now forgot them? To which I answer, that we must here take notice what the word I is applied to; which, in this case, is the *man* only. And the same man being presumed to be the same person, I is easily here supposed to stand also for the same person. But if it be possible for the same man to have distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times, it is past doubt the same man would at different times make different persons; which, we see, is the sense of mankind in the solemnest declaration of their opinions, human laws not punishing the mad man for the sober man's actions, nor the sober man for what the mad man did,—thereby making them two persons: which is somewhat explained by our way of speaking in English when we say such an one is "not himself," or is "beside himself"; in which phrases it is insinuated, as if those who now, or at least first used them, thought that self was changed; the self-same person was no longer in that man.

Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding,*
Bk. II, XXVII, 20

33 Self-esteem is the instrument of our conservation; it resembles the instrument of the perpetuity of the species: it is necessary, it is dear to us, it gives us pleasure, and it has to be hidden.

Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary:* Self-Esteem

34 Our first duties are to ourselves; our first feelings are centred on self; all our instincts are at first directed to our own I preservation and our own welfare. Thus the first notion of justice springs not from what we owe to others, but from what is due to us.

Rousseau, *Emile,* II

35 *Johnson.* A man should be careful never to tell tales of himself to his own disadvantage. People may be amused and laugh at the time, but they will be remembered, and brought out against him upon some subsequent occasion.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson (Mar. 14, 1776)*

36 *Johnson.* All censure of a man's self is oblique praise. It is in order to shew how much he can spare. It has all the invidiousness of self-praise, and all the reproach of falsehood.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson (Apr. 25, 1778)*

37 Man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.

Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1, 2

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THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE
is published weekly for its members by the
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE GREAT IDEAS
Founded in 1990 by Mortimer J. Adler & Max Weismann

Max Weismann, Publisher and Editor
Ken Dzugan, Senior Fellow and Archivist

A not-for-profit (501)(c)(3) educational organization.
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