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THE NARCISSISTIC DIALECTIC: NARCISSISM, DUALISM AND GENDER

*The University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

Ed.D. 1986

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The Narcissistic Dialectic: Narcissism,  
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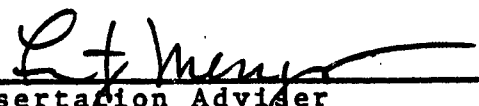
by

Allen Paul Speer III

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APPROVAL PAGE

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Narcissism is a condition marked by the absence of authenticity. Narcissistic self-deception can become a problem within a culture if citizens fail to achieve maturity within the human community. If narcissism is related to immaturity, lack of authenticity, and the reluctance to accept social responsibility, then it can develop into a very serious cultural problem. The purpose of this research is to assess, describe, analyze and examine the characteristics of narcissism and investigate whether this disorder is detrimental to human growth and development.

Presented are perspectives provided by three theoretical schools of thought: psychology, theology, and philosophy. The methodology used is philosophical and analytical in its approach to the questions raised, the assumptions made, and the conclusions drawn. Therefore, this work is not objective, quantitative, scientific or empirical, but rather it is qualitative in its methodology. Since narcissism and authenticity deal with questions and concerns related to quality, meaning and human values, they cannot easily be measured on a numerical scale.

This writer concludes that narcissism is a condition that separates human beings from themselves, others, and from meaningful spiritual commitments. The ramification of this condition is far-reaching in scope. This treatise analyzes

the narcissistic affliction, and exposes it as a serious problem to humankind.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

Narcissism is a condition marked by the absence of authenticity. The narcissist is unable to be true to the essential nature of the authentic self, and therefore the actual self becomes obscure and remote. Replacing reality with an image is what the narcissist suffers. Narcissistic self-deception can become a problem for young children, teenagers, or adults if it impairs or jeopardizes their chances for developing critical thinking ability and prevents them from achieving autonomy, maturity, individuality, and authenticity within the human community. Therefore, this work is germane to any study of the human condition. By understanding narcissism we learn how to overcome a common barrier which prevents success in such varied areas as schoolwork, business, communication and self-esteem. It is an affliction which discourages the authentic in order to seek an image.

Authenticity is not an easy concept to define, so there is much philosophical speculation involved in its description and discussion. Nonetheless, this writer assumes that there does exist an authentic self (however illusive, mysterious, or intangible its essential nature may be) and that the

authentic self differs dramatically from the narcissistic self.

This dissertation is written from perspectives provided by three theoretical schools of thought: psychology, theology, and philosophy. The methodology used is philosophical and analytical in approach to the questions raised, the assumptions made, and the conclusions drawn. But the dissertation is more than an examination of narcissism; it also deals with the human search for authenticity and identifies the historical dialogue which often robs us of our sincerity: the narcissistic dialectic.

Within the narcissistic dialectic there are two impulses: the first (referred to as agency) is the impulse for self-glorification, self-magnification, and individual omnipotence; the second (defined as communion) expresses the need and desire for connectedness, wholeness, oneness, fusion with the world, and group relatedness. These two impulses can become narcissistic when the actual self is ignored, denied, or suppressed, and when self-image is attached to an image of agency or communion. Authenticity exists only when there is an uneasy tension between agency and communion, and when the real self is not associated with an image.

### Methodology

This dissertation is a dialectical philosophical inquiry, and an examination of human nature. It discusses

the human search for completeness, fullness, meaning, purpose, and authenticity, while recognizing the difficulties, distractions, and dilemmas inherent within the search. "None of the sciences has asked the question about man in his wholeness." (Buber, 1965, p. 19)

The methodology of this paper, therefore, is not objective, quantitative, scientific, or empirical, because this writer has chosen to incorporate the following philosophy:

According to Huston Smith, science tends to miss values because quality itself is unmeasurable. One of the problems with numbers is that, whereas one quality can be better than another, one number cannot. Love is intrinsically better than hate, but three is not better than five. . .once you have translated the world into empiric measurement and numbers, you have a world without quality guaranteed. . .Empirical-analytic science cannot easily operate without measurement; measurement is essentially quantity; quantity is number; number is per se outside of values. (Wilber, 1983, pp. 26-27)

Since narcissism and authenticity deal with questions and concerns related to quality, meaning, and human values, they cannot easily be measured on a numerical scale; therefore they are examined and analyzed from the perspectives provided by phenomenological psychology, theology, and philosophy.

Within each of the three chapters also exists an approximate Hegelian dialectic between agency and communion which strives to achieve a new synthesis. The dialectic focuses on the search for authenticity, not in the thesis



(agency), or in antithesis (communion), but in synthesis (between, and beyond agency and communion). In this sense, the methodology used is in many ways, related to the dialogical process employed by Martin Buber, a process whereby purpose is a search for ever greater meaning and growing authenticity.

### Overview of the Chapters

The first chapter is an examination of the different theoretical descriptions of narcissism presented from the perspectives provided by psychologists. Most of the theories analyzed, and the language used, comes from the psychoanalytic tradition. The description of narcissism in this chapter is intentionally abstract for the purpose of defining the parameters of the discussion.

The second chapter involves speculation on the nature of narcissism by theologians: traditional, radical, liberation, female, and existential. In this chapter, the insights provided by Martin Buber are utilized. The focus of this paper is not on a particular religion, although frequent references are made to scholars within the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In chapter three narcissism is examined from the perspective of Southern American writers who were and are writing in the agrarian tradition. By including the aesthetic philosophical positions presented by agrarian poets

and novelists, the narcissistic dialogue is broadened, and given greater depth, dimension, substance, and texture. In this chapter narcissism is examined in a concrete and specific manner.

In all three chapters narcissism is described, analyzed, and examined within the context of American cultural experience, although the psychological, theological, and philosophical language used to dissect narcissism is broad, speculative, and historical.

## CHAPTER ONE

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF NARCISSISM

The Myth of Narcissus

Narcissus was a mythological character who possessed exceptional beauty and uncommonly striking features. The handsome young man was followed by many nymphs, admired by all for his good looks and handsomeness, yet he spurned love and rejected all girls who offered him their affection, even the loveliest of the nymphs, Echo.

Because Echo also possessed extraordinarily uncommon beauty, Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus, placed a curse upon her; Echo could never speak, except only to repeat words that she had heard spoken. The young nymph followed Narcissus but could not speak to him. She made her love available but was rejected by him.

Because Narcissus rejected Echo (as he had rejected all the other nymphs who tried to love him), "one of those he wounded prayed a prayer and it was answered by the gods: May he who loves not others love himself." (Hamilton, 1940, p. 88) And so Narcissus, while stopping to get a drink of water from a clear pool, bent over and saw his reflection in the stream. He immediately fell in love with the image. "Now I know, he cried, what others have suffered from me, for I burn with love of my own self and yet how can I reach that

loveliness I see mirrored in the water? But I cannot leave it. Only death can set me free." (p. 88) And so Narcissus was not able to free himself from worshipping his image, and drowned in his own reflection.

Was Narcissus unable to love others because he was incapable of loving himself; or was his lack of self-love related to his inability to reach out to others; or did he withdraw from the world and worship an image because it was the only thing he could ever love?

#### Exclusiveness

Narcissism denotes the belief in individual or group exclusiveness. The narcissist believes that his self-created image is incredibly important and exceptionally special, while beneath his facade of superiority resides a deep-seated fear of helplessness and vulnerability. Because his self-esteem is weak and insecure (usually related to humiliating childhood experiences), the narcissist is incapable of living a genuinely authentic existence. Instead of having the courage to face the prospect of pain, powerlessness, and defeat, the narcissist builds a protective fortress around himself as a defense against present fears and future threats. His exaggerated self-image serves as an impenetrable barrier, through which emotionally threatening feelings cannot enter, but also through which meaningful human

interaction and communication are excluded and made impossible.

The narcissist has chosen emotional disengagement rather than choosing to contend with the helplessness and dependence that are unavoidable parts of the human condition. He is afraid of life, death, and the terrible ambiguity of each waking moment, which present new possibilities for choice, but also reawaken old memories of his limitations and failures. Therefore, the narcissist casts his lot with those timid individuals who avoid courageous action in the face of adversity, and who, by denying their need for help, assistance, and affirmation, substitute imaginary illusions of omnipotence.

Narcissism not only creates personal dilemma but cultural problems as well. We shape our culture in our image, yet we are shaped by culture. The narcissistic dialectic occurs internally, within the divided self, but it also is part of a larger dialogue between the human being and society. It is a manifestation of the need for self-protection and self-affirmation. It is also an expression of cultural exaltation and societal expectation. "Because of inadequacy the person invests more energy in the facade." (Lowen, 1983, p. 126) The facade, or image, frees the person from emotional involvement, or societal commitment. In order to preserve the superiority of the appearance, and maintain

the invincibility of the image, the narcissist avoids threatening situations, or emotionally charged encounters. "The appeal of the self-made man is his apparent freedom, not only from traditional restraints, but from the tight organization, the drudgery, and banality of so much of modern industrial life." (Bellah, 1985, p. 44)

The greatest love of the narcissist is his self-created image. He responds to inferiority by imagining that he is superior. However, when his image of invulnerability is threatened, there is the danger that he will become increasingly more paranoid.

The paranoid individual begins with a conviction of exceptional gifts and special destiny. When life proves disappointing, and this conviction of special status is threatened, the paranoid is less successful than other personality types in adjusting to reality. . . . It is possible that Americans are peculiarly prone to the political variety of paranoia (which of course afflicts many persons entirely sane in their personal lives) precisely because of the great expectations of special political destiny that the American ideology has always encouraged. (Hodgson, 1976, p. 39)

The narcissistic manifestation of paranoia occurs when energy is invested in an image of perfection as a defense against self-defeat, failure, and humiliation. "As life threatens the self-image of perfection, narcissists are often busily engaged in hating and destroying that life usually in the name of righteousness." (Peck, 1983, p. 74) It is ironic that an image, however powerful or noble it may be, still is an impediment and obstacle to meaningful encounter, emotional

engagement, and to being human. "No superiority of strength lies in an image, only in inner strength." (Lowen, 1983, p. 107) For it is only by developing inner strength that people are able to realize their genuine worth and true significance and to see through the shaky facade of false exclusiveness.

### The Stage of Narcissism

Most psychologists believe that narcissism is a primary stage of development and that the narcissistic person has not outgrown this self-centered phase.

Freud, Hartmann, Klein, Jacobson, Spitz, and Mahler believed that the earliest stages of infant development were ones of narcissistic fusion: the infant cannot differentiate self-other, subject-object, but rather lives in a primary matrix where such distinctions are as yet absent--an all encompassing unity of ego and self. . . with little or no actual comprehension of others, this safety stage is referred to as self-protective (Loevinger), narcissistic (Freud), egocentric (Piaget), preconventional (Kohlberg), and safety bound (Maslow)." (Wilbur, 1983, p. 223)

Infancy, along with the pre-natal period, seems to be the only time of life when most needs are met, when we feel connected to another human being, and when tension and anxiety are minimal. "It is taken for granted that the other partner will automatically have the same wishes, interests, and expectations. This explains why this is so often called the state of omnipotence." (Balint, 1979, p. 2)

Alexander Lowen disagrees with the psychologists who believe that narcissism is a primary stage of development.

According to Lowen, "all narcissism is secondary, stemming from some disturbance in the parent-child relationship." (Lowen, 1983, p. 12) Lowen believes that children are powerless and that all they want is to have their needs met. He disagrees with Freud's description of the child as "his royal highness." (Freud, 1963) "There is no feeling of power in the child, in fact no need for either power or effect, as all things are in harmony." (Balint, 1979, p. 2) Adler also believes that narcissism is secondary:

We regard it as a secondary phase which occurs when a person has excluded social relationships that are self-understood and naturally given, or when he has never found them. . . narcissism signifies a feeling of weakness which originated from a feeling of inferiority. (Adler, 1979, p. 208)

Because the narcissist lacks self-confidence and self-esteem, he is unable to interact adequately with other human beings. Therefore, he leads an isolated and alienated life where authentic feeling and emotion are absent. His lack of courage, and his fear of life prevent him from breaking out of the narcissistic shell he has constructed, and from breaking out of the self-created image that he worships.

It is not clear whether narcissism is a primary or secondary stage of development; however, it is unavoidable that we eventually realize the limits of our power. Inevitably, we are encountered with obstacles which serve to frustrate our intentions and actions.



There is no way that a parent can satisfy all the child's needs; therefore, it might follow that human beings are doomed to frequently encounter frustration. All people have at least some ambivalent feelings about a vulnerable childhood, where on the one hand they receive unconditional love, but on the other hand they fear the power that parents have over them. It is probably impossible ever to fully escape the feelings of love, hate, guilt, and anger that are experienced in childhood and are later reinforced by the adversities of life.

#### Types of Narcissism

Some psychologists believe that there are different types of narcissism, and these differences are in degree, not in kind. Narcissists within every category show an insensitivity to others, have low self-esteem, are in love with images instead of the true self, and are overly concerned with protecting their appearance. All narcissistic disturbances are related to a lack of authentic feeling and to the inability of the narcissist to have meaningful emotional intercourse with other human beings. Five types of narcissism are: "the phallic-narcissistic character, the narcissistic character, the borderline character, the psychopathic narcissist, and the paranoid narcissist." (Lowen, 83, p. 14) These narcissistic categories can be viewed on a scale of neuroses, going from the minor

narcissitic disturbance (the phallic narcissist) to the very serious withdrawal of the psychopathic and paranoid narcissists.

The phallic narcissist is primarily interested in manipulating and seducing people. This is true for both men and women. Narcissists are "self-confident, often arrogant, elastic, virgorous, and often impressive." (Reich, 1971, p. 201) According to Reich, "narcissism is manifested in an exaggerated display of self-confidence, dignity, and superiority." (Reich, 1971, p. 202) However, superiority and inferiority are two sides of the same coin (Adler, 1979). When one is on top, the other is on the bottom. The need for mastery is a response to feelings of inferiority. Human beings have a need to master the environment and overcome the obstacles and frustrations that stand in their way. If the blockage is too severe, the person may choose to escape by retreating to the solitary sterility of narcissism. For example, a person with limited capabilities may try to compensate by reaching beyond his potential. When he fails, he relies on his artificial self-image for support.

The narcissistic character has more of an inflated image than the phallic narcissist. He has the "need to be perfect and to have others see him as perfect." (Masterson, 1981, p. 30) Like the phallic narcissist, he sees himself as

superior and special, but is well aware of the fact that he may be inferior to others.

The self-esteem of borderline narcissists is weaker than the self-regard of phallic narcissists and narcissistic characters. Again, these differences are only in degree, not in kind. The borderline character fluctuates from one extreme to another: "he is either totally great or totally useless." (Lowen, 1983, p. 20)

The psychopathic narcissist has the weakest ego and the lowest self-esteem of those yet mentioned.

The impulses underlying his behavior stem from experiences in early childhood that were so traumatic and so overwhelming that they could not be integrated into the developing ego. As a result, the feelings associated with these impulses are beyond the ego's perception. (Lowen, 1983, p. 22)

According to Masterson, "the acting of the psychopath, compared to that of the borderline or narcissistic disorders, is more commonly anti-social and usually of long-duration." (Masterson, 1981, p. 44) The psychopath is unable to repress desire or tolerate frustration. Sometimes a psychopathic narcissist can attain a position of prominence, especially within an economic system that recognizes lack of reticence, and the need for instant gratification.

This person might become a corporate raider and murder companies, firing people instead of killing them, and chopping up their functions, rather than their bodies . . . he might be a brilliant, remorseless person with icy intelligence, incapable of love or guilt, with aggressive designs on the rest of the world. (Harrington, 1972, p. 18)

The paranoid narcissist believes that people are constantly conspiring against him. He is totally unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality and is completely crippled in his capacity to communicate, relate, and interact with other human beings.

Nevertheless, even in such extreme cases, we find most of the characteristics of narcissism: extreme grandiosity, a marked discrepancy between the ego image and the actual self, arrogance, insensitivity to others, denial and projection. (Lowen, 1983, p. 24)

While fear and helplessness are related to all types of narcissism, the denial of authentic feeling is the key to understanding the nature of the disturbance. In order to avoid threatening emotions, the narcissist adopts a theatrical role or wears a superficial facade whenever he engages in human interaction. The part he plays in the human drama is desperately important to him, for if his mask is removed, he stands dangerously naked and alone before the terrible ambiguity and cruel inflexibility of life. He is attracted to celebrities and superstars because they appear to be immune to life's hardships and difficulties; they seem to be able to rise above the squalor, clamor, and common problems that an ordinary person must experience. However, because the narcissist has an exaggerated self-image (like most of the celebrities he admires), he loses the very objective he is trying to find: unconditional acceptance and

heartfelt affection. Fear is the greatest obstacle and the most threatening impediment to human authenticity.

### Fear of Separation

Within nature, human beings seem to have an unrequited need to achieve self-completion by overcoming isolation. The impulse for oneness, fullness, and wholeness (by-products of self-completion), is incredibly strong, and painfully elusive. Man generally associates them with healthy social relationships. However, when feelings of isolation, alienation, and separation exist, human beings are constantly trying to alleviate the strife, tension, conflict, and loneliness that accompany aloneness, the great enemy of self-completion.

We constantly try to overcome the consciousness of our smallness, and the awareness of our vulnerability. The burden of individuality and responsibility can be overwhelming if the inner strength, will-power, and self-esteem have developed inadequately. Feelings of weakness and powerlessness are the neurotic sources of narcissism, and fears caused by these feelings of helplessness are among the reasons why the narcissist has feeble effort, crippled will, an ineffective action. Routine needs become paralyzed when overcome with fear.

If the ego is weak, the frustrations encountered in life can be insurmountable. That weak ego has a number of causes:

the lack of security, self-protection, and affirmation. When these are not present, human growth and development is retarded and the person is thereby weakened. Furthermore, if man is faced with awareness of threats to his psyche and his physical self, fears of separateness and the desire for wholeness increase. His weakened ego tells him he is more isolated than ever and wholeness cannot be achieved. He is alone and desperately "unwhole."

The deepest need of man is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity, because the panic of complete isolation can be overcome only by such a radical withdrawal from the world outside that the feeling of separation disappears--because the world outside, from which one is separated, has disappeared. Man of all ages and cultures is confronted with the solution of one and the same question: the question of how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one's own individual life and find at onement. (Fromm, 1956, p. 8)

If fear of isolation and separation are the causes of narcissism, the greater the threat of these, and the weaker the self-esteem, the more serious the narcissistic response can be. A hopeless anguish accompanies this fear, which is too much to bear; therefore the narcissist withdraws from the world and lives a life filled with illusion, fantasy, and imagery.

In one sense, the world does disappear, because the narcissist ceases to feel joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, and hope and despair. Consciousness is too painful, so he attempts to become unconscious, achieving a blissful union of

oneness with the world which will transcend his personal torment and private pain. Awareness of the broad panorama of possibilities in life is too unsettling for him, and the frustrations caused by limitations are too great to overcome. Because the ego is weak and the self-esteem low, the narcissist starts to worship images. Nietzsche would say that he tries to forget the truth of his weakness. "The most terrifying burden of the human being is to be isolated, which is what happens in individuation." (Becker, 1973, p. 171) He begins to rely only on the image of himself and to distrust those who are around him. Isolation is not so terrible if the individual is perfect and does not need his fellow man.

Narcissism arises in response to being in the world with inadequate strength and courage to cope.

The narcissistic image develops because of an unacceptable self-image and in defense against intolerable feelings. These two functions of the image are fused--the unacceptable self-image is associated with intolerable feelings. (Lowen, 1983, p. 66)

Because intolerable feelings are not acceptable, neither is the actual self. The inauthentic self is acceptable because it will not accept unbearable emotions. The narcissist becomes emotionally lifeless. The corpse-likeness of narcissism is easily recognizable; this is apparent because the narcissist moves in a mechanical way, with rigid efficiency, stoic countenance, and emotional disengagement.

### The Fear of Duality

Narcissism is frequently mistaken for self-love; it is not self-love, but rather a lack of that sensibility. What appears to be self-absorption is, in actuality, a lack of self-esteem. Narcissism is dualistic. "It seeks self-sufficiency as well as self-annihilation: opposite aspects of the same archaic experience of oneness with the world." (Lasch, 1984, p. 20) According to Grunberger (1979), in its original form, narcissism is oblivious to the self's separation from its surroundings, while in its later form, it seeks to annul awareness of separation. "The narcissist becomes his own world and believes the whole world is him." (Ruben, 1981, p. 64) Again, the dualistic nature of narcissism is expressed by the attempt to "dissolve the tension between the desire for union and the fact of separation, either by imagining an ecstatic and painless reunion with the mother, or by denying any need for external objects at all." (Lasch, 1984, p. 177)

A healthy mental state is neither masculine nor feminine but includes characteristics of both. "Agency," a masculine term, refers to self-glorification and isolation. "Communion," a feminine term, refers to self-surrender and connectedness. Both impulses reside in men and women. The narcissist wants to separate the two. "Man wants to lose his isolation and keep it at the same time. He can't stand the



sense of separateness, and yet cannot allow the complete suffocating of his vitality." (Becker, 1973, p. 155)

In order to better understand agency and communion, there is a need to more fully describe these masculine and feminine qualities, using Bakan's definition:

I am adopting the terms agency (masculine) and communion (feminine) to characterize two fundamental modalities in the existence of living forms, agency for the existence of an organism as an individual, and communion for the participation of the individual in some larger organism of which the individual is a part. Agency manifests itself in the formation of separations; communion in the lack of separation. Agency manifests itself in isolation, alienation, and aloneness; communion in contact, openness, and union. Agency manifests itself in the repression of thought, feeling, and impulse; communion in the lack and removal of repression. (Bakan, 1966, p. 15)

Narcissism is a response to the uneasy tension and emotion that exists between agency and communion. Because the psyche does not have the strength to deal with paradox or confront ambiguity, it attempts to recapture the painless sense of oneness with the world by choosing between the masculine or feminine impulses.

Freud is puzzled by the paradox of narcissistic biological duality. He suspects that the masculine and feminine proclivities create tension psychologically as well as biologically. Freud says that at the point of the Oedipus moment:

We must give separate accounts of the development of boys and girls, for it is now that the difference between the sexes finds psychological expression for the first time. We are faced here by the great enigma of

the biological fact of the duality of the sexes: It is an ultimate fact of our knowledge, it defies every attempt to trace it back to something else. Psychoanalysis has contributed nothing to clearing up this problem, which clearly falls wholly within the province of biology. In mental life we only find reflections of this great antithesis; and their interpretation is made more difficult by the fact, long suspected, that no individual is limited to the modes of reaction of a single sex, but also find some room for those of the opposite one, just as the body bares, alongside the fully developed organs of one sex, atrophied and often useless rudiments of those of the other. For distinguishing between male and female in mental life, we make use of what is obviously an inadequate empirical and conventional equation: We call everything that is strong and active male, and everything that is weak and passive female. This fact of psychological bisexuality, too, embarrasses all our inquiries into the subject and makes them harder to describe. (Freud, 1940, p. 188)

Mitchell agrees with Freud:

The presence of the two sexes in human beings is a fact of biology; however, the mental experience of this is a matter for psychology; it does not cause our mental life, but our mental life has to take it into account--indeed it is the most fundamental and difficult problem it has to face--on par with only one other dilemma: where do we come from and how do we fit in? In taking into account the biological great antithesis between the sexes, we are psychologically bisexual; each of our psychologies contains the antithesis. (Mitchell, 1974, p. 51)

The tension created from biological and psychological duality causes the narcissist to search for an escape from emotional ambiguity, either by choosing agency or communion, for both represent the pathway to wholeness and the blissful ecstasy of oneness.

Human beings have another type of dual identity. "One part is derived from identification with the ego, the other

from identification with the body and its feelings." (Lowen, 1983, p. 31) However, the ego is constituted symbolically; narcissism occurs when "the person tries to overvalue the powers of the symbolic self." (Becker, 1973, p. 76) This ballooning of the ego, which denies the importance of the body and the outer world, can be a megalomaniac expansion that seeks separation (agency), or it can be a narcissistic regression back to the womb (communion). Here both conditions appear to deny the importance of the physical world, and both try to escape from the body and its feelings.

According to Kernberg, "narcissists are plagued by chronic uncertainty, and dissatisfaction about themselves." (Kernberg, 1975, p. 264) This is largely caused by the inability of the narcissist to deal with his physical self and his emotions. "In a healthy person, the self-image (symbol) and self-experience (body) coincide, with an acceptance of and identification with the body and its feelings. Self-acceptance is lacking in narcissistic individuals." (Lowen, 1983, p. 31) This self-acceptance is absent because the actual self is threatened by intolerable feelings; therefore, the symbolic self assumes a pose of invulnerability as a means of self-protection. Narcissists wear a facade of strength and power because at some time during their lives they were overwhelmed by fear and overpowered by humiliating experiences. Therefore, they

become what Scott Peck (1983) refers to as people of the lie. "They are utterly dedicated to preserving their self-image of perfection." (Peck, 1983, p. 75) This self-image of perfection is the ego side of the identity.

In order to sustain the image of invincibility, the narcissist worships images and objects; symbols are not threats to him, but emotions are.

Man chooses an object onto whom he projects all his own human qualities: his love, intelligence, and courage. By submitting to this object, he feels in touch with his own qualities; he feels strong, wise, courageous, and secure. To lose the object means the danger of losing himself. This mechanism, idolatric worship of an object, based on the fact of the individual's alienation, is the central dynamism of transference, that which gives transference its strength and intensity. (Fromm, 1962, p. 52)

By worshipping idols and images, the narcissist becomes an object, a symbol of what he reveres. "Narcissists cannot distinguish between an image of who they imagine themselves to be, and the image of who they actually are." (Lowen, 1983, p. 7) They lose their identity by transferring it to a representative object. Their images and illusions replace the reality of their physical and emotional worlds. As this takes place the symbolic self elevates to a position of omnipotence.

By succumbing to an image (or becoming an object), the narcissist relieves his fear of separation. "An object is the symbol of the union of the baby and the mother, but also an acknowledgement of their separation." (Lasch, 1984,

p. 194) According to Norman O. Brown (1959), separation means death, and the fear of separation stands in the way of the individual having meaningful communication with the world. This fear causes the narcissist to attempt to become his own world (the masculine obsession), or to try to become one with the world (feminine mutuality). Brown believes that our incapacity to accept death (or separation), condemns us to a restless activity which seeks relief from tension.

To take the gender sensibilities one step further, the masculine identity (agency) seeks self-protection by denying death, while the feminine (communion) finds security by avoiding life. The narcissist is reluctant to move forward, afraid of going backward, and is perpetually perplexed by the duality of human existence. This confusion causes him to seek even greater self-protection. This duality, however, is not exclusive to the narcissist, but rather is a commonly faced dilemma. Our acceptance and treatment of it will determine if we sink into neurosis.

. . .self-protection is like a two-edged sword--while we protect ourselves through all possible social precepts, moralistic restrictions, and ethical ideals, from a too intensive living out or living up, we feel ourselves guilty on account of the unused life, the unlived in us. However, if we step over these repressions set up for self-protection, then we follow repentance and conscience fear, which are expressions of threat by death, which is brought nearer by experiencing. This double repression mechanism creates the appearance of self-punishment, but is just as much self-protection. (Rank, 1936, p. 149)

When this form of duality occurs, the narcissist begins to confuse expectations with limitations. He is guilt-ridden for reasons beyond his understanding; he intuitively knows he is not dealing critically with truth (the actual self), so he buries himself in expectations to either protect himself from or obviously sink into life. "Self-hood expresses itself in the form of a guilty conscience, the painful awareness of the gulf between human aspirations and human limitations." (Lasch, 1984, p. 258) According to Jacques Ellul (1978), there is no freedom without a critical attitude to the self. However, the narcissist already has much too critical an attitude toward his actual self, and too high an opinion of his symbolic self. What he does not have is the inner strength that enables him to communicate meaningfully with himself and others.

The narcissist tries to protect himself from experience. Otto Rank believes that fear of death and reluctance to live can be seen together in the birth trauma. What "birth" symbolizes is an end to a former life and the fear of a new one. "The individual comes to the world with fear and this fear exists independently of outside threats." (Rank, 1936, p. 122) Every waking minute is a manifestation of the original birth trauma--something is ending and a new life is beginning. What the narcissist cannot deal with is the

inevitable ambiguity of the moment--the duality of birth and death:

. . .when the life fear [feminine] which has restricted ego development, meets with the death fear [masculine] as it increases with growth and maturity. The individual then feels himself forward by regret for wasted life, and the desire still to retrieve it. But this forward driving fear is now death fear, the fear of dying without having lived, which even so, is always held in check by fear of life. . . . On this account, the neurotic, governed by impulses and restrained by fear is always divided, always in conflict. (Rank, 1936, pp. 188, 189)

If the fear of life and death (agency and communion) becomes too horrifying, and if the fear of losing the actual self is too terrifying, then the individual may choose narcissism.

The narcissist knows too much about himself, and he is painfully aware of the problem of being alive, but he has an insufficient amount of inner strength to withstand and make sense of this knowledge.

Beyond a given point man is not helped by more knowing, but only by living and doing, in a partly self-forgetful way. As Goethe said we must plunge into experience and then reflect on the meaning of it. All reflection and no plunging drives us mad; all plunging and no reflection and we are brutes. (Becker, 1973, p. 199)

Dualism comes in varying forms and the narcissist may experience one or all of them. If he does, he may be subject to fear, anxiety, and suffering.

If dualism is masculine and feminine, it stands to reason that the father and mother play a vital role in mental development. This should be isolated for discussion, and the father will be discussed first.

Freud believes that the ambivalent childhood feelings of love and hate, which are directed at the mother, are, as we grow older, transferred to the stronger and more powerful father.

The will of the father is not only something which one must not touch, which one has to hold in high honor, but also something which makes one shudder, because it necessitates a painful instinctual renunciation. (Freud, 1961, p. 156)

Freud says we have to renounce not only the hate and anger directed at the father's power, but also the desire for the mother. This is because the father is a natural adversary and rival for the mother's affection, a powerful competitor we cannot ignore.

Freud also believes we have a fear of being castrated by the father. According to Freud,

the boy has innate drives of sexuality and even wants to possess his mother. At the same time, he knows that his father is his competitor, and he holds in check a murderous aggressiveness toward him. The reason he holds it in check is that he knows that the father is physically stronger than he and that the result of an open fight will be the father's victory and the castration of the son. Hence the horror of blood, of mutilation of the female genitals that seem to be mutilated; they testify that castration is a fact. . . there is indeed something about the genitals, the physicalness [sic] of the family and its copulations that weigh on the psyche like an age old stone. Freud thought that such a heavy weight must date from time immemorial, from the first emergence of humans out of primate ancestors. He thought that the guilt we each feel deep down is connected with a primal crime of patricide and incest committed in the dim recesses of prehistory; so deep is the guilt ingrained, so much is it confused with the body, with sex and excrement, and with the parents. (Becker, 1973, pp. 34, 35)



Thus Freud suspects that some ancient crime against the father, along with the real and present threat which the father presents, keeps us in a state of perpetual fear and dependence.

Freud believes this subservience remains true until we muster the courage to kill the father--in a psychological sense--and have the strength and courage to stoically live with the guilt and consequences of the action. Therefore, Freud is very pessimistic about the possibility of liberation, at least the prospect of being liberated from the guilt, anger, fear, and feelings of vulnerability associated with childhood memories.

The inability to cope with fear and helplessness is the source of the problem for the narcissist.

In childhood, narcissists have a severe blow to their self-esteem that scars and shapes their personalities--the injury entails humiliation, the experience of being powerless while another person enjoys the exercise of power and control over one. For narcissists, control serves the same function as power--it protects them from possible humiliation. (Lowen, 1983, pp. 76, 77)

As a child the narcissist first tries to protect himself from the power of adults, and as he grows older, tries to protect himself from the general destruction and devastation of life. In American culture today, he may hide his psychological weakness behind the facade of superiority, scientific virility, military strength, and monetary invincibility. But beneath the surface of his sterile mask, the old demons still

exist: pride, greed, envy, vanity, hate, lust, and vulnerability.

Contrary to Freud's position, Dorothy Dinnerstein believes that fear and vulnerability are reactions against the power of the biological mother. Dinnerstein suspects that we never escape our fear of the mother, even when we are adults.

The early mother's apparent omnipotence, her ambivalent role as ultimate source of good and evil, is a central source of human malaise: our species, unstable, uneasy stance toward nature, and its uneasy, unstable sexual arrangement, are inseparable aspects of this malaise. Both toward women and toward nature as a whole--as originally toward the mother who was half-human, half nature--we feel torn between two impulses: the impulse, on the one hand, to give free reign to the nursling's angry greed, its wild yearning to own, control, suck dry, its wish to avenge deprivation; and the impulse, on the other hand, to make reparation for these feelings, which is most precious and deeply needed. (Dinnerstein, 1976, p. 100)

Even though Dinnerstein makes the infant appear to be insatiable and somewhat of a cannibal, she does raise an important issue: Freud underestimates the power and influence of the mother, and attributes too much power to the father.

Dinnerstein further believes that because of the ambivalent (love-hate) feelings about the mother, we project these paradoxical emotions onto women in general; we are threatened by these uneasily defined memories. Therefore, the fear of female power makes us turn to the father for protection.

The central opportunity for self-deception, then, that lies in the shift from dependence on female authority to dependence on male, patriarchal authority is seized by both sexes. In the original self-reversing revolution it is daughters as well as sons who revolt, and the revolt is not against a father but against a mother. What makes it possible to replace that deposed sovereign with another and still feel triumphant is that the new sovereign is of a different gender: If a different, apparently, blameless, category of person were not temptingly available as a focus for our most stubborn childhood wish--the wish to be free and at the same time to be taken care of--we would be forced at the beginning, before our spirit was broken, to outgrow that wish and face the ultimate necessity to take care of ourselves. . .if these first encounters had not taken place under all female auspices, if women were not available to bear the whole brunt of unexamined infantile rage at defeat that permeates adult life, the rage could not so easily remain unexamined; the infantilism could more easily be outgrown. (Dinnerstein, 1976, pp. 188, 189)

Narcissism is an expression of the wish to be free (agency), and at the same time, the need to be taken care of (communion). Because the narcissist is unable to control his greatest childhood fear (the mother), he may make an exaggerated investment in his image at the expense of his actual self.

Whereas Dinnerstein advocates that human beings are afraid of the biological mother, Jung believes that we all fear the female archetype: "Everyone inherits the same basic deep archetypal structures, which can be quite similar or dissimilar from those of individuals or cultures, but still within the constraint of the deep structure." (Wilbur, 1983, p. 105) Like Rank, Jung believes we come into the world with certain proclivities, and of course, certain pre-existing

fears. However, whereas Rank attributes this fear to the birth trauma, Jung believes that our most difficult battles are fought with archetypal images that exist only within the unconscious mind. Interestingly enough, this unconsciousness may be duality within a feminine shell.

An archetype is capable of being kind and benevolent, or possessive and destructive. Jung and Neumann write at length about the image of the great mother archetype that is part of the collective unconscious.

The great mother is uroboric: terrible and devouring, beneficent and creative; a helper, but also alluring and destructive; a maddening enchantress, yet a bringer of wisdom; bestial and divine, voluptuous harlot and inviolable virgin, immemorially old and eternally young. (Neumann, 1954, p. 380)

Jung and Neumann believe that the archetypes which exist within the unconscious are projected onto the outer world. The significance for understanding the scope and dimension of the mother archetype can be seen when we examine the spectrum of this projection.

The mother archetype can appear under an almost infinite variety of aspects. First in importance are the personal mother and grandmother, stepmother and mother-in-law; then any women with whom a relationship exists. Then there are what might be termed mothers in a figurative sense. To this category belongs the goddess, and especially the mother of God, the Virgin, and Sophia. Mythology offers many variations of the mother who reappears as the maiden in the myth of Demeter and Kore; or the mother who is beloved, as in the Cybele - Attis myths. Other symbols of the mother in a figurative sense appear in things representing the goal of our longing for redemption, such as Paradise, the Kingdom of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Many things arousing devotion or feelings of awe, as for instance

the church, university, city, country, heaven, earth, the woods, the sea or any still waters, matter even, the underworld and the moon can be mother symbols. The archetype is often associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness: the cornucopia, a ploughed field, a garden. It can be attached to a rock, a cave, a tree, a spring, a deep well, or to various vessels such as the baptismal font, or to vessel-shaped flowers like the rose or the lotus. Because of the protection it implies, the magic circle or mandala can be a form of mother archetype, and of course the uterus, and anything of a like shape. Added to this list are many animals, such as the cow, hare, and helpful animals in general. All of the symbols can have a positive favorable meaning or a negative evil meaning. (Jung, 1959, p. 17)

The mother archetype that Jung describes is easily confused with feelings, emotions, and memories of childhood (love, warmth, the tender moments of affection, the bliss of infancy) but it also has negative connotations (hate, fear, feelings of inferiority, weakness, vulnerability, and helplessness). In this sense, the source of salvation or damnation can be the same archetype, or its outer projection onto a person or thing. If the feelings of weakness outweigh the feelings of love and acceptance, the seed then has been sown for narcissism. For as already illustrated, when emotional threats become intolerable, then the person often seeks refuge and shelter by escaping into an exaggerated self-image. When this retreat occurs, authenticity is surely lost.

#### Inferiority and Heroism

So far it has been illustrated that narcissism is a defensive response to humiliating childhood experiences, the

threat of separation, and the fear of masculine/feminine dualisms. It has also been pointed out that the result of that response is low self-esteem or the inferiority complex. Because the narcissist feels inferior to powers around him, his expectations, fears, and feelings of oversensitivity increase. He believes he is inadequately equipped to solve the problems of life. When feelings of vulnerability reach an intolerable level, he tries to exclude social relationships, and avoid the realities of living. "All neurotic symptoms are safeguards of persons who do not feel adequately equipped or prepared for the problems of life." (Adler, 1979, p. 94) If the narcissist perceives the obstacles to be too overwhelming and formidable, then he raises himself to a position of godlikeness in his imagination. "All phenomena in the psychic life of a child tend toward overcoming his inferior position." (Adler, 1979, p. 87) As Nietzsche points out, "the will to power is essentially a striving to transcend and perfect oneself." (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 248)

Adler believes that perfection means "mastering the environment in a superior way." (Adler, 1979, p. 39) The development of the child moves in the direction of overcoming and mastery. If social relationships are excluded from the child's milieu, then he may "see himself in enemy country, and believe he cannot accomplish anything anymore, or refer

all events almost compulsively to himself and exclude every obligation." (Adler, 1979, p. 208)

Both Freud and Adler understand that narcissism frequently occurs when individuals have low self-esteem.

Ernest Becker relates the need for self-esteem to heroism.

The problem of heroics is the central one of human life; it goes deeper into nature than anything else because it is based on organismic narcissism and on the child's need for self-esteem as the conditions for his life. . . everything painful and sobering in what psychoanalytic genius and religious genius have discovered about man revolves around the terror of admitting what one is doing to earn his self-esteem. This is why human heroics is a blind drivenness that burns people up; in passionate people, a screaming for glory as uncritical and reflexive as the howling of a dog. In the more passive masses of mediocre men it is disguised as they humbly and complainingly follow out the roles that society provides for their heroics and try to earn their promotions within the system. (Becker, 1973, p. 6, 7)

Adler (1979) believes that heroism (the desire for superiority) is a response to feelings of inferiority. When the human need for mastery is blocked, then narcissism can be a convenient escape.

Narcissism is different from the instinct for self-preservation (Becker's view), and the libidinal instinct theory (Freud's position). According to Grunberger (1979), narcissism wishes to exist on earth free from both desire and body. There are reasons to question Freud's position that narcissism is the libidinal counterpart of the self-preservation instinct; rather it could be seen as an attempt to remove threatening feelings that endanger the self-esteem,

and jeopardize the integrity of the authentic self. The narcissist has contempt for the ego, the body, and the physical world--all the things that make him aware of his weakness, helplessness, and inferiority.

### Summary

In summary, the narcissist may choose hyperindividualism (masculine), which is the attempt to create a world from himself, an effort to blow himself up to gargantuan size and promethean dimension. On the other hand, he may choose super-communion (feminine), which is an expression of the desire to merge with the world by allowing the surroundings to swallow the ego. In both instances, the narcissist tries to find a symbiotic fusion of oneness, fullness, and wholeness with the world in response to the pain of separation. When we stand alone in our authenticity, we tremble before the incomprehensible beauty and cruelty of creation, and the mystery of existence.



## CHAPTER TWO

### NARCISSISM AND THEOLOGY

To many psychologists, narcissism is a mental disorder; to some theologians, it is a sin. Oddly enough, however, within both schools of thought narcissism can be categorized into the areas of exclusiveness, separation, and duality. The first chapter compared ideas that are created out of scientific principles; the second chapter will compare principles which are created from spiritual ideals.

Sin can be defined to mean that by failing to be just in our relation to God or man, we fail to fulfill our commitments to the human community. Most theologians believe that pride, self-centeredness, and self-love are the original sins, and the causes of our unwillingness to assist the poor, oppressed, and suffering. It is this reluctance to help others that separates us from God and man, makes us feel guilt, and inhibits our ability to obtain justice. Therefore, sin may mean that by separating ourselves from others, we rebelliously deny, avoid, and ignore our responsibility to God.

Theologically, within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the narcissistic dialectic of sin manifests itself either in a belief in cosmic self-hood (agency), or in cosmic surrender (communion).

To the first, God is simply the self magnified; to the second, God confronts man from outside the universe. One seeks a self that is finally identical with the world; the other seeks an external God who will provide order in the world. (Bellah, 1985, p. 235)

This dialectic is not unlike the dialogue in Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, where the Grand Inquisitor represents the self-magnified, and the great masses of people symbolize the self in surrender. However, both the Grand Inquisitor and the masses are living a lie, a lie that can be seen in the Grand Inquisitor's role as agentic master, or in the renunciation of responsibility by the masses. Some people believe the truth exists between agency and communion, and is not exclusively possessed by one or the other.

#### The Sin of Exclusiveness

Many theologians would identify narcissism as a sin because it is the manifestation of a lie which presents itself as truth.

In a lie the spirit practices treason against itself; the lie is our very own invention, different in kind from every deceit that the animals can produce. . .the lie in this generation has reached the highest level of perfection as an ingeniously controlled means of supremacy. (Buber, 1952, pp. 7, 8)

We respond to weakness and inferiority by identifying with self-created images of power or surrender, individually and collectively. That self-created image is a lie, and theologians consider the lie a sin.

Every man hides, like Adam, to avoid rendering accounts. To escape responsibility for his life, he turns existence into a system of hideouts and enmeshes himself

more and more deeply in perversity. The lie displaces the undivided seriousness of the human person with himself and destroys the good will and reliability on which men's life in common rests. (Friedman, 1960, p. 90)

The narcissist, by denying the reality of his actual self, erects a barrier between himself and his neighbors; therefore the concept of "love your neighbor as yourself" is probably impossible.

Pride caused Adam's fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. Not only did he desire power and knowledge, but he also wanted to become the master of his fate, and the creator of his destiny. Menninger tells us that theologians consider pride a basic form of sin, and its synonyms are "vanity, egocentricity, hubris, self-adoration, selfishness, self-love, and narcissism." (Menninger, 1973, p. 157)

According to radical theologian, Richard Rubenstein, pride is the sin committed by Jew and Christian alike.

Religious uniqueness does not necessarily place us at the center of the divine drama of perdition, redemption, and salvation for mankind. All we need for a sane religious life is to recognize that we are, neither more nor less than any other men, sharing the joy, pain, and the fated destiny which Earth alone has meted out to all her children. . .only hubris is man's real sin and hubris, man's sin against his limits, characterizes his refusal of the ecstasy and passion as his insistence on too great an aggrandizement of it. Hubris characterizes his refusal of his limits. When all sins have been reduced to their final term, man's greatest sin will be his sin against his own being, his pathetic refusal to recognize and be himself. (Rubenstein, 1966, pp. 58, 136)

Some theologians go further to say that the narcissistic sin is nurtured in the modern world. The betrayal of truth in American culture is related to the lie of omnipotence, and the sin of exclusiveness; the belief that power, wealth, success, and fame will insure superiority and guarantee invulnerability.

Therefore, American culture within the Judeo-Christian tradition, is guilty of committing the sin of exclusiveness. "America, was the new promised land, reserved by God for His new chosen people as the site for a new heaven and a new earth." (Bercovitch, 1978, p. 8) The belief that America was a city set upon a hill marked the nation with the sin of exclusiveness from the very beginning of its history. "Like Canaan of old, America was the child of prophecy and promise." (p. 69) Because of this exalted self-image, we have separated ourselves from our neighbors and laid the foundation for the inevitable emergence of a culture of narcissism.

Only in the United States has nationalism carried with it the Christian meaning of the sacred. . .of all symbols of identity, only America has united nationality and universality, civic and spiritual self-hood, secular and redemptive history, and the country's past and paradise to be, in a single synthetic ideal. (p. 176)

According to contemporary radical theologian Thomas J. Altizer, "America is the land of the future in which the promise of the Gospel will ultimately be achieved." (Rubenstein, 1966, p. 250)

The belief held by many Americans that they are a chosen people in pursuit of a special destiny has become increasingly more secular within the short history of the republic. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the meaning of the Protestant identity became more vague; "what passed for divine plan lost its strict grounding in scripture; providence itself was shaken loose from its religious framework to become part of the belief in human progress." (Bercovitch, 1978, p. 176) Instead of a self-realizing Kingdom of God, America became a romantic, progressive, individualistic nation on an errand of limitless expansion, growth, and progress. However, "romanticism yearns for deliverance from the cross of the here and now: it is willing to face anything but the facts." (Kaufman, 1956, p. 13) Harvey Cox, describing contemporary America, says "science-based technology lures people into thinking they can now solve for themselves the problems which they once turned to God." (Cox, 1984, p. 34)

Science and technology have contributed to our narcissistic illusion of omnipotence, and our belief in an ever expanding future. Godfrey Hodgson, in America in Our Time, writes,

By 1960 American athletes expected victory, and so did American military men. The economists expected uninterrupted growth, and the businessmen expected uninterrupted profits. . . . The doctors expected to conquer disease. There was so much publicity about the cure for cancer, the cure for heart disease. . .that

people began to feel it was only a matter of time before the brilliant, dedicated doctors discovered a cure for death. (Hodgson, 1976, p. 464)

The narcissist revels in this false security to such a degree that even death loses its sting, and God loses his power.

Chosen people in pursuit of a special destiny are incapable of loving their neighbors as themselves, unless of course, their purpose is to love their neighbor. When self-magnification, wealth, power, and pride are the goals of ideal perfection, then authentic interaction is impossible. Scott Peck (1983) is right when he describes people who have an obsession with their own exclusiveness as "people of the lie."

The narcissist is concerned with saving his appearance, and hiding the truth, the truth being that humans are weak creatures who desire strength. "Every one of us has been struck in some diseased form of self-love. Indeed, that is what the Fall in every individual is." (Payne, 1981, p. 55) The sin of narcissism arises from the narcissistic inability to admit or reveal authenticity. Because the narcissist is unable to do this, he plays the "uncanny game of hide and seek in the obscurity of the soul, in which it, the single human soul, evades itself, avoids itself, hides from itself." (Buber, 1952, p. 111) According to Dostoevsky, "life lived only according to human self-direction will invariably lead to a subhuman existence." (Hubben, 1962, p. 80) As Nietzsche

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oppressed. "Very often it is the titans whose days are numbered and the field mice who inherit the jungle." (Cox, 1984, p. 145)

### The Sin of Separation

As already mentioned, the belief in individual or group exclusiveness separates us from our neighbors. Theologians see separation not only as separation from God, but also as separation from one's true self and from one's fellow human beings. Martin Buber says:

. . .love without dialogic, without real outgoing to the other, reaching to the other, and companying with the other, the love remaining with itself--this is called Lucifer. This love is evil because it is monological. The monological man is not aware of the otherness of the other, but instead tries to incorporate the other into himself. (Friedman, 1960, p. 89)

Tillich and Kierkegaard (Rubenstein, 1966) believe that human beings become monological because they want to return to God. Many psychologists interpret this longing for God as an unconscious wish to return to the mother's womb. The narcissist may desire God or the uroboric so much that he denies himself his own existence, the existence of others, and ultimately life itself. He enters what Buber calls a "state of immersion," (Buber, 1970, p. 138). This condition closely resembles a comatose state: without consciousness and devoid of memory. Buber believes this is caused when man isolates himself from others, and from the authentic self. Tillich agrees, stating that the narcissist does not have the



courage to be who he is. Both Tillich and Buber see this lack of courage as sinful. Buber describes "two different types of human existence--one which proceeds from the essence--from which one really is--the other which proceeds from an image--from what one wishes to appear to be."

(Friedman, 1960, p. 85) Sin occurs when concern for our appearance separates us from our neighbors, makes us indifferent to their suffering, and causes us to be unresponsive to their needs. This absence of caring is called "acedia, the Great Sin; the heart of all sin. Some call it selfishness. Some call it alienation. Some call it schizophrenia. Some call it egocentricity. Some call it separation." (Menninger, 1973, p. 221)

The narcissism/sin is largely responsible for an American culture that has overwhelmingly chosen a technical-rational way of living, a style of life that is overly objective, value-free, cost-benefit oriented, secular and impersonal. Our vulnerability is not as severely threatened by the anonymity of the cities and factories. Cox (1965) says that our cities now represent what we are, and furthermore, represent how we view the world; a "secular city" where religion does not exist. When money becomes all important and the only reality, Rubenstein (1983) says that people without money become categorized as "not real," thereby not important. He also tells us (1975) that our

twentieth century mentality has isolated those "unreal" people into conditions he calls the "living dead" (ghettos, for example), or they are "exterminated outright" (as was the case in Nazi Germany).

When people become numbers or impersonal objects, they cease to be real, and are therefore treated as things to be used. When this condition occurs, an evil, sometimes violent, phenomenon can happen. "Imagery, the depictions of the heart, is play with possibility, play as self-temptation, from which ever and again violence springs." (Buber, 1952, p. 91) It is a battleground where fantasy and reality fight. The narcissist is "driven," out into goals that are boundless. This is evil, Buber says, because the imagination can only house fictitious thoughts. (p. 92) As Scott Peck (1983) recognizes, people of the lie are committed to protecting their fiction, whatever the cost may be. Dostoevsky takes this one step further when he says that "man's spiritual catastrophe will be inescapable when he loses his ties with the soil, the people, and humanity." (Hubben, 1962, p. 79)

The source of all separation may come from the divisiveness that exists within the self, the isolation that springs from an absence of authenticity. However, in order for a person to authenticate his existence, he must acknowledge and recognize his separateness. Again, by

legitimizing and embracing our aloneness, we then are able to overcome it. "Evil is, in actual fact, separation, separation from that which completes me." (Payne, 1981, p. 30) Because the narcissist does not love his real self-- "failing to love himself aright, he will love himself amiss." (p. 55)--he falls in love with his reflection. According to Walter Trobisch loving oneself "aright" is imperative, because

. . .whoever does not love himself is an egoist. He must become an egoist because he is not sure of his identity and is always trying to find himself. Like Narcissus, being engrossed with himself, he becomes -centered. (p. 56)

#### The Sin of Duality: Narcissism and Gender

There is neither Jew nor Greek,  
there is neither slave nor free,  
there is neither male nor female;  
for you are all one in Jesus Christ.  
(Galatians, 3:28)

The great tragedy of human history is the conceptual division we have made between the sacred and profane as it relates to masculine and feminine. By viewing the world in a dualistic way, we have designated that one half of the dichotomy is good, while placing the other half in a position of inferior importance, the position that women occupy.

"Human recognition of opposites alone brings with it the fact of their relatedness to good and evil." (Buber, 1952, p. 77)

The masculine/feminine dualism is part of a division within human consciousness which separates the masculine and feminine sides of the personality, a division that does not

necessarily have to exist. The great contribution of women theologians to this dialogue is the criticism and challenge to individuals and institutions which symbolize the masculine propensity for self-magnification.

Several contemporary feminist theologians such as Ruether and Daily believe that men are threatened by women because of the masculine inability to accept vulnerability; men are unable to come to terms with the feminine (communion) within themselves. These religious writers believe that in order to have meaningful interaction within relationships, a person must be authentic, open, and somewhat vulnerable.

The feminist theologians may be correct in their assertion that many men exaggerate their self-image to a position of Faustian importance. What we have ordained is a terrible division between agency and communion, male and female, active and passive, strength and vulnerability, and reason and emotion. We forget that both men and women desire life and fear death.

Since earliest times, the denial of the feminine side of the personality has led to the denial of power to women within institutions. The denied part of the self, which was feared, was projected onto women, who became scapegoats. According to theologian Rosemary Ruether,

The psychic organization of consciousness, the dualistic view of the self and the world, the hierarchichal concept of society, the relation of humanity and nature, and God and creation - all these relationships have been

modeled on sexual dualism. Therefore, the liberation of women attacks the basic stereotypes of authority, identity, and structural relations of reality. (Reuther, 1975, p. 3)

Reuther believes we need a new theology, one which does not have a masculine/feminine split, one which affirms all of life, and one which does not rank differences. If religious symbolism changes, then the narcissistic need for self-protection may not be as great. Spiritual symbols are too closely related to self-images; the unity of mind, body, and soul are necessary prerequisites to authenticity.

Women theologians believe the institutionalization of agency occurred very early in human history. Within the Hebrew, Greek, and Christian traditions the narcissistic dialectic was at work.

The sexism of Christianity is related to the dualistic and hierarchical mentality that Christianity inherited from the classical world. The dualistic mentality opposed soul, spirit, and transcendence to body, flesh, matter, nature, and immanence. God is identified with positive sides of the dualism, the world with the negative sides. In the view, human beings stand between God and the world, spirit and nature, and must learn to subdue the irrational desires of the flesh. . . classical dualism became the model for the oppression of women when culture creating males identified the positive side of the dualism with themselves and identified the negative sides with women over whom they claimed the right to rule. Reuther has noted that this dualistic pattern has been adapted to the oppression of other groups, including Jews and Blacks, who like women, are seen as more carnal and irrational than dominant. When this dualistic pattern of thinking is combined with a symbolic tradition in which God is addressed and conceptualized in predominantly male language and imagery, the sexism of religious thinkers appears logical and consistent. (Christ & Plaskow, 1979, p. 5)

The masculine obsession with agency is an example of the narcissistic sin of exclusiveness. It is also indicative of the sin of separation which keeps us from loving our neighbors. Agency is synonymous with the core religious symbols of western tradition--the male symbols of divinity. According to theologian, Mary Daly,

. . .the history of anti-feminism in the Judeo-Christian heritage has been exposed. The passages of the Old and New Testaments are well known. I need not allude to the misogynism of the Church Fathers--for example Tertullian, who informed women in general: you are the devil's gateway, or Augustine, who opinioned that women are not made in the image of God. I can omit reference to Thomas Aquinas and his numerous commentators and disciples who defined women as misbegotten males. I can overlook Martin Luther's remark that God created Adam lord over all living creatures but Eve spoiled it all. I can pass over the fact that John Knox composed a first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women. All of this after all is past history. (Daly, 1973, p. 3)

Many feminist theologians believe that men subjugate women and protect the masculine image of autonomy because communion is associated with female closeness to nature. Nature is placed in an inferior relation to God, just as women are juxtaposed in such a way to men.

In the Biblical view of the nature of things women comes after and also below man. Woman was created out of man's body (rather than from a woman's body as happens naturally). She was created in order to be a function in man's life, to ease his loneliness, and to define her existence in relation to him by being a helpmate to him. . . . But the creation myth also puts down children, animals, plants, and nature itself. It is no accident that the Old Testament in the Book of Judges casually tells of a master's appeasing a crowd of drunken men who wanted his male guest by offering them instead his concubine--who was raped until she died.

The Book of Genesis tells how under similar circumstances Lot had offered a crowd of lustful men in Sodom his two daughters in order to protect his male guests. It is really no accident that the same Old Testament recalls with approval the patriarch Abraham almost sacrificing his son Isaac in order to test his own faith and trust in God. The right of the male is depicted as absolute over the life or death of females and children--whether for the male's convenience for the protection of his male guests, or for the testing and strengthening of the male's religious faith. . .what is clearly articulated here is a hierarchical order of being in which the lower order--whether female, child, animal, or plant, can be treated, mistreated, violated, sold, sacrificed, or killed at the convenience of the higher states of spiritual being found in males and in God. (Gray, 1979, p. 5-6)

These sins of exclusiveness and separation contradict the words of Christ who said "Anything that you did not do for one of these, however humble, you did not do for me."

(Matthew, 25:45)

One reason that women were so closely associated with nature is because of primitive taboos which ascribed a demonic character to sexual fluids. This segregated women for most of their lives and did not allow them access to sacred places or to precincts of political and educational power.

There is misogyny within the preaching of St. Paul when he spoke to

. . .the fledgling churches and to those who later read his words and are guided by them--Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Clement, Prophyry, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine,--of the fatal, earthy attractiveness of women and of the high, solitary virtues of continence and mortification. (Turner, 1983, p. 73)

In the Old Testament, the images used to depict God are overwhelmingly masculine: God is the king, the judge, the shepherd, the warrior. Some of the following Old Testament passages express the strong patriarchal nature of God:

Genesis 1-3, 12, 16, 29-30, 34, 38; Exodus 20:14, 17, 21:7-11, 22, 22:16-19; Leviticus 12, 15:19-32, 20:10-21; Numbers 15:21-31, Deuteronomy 22:5, 13-30, 24:1-5, 25:5-10; Judges 11:29-40, 19; Ruth 2; Samuel 11-13; Esther; Proverbs 5:1-6, 9:13-18, 31:10-31; Song of Songs; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1-3.

Some passages from the New Testament that relate to women are as follows:

Matthew 1-2, 5:27-32, 9:18-26, 10:34-39, 12:46-50, 15:21-18, 19:1-15, 22:23-33, 27:55, 28:20; Mark 3:31-35, 5:21-43, 7:24-30, 10:1-16, 12:18-27, 15:40, 16:20; Luke 1-3, 7:11-17, 36-50, 7:1-3, 19-21, 40-56, 10:38-42, 11:27-28, 12:51-53, 13:10-17, 14:26-27, 15:8-10; 16:18, 18:15-17, 20:27-40, 23:49-24, 53; John 2:1-11, 4:1-42, 8:1-11, 11:1-44, 12:1-8, 19:25-20, 31; Acts 9:36-43, 12:12-17, 16:11-15, 18:1-3, 24-28, 21:8-9; Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 5-7, 11:1-16, 14:33-36; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-19, 4:15; I Timothy 2:11-15, 5:3-16; Titus 2:3-5; I Peter 3:1-7. (Clark & Richardson, 1977, pp. 26, 31)

Although there is an absence of misogyny in the teachings of Christ, the myth of feminine evil was very much a part of the thinking of the early church fathers, as well as religious thinkers who came later. As previously mentioned, the fear of women may have originated from women's biological functions of menstruation and childbirth that rendered them ritually unclean (Leviticus 12:15). These menstrual taboos are prominent in classical religious law:



Hebrew, Hindu, Zoroastrianism, as well as in Christian Canon law. According to Rosemary Ruether,

. . .misogynism developed, both in Greek literature, and in the later strata of Old Testament and Talmud Judaism. These texts expound the evilness of women and trace origins of evil in the world to female figures such as Eve and Pandora. The Jewish tradition expressed its misogynism in language drawn from the patriarchal family, whereas the Greek tradition came to symbolize it in abstract philosophical language. But these two forms of patriarchal hierarchicalism were parallel and began to amalgamate in the Hellenistic Period. Christianity fell heir to the fusion. (Ruther, 1975, p. 15)

Because the narcissist is threatened by female power, and the dread of communion, he either exaggerates his self-image as a way of excluding the world, or he surrenders himself as an act of communion--this is an attempt to deny the world by becoming one with it. Obviously, in the western religious tradition, the myth of feminine evil has prompted a masculine overreaction, which manifests itself in agentic religious symbols that are the core foundation of our theology. It is no coincidence that narcissism increases dramatically during historical time periods when agency and communion are out of balance, when spectacle is fashionable and when fear is unbearable. It is during times like these that "one must pay dearly for life lived from the being." (Buber, 1965, p. 78)

There are two groups of women theologians who are trying to restore the balance between agency and communion: reformists and revolutionaries. The reformists claim

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religious insights that come from women's experience: menstruation, marriage, and pregnancy. Washbourn, like Collins, is mystically inclined, and believes women should try to identify with forces larger than themselves.

Writers like Letty Russell (1974) and Elisabeth Fiorenza (1976) believe that retelling Biblical stories from a feminist perspective can make a feminist Christian theology possible. Judith Plaskow (1974) tells the story of Lilith, who meets Eve, makes a bond of sisterhood with her, and the two refuse to take a subservient position to Adam. Stories like this, she believes, reinterpret the creation myth in a positive way for women.

In order to restore the balance within the narcissistic dialectic, we must re-examine, and reinterpret the relationship between agency and communion. This means we should seriously question the trend in contemporary society which celebrates an ancient theological agency and its manifestations--self-exaggeration, pride, vanity, and worship of images.

When a world view exists which divides everything into a dichotomy, and places a value judgement on each half of the dualism, then there will always be superior and inferior. In a civilization where there is a wide gulf between agency and communion, narcissism is likely to flourish.

### Other Dualisms

Buber believes that the human spirit is the creation of a balanced dualism. He says (1970) that between the "I" and "you," understanding can be found and compassion learned. Because the narcissist is concerned with protecting his image and saving his appearance, no "between" exists for him. His world is a "magnified I" (agency), or an "expanded you" (communion). "The essential problematic of the sphere of the between is the duality of being and seeming." (Friedman, 1960, p. 85) Being means becoming vulnerable, seeming means being inauthentic. "It is not the dominance of any one faculty, but the unity of all faculties within the personality that constitutes the wholeness of man, and it is this that Buber calls spirit." (Friedman, 1960, p. 92)

Buber introduces another dualism when he writes of the psychic and spiritual division that can be healed only when we have accepted the denied part of the self, an acceptance that is extremely difficult to make:

. . .the man with the divided, complicated, contradictory soul is not helpless: the core of his soul, the divine force in its depths, is capable of binding the conflicting forces together. . .This unification of the soul is never final. Again and again temptation overcomes the soul, and again and again arises from out of its depths and promises the utterly incredible: you can be whole and one. (Friedman, 1960, p. 91).

The sin of duality exists whenever the narcissist elevates one side of the dialectic to an unrealistically high

level of importance and denies the other side of the dichotomy. By doing this, the narcissist commits the sins of exclusiveness, separation, and duality.

Down through the ages, humankind has spent a great deal of time and energy speculating on the existence of a dualistic world. Yin and Yang are dualistic concepts, as are right and left, good and evil, up and down, black and white. Sometimes it is very tempting to look at the world as a collection of either-ors. . . . In dualistic thinking, affirming one side of the dualism is tantamount to attacking the other. . . the very structure of most theological assumptions results in this dominance-submission scheme. (Schaefer, 1981, pp. 149, 150, 166)

At times, there seems to be no way to escape the stress caused by ambiguous and contradictory dualisms. However, Martin Buber believes that "man ultimately reaches a point where he can rely on his soul, because its unity is so great that it overcomes contradiction." (Friedman, 1960, p. 91) In order to overcome the dualisms, humankind must restore balance to western theology, and compassionately reach out to our suffering neighbors, friends, and enemies.

CHAPTER THREE  
NARCISSISM AND PHILOSOPHY: A SOUTHERN  
AGRARIAN PERSPECTIVE

Although it is useful and helpful to examine narcissism through the eyes of the psychologist and the theologian, it is further clarifying to view it through the eyes of the poet. The first two offer us logical reasoning, while the latter offers emotional insights. It is this writer's belief that because narcissism is a topic dealing with humanity, the expression of it in literature is every bit as important as its expression in philosophy and theology. Chapter Three will introduce several well-known literary characters, each of whom succumbs to the love of self-image.

Exclusiveness

One of the strongest statements on narcissism comes from Faulkner's Absalom Absalom. It tells the story of a man who becomes trapped in a vision he creates as a child.

When Thomas Sutpen is a young boy, he is insulted and humiliated by the slave of a Southern planter. He is turned away from the front door of the plantation house. Even though he is a country boy from the mountains of West Virginia, the son of a poor farmer, he knows that no human being should be treated in such a way. So he makes a pledge:

he will become an aristocrat and commit himself to becoming the image of the very thing he despises. He will become a baron too.

Sutpen's plan is simple. He becomes the dream he envisions:

. . .as a ten year old boy emerging from West Virginia he had never heard of or imagined a land neatly divided and owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them. (Faulkner, 1936, p. 221)

So Sutpen decides that he will have what they have. He says "I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family--incidentally of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these, asking no favor of any man." (Faulkner, 1936, p. 263)

Sutpen does become a planter. He becomes the living image of the aristocrat that he originally hated.

He inherited his kingdom, possessed duplicates of his possessions, upheld his standards, created in turn his own sons to perpetuate all that the man in the big house, and through him the Old South stood for so clearly and simply. (MacKethan, 1980, p. 165)

Sutpen becomes obsessed with his grand scheme, his great plan, his image that will placate the insult to his pride. Sutpen and the image of Sutpen are inseparable. Anything that does not fit his image or correspond to his design is systematically excluded from his plan: son, wife, slaves, or whoever does not fit. "He violated the dream in order to

establish its form, the willingness to sacrifice the human to the ideal in its system." (p. 167) Sutpen's ambition, his narcissism, is more important than humanity.

Sutpen eventually rejects his son because he does not correspond to the dream, to the image of the vision created to perpetuate the Sutpen dynasty. But in doing so, the nouveau-aristocrat reenacts the original rejection: the pain and humiliation that he experienced when turned away from the plantation house.

Like Captain Ahab in Melville's Moby Dick, Sutpen sacrifices people in order to make his plan work. If he were to abandon his dream (his aristocratic self-image), then he believes he would again be a weak, helpless, defenseless, powerless, West Virginia farm boy. To be a common man is unacceptable. Because his fear of vulnerability is so great, he substitutes symbols of exclusiveness and dreams of nobility for his commonness, genuineness, sincerity, and authenticity. Thomas Sutpen commits the narcissistic sin of self-glorification. He wants "to reach beyond time and mortality." (p. 179)

Willie Stark in Warren's All the King's Men, is a "red-neck" from north Louisiana who has high ideals and big plans. He is known as cousin Willie, the country boy who does not drink, who studies his law books at night after a hard day's



work, who is married to Lucy Stark, the school-teacher, who is sincere, decent, respectable, and honest. Willie and Lucy believe in the basic goodness of people, and want to make the world a better place to live. Their aims are admirable and their aspirations high.

But Willie is corrupted. He becomes a demagogue, a dictator, a narcissistic tyrant, and like Thomas Sutpen, uses people as pawns in his political game of chess. In the beginning all Willie wants is to be a good man and to be governor, but he will end on his dying bed with an assassin's bullet in his side, and he will say to his friend Jack Burden "It might have been all different, Jack. You got to believe that." (Warren, 1946, p. 436)

Why do people like Thomas Sutpen and Willie Stark become the very image of the thing they hate? Perhaps it is because of their vulnerability, and because they have experienced humiliation, rejection, and injured pride. It is only after Sadie Burke tells Willie the "truth" that Stark loses his idealism and becomes bitter.

You've been framed. . .you decoy, you wooden-headed decoy, you let em! Oh yeah, you let em, because you thought you were the little white lamb of God. . . . Well, you're the goat. You are the sacrificial goat. You are the ram in the bushes. You are a sap. For you let em. You didn't even get anything out of it. They'd have paid you to take the rap, but they didn't have to pay a sap like you. Oh you were so full of yourself and hot air and how you are Jesus Christ, that all you

wanted was a chance to stand on your hind legs and make a speech. (p. 91)

After Sadie reveals this information to Willie, Stark is never again the same. He loses his ability to trust and care.

Like Thomas Sutpen, Willie Stark is placed in a humiliating position; he is insulted, hurt, used, and as Willie says, treated "like dirt." He is seduced by a political machine, made to feel special, (even more so than he already feels), and when his position of importance is threatened, he responds by constructing a protective narcissistic shell.

It is ironic that when Stark reveals to a crowd of people that he has been used, and "taken for a sap," he turns his vulnerability into a weapon to manipulate the masses, and with his persona, becomes a symbol of humility; his narcissistic self-image becomes a mask which presents the picture of a good 'ole' boy who is trying to help the common man. Stark's testimony is clear at the height of his narcissism when the image takes power over reality:

It's a funny story, he said. Get ready to laugh. Get ready to bust your sides because is sure a funny story. It's about a hick. It's about a red-neck, like you all, if you please. Yeah, like you. He grew up like any other mother's son on the dirt roads and gully washes of a north-state farm. He knew all about being a hick. He knew what it was like to get up before day and get cow dung between his toes and feed and slop and milk before breakfast, so he could set out by sunup to walk six miles to a one-room school, slab-sided schoolhouse. He knew what it was to pay high taxes for that windy shack

of a schoolhouse and those gully-washed red-clay roads to walk over--or to break his wagon axle or string-halt his mules on.

Oh he knew what it was to be a hick summer and winter. So he sat up nights and studied books and studied law so maybe he could do something about changing things. He didn't study that law in any man's school or college. He studied it nights after a hard day's work in the field. So he could change things some for himself and for folks like him. I am not lying to you. He didn't start out thinking about all the other hicks and how he was going to do wonderful things for them. He started out thinking of number one, but something came to him on the way. How he could not do something for himself and not for other folks or for himself without the help of other folks. It was going to be all together or none. That came to him. . .He looked into his heart and tried to change things. In all humility he thought he might try. He was just a human, country boy who believed like we have always believed back here in the hills, that even the plainest poorest person can be governor if his fellow citizens find he has got the stuff and character for the job. (pp. 91, 92)

Again, it is paradoxical that in Stark's moment of intimate sincerity with the crowd, he realizes the tremendous power that this sincerity has to control people. Also, in his telling of the story Stark reveals his tragic flaw, his belief in his own exclusiveness. He eventually believes that his mission (his notion of how things should be) is more important than people.

Sutpen and Stark symbolize a vision that is uniquely American, but also distinctly human, as they recklessly, relentlessly, and demonically pursue their dream of perfection. Because they are obsessed with their projects, they become insensitive, ambitious, arrogant, belligerent,

and totally immersed in their self-created images of exclusiveness. They are completely incapable of caring for other human beings. Their self-absorption is a reaction to injured pride, and their self-magnification is an attempt to transcend the pain caused by this injury. However, by trying to transcend the troubles inherent within the human condition, they sacrifice their humanity for an image of superiority.

In All the King's Men and in Absalom Absalom, innocence and idealism are destroyed, then replaced by the narcissistic will to power. Thomas Sutpen and Willie Stark are not corrupt at the beginning of their lives, but they are corruptible. Because of the inability to overcome their belief in their own exclusiveness, they create exaggerated self-images and pursue the goal of individual omnipotence. Within the narcissistic dialectic, their sin is the sin of agency.

If Willie Stark and Thomas Sutpen are two characters who represent the masculine obsession, then Jack Burden and Quentin Compson symbolize the other side of the narcissistic dichotomy. In Absalom Absalom, Quentin Compson, like a Southern Prince Hamlet, is the personification of the feminine impulse for communion. Unlike Sutpen, who is a man of action, Compson questions whether any action is important

or significant. Whereas Sutpen tries to deny the existence of obstacles in the outer world, Compson is overwhelmed by them. Compson is a romantic in love with a glorious moral ideal of perfection; he is obsessed with the image of a "timeless, guiltless Eden, an untainted existence of childhood." (Mackethan, 1980, p. 175) He believes that evil is inherited because the people who preceeded him failed to choose good instead of evil. So he comes to the conclusion that the only noble action for him is to choose death. His narcissistic self-absorption, and his sense of self-importance are so great that he can not act, so he seeks a symbiotic fusion with the timeless guiltless Eden he worships.

In Absalom Absalom and in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, Quentin Compson's character is essentially the same. He sees his image of moral perfection corrupted by the senseless, meaningless, incomprehensible values of those people around him. He is defeated by a world that possesses, in his opinion, no meaningful code of conduct or significant moral values. His suicide symbolizes his deep-seated need for communion, and his desire for emotional disengagement from a chaotic irrational existence.

Like Willie Stark and Thomas Sutpen, Compson's pride is injured by,

. . .a mother incapable of giving love, by a sister incapable of preserving his standard of purity, and most tragically of all, by a father so disillusioned that he will tell Quentin, "no man ever does that [suicide] under the first fury of despair or remorse or bereavement he does it only when he has realized that even the despair or remorse or bereavement is not particularly important to the dark diceman." (MacKethan, 1980, p. 169)

Compson worships the image of an unrealizable past, present, and future. Because of his deep commitment to this dream, and his impenetrable resolve to complete it, he denies himself "the possibilities of love and full life." (p. 170) His devotion is to an image, not to the truly difficult reality that comes with actuality and authenticity. Compson's sin is the sin of a self-surrender, communion, that is imbalanced.

In the same way that Quentin Compson is juxtaposed with Thomas Sutpen in Faulkner's world, Jack Burden is the passive counterpart to Willie Stark in Warren's All the King's Men. Burden and Compson are very similar: both are personalities paralyzed by the past. Burden does not understand why his father deserted him, why his mother sent him off to school and remarried, and why the woman he fell in love with rejected him. Because Burden feels abandoned and uncared for, he withdraws into himself and refuses to reach out to others. He becomes indifferent, insensitive, uncaring, and incapable of understanding the feelings of others.

Burden will not take the initiative in any action. He believes the world is controlled by the "Great Twitch," an incomprehensible impulse which causes people to behave in irrational ways. Because he is unable to find any reason or purpose for action, he develops no close emotional attachments. Like Compson's timeless, guiltless Eden, Burden worships an idealized image of his past, a childhood that was spent in Burden's Landing, the home of his ancestors.

It takes a severe and traumatic shock to Burden before he is able to abandon his narcissism, cynicism, and indifference.

He had seen his father die. He had seen his friend Adam Stanton die. He had seen his friend Willie Stark die, and had heard him say with his last breath, "It might have been all different, Jack. You got to believe that." (Warren, 1946, p. 436)

Unlike Quentin Compson, who commits the sin of communion, Jack Burden is able to confront "the convulsion of the world," and face "the awful responsibility of time." (p. 438) Burden abandons his obsession with dreams, images, and symbols of an arcadian past, and instead, turns his attention to human beings. "History is blind, but man is not." (p. 436)

Of the four characters so brilliantly created by Warren and Faulkner, only Jack Burden is able to eventually live with the inevitable ambiguity and uneasy tension that exists

within the narcissistic dialectic. But Burden's rediscovered authenticity costs him dearly; it is paid for by the deaths of three friends. Because Burden chooses to pursue an authentic existence, he is able to avoid seduction by the irresistible attraction of self-omnipotence or self-surrender, both of which come from the sin of self-exclusiveness. The authentic world that Burden will live in demands that he acknowledge pain, hurt, guilt, regret, loss, and hope. In order to become fully human, Burden has to renounce narcissism and embrace compassion, abandon ambition and celebrate humility, avoid immobility and pursue responsibility and action. Burden's decision is the most difficult one that any human being ever has to make.

All the King's Men and Absalom Absalom clearly express a Southern Agrarian concept: modern man believes he can overcome the adversities, difficulties, and hardships that are a tragic part of our existence. Sutpen, Stark, Compson, and Burden, represent human beings, especially human beings in America, who suffer from and are victims of the sin of exclusiveness. We deny limits and choose self-magnification, or we are paralyzed by the obstacles, limits, and roadblocks, and therefore choose immobility, inaction, and surrender. Both reactions to human existence are inauthentic and narcissistic, and both prevent us from reaching out to other



human beings in a loving and caring way. When we exaggerate our self-importance, we become extraordinarily afraid of life and refuse to live it, or we become inordinately fearful of death and try to deny it. In American culture, we invariably do both, and by doing so, we avoid the sacrifices that are a necessary prerequisite to authenticity, compassion, commitment, and maturity.

The Southern Agrarian philosophy is probably best expressed by poets and novelists. It is first and foremost a philosophy that is critical of "a way of life that omits or deemphasizes the more spiritual side of existence." (ITMS, 1983, p. 33) Agrarians are concerned about America's sin of exclusiveness, its arrogance of power, its worship of wealth, and its absence of authenticity. According to Faulkner, "We have become a nation of bragging sentimental not too courageous liars." (Rubin, 1980, p. 186) Agrarians also believe that,

. . .no man may impose his heart's desire view of reality on the world. Human reality in time, and his relationship to it, must be found in one's continuing engagement with the world. Acceptance of that relationship involves an acceptance of one's need for what is outside oneself, and the obligation to seek to be oneself in that exterior world. A difficult task, truly, requiring as it does neither abject surrender nor prideful disdain, but ongoing engagement. (p. 364)

Agrarians do not believe that humankind is inherently corrupt; it is, however, corruptible. "Man far from being a

godlike genius of unlimited potentialities, is a fallible, finite, creature who functions best in a society that takes account of his limitations." (ITMS, 1983, p. 29) By acknowledging our limitations, and by being aware of our propensity, proclivity, and potential for corruptibility we "thus control and abate the prevailing drift toward mass dehumanization and materialism." (p. 20)

Agrarians are skeptical of progress when it becomes an end in itself. According to John Crowe Ransom,

. . .progress never defines its ultimate objective, but thrusts its victims into an infinite series. Our vast industrial machine, with its laboratory centers of experimentation, and its far flung organs of mass production, is like a Prussianized state which is organized strictly for war and can never consent to peace. . .our progressivists are the latest version of those pioneers who conquered the wilderness, except that they are pioneering on principle, or from force of habit and without any recollection of what pioneering was for. (p. 18)

Agrarianism is "a rebuke to materialism, a corrective to worship of progress, and a reaffirmation of man's aesthetic and spiritual needs." (p. 31) When fame, success, power, wealth, and progress become the goals of the ideal of perfection, when they become the images we emulate, or if, like Thomas Sutpen's design, they become the neatly arranged pieces of furniture in our carefully designed living room, then our human existence is forsaken, and narcissistic self-magnification or surrender becomes the final objective.

Agrarians are humanists, and therefore believe people are more important than profits. They attack

. . .the erosion of the quality of the individual life by the forces of industrialization, and the uncritical worship of material progress as an end in itself. .  
 .they rebuke the acquisitive materialistic compulsions of a society that from the outset was very much engaged in seeking wealth, power, and plenty on a continent whose prolific natural resources and vast acres of usable land, forests, and rivers were there for the taking. (pp. 14-15)

According to Richard Weaver, Agrarians should continue to issue a challenge to the nation, "the challenge to save the human spirit by re-creating a non-materialistic society." (Weaver, 1968, p. 391) George Core, like Weaver believes that "industrialism is founded on a boundless aggression against nature." (Rubin, 1980, 298) Agrarians criticize any design, plan, or scheme which becomes a technical, rational, mechanical force replacing humanistic values. Ambition should not be more important than humanitarian principles, and one's self-exclusiveness must not be beyond the scope of humanistic ideals.

### Separation

Agrarians, like the philosophers and theologians mentioned, believe that man is isolated and alienated because of his separateness and aloneness. Although loneliness can never be completely overcome, it does increase its paralyzing

grip dramatically when we separate ourselves from others, our past, and the land.

A frequent theme is Southern poetry and fiction is man's attempt to regain his wholeness. The key to his reestablishing his identity and healing the alienation within himself is connected and related to his capacity to care for the land, the past, other people, and the human spirit. When the individual's memory is gone, or if his ties to place and community are severed, then there is a greater likelihood that he will become a candidate for anomie, a victim of fear, and one of the many helpless, rootless people who are without tradition, and have no past or sense of place.

A sense of place helps us determine who we are and what is real in our experience. It serves as a reminder that the joy, sorrow, and suffering of the strong, weak and helpless resemble our own experience. It makes us confront the fact that pleasure and pain, greed and passion, love, hate, pride, and the petty concerns of all people constitute the delicate fabric of our humanity. Our identity is defined by our connection with a place and with the people who have lived in that place over a period of time. The people, places, objects, and associations give life meaning and purpose; purpose continues to give order, form, shape, and substance to our lives.

Many people today never stay in one place long enough to understand it. The elusive search for a "city set upon a hill" continues, at least symbolically. No one seems to be at home anywhere. We do not realize that there has never been, or ever will be, a simple or ideal time, only times, places, and people worth remembering, and stories worth telling.

Memory is the essential force which helps us define our identity, and preserve our humanity. It helps us carry on a conversation with the past; it is the enduring and endearing presence which enables us to continue. When science, technology, and our insatiable appetite for material things threatens to destroy our soul, then memory must remind us of the eternal verities that are worth preserving. In an age of rapid change, memory can help us interpret and re-interpret who we are, what we should do, and where we must go. It must enhance and enrich our realization that life is sacred and must continue.

Many people in contemporary America are paralyzed by alienation, isolation, separation, and the inability to act. Like Quentin Compson, and Jack Burden, they experience a world without meaning, purpose, or direction. It is a world of the "Great Twitch," where people deny or exaggerate their separateness--either in the quest for self-omnipotence, like

Willie Stark and Thomas Sutpen, or in the desire for communion and surrender like Quentin Compson.

The poetry of Jim Wayne Miller paints a very powerful and accurate picture of the problems of separation. In

"Skydivers" he writes:

When I think of us seated in our  
 separate days,  
 a hand under my breastbone tightens  
 around a bar,  
 my seat tips back, rises, and my feet  
 swing free,  
 as if I were riding a chair-lift in an  
 amusement park. . .  
 When we are quiet in our separate  
 rooms at night,  
 I think we are all skydivers falling  
 through our  
 separate spaces. . .but we are falling  
 farther and farther apart through private  
 corridors  
 of air. The earth grows under us, and  
 begins  
 to be patches of ground the size of our  
 shadows.

(Speer, 1981, p. 56)

The emptiness that Miller describes in the poem is a very personal and private pain, yet it expresses the loneliness, separateness, and lack of meaning that we all experience. It also expresses the great fear that causes the narcissist to retreat into his cocoon or shell. In "No Name," Miller describes this alienation even more:

He stopped being able to say 'I'.  
 as if a stroke  
 had frozen his face and given him some  
 impediment of speech, he lost  
 the gift of idle talk, grew

impatient with words that rose  
like bubbles from the mouths  
of pretty goldfish in a glass aquarium.  
Like a school of minnows that must  
swim  
against a current or else panic, crowd,  
suffocate and die, his thoughts sought  
out  
a deep invisible flow and, moving  
against it, lived among dangerous  
slow-moving shapes that had no name.

(Speer, 1981, p. 57)

Because the narcissist worships an image, he has no name, and without a name he has no identity. Without an identity he has no purpose, passion, emotion or feeling--all the things that are necessary for us to survive and continue. When the narcissist loses authentic self-awareness, he drifts deeper and deeper into a dream-like world of flickering images. Objects become insignificant, places are the same, people are unimportant, and associations become objective, impersonal, and mechanical. The narcissist does not know who he is and what is real. He is plagued by the terrible self-consciousness of a narcissistic age.

How should an Agrarian respond to the fear of separateness and aloneness? He recognizes and acknowledges it as being an inevitable, inescapable, inseparable part of his existence, and then he says that we are together in our aloneness. We are together in the sense that we can reach out to others; to the people, places, objects, associations,

and stories from the past that give life meaning, purpose, continuity, and direction.

Within every time and place men have faced the task of reconciling individual and private virtue with an inescapable need for fulfillment within a community of men and women, and there is always the requirement to redefine the ethical and moral assumptions of one's rearing and one's present social circumstance amid change. (Rubin, 1980, p. 368)

Individuality and community should always strive for balance and harmony, however remote that prospect may be.

#### Duality and Authenticity

The Agrarian has great difficulty living authentically in the age of the secular city. He is a soul divided, torn between two worlds. In one world, individuality, community, and spirituality are recognizable, reinforcable, and compatible. However, this world moves further and further away from the reality and experience of the Agrarian. In many respects, it exists only in his thoughts. The other world (the secular city) is efficient, cold, mechanical, and impersonal. It is rigid, objective, and demanding in its technical, rational, inhuman pull upon people; it demands that we sacrifice our inner strength and spirituality.

In response to this secular world, the Agrarian searches for his essential self, for direction, and sense of place that he so desparately needs. However, it is difficult to put down roots in a mobile, industrial economy which destroys



traditional communities and demands capricious and senseless change. Jim Wayne Miller, in his poem "Quick Trip Home," describes the dislocation and disorientation of the modern Agrarian. The dialogue within the poem reflects the search for authenticity in a dualistic world:

The prop-jet brings me in from Washington at 2:03 p.m.  
An hour later, in a rented Pinto, I'm out  
in the country, back home. Early September. Cloudy.

In 1907 a teacher of the Brick Church subscription school here at the foot of Hanlon Mountain made entries in her diary

(I have that diary in a stringbag on the seat beside me):  
"Thurs. Sept. 3. Attended church, the usual thing, etc."

Years later, when a movie was made here, no wonder people vied with one another: Burn my barn! Mine!  
"Cloudy. Attended church, the usual thing, etc."

I know these woods were full of gnomes once.  
Trolls came out from under the bridge and walked along Temporary 63. I didn't think so then. It was just wart-faced Clayton Rogers, who took shortcuts through the woods (and people's yards), a huge bundle of laundry balanced on his back, beetle with an outsized ball of dung, humping home to his wife, her slat bonnet, her steaming black washpot out by the smokehouse.

Or it was only Whitey King, the red-eyed albino,  
or Running Jack Sterling, running away from the County Home,  
or Weaver Sams, there on the mountain where the retired Florida car dealer has a house now, whose cabin I came down to once, to find him sitting in the open door, listening to the World Series on a battery-powered radio, eating chinquapins, blowing the black hulls off his tongue into the dirt yard.

There are Bedouin tribesmen who carry battery radios on their camels. There are old men who speak Eskimo and wear tennis shoes, whose grandsons speak English and wear mukluks.

In 1907 the teacher wrote in her diary:  
 "I have been reading in a desultory way."

A woman goes on a crusade to defend  
 the integrity of the family--and then divorces.

A man writes about an old fashioned life he lived,  
 describes its pleasures, a certain serenity and knowledge  
 that comes from living a long time in one place--  
 and does this so many times, in so many places,  
 he grows harried and distracted.

Late afternoon. At a turnaround on a logging road  
 I stand in a drizzle drinking beer with my brother.

They found Weaver Sams on a logging road  
 one January morning, face down in a frozen rut,  
 beaten to death with a tire tool.  
 Face had to be chopped out of the ice.

Beaded rain runs off the hood of the red pickup  
 when my brother raises the hood. We stand under dripping  
 oak leaves drinking beer, puzzling over the motor.  
 He pushes back his CAT hat, scratches his head.

"Thurs. eve. Slight rain falling."

Not far from here a huge white dish high on a ridge  
 is aimed at the RCA SATCOM Satellite.  
 I didn't know that until this morning  
 when I sat in a meeting puzzling over a budget  
 whose figures were expressed in thousands.  
 The Chairman said: A motion has been made. . . .  
 An Executive Director said: Move on to the next slide.  
 A board member said: You say there are 45 stations  
 receiving the program, but what is the universe?

In 1907 the teacher wrote in her diary:  
 "Am hearty but nervous."

Today I have smelled honeysuckle and gunpowder,  
 jet fuel and hot cornbread.  
 Today I have heard punk rock and foxhounds,  
 felt crushed velvet and a mule's nose.  
 Today I have passed through a smokehouse door  
 and airport metal detectors.

Today my father pointed to a pretty girl in an album  
(a younger sister of the teacher who kept the diary):  
"That one like to a been your Mama."

Arthritis has burlled my mother's fingers,  
swollen her wrists and ankles, my pretty mother.  
Once she had her good days and her bad days.  
Now she has her bad days.  
A Cherokee Indian nearby is peddling DMSO for swollen  
joints.  
My mother wants me to get her some.  
I checked by telephone with a friend who is a chemist.  
"You have to be careful with that stuff."

My brother's head is under the hood of the pickup,  
his beer can balanced on the radiator. He mumbles, tinkers.  
A gladness: the red-tailed hawk, though perched there  
on a powerline in this drizzle, still hunts.

Am hearty but nervous.  
What is the universe?

(Speer, 1983, pp. 1, 2, 3)

Authenticity is never easily available in any place, not  
even home. Yet when we cut ourselves off from the spiritual  
sustenance that comes from the land, family, and community,  
we are cast adrift on a sea of uncertainty and anxiety. The  
duality of our existence, as Buber believes, is the dichotomy  
of being and seeming. And when we do not discover or  
recognize who we are, then we lead inauthentic lives. The  
dialectical quarrel between being and seeming is described by  
Ed Davis in his poem "Concrete and Wood":

They'll suck you dry,  
till you whiten  
like cancerous flesh.  
Smiling faces crack  
when you look too close.  
They'll utilize your talent,  
appoint you chairman,

give you jobs for life,  
 their eyes glittering  
 nothing but fever left.  
 So you fade into forest,  
 seek the owl whose nest you know,  
 track white-tailed deer  
 for the thrill of seeing  
 sleek phantoms leap.  
 Kneeling on pine needles,  
 you breathe deep their scent,  
 wedged between worlds  
 of concrete and wood.

(Speer, 1984, p. 19)

Adjustment to modern life is difficult, but then so is  
 the nature of existence at any time. The deep division  
 within the soul of humankind tries to find togetherness and  
 overcome separateness. Carl Jung believes that we always  
 look for our shadow, our hidden self. We do this to find  
 oneness, wholeness, and fullness of being. The Agrarian  
 attempts to grasp completeness by carrying on a conversation  
 with his past, and by trying to discover what is actually  
 real, and meaningfully important in his life. In Fred  
 Chappell's poem "My Grandmother Washes Her Feet," Chappell  
 carries on a dialogue, not only with his past, but also with  
 himself. He is looking for his shadow, and finds it in a  
 family that nobody ever talks about:

. . . John Giles. Everybody knew  
 He was a mean one, galloping whiskey and bad women  
 All night. Tried to testify dead drunk  
 In church one time. . .

. . . Bubba Martin, he was another, and no  
 kind of man. Jackleg preacher with the brains  
 of a toad. Read the Bible upside down and crazy  
 Till it drove him crazy, making crazy marks

On doorsills, windows, sides of Luther's barn.  
 He killed himself at last with a shotgun.  
 No gratitude for Luther putting him up  
 All those years. Shot so he'd fall down the well.  
 . . .Born then in my mind a race of beings  
 Unknown and monstrous. I named them Shadow-Cousins,  
 A linked long dark line of them,  
 Peering from mirrors and gleaming in closets, agog  
 To manifest themselves inside myself.  
 Like discovering a father's cancer.  
 I wanted to search my body for telltale streaks.  
 (Owen, 1979, pp. 55, 56)

Not only does Chappell discover the shadow, but he also finds the narcissistic side of the family, the relatives who refuse to recognize the dark secrets within themselves and their past: ". . .They'd rather talk about fine men, brick houses, Money. . .And the damn Civil War, and marriages. Things you brag about in the front of Bibles." (p. 55) For Chappell, the authentic person is his grandmother with, "the bruised patchy calves that would make you weep." (p. 54) In the poem, Chappell's grandmother tells him how terribly difficult it is to be true to oneself, how hard it is to be, rather than just seeming to be:

You're bookish. I can see you easy a lawyer  
 Or a county clerk in a big white suit and tie,  
 Feeding the preacher and bribing the sheriff and  
 judge.  
 Second - generation - respectable  
 Don't come to any better destiny.  
 But it's dirt you rose from, dirt you'll bury in.  
 Just about the time you'll think your blood  
 Is clean, here will come dirt in a natural shape  
 You never dreamed. It'll rise up saying, Fred,  
 Where's that mule you're supposed to march behind?  
 Where's your overalls and roll-your-owns?  
 Where's your Blue Tick hound and Domineckers?

Not all the money in the world can wash true-poor  
 True rich. . . .  
 When I said true-poor. It ain't the same  
 As dirt-poor. When you got true dirt you got  
 Everything you need (p. 57)

In "Cleaning the Well," again Chappell delves into the  
 duality of human existence. He says, "Two worlds there are.  
 One you think You know; the other is the Well." (p. 52)

The poem can easily symbolize a dialogue between light and  
 dark, self and shadow, and life and death. There is trouble,  
 fear, and trembling within this dialogue, but there is also  
 hope, promise, and deliverance.

. . .What did I find under this black sun?  
 Twelve plastic pearls, monopoly  
 Money, a greenish rotten cat,  
 Rubber knife, toy gun,  
 Clock guts, wish book, door key,  
 An indescribable female hat. (p. 53)

And from the well he returned.

. . .Slouch sun swayed like a drunk  
 As up he hauled me, up, up,  
 Most willing fish that was ever caught.  
 I quivered galvanic in the taut  
 Loop, wobbled on the solid lip  
 Of earth, scarcely believing my luck.  
 His ordinary world too rich  
 For me, too sudden. Frozen blue,  
 Dead to armpit, I could not keep  
 My feet. I shut my eyes to fetch  
 Back holy dark. Now I knew  
 All my life uneasy sleep. . . .  
 I could not say what I had found.  
 I cannot say my dream. . . .  
 I had not found death good. (pp. 53, 54)

As Buber says, "one must at times pay dearly for life lived  
 from the being." (Buber, 1965, p. 78)

How does the Agrarian respond to duality in an authentic manner? According to Wendell Berry,

. . .by dividing body and soul, we divide both from all else. We thus condemn ourselves to a loneliness for which the only compensation is violence--against other cultures, against the earth, against ourselves. For no matter the distinctions we draw between body and soul, body and earth, and ourselves and others--the connections, the dependencies, the identities remain. (Berry, 1977, p. 106)

It is the division within the human soul which causes the split between agency and communion, and man and nature. The dialectical quarrel between humankind and the physical world is a reoccurring theme in Southern Agrarian thought, literature, and poetry. It is this writer's belief that fear of communion is related to the abuse of earth.

John Crowe Ransom, like Wendell Berry, believes that,

. . .ambitious men fight, first of all against nature; they propose to put nature under their heel; this is the dream of scientists burrowing in their cells, and then of industrial men who beg of their secret knowledge and go out to trouble the earth. But after a certain point this struggle is vain, and we only use ourselves up if we prolong it. Nature wears out man before man can wear out nature; only a city man, a laboratory man, a man cloistered from the normal contacts with the soil, will deny that. It seems wiser to be moderate in our expectations of nature, and respectful; and out of so simple a thing as respect for the physical earth and its teeming life comes a primary joy, which is an inexhaustible source of arts and religions and philosophies. (ITMS, 1983, p. 9)

The great fear that the Agrarians have is that humankind, in its promethean quest to transcend limits, will exalt the value of agency, while denying the importance of communion.

The conflict between agency and communion can be seen in All the King's Men, when Jack Burden describes the tense relationship between Willie Stark and Adam Stanton.

As a student of history, Jack Burden could see that Adam Stanton, whom he came to call the man of idea, and Willie Stark, whom he came to call the man of fact, were doomed to destroy each other, just as each was doomed to try to use the other and to yearn toward and try to become the other, because each was incomplete with the terrible division of their age. (Warren, 1946, p.436)

This conflict between thought and action, agency and communion, and will and conscience is part of the ongoing Southern Agrarian dialogue. But it is also important to psychologists and theologians because all three schools of thought wrestle with the dualisms which separate us from ourselves, our neighbors, our world, and our spirituality.

The focus and purpose of the Southern Agrarian philosophy is to illuminate our experience in the physical world, so that in our striving to become fully human, we will not disregard or ignore the subtle complexity or infinite variety of our existence. The Agrarian wants to know who he is, and what he should do to improve the world, and benefit humanity. Like Robert Frost, Alfred Adler, Martin Buber, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, Richard Rubenstein, and many others, the Agrarian believes the earth is the right place for love.



Perhaps the only way that duality can be placed in proper context is to look at it from the perspective of death. The dialogue between life and death makes all other dichotomies seem somewhat superfluous. In the poem "At the Grave of Virgil Campbell," Fred Chappell describes an encounter between the narrator (Fred), and the burial spot of his dead friend, Virgil. The poem shows the paradoxical, and ambiguous feelings that death elicits:

I think I wouldn't mind  
 Now and then a fast cold skinny dip  
 In death, so long as a cramp wouldn't drag me under.  
 I don't want to leap for keeps, not yet  
 Anyhow, just want to wash the fever.  
 Too many drownings I've seen and had already,  
 There's an army of drownings been marching this  
 earth so long  
 That every man among us has been stropped thin,  
 I'm older and newer than NEW will ever be,  
 Gimme a break, sweet Gospel, let me grow  
 Some skin, the sea is tired of plowing me. . .  
 After last week's ice storm, Virgil, I walked  
 The groves in the suburbs. All the chandeliers  
 That ever were flew there to roost the trees,  
 Bare limbs decked out gaudy as matadors  
 Where sunlight tingled the crooked slicks and  
 notches.  
 And it came to me the dead rise up in light,  
 We're skeletons of light we are, dimmed down  
 In the cloudy season of flesh.

(Chappell, 1981, pp. 170 and 171)

Agrarians listen carefully to the conversation between life and death, understanding that within this dialectic lies the secret mystery of authenticity. In Lanterns on the Levee Will Percy eloquently expresses the beauty and cruelty of life and death.

Here among the graves in the twilight I see one thing only, but I see that thing clear. I see the long wall of a rampart sombre with sunset, a dusty road at its base. On the tower of the rampart stand the glorious high gods, Death and the rest, insolent and watching. Below on the road stream the tribes of men, tired, bent, hurt, and stumbling, and each man alone. And as one comes beneath the tower, the High God descends and faces the wayfarer. He speaks three slow words: "Who are you?" The pilgrim I know should be able to straighten his shoulders, to stand his tallest, and to answer defiantly: "I am your son." (Percy, 1941, p. 348)

Death is the brother of authenticity; it is the window through which we see the mystery, wonder, terror, shadow, and substance of our existence:

What did my mother, ready to die say? "Son, I like your new suit." Nor spoke again. Not to me.

(Warren, 1978, p. 71)

I have lain  
 In darkness and heard the depth of that unending  
 song,  
 And hand laid to heart, have once again thought:  
 This is me.  
 And thought: Who am I? And hand on heart, wondered  
 What would it be like to be, in the end, part of  
 all.  
 And in darkness have even asked: Is this all? What  
 is all?

(p. 8)

The stories, memories, people, places, and community commitments are the treasures and triumphs of being and the irreplaceable source of our authenticity. Being impervious to pain, time, mortality, disease, and despair only makes us become oblivious to our friend and persecutor--death. For he is the brother, burden, benefactor, tormentor, and the beacon

of brevity which illuminates being, and exalts the fading beauty of a transitory existence. Being on earth means acknowledging this brother, this paradoxical friend who begs us to open our eyes, hearts, and hands to the world, for darkness comes quickly and soon the story is over.

Old man: You get old and you can't do anybody any good any more.

Boy: You do me some good, Grandpa. You tell me things.

(Being Here, 1978)

## CHAPTER FOUR

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Existential Dilemma

In the twentieth century as life has grown increasingly more complex, impersonal, and violent, human beings have tried to sublimate fear by freeing themselves from consciousness. Nazi Germany and, to a lesser extent, Jonestown are examples of episodes where people denied reality and chose fantasy. Satellite communications and television have dramatically raised our level of awareness, while leaving us confused about what this new consciousness means. We are more aware, but we are also more frightened and disenfranchised by what we are told and shown. If the narcissist attempts to protect the self from over-stimulation, then he does not want to think about crime, terrorism, nuclear power, overpopulation, starvation, a large impersonal bureaucracy, cancer, the breakdown of the family, the inability of men and women to communicate, and the superficiality of life portrayed on television. These are problems he tries to forget. One way he blocks out these troubling thoughts is to allow the world to become more dreamlike and inauthentic, full of images and illusions which he thinks will provide identity, security and self-protection.

The narcissist is afraid of life and death. He sees a world that is chaotic, an existence that is uncertain, and a death that is unavoidable. He stands on shifting sand, aware of the subjectivity of perspectives and the relativity of logic. He is painfully conscious of the complexity and duality of human existence, a riddle he cannot solve, and a puzzle he cannot complete. He feels the isolation, loneliness, and alienation caused by separation from self, others, and the world. In response to this existential anguish, he may choose narcissism.

### Psychological Healing

In order to overcome exclusiveness, separateness, duality, and the problems of our existence, we must accept and acknowledge our common humanity and our human vulnerability. For we are all mortal and alone. After this acknowledgment, we must reach out, either to Adler's cooperating community: "Never can the individual be the goal of the ideal of perfection, but only mankind as a cooperating community;" (Adler, 1979, p. 40), or to Rank's god-ideal: "Only by living in close union with a god-ideal that has been created outside one's ego is one able to live at all." (Rank, 1936, p. 74) (It should be noted at this point that the psychologists mentioned are using theological language.)

However, the acknowledgment of our mortality and aloneness is difficult enough; how can we ever hope to find

the cooperating community or the god-ideal? It is interesting to note that many psychologists, when describing the psyche divided against itself, attribute the healing process to the surrender of agency. However, relinquishing the will to power does not mean giving up or releasing the inner strength and courage that are necessary for living authentically and meaningfully. It is even possible to combine cooperating community with the god-ideal.

One of the paradoxes of our religious history has been that the healing role of the Devil is taken over by the messianic figures, a paradox which we can now understand. For in both instances, the effort involves the surrender of the mastery feature of the ego and the reuniting of that which has been split apart. . .it is important to be able to overcome repugnancy and bear the anxiety which is associated with overcoming separation. Theologically, this is to recognize that there are not two cities as Augustine conceived of, but one, that the divine is not multiple but singular. Psychologically, this requires overcoming repugnance, bearing anxiety, beholding what has been repressed, and increasing understanding. (Bakan, 1966, pp. 93, 95)

Being vulnerable, open and available to others is an important part of healing the psychic split within the self (cooperating community). A reunion will occur within the divided self when one learns the capacity to care. When man recognizes that divine spirit is one master who will reunite his divided soul, he can heal his spiritual split (the god-ideal). The reunion occurs then when man has the capacity to reach out to one divine source.

Thus, the healing process cannot be accomplished alone. Furthermore, it is a painful process. In order for the

narcissist to accept his authentic self, he must develop the inner strength necessary for dialogue with self and others. This takes enormous resoluteness. Becker, quoting Adler, says,

It is a problem of courage; it develops in people who are afraid of life, [and death] who have given up any semblance of independent development and have been totally immersed in the acts and aid of others. They have lived lives of systematic self-restriction, and the result is that the less you do the less you can do, the more helpless and dependent you become. The more you shrink back from the difficulties and the darings of life, the more you naturally come to feel inept, the lower is your self-evaluation. (Becker, 1973, p. 210)

The narcissist must make a clear courageous choice to stop the "shrinking process" and boldly seek authenticity, no matter how painful. The result will heal the divided self.

### Theological Healing

A few years ago, a priest working in a slum section of a European city was asked why he was doing it, and replied, "so that the rumor of God may not disappear completely." (Berger, 1970, p. 94)

Theologians agree with psychologists that the cooperating community is a key to narcissistic healing. In order to overcome exclusiveness, separateness, and duality, we must accept and acknowledge our neighbors as being just as important, special, and valuable as ourselves. "Each should regard his partner as the very one he is." (Buber, 1965, p. 79) By not making humankind as a cooperating community our ideal of perfection, we isolate and separate ourselves from others.

Duality will continue to exist until one's meaning, purpose, and direction are focused on the ideal of brotherly love. According to Martin Buber, "the person who knows direction responds with the whole of his being to each new situation with no other preparation than his presence and his readiness to respond. . . . Direction is not meeting, but going out to meet." (Friedman, 1960, p. 95) Reaching out means risking vulnerability, relinquishing power, and recognizing our common mortality; it is an act of faith and courage. "How much of a person a man is depends on how strong the I of the basic I-you is in the human duality of his I." (Buber, 1970, p. 115)

Theologians also promote the healing capacity of the god-ideal. Perhaps this is their strongest language. Gutierrez recognizes that narcissists are in trouble because, "They reject union with God insofar as they turn away from the building up of this world, do not open themselves to others, and withdraw into themselves." (Gutierrez, 1973, p. 151)

If Gutierrez is right, then community cooperation and the god-ideal are one and the same. Man cares for his fellow man and, in doing so, reaches out to God. This is totally compatible with the psychological thought previously mentioned.



### Agrarian Philosophical Healing

You don't have to think ridge-to-ridge, the way they did.  
You can think ocean-to-ocean. (Jim Wayne Miller, 1981, p. 58)

A man cannot hate the world and hate his own kind without hating himself. (Wendell Berry, 1970, p. 11)

When Carlos Castaneda (1974) tells the story of his apprenticeship with Don Juan (a native American teacher), Juan describes the bravery, courage, love, and passion for life that the warrior must possess. The warrior, like the Agrarian, appreciates the earth, celebrates the changing seasons, and believes the land should be treated with respect, reverence, and sacredness.

The earth, this world. For a warrior there can be no greater love. . . . Only if one loves this earth with unbending passion can one release one's sadness. . . . A warrior is always joyful because his love embraces him and bestows upon him inconceivable gifts. The sadness belongs only to those who hate the very thing that gives shelter to their beings. (p. 285)

The Agrarian embraces a moral ideal which seeks engagement with the world and encounter with all of life. His ethical ideal of perfection includes a respect for all of humanity, a belief in the sanctity of life and the spirituality of all things. He agrees with the vision of Black Elk, who says -

My friend, I am going to tell you the story of my life, and if it were only the story of my life I think I would not tell it; for what is one man that he should make much of his winters, even when they bend him like a heavy snow. . .it is the story of all life that is holy

and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one spirit. (Neihardt, 1932, p. 1)

The Agrarian knows that the modern self-conscious pre-occupation with glorious self is a story not worth telling. It is selfish, evil, and demonic in its scope and nature. The story is filled with static images, petty illusions of power, sterile symbols of self-fulfillment, and cosmic fantasies of communion. There is no flesh, blood, bone, or breath in this story; it is flaccid, obscure, obscene, sensational and dreamlike in its unreality. Weakness, pain, poverty, and deprivation are ignored, while fame, success, power, and wealth are celebrated. It is a story of seduction, withdrawal, escape, and disregard, and of people who no longer love the land, appreciate the earth, or love their neighbors; it is the story of the narcissistic dialectic, an age old dichotomy that is the hostile adversary of authenticity and the perennial ally of pride.

The Agrarian, therefore, also promotes man becoming one with his maker (god-ideal) and his fellow man (cooperating community). He takes these ideals one step further, however, when he tells us that we should respect the land and all of its creatures. This is, after all, consistent, because a creator makes all things, and when we become one with him, we become one with the land, its plants, its creatures and humankind.

## Conclusion

It is the purpose of this dissertation to examine in an abstract manner the narcissism of modern man within the context of psychology, theology and philosophy. A serious problem has been presented. The problem needs further research, however, to seek a solution. On an abstract level, further research may be done on each treatise presented in the three chapters of this work. On an empirical or scientific level, research will need to provide data and case studies to confirm the philosophy presented in each treatise.

In one sense, there is nothing provocatively new or strikingly original about this paper; poets, philosophers, and theologians since Plato have pointed out the danger of self-magnification and self-surrender. However, these masters of thought could not foresee the effect of technology on man's image of himself. The instant images provided by the media present information to us within a nonsubstantive, simple, trivial, and non-historical context. Much more research is needed to demonstrate how technology (via the media) has created a false image which is difficult to dispel, even by psychologists, the clergy, or philosophers. If the "lie" is difficult to dispell for the great thinkers of our generation, it is possibly more difficult for those

who must deal with the problem on a daily basis: teachers, business managers, or social workers.

Narcissism is unacceptable because the narcissist does not care about other human beings. In order for him to have concern for others, he would need to abandon his self-protective image and face the Gethsemane that is necessary for growth and maturity.

The freedom to which we are called means going out of oneself, the breaking down of our selfishness and all of the structures that support our selfishness; the foundation of this freedom is openness to others. The fullness of liberation--a free gift from Christ--is communion with God and other men. (Gutierrez, 1973, p. 37) The goal of all great historic religions can be summarized as being the overcoming of one's self-love. (Menninger, 1973, p. 159)

This quote should be changed to state - the goal of all great historic religions can be summarized as being the overcoming of one's love of his self-image.

We must recognize that self-respect, self-approval, and self-confidence are favorable aspects of a normal self-concern. A marked imbalance of self-concern and others concern is what psychoanalysis calls narcissism. (p. 159)

If western culture is going to avoid the trap set by the narcissistic dialectic--the agentic impulse toward cosmic selfhood, and the feminine desire for cosmic communion--it must revitalize and restore meaning to the ethical principle of loving our neighbors as ourselves. We must respond to other human beings, and according to Buber "hear the unreduced claim of each particular hour in all its crudeness

and disharmony, and answer it out of the depths of our being." (Friedman, 1960, p. 93) We must laugh, cry, succeed, fail, hope, and despair, but most of all, we must care.

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