THE ESSENCE OF NARCISSISM

Narcissism is the psychological condition of needing to simulate love of the self due to an deficiency in ones core identity. This condition has become nearly universal in modern society due to widespread dehumanization in society and community and a breakdown of social values. As a result, it has led to an increasing need to simulate love, importance and entitlement. The primary symptoms and origins of narcissism are examined.

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Narcissists are unique in that they are allergic to themselves. This is a curious phenomenon, because how is one allergic so? While many have allergies to pets, plants or even politics; narcissists are allergic to the truth and reality that is their own identity. Like many ideas these days, it is misunderstood in the popular imagination. Most erroneously assume it to be a type of extreme self-love or selfishness. At its core, it is not these things. As understood classically by the Greeks, and even psychologists like Freud a century ago, narcissism was a sophisticated character flaw, one where self-love is merely a symptom. In reality, it's essence is the exact opposite – a profound inability to love the self, or to be satisfied with it.

This concept is easily misunderstood, particularly when we hear the myth of Narcissus as children. Commonly, it's portrayed as if a narcissist has too much love for themselves, and thus not enough for others (i.e. selfishness). As Narcissus becomes enamored with himself in the water, we easily read the wrong message into the myth. Instead, we ought to see it for what it is – the inability to love oneself in a healthy way. When vulnerable to this condition such a person tries to simulate love, either by manipulation or delusion. This creates a range of dysfunctional behaviors that are easily misunderstood.

Freud distinguished between two basic forms of narcissism, a primary form, whereby the infant mistakes mother's love for his own importance and omnipotence; and a secondary form, where a failure to respond to the infant's needs generates a rage which subsequently becomes anxiety, guilt and issues of abandonment. The infant, here the narcissist, exhibits primary narcissism in the first months of life, gradually overcoming it, and becoming a secondary narcissist. If the child develops healthily, the secondary narcissism (also known as pathological narcissism) is gradually

overcome as well, as it becomes self-aware and finds an identity. This secondary form is a narcissism of denied fulfillment and separation anxiety. But as it establishes it's own identity, it no longer needs the pathological closeness typical of infants.

While the development of narcissism as an innate human process is important, it must be understood in the unique context of modernity. Because of the existentially empty nature of modern society, there is a persistent need to have the self echoed back into ourselves. Readers of the myth will recall Echo's interaction with Narcissus. Typically, one's identity (and existence) is validated in the everyday experience, but such is no longer the case. This leads therefore to a number of psychological adaptations designed to salvage what's left of the identity.

The origins of this process is understood in the psychology. The difficulty is that the identity of an individual can be weaker than the situation in which it exists. In some versions of the Narcissus myth for instance, he is longing for his lost sister who looks like him. In the case of a child, this is that the world is overwhelming, and one needs to shield themselves from it. In essence this is a retreat from reality, due to personal immaturity. This overall leads to the creation of echo-chambers whereby the self be reflected back, like a mirror. Echo's role in the myth is naturally notable, as she was cursed to repeat everything back to the speaker. In modernity, we can read these as the infamous 'safe spaces' in the world.

Christopher Lasch, in his now famous book, *The Culture of Narcissism* argues that ever since the mid 20th century, the prevailing psychological defect of our age is narcissism, particularly secondary narcissism.[1] If Lasch is correct, then the contorted

1 If Nietzsche's insight about cultural atavism is true, namely that it increases as nihilism becomes more pervasive, then we should expect the primary form of narcissism to replace the secondary form.

definition of narcissism (as mere 'selfishness') is merely a symptom of a far larger array of behaviors designed to insulate us from ourselves and reality.

Narcissism is, at its essence, the inability to love oneself because of an unclear boundary between the self and the world. It must simulate love for itself because it cannot find it elsewhere. This 'love' is also not the simple form that is used commonly. Instead, it is a profound existential type of acceptance, meaningfulness, and satisfaction in the world. It would be the type of meaningfulness that would reject any 'selfishness', because it is sated already.

As mentioned, there are two basic forms of narcissism, of which we tend to only recognize the first. Freud's conception was rooted in that of the child's developmental period, with emphasis on unsatisfied needs due to immaturity. Children don't have an identity that contains 'meaningfulness' for the mere fact that they don't have an identity yet. Their rationality isn't developed, and so have no concept of the world as it is, and no idea of their place in it.

This first form, primary narcissism, is the simulation of self-love we most commonly recognize. It originates from the inability of a new-born to distinguish itself as the object of someone's love, and instead misunderstands itself as the totality of the world. Thus it mistakes the boundaries of its own existence, with that of the mother. It is shocked to learn to that it is not totality, and instead is relegated to a particular existence. Moreover, this existence is not based on its own whims, but those of others as well. Needless to say, this form of narcissism is solipsistic, where only the self matters. It is the more immature variety of narcissism. The most common examples are those driven by resentment and childlike entitlement.

The second form is known as secondary narcissism. This is the form that follows primary narcissism. Once the first form is overcome, the then infant gradually realizes its secondary importance in the world. Namely that all of its needs might not be met. Moreover, it has little say over this process. This leads to a type of existential anxiety and ambivalence. For on one hand, it is dependent on mother (or the world) for its fulfillment, but at the same time resentful that mother doesn't exist solely for it – or that she has a separate existence as well.

In defense against this anxiety, a type of narcissistic shell or barrier is constructed to avoid deeply intimate interactions. The reasons for this are numerous, but can be reduced to guilt and anxiety. Anxiety in the sense that things that offer fulfillment tend to provoke the realization that they cannot be fulfilled, despite being so near to it. Guilt in the sense that their own rage and resentment (which becomes concentrated and enhanced) leads to a self-loathing, since all objects of love are also objects of hate – leading to a confusing contradiction. Children of this age are paragons of this ambivalence.

At the theoretical level, secondary narcissism is a vicious circle, since it continually reinforces itself from an early age. If allowed to fester, it will probably never be cured since therapy is ineffective and the individual won't be able to stabilize their identity. Why isn't therapy effective? As we'll see in our section on symptoms, the shell constructed by narcissists tends to neuter all incoming insights and is instead rationalized superficially, but never internalized. This is because the shell doesn't allow a narcissist to open themselves to true intimacy, and internalizing a true insight would be to drop the shell – which they find unbearable. This basic tendency is reinforced in therapy because it provides a great opportunity to superficially simulate that which

they lack the most – identity. Thus the delusions that compose their identity become reified and actualized in therapy. This situation is exactly mirrored in the Greek myth, where the therapist becomes a type of reflection, thus providing a legitimating echo for the patient.

As mentioned, narcissism is a type of [separation] anxiety. The basic dynamic begins with a perceived lack of fulfillment, and a subsequent rejection of intimacy to avoid potentially disastrous anger towards the person (or object) that should have been fulfilling. As a result, a contradictory relationship with other people begins, since unfulfilled anger stifles the intimacy of healthy relationships. On the one hand, they seek the attention of others for their own benefit and need, but subsequently hate the intimacy because it leads to a dependence that arises from fear and rejection. Over time, these contradictory feelings lead to a lack of a stable identity (or perhaps are themselves the cause of it) and thus an insufficient identity and rootlessness.

In general, there are many symptoms of narcissism, all of which lead to neurotic and pathological behaviors. To see this, I'll introduce a hypothetical example of a woman suffering from this condition, and how a person might be able to identify the condition as it results from external behavior. My point here, aside from the fact that almost everyone suffers from this to a degree, is to outline the details of how a rational process like this works, as this condition is incredibly subtle and devious.

Symptoms of Narcissism

Let us call this hypothetical woman "Linda", and let us say that she is an archetypal secondary-narcissist. I chose a woman

because it works out better for the logistics of sexual promiscuity, and the demographics, since it leads to depressive symptoms in women, and depression and anxiety is similarly nearly universal in modern women.

First, let us describe Linda's basic life-story and mode of interaction. Having introduced some of the essential characteristic already, we will soon recognize the pathology. Linda is a semi-successful woman who attended some college and has had a bit of professional and romantic success, then and even today. She is now a middle-aged woman (say mid-forties) who still has difficulty in her relationships. Despite having a large number of boyfriends and lovers over the years, has never found herself married. She often fantasizes about past lovers, and is constantly embroiled in nostalgic seeking and distraction, not only sexually, but in all aspects of life. She has a fear of being alone, and persistently tries to 'stay busy'. She rationalizes this in various ways (e.g. achievement). Her relationship with her family, particularly her parents, is fraught with contradiction, loving at one moment, but filled with anger and resentment the next. A persistent jealousy chases her. At her core, she feels a profound loneliness, but cannot seemingly find its root or core. She has never found any appeal to being a mother, but instead prefers seeking novelty and new excitements, particularly sexual.

Her finances are atrocious, and is a testament to an impulsive life, always acting but never finding. A constant need to discover, to validate and to find oneself, but it seemingly never comes. She lives one day at a time, and has difficulty preparing for the future, and persistently puts it out of her mind. She knows on some level that her beauty is fading, but like most things, has no means of coping or subsuming it into herself. She doesn't know who she is, and tries to discover herself thru the

mirror of reality: other people and objects, particularly thru men and shopping.

To live such a life would be challenging, if not despairing. With little wonder, depression and its 'learned helplessness' are persistent. She has been in therapy and used anti-depressants off and on. They sometimes seem to help, but after near a decade (or more) of failed attempts, the whole situation appears to be unsolvable. After all, shouldn't an expert in cognitive-behavioral therapy (or another therapy) know how to cure this? If it were caused by depression alone, perhaps they might. But what about narcissism? The trouble with a narcissist is that they love therapy, but never get anything from it. Because of the need for intimacy, they love the attention and validation it offers. But because they also think themselves smarter and more well-adjusted than they are (often because of delusional reframing). They never humble themselves and instead intellectualize and rationalize things, rendering therapy or any self-analysis useless. In some cases it actually makes it worse because it legitimizes their rationalizations about themselves and their situation. It allows a person to make up almost anything that sounds plausible, and deflects any truth from reaching them.

Above, I mentioned around a dozen different symptoms, all of which can be reduced into a single, essential cause. For the sake of clarity I already gave the cause itself: secondary narcissism. So lets break down the basic symptoms and how they relate to the origin, and then we'll explain the cure.

At its core, narcissism is caused by a blurring between the self and the external world. For infants, this is the thinking that they are the world. As for children, it's that the world revolves around them. For adults, it's the improper boundaries of identity, often the lack of an identity itself. Without good boundaries, we

end up caring about things we shouldn't (often leading to jealousy, envy and resentment) and not caring about things we should (like dependable personal relationships or authentic being).

The result of this blurring between the self and the world ultimately results in a lack of identity, and consequently a lack of fulfillment. Linda, in her constant search for happiness jumps from one source of temporary pleasure to another, be it a man, a new purse or travel, a new car or whatever it might be. It leads to an endless oral-fixation, a constant need to consume new things. One's entire purpose in life becomes appetitive and its satiatory. With little wonder, we could add that Linda has been steadily gaining weight over the years, and might even begin to have health-problems as a result. Yet she continually uses makeup and fashion as a means of avoiding her age and condition. Like many personal habits, she uses makeup so as to distance herself from reality. Combined with her increasing age, and her ability to make money, and allure men have for her will only get worse over time. Men that meet her will not be attracted to her personality, as none will want a woman who can't offer love in return as her focus is always on herself. She is beginning to embody Jung's Terrible Mother archetype.

As a result, there is a tendency to avoid thinking about the future, for it only holds pain and increased suffering. A healthy person prepares for old-age by storing up memories and a stable lifestyle to endure the hardships of age. For this reason, marriage and children often prove to be one of the most important sources of fulfillment. For women they also provide the valuable community experience that she craves. Unfortunately these aren't valid options for Linda because of her tendency towards short-term tumultuous relationships and the selfishness that prevents stable and deep intimacy.

At this point we see the circle complete itself, and the lack of fulfillment that prevents future fulfillment. As she doesn't have the identity needed to endure dependent relationships without triggering her anger and resentments, she ends up ruining the relationships with those that might actually work. The cycle then repeats itself, and further resentment is built up. But since it is partly her fault, she ends up resenting herself as well as others. Thus she is anxious about each new relationship, unable to commit for fear of repeating the cycle. Thus her own identity becomes the enemy, and a self-loathing soon takes over. Without a lovable identity, the loneliness becomes legitimate, and impossible to fix.

Pretty depressing? Yes it is. However, the situation might only seem impossible until we break it down. Obviously, we've already accomplished a great deal by analyzing many of its parts and explaining them. However the cure is fairly straight-forward once a clear path can be cut. In essence, Linda, like any narcissist, needs to find a self-sufficient identity. Most importantly, that identity must be localized within her own sphere of well-being, without any dependencies on other sources. Unfortunately, many try to center their identity in their behaviors, careers or even other people. They understand themselves only thru the mirror of reality. This is the cautionary-tale of Narcissus. In such a mode, everything becomes a form of acting, which is done for other people, never for oneself. This is largely responsible for the social-media obsession of millennials. They live their lives in public, and come to see themselves only from the perspective of others, and never from within their own head (ironically enough). This is one of the many ways in which the boundaries of self and other become blurred.

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Aside from a basic symptom like trying to instantiate an identity, narcissism takes other forms. A major one is the ambivalent and contradictory relationships with others. Because of the ambivalent way in which fear and intimacy are related, there is a tendency to perceive others as a synthesis of friends and enemies. A nemesis-or-lover situation, where there is always a battle is to be fought, and so one must be careful not to become the victim. Soap-operas and other melodramas are shows about narcissism since their plots and characters follow these formulae. For these folks, all things, even good advice become subsumed under this framework. Therefore anyone criticizing or trying to 'get one up' on them will always be treated with hostility and distrust. This leads to a type of petulance that prevents criticism (both constructive and not), and even the obvious truth from getting inside. This is the basis for the allergy towards reality.

Rather than deal with it, they must live inside a 1984-style memory-hole where no errors are admitted, and all mental gymnastics are permitted. The admission of error would be disastrous, as it says that the ideals that one has for themselves are merely fictitious. Thus one will often see an incredible amount of rationalizations, and a preference towards illogical and inorganic narratives in order to preserve themselves or ideas about the world. And these narratives will naturally be centered on themselves, their skills, their value, their worth etc. All are simulations of the love that seem to escape them. While all people need these things, as a species we are built not to lie about them. We must embody them authentically, and if we don't, *we must be corrected.* Narcissism makes an end-run around this repentance and self-change. It cheats Nature, and so Nature punishes us in return. Rather than live in a reality outside

themselves, they keep a shell up to maintain their necessary illusion.

Trying to break thru this shell proves extremely difficult, and is a recipe for conflict for all that dare enter. Because anyone threatening their shell is threatening them, they will quickly react negatively and with hostility. Because these will find shelter in subjectivity (for then one's own truth is as good as any other), things which are objective, necessary, and irrefutable are scary and to be avoided. People who persist 'against them' are often labeled as arrogant. Narcissists believe themselves equal or greater than others, and so anyone who might be above them must be attacked. This leads to a resentment-driven leveling that distrusts expertise, knowledge, improvement, and leads to pride and actual arrogance. Where most human activities strive upwards, narcissism strives downwards. Instead, they would prefer to stay away from such, for secrecy and solipsism is much safer. It is a cosmopolitan modern problem because subjectivity is given such high regard in our culture.

Unfortunately, these delusions can only go so far until reality begins to intrude again. These are the major depressive episodes or other forms of 'acting out'. Reality can only be held back for so long, and eventually relationships begin to suffer as the number of self-caused errors accumulate. Individuals will recognize this in others, and so narcissists will tend to keep to themselves, finding others to aid them in their play-acting. They will conflict with non-narcissists, for the latter will insist on authenticity and accuracy. Far easier it is to: 'take no criticisms and find no answers'. Thus narcissists prefer the company of other narcissists.

Now, this question of authenticity seems the metaphysical essence of narcissism. All humans demand an authentic relation-

ship with themselves and with Nature. As a result, narcissism is a dike merely holding back reality for as long as one can sustain it. The higher the barrier, the worse the catastrophe. Instead however, a narcissist can overcome it by slowly draining the inflations of self. Because authenticity is the efficient-cause of identity, finding authentic relationships and modes of being will actually spur the identity, even ex-nihilo. This is how well-adjusted children overcome secondary narcissism. They 'find themselves' in the world, by slowly letting off the pressure. In practice, this happens when the identity is instantiated in reality, and then localized in a proper region.

Unfortunately, this process is often corrupted as well in narcissists, particularly with authentic social relationships. Rather than seek the relationship for its natural boons, weird extras and meaningless tokens become involved, almost in a 'putting the cart before the horse' kind of way. For instance, rather than merely wanting to spend lunch and talk, a narcissist might want to go to an extraordinary lunch, perhaps spending extravagantly, and then fail to discuss anything of substance. Many actions will be self-defeating in this way, with too much emphasize on a thing that doesn't promote authenticity.

A novel test for this in a person is to identify what type of media they enjoy. Narcissists will prefer media that tends towards the extravagant or exciting, albeit without any substance. Because they live in a fantasy world, media that blends truth with fiction will be preferred. Moreover, since they need and desire social approval, it will be a socially-directed show. The perfect combination of these are soap-operas. For this reason, soap-operas have become the dominant television show in recent years, and not all of them are on day-time television. Their hallmarks are those of narcissism, and feature characters who function as such.

This is also why many shows have become hyper-sexualized, but without any purpose or content. In these, sex is a hollow extravagance, and gives the opportunity for a semblance of intimacy, but then denies it by hiding the true exploration of self. It simulates authenticity, but without substance. While 'meaningless sex' is actually impossible, it does tend towards such as much as it can. Thus promiscuity, and a general inability to engage with intimacy is another hallmark of narcissism.

Other prominent symptoms include extraordinary oral deprivation. As Freud noted, there is a need to consume and experience new things. This goes with the infancy and immaturity innate to identity. Because infants don't have enough to base themselves, they must search and explore. They are seeking to consume things into themselves, even if it is something like a toy or finger. This is how humans accumulate into themselves. In adults this takes the form of a listless wandering, where they might move from town-to-town or person-to-person. They tend to stay just long enough to have satisfied their superficial curiosity and then it becomes time to move on. From their side, it is a type of boredom and emptiness which leads to an impulsive searching and striving. This also is seen in the nexus of insignificance that characterizes narcissism in general. It is a person without an essence.

The final symptom is the defensive shell we mentioned above. This shell is designed to keep people at arms length. It is typically a set of psychological and rhetorical barricades designed to lure a person in, while actually keeping them out. Thus it comes across as a combination of intimacy-seeking and intimacy-avoidance. This symptom has two faces, and is recognizable if an outsider tries to penetrate the barrier fully. A common tactic is idle flattery, where the person attempts to bait intimacy by

offering an overly generous compliment, but then spurns the intimate response it generates. Another common dynamic is an extraordinary openness in one area of themselves, but then to deflect and hide others things of the same order. In the case of sexual promiscuity for instance, the sex comes easily, but the intimacy never follows. This is of course, the opposite of typical sexual encounters, whereby the sexual-act is merely an embodiment of the intimacy itself, and thus the one gives-way to the other and vice-versa. In this dynamic, the part that is easily given is the part that is most simulated, and exists in a type of demilitarized zone.

Causes of Narcissism

At the core, there are two basic psychological patterns at play underlying all the symptoms. As we'll see, they mutually reinforce each other and the symptoms of these feedback into themselves to enhance the fundamental causes. It cannot be understated that secondary narcissism is a vicious circle, and extraordinarily difficult to overcome. The first cause is a fundamental lack of identity and sense of self, resulting in a profound emptiness. The second is a fundamental inability to be intimate with another person due to repressed rage, self-loathing and anxiety. When combined, these create a confusing jumbled mess of half-thought motives, tendencies and personality traits which continually undermine the identity, or the ability to be intimate, which itself might stabilize a borderline condition.

Narcissism is the hardest pathology to cure, and it must be cured by choice alone. Because narcissism takes extraordinary mental gymnastics, they are developed enough to resist any

invasion. They are strong individuals, definitely possessing free-will, but they've come to use it for dysfunctional ends. One can only encourage and instruct; but therapy tends to reinforce the trend without actually instructing and so should be avoided.

In general, the cure is a strong and reality-based identity. To create a self-sufficient identity is thus the only task needed to overcome narcissism. Once it, and its boundaries are created, the impulsive and self-destructive tendencies will soon diminish. Such a process will happen organically once the root cause is identified and fixed. This is because the identity will care for itself, and begin to realize that itself is the cause of its own pain. And when it comes to recognize this, it makes changes to avoid the error – as one who burns accidentally will be more careful with fire in the future.

In a generic sense, the identity must be developed, and so might merely fail to develop from youth. In modernity there are a lot of ways in which a person fails to possess (or develop) an identity. As the identity is the legitimate self-purpose that is felt by an individual as a result of their subjective well-being; anything which threatens or erodes well-being, subjectivity or self-purpose can lead to its loss. For instance, a dehumanizing tendency in society at large, perhaps an anomie, boredom or sense of insignificance might trigger a narcissistic cycle. Similarly, a lack of purpose in youth might merely be carried upwards from adolescence, as pleasure and novelty become the basis or purpose in life, but since such are hollow, the identity becomes a facade. As the identity is a persistent organization of unconscious impulses and needs to be mixed with our conscious reactions and beliefs, it must be maintained daily. If that maintenance ever falters, a once-strong identity can become eroded, similarly triggering a narcissistic cycle.

This cycle is probably the most visible aspect of narcissism. Since the condition is characterized by a 'hand-to-mouth' identity, there is a focus only on the short-term aspects of intimacy. This leads to a contradictory cycle that's only vaguely perceptible, and is recognizable as the invitation to intimacy but no follow-up.

At the core of this condition is the contradictory relationship between identity and intimacy. All human nature is expressed in the dance between the intimacy we share with others, and the identities that we perceive in it. Narcissists however can't participate in this basic dynamic, and are left to simulate it and make-do with whatever they can imagine. Unlike non-narcissists, who recognize the difference between acting their identity, and living it; narcissists aren't familiar with a stable identity. Instead all they know is a living spectacle. And the strength of this spectacle is the barrier that protects their vulnerability. To find true satisfaction in an identity however, the barrier must fall, and the identity must be strong enough to sustain reality.

Once this barrier is weakened, the natural cycle of intimacy and identity can begin again. But first, we should explain what the identity is in the existential sense. The identity is the sense of 'home' that you carry with you. It is the range of objects, ideas, persons and habits that give us a sense of well-being or happiness. Often, we think of our identity as being that which makes us unique from other people. This is a misunderstanding. The problem is that well-being is rooted in objective human needs, needs that we all have. Thus it is precisely what makes us the same. And this is where we should root our identity. We should not focus on ourselves as a 'special snowflake', for that will merely enhance narcissism. Instead, we must find what makes us the best version of ourselves – as persons. And so should be that which offers a universal fulfillment. And that's not

to be found in the difference of self – that's merely to reify narcissistic megalomania.

To find this 'home', one must find a sense of security and perpetuity. This refers back to the concept of rootlessness and immediacy, but home should be thought of as the thing that can endure thru the ages – eternal. One of the difficulties of modernity, and narcissism in general, is that we lose our idea of history, and thereby our sense of the future and the eternal. Thus we don't plan for it or appreciate its inevitability. Older generations had a sense of community, and perpetuity, whether it be the small-town, the community, or the family-land. There is a sense of an endless-tomorrow, found within those who have children and want to 'pass things on'. But because of the stressful and chaotic relationships with parents, the prospect of children is daunting, and so we become disconnected from the river of posterity. But while children are not necessary for this sense of continuity, a person does need something legitimate and real. There must be a sense of future and eternal continuance.

Thus the identity is the internalized feeling and understanding of this 'eternality' that we participate in on a daily basis. But if we don't actually participate in an authentic continuity, then what is our identity? There isn't one. Thus one must discover and dedicate themselves to an authenticity of this sort. And when discovered, it should be shared and grow itself into a community. Without it, narcissism is the outcome because one is a homeless pariah.

Now, while this is a psychological and philosophical explanation, this is not how we'll understand it as a person with an identity. Internally, an identity looks like a sense of purpose and fulfillment – it's the sense of 'destiny' or 'role' that a person has. It's the thing that they contribute to the world, and

that others depend on them for. But here again we should notice that if there is no dependency, then the feelings of insignificance are actually accurate. And if accurate, should not be simulated – as that is narcissistic. Instead, the goal must be to seek the legitimate authenticity, to seek the dependency and the purpose offered therein. This is why pets are so appealing to many people. They love us because they legitimately need us, and so give us a grounding in a world that actually matters.

Now, where should one go about constructing a homestead of this sort? In the mind of course! And what are the building materials? Memories of well-being, achievement, happiness, and purpose, ideally in social relationships. In short, one must ruminate on the positive aspects of themselves. Everyone has accomplished things, we merely must reflect on their legitimate aspects. One of the problems with narcissists is that they focus on their own delusions, and thus create fictions of their own histories and competency, like a spider making a web. Instead, one needs to identify the legitimate memories and emphasize those. And if they don't have any, then it's time to start making them! One might even need to humble themselves to their own faults and flaws and begin to work thru them.

In the process of ruminating on one's history and successes, the understanding will gradually process the information and come to a satisfactory answer. The central problem of narcissism, as with most failures of the understanding, is that it's merely not given a chance to do its work. The job of the understanding is to process personal and social history. It wants to digest the past and present, as the stomach 'wants' to digest food. However it must be given the chance with healthy rumination. One of the interesting things about narcissists is that they often try to become creative individuals. This is particularly true of male

narcissists, who try to live in their achievements and creations. The purpose of such then is therapeutic. Unfortunately, it is often self-indulgent, and so fails on technical grounds. This has even been happening in major motion pictures and music, where celebrities imbue themselves into the work. Rather than respect the needs of the creation or the audience, it becomes about the creator, and so ends up as a self-fulfilling prophecy: where the insignificance of the creator is made manifest by failing to make an impactful work.

Conclusion

The allergy to self is probably the most subversive problem of individuality because it denies the possibility of being comfortable in oneself. When that can't happen, then life becomes a series of simulations. Modernity is fraught with these simulations. The cure to narcissism is to find a strong and stable identity, and to curate it. When that happens, the endless longing for self will diminish as the extraneous needs are revealed as mere dopamine-chasers. Unlike many other psychological problems, narcissism is a wholly individual act, and requires a wholly individual cure. Freud long warned against trying to treat narcissists as therapy would usually reify their simulations of reality.

However for the modern 'individual', who is not quite a person (yet), understanding this common condition gives us freedom. The difficulty is in finding our identity. One of the difficulties here is that we need to simultaneously ruminate on ourselves, but also need to avoid it. Rumination can not only help us know our identities, needs and etc., but it can also fabricate the lies that we tell ourselves. Here is where individual

good-faith is born. A well-developed person will always analyze their own mistakes and faults, although they'd be wise not to share them (which perhaps gives outsiders the impression they don't do this). A well-developed narcissist will also do this, except that it will be hollow and therefore vulnerable. Since narcissism is already common, I will still recommend rumination each and every day, hopefully at least 30 minutes if possible. Ideally, this time should be uninterrupted and alone.

During this time, the person should analyze their true desires, preferences, importance and goals. Initially this might be difficult to do, but will improve over time. Of special note will be the relationship between goals and skills. Narcissism most commonly manifests itself as a need to exaggerate skills, and thereby the goals (or entitlements) that result. Typically, they will think they are not getting what they deserve, and so will think the world is unfair. Another manifestation is the lack of thinking on others. In humans, the identity of self is inextricably connected to that of others. And in most respects, ruminations on our identity are closely associated with friends and family. The inability to recognize and see others is common in narcissists. Kant's famous moral dictum to see others as an end unto themselves, rather than 'mere means', gives a good indication of this solipsism.

As narcissists are allergic to themselves (and all love therein), their intimacy is fraught with allergies as well. But once the purpose of intimacy is known, then utilizing it is quite simple. Intimacy is merely the degree of overlap between two identities. To let another identity into ours can be a scary process. If those people have bad intentions then we would be harmed. Again we can return to the need for judgment, for we should not let just anyone into our identity, instead they must be

vetted properly. Another potential cause of the defensive shell thus, although it will be accidental to narcissism, is the lack of judgment, and so it becomes impossible to tell who will hurt us, and who won't.

The ultimate problem with narcissism is that in modernity, people are not as unique as they need to be, yet there is a legitimate human need to be unique and important. We see the simulation of uniqueness in the 'snowflake-syndrome' that characterizes modern people. The issue is that if we can't, or don't find a good way of becoming unique and important thru legitimate means, then narcissism is the outcome. Today, people are all fungible, and we are mostly the same as others. And if one is the same as all others, then it becomes difficult to see why a particular person matters. If one can be easily replaced, then none are missed. Finding reasons and ways of ensuring that you as a person matter is key to overcoming narcissism. Many individuals have found this in family and relationships because they incur real costs – a child absolutely needs its mother and father. Thus being a parent matters and gives one a unique importance. As long as one lacks a true identity, all are vulnerable to narcissism. One must ensure that we are strong enough for reality so a retreat into our own fantasy is not needed.