

How Not to Be a Narcissist: Understanding the God Who Made You

Talk 1

The God Who is Not Like Us

The Two Cosmologies

1. *Biblical Two-ism*

2. *Pagan One-ism*

The Two Cosmologies

1. *Biblical Two-ism*

The Creator/creation distinction

*“In the beginning God created the
heavens and the earth”*

The Two Cosmologies

2. Pagan One-ism

Locating the ultimate and sacred within
this world

Pagan religion locates the sacred within this world. In that way, paganism can consecrate the world from within: it is religiosity relative to an immanent sacred. Judaism and Christianity, by contrast, reflect transcendent religiosity; they place the sacred, ultimately, outside the world.

(Steven Smith – Pagans and Christians in the City)

Two Types of Paganism

1. *Nature Paganism (ancient)*
2. *Ego Paganism (modern)*

Ego paganism and the new religions

“our Nones may not be traditionally religious, in the sense that either Jerry Falwell or Sam Harris is used to. But they’re not exactly secular, either.”

Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World
(Tara Burton)

“they aren’t rejecting religion, but rather remixing it. It’s the story of how more and more Americans—and particularly how more and more millennials—envision themselves as creators of their own bespoke religions, mixing and matching spiritual and aesthetic and experiential and philosophical traditions. The Remixed hunger for the same things human beings have always longed for: a sense of meaning in the world and personal purpose within that meaning, a community to share that experience with, and rituals to bring the power of that experience into achievable, everyday life. But they’re doing it differently.”

“At least half of America—and likely far more—is either a faithful None, an SBNR, or a religiously flexible hybrid.”

This “outnumbers white evangelicals, a group traditionally considered among the most influential voting blocs in America, but whose numbers are now dwindling to just 15 percent of the population.”

(Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World)

The Choice?

“The choice between a Christian and a pagan society has (always) remained very much a live possibility.”

(Steven Smith – Pagans and Christians in the City)

Why the recovery of Two-
ism is critical for the
modern self!

1. Human identity is grounded in One who is not of this world.

(the true basis for our value and worth)

2. Only in a Two-ism can distinction and diversity be maintained

(without this we disappear)

3. A Two-ism is necessary for the rescue
we require

Talk 2

The God Who is True to
Himself

The Secular Aseity Project

the new entrepreneurs of the self

The self-actualizers

I can and I must be true to myself

I am the only truth I know.... (telling) me what to do and how to live. To be my truest self I should follow my instincts. My body and my gut know more than my mind. An unjust and repressive society has held me back from becoming my best self. It has warped my faith in my own abilities and my relationship with others. I owe it to myself to practice self-care. I owe it to the world to perfect myself: physically, spiritually, and morally. There is no objective right or wrong. Different people and different societies have different moral obligations.

(Tara Burton – Strange Rites)

The new techno-utopians as a case study in self-actualization

*Today's techno-utopianism basically worships
human potential and its technological
manifestations, including artificial intelligence.*

(Tara Burton – Strange Rites)

What the Secular Aseity Project Ignores

“The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums.”

(G K Chesterton)

Our limited freedom

“Man cannot be at times free and at other times a slave: either he is always and entirely free or he is not free at all.”

(Jean Paul Satre)

The self can't know the self

Augustine - *'I am a great question to myself'*

Nietzsche – *'Each is furthest away from himself'*

How can you be true to a self that is
corrupted and divided?

“The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

(Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn)

Knowing the God who is True to
Himself

The Great I AM

Divine Aseity

God as the true self-actualizer

This ruptured syllogism—If I understand myself, I'll get better—made me question the way I'd come to worship self-awareness itself, a brand of secular humanism: Know thyself, and act accordingly. What if you reversed this? Act, and know thyself differently.

(Leslie Jamison - The Recovering: Intoxication and Its Aftermath)

As Marion rightly comments, this “weight of the self,” this burden of conversion, means “deciding between two burdens: that of the self reduced to itself, the weight of a deadweight, or that which I would love and which would lighten me.” THIS OUTWARD, UPWARD turn is Augustinian. It is the posture of a dependence that liberates, a reliance that releases. This deconstructs the myth of authenticity... In that story, I’m authentic if I’m “sincere,” and I’m only sincere if I act as if I’m making things up from scratch, expressing something “inside” me that’s all my own.

(Jamie K Smith – On The Road with Saint Augustine)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

(Mt 11:28)

Talk 3

The God Who Loves
Himself
(but is not a narcissist)

The Secular Self-love Project

(or a Culture of Narcissists)

Striving to perfect ourselves

The new religion of wellness

Marketing personal self-improvement and commodified self-care as quasi-religious experiences—has gone viral. The sense of meaning and purpose that contemporary wellness culture provides can be found in health and self-improvement discourse all over the United States. At its core, wellness isn't simply a marketing scheme, or even a self-help mantra. It's a cohesive philosophy of life.... (It's) an inherently meaningful world where you can still, ethically, do whatever you want. Wellness begins—and ends—with the self.

(Tara Burton – Strange Rites)

*All things find their destiny in
me*

Why the Secular Self-love Project is Failing

Our quandary is much worse than we imagine
it to be

We were created to be the beloved

“And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so...And what did you want? To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth.”

(Raymond Carver)

Knowing the God who is the
supreme good

The Divine Perfections

Only God has a true basis for
self-love

Delighting in His own perfections

Finding our destiny in Him

'If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.'

(C S Lewis - Mere Christianity)

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.