

## Narcissism: The Future Religion

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### Abstract

**Narcissism is the first distributed or networked faith: every believer and practitioner (i.e., every narcissist) is a worshipper but also the god that he worships (has a godlike False Self). Every node is equipotent and self-sustaining as it seeks to consume narcissistic supply (attention, good or bad).**

Pathological narcissism develops as a set of complex psychological defenses against childhood abuse and trauma in all its forms, including not only “classical” maltreatment, but also idolizing the child, smothering it, parentifying it, or instrumentalizing it [1-6].

Whenever the child is not allowed to separate from the parental figures, form boundaries, and individuate (become an individual), a disorder of some kind ensues, secondary (pathological) narcissism being among the most prevalent [6-13].

In the narcissistic pathology, the child forms a paracosm ruled over by an imaginary friend who is everything the child is not: omniscient, omnipotent, perfect, brilliant, and omnipresent. In short: a godhead or divinity. The child worships the newfound ally and makes a human sacrifice to this Moloch: he offers to it his true self.

The child strikes a Faustian deal: he is endowed with a grandiose albeit fragile self-image and a fantastic self-perception, but, in return, he ceases to exist.

The narcissist outsources his ego boundary functions to the False Self and regulates his internal environment (for example: his sense of self-worth) via constant feedback from a multitude of interchangeable sources of narcissistic supply. His is a veritable hive mind [14-20].

Narcissism is the celebration, elevation, and glorification of a superior absence, a howling emptiness, the all-devouring void of a black hole with a galaxy of internal objects (introjects) swirling around it.

Narcissism is, therefore, a private religion which resembles very much primitive faiths and rites. It is a fantasy defense writ large and gone awry, having metamorphosed into a delusion. Reality testing is severely impaired and the narcissist mistakes inner representations of people with the external objects that gave rise to them [21-25].

As a growing number of people become increasingly more narcissistic and as our civilization rewards narcissism and veers towards it, the allure of the narcissism religion is growing exponentially.

It is beginning to be widely and counterfactually glamorized - even in academe - as a positive adaptation. Counterfactually because narcissism ineluctably and invariably devolves into self-defeat and self-destruction.

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Like every religion before it, narcissism is fast becoming an organizing and hermeneutic (explanatory) principle. It imbues existence with meaning and direction. It is both prescriptive and proscriptive. Fueled by technologies like social media, it is spreading with more alacrity than any previous historical faith.

Pathological narcissism is also missionary: the narcissist attempts to convert potential sources of narcissistic supply and intimate partners to participate in his shared fantasy and to worship his grandiose deity, the False Self.

Everything abovesaid applies with equal rigor to narcissistic collectives. This is where the danger lurks: narcissism is aggressive and intolerant, dysempathic and exploitative. It is a death cult. It elevates objects above people. In a society of the spectacle, everyone is rendered a commodity. Materialism and consumerism are manifestations of narcissism as is malignant, ostentatious individualism.

Narcissism in collectives is indistinguishable from the individual sort: it is always adversarial and results in dismal self-defeat and self-destruction. Left unbridled and unconstrained and elevated ideologically, it can bring about Armageddon in more than one way [26,27].

The rise of narcissism is inexorable. It is comparable to climate change and to the shift in gender roles: there is no going back now. If I am right, it calls for major adaptations on multiple levels, individual, institutional, and collective:

1. To harness the considerable energy of narcissism and channel it in socially acceptable ways (sublimate it). Prosocial and communal narcissism could spell a workable compromise, for example.

2. To put in place checks, balances, and institutions to prevent the more destructive, insidious, and pernicious outcomes and aspects of narcissism; and
3. To prepare the general populace to accept narcissism as a part of the landscape and Zeitgeist. This latter goal is best accomplished via technologies that would provide outlets to conforming, positive healthy narcissism and at the same time isolate users from an increasingly more narcissistic reality as much as possible. Social media and the metaverse as harbingers of these twin tasks. Atomization and self-sufficiency as well as the disintegration of social institutions are mere symptoms of this tectonic shift in what it means to be human [28,29].

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