

WHAT IS SELF?
- A Research Paper -
by
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PREFACE

This paper was written at the request of Dr. Nini Praetorius, Docent Professor, University of Copenhagen. It was written as a contribution to her research project entitled “*A new approach to the studies of Self, its development, function, and relation to consciousness*”. The questions posed are “*whether or not self has any real existence, i.e., is there something of substance being referred to by the notions of “self”, “I”, and “me”, or is the self a mere narrative construction, a cognitive representation, or is self a linguistic artifact, or a neurological induced illusion?*”

Since I have already written and spoken rather extensively on the true nature of self,¹ the focus of this paper will be on “*Self as the cause of individuation*”. What I can contribute to this subject, however, is not academic, but arises solely from my experiences as a Christian contemplative - i.e., a life centered on God. Apart from this particular context, I find the subject of “self” of no particular interest. While this background may narrow the scope of this paper, yet, apart from what I have already written (of “self”), what follows is about all I can add to it.

INTRODUCTION

If this paper were intended for those already acquainted with my works I could have made short work of it. The difficulty, however, is writing for those without this particular background. With no time to repeat what I have already gone over, some people may find this paper difficult reading. Questions are bound to arise that have already been addressed or gone over at length and cannot be repeated here. Realizing this problem, I decided that in the interest of making this paper more comprehensible, I would begin with a statement of its *major premise and conclusion*, and leave the rest of the paper to provide its *minor premises or middle terms*. This syllogistic set-up is not intended to *prove* anything, but is simply a way to understand this paper in light of its *premise and conclusion*. So here, then, is our thesis statement:

Premise: “*Self is the cause of individuation*”.

Conclusion: “*Without Self there is no individuation*”.

¹ See both my book *What Is Self?* and DVD “*A Passage Through Self*”. Chapters on self can also be found in my book *Essays on the Christian Spiritual Journey*. My first two books (*The Experience of No-Self* and *The Path to No-Self*) were *not* concerned with the true nature of self. The first book solely recounts the conundrum of living *without* the experience of self and the mystery of the ***true nature of “what” remains beyond all self*** - a question of far greater importance to man than the true nature of self. As to “*what*” lies beyond all self, this is the subject of my most recent book, *The Real Christ*.

Individuation

As used in this paper, the term “*individuation*” is to be understood in its philosophical sense and not its more contemporary Jungian sense. Where psychology takes man’s *experience of individuality* for granted, philosophy questions the *cause* of this experience - i.e., how man knows and experiences *his own* individual “*I am*”, “*I exist*”, “*I think*”. Without the experience of *his own being*, the entire philosophical question of “*being*” would never have arisen in the first place. So the source or *cause* of *individuation* is first and foremost man experiencing *himself* as a discrete individual being.

From a philosophical perspective, the problem of “self” can be put this way: based on the theory that man (human nature) is a composite of *matter* and *form* (soul), it is difficult to explain how either *prime matter* (which is the *same* in *all* physical things), or substantial *form* (which is the *same* in all members of the same species) could be the ***cause or principle of individuation*** (individuality). Since neither *matter* or *form* (soul) is the *cause* of “individuation”, then neither *matter* or *form* is the *cause* of man experiencing himself as an *individual being*. The question, then, is “***What is it that causes man’s one universal human nature to be individuated into a plethora of individual persons or selves?***”

Given there is but one *common human nature* and not *many* human natures - different kinds of human nature or even a *particular* human nature (“*What is common to all is proper to none*”) - **the question is how to get from one universal human nature to every man being his own incommunicable self or person?** In some respects, this question harks back to the ancient Greeks pondering how the “one” could be many or the many be “one”. As a proverbial question, however, it is one for which no answer has ever proved satisfactory. Thus, for example, Plato thought *matter* was responsible for individuating man’s *universal soul* into many individuals. Aristotle, on the other hand, thought it was the *soul* that individuated matter – because, he said, it is the *essence* of man’s *common soul to be one*. For Aristotle then, it is the soul *in-forming* matter that is the *cause* of individuation – i.e., many individual “ones”. Of course there were other views as well - the Stoics, Plotinus, etc.

Simply put, my answer to this proverbial question is this: *self is the cause of individuating man’s one common universal human nature into many individual selves or persons*. Human differences are not due to man’s *common human nature*, but to that particular *property* of human nature man *experiences* as “self”- as “*I am, I exist, I am myself and no other*”. Self, then, is responsible for the *experience* of being a discrete entity, a unique individual person. Without self, man would ***not*** experience himself as an *individual* or *person*, nor as a *being* - a “*who*” or “*I am*”. This means that ***man’s common universal human nature is void of all these experiences, void of any experience that could be called or defined as “self”***. **In short, man’s one common, universal human nature, is void of any self.**

Self IS self-awareness

As a mere word, “self” is simply the expression of everyman’s *experience of existence* – “*I exist*”, “*I am*”. Self-awareness is not something man was taught or figured out – indeed, within the first year of life infants give signs of being aware of themselves – rather, *self* is first and foremost everyman’s *awareness of his own existence*. (For those who get hung up

on mere *words*, sign-language expresses the same thing). The reason most people take self-awareness for granted is because, as an “experience”, they have *never been without it!* (In truth, one never knows what he *has* until it is gone!) Thus when people refer to their “selves”, the usual reference is to their whole being, their very existence and *not* to some idea in their heads, to some bodily organism, or to a disembodied soul. It is because man’s awareness of his *own* existence is an autonomous “given” he takes “self” as everything it means *to exist*. So unless otherwise specified, all “self” words refer to man’s entire being, more especially, to *himself* as a discrete **individual entity** or person.

All self-words, then - “*me, myself and I*” – are simply expressions of man *experiencing* his individual existence as the independent owner, agent or steward of his *own* being. He is aware that his thoughts, desires, judgments, feelings and acts are *his own* and *not* someone else’s. *Self*, then, is *autonomous self-awareness* responsible for everyone being his own unique “person” - person defined as one in possession of himself, or maybe, one who is “self possessed”. Since it is *self-awareness* that *individuates* man’s universal *human nature*, we **define “self”** (what it means and “what” it is) as “**self-awareness**”. As an objective study, self-awareness is called “**consciousness**”, the singular nature of which is awareness-of-oneself – one’s *own* being, *own* existence. Thus “self-awareness” and “consciousness” are synonymous terms for “self”, for without consciousness or self-awareness, man would have no experience of “self”. There is no self beyond consciousness or any consciousness beyond self. In fact, there is also no such “thing” as “the unconscious” or an “*unconscious self*”. What is called “*unconscious*” is merely a term for what one either does *not* know or is *not* aware of, in which case, it has no *reality* for anyone. As for different “levels” of consciousness, they are all *self*.²

Perhaps it is not for nothing the Greek term for “soul” was “*psyche*”. Though the *psyche* or soul was defined as “life”, today, however, *psyche* is just another term for “consciousness” or “self-awareness”, which is *not*, however, “life” defined as a “soul”. Keep in mind, man’s human nature is a composition of matter-plant-animal-and-human *life*. It is because human nature includes the life of *all beings* that the ancients regarded man as a “*microcosm*” of the *macrocosm* (universe). What is unique about the *human soul*, however, is self-awareness or consciousness.³ Yet, as a *function* of the *human soul*, *self* is *not* man’s real or true *life*. If this function (self or self-awareness) were to cease functioning, nothing could be more obvious than that the physical body has a *life* of its own - with no one running the show, no *one* even *in* the body - we call this “*vegetative life*”. So too, *sensory or animal life* is *not* human life - plants and animals have no human “*psyche*”, this is solely a human prerogative.

² Obviously my use of the term “*individuation*” is not Carl Jung’s use of the term. His was a dual notion of self as the *conscious* ego (“I am”) and an *unconscious* “true self”. What he called “*individuation*” was integrating the conscious and unconscious, a kind of “self-realization” that constituted an authentic or holistic selfhood. We could say this was his idea of a “whole undivided *person*”.

³ Although the uniqueness of the *human soul* has been defined as a “*rational soul*”, there is little evidence for this. Man acts more on his feelings than on reason. The only group in history that warned man that his feelings and emotions *swamped* his ability to use his reason were the Stoics - and they were right. Man has to overcome his affective responses before he can ever use pure reason.

Needless to say, if “self” was *not* man’s immediate awareness of his own existence, there would never be an inquiry into “*what*” self is. So given that self-awareness is everyman’s *experience*, the concern is not “*that*” self-awareness exists, rather, the concern is “*what*” is it that every human being knows and experiences as his self? For most people the simple answer is, “*I experience myself as a human being – because that’s “what” I am*”! To be one’s own self, then, is to know and experience one’s *self* as a *human being*. The usual reference to “self”, then, is to the experience of being a discrete *individual human being*. Indeed, it is *because* in common parlance “self” is reference to an individual human *being*, we get the view that “*self is a being*”. As a *function* of the human soul, however, *self is not an individual being*.

Self is the major Faculty (function) of the human soul

To understand how self-awareness works, it is important to know the difference between “reflexive” and “reflective”. The soul’s function of self-awareness is *autonomously reflexive*, it is only with deliberate *reflection* that man becomes aware of its autonomy. So while man autonomously “knows himself,” he does not know he knows himself until he deliberately *reflects* on himself to realize he is always aware of himself – even when he is *not* aware of this! Needless to say, since man never created himself (or even asked to exist), he has no control over self-awareness, nor can he ever get rid of it - even if he wanted to. (To be without any self-awareness scares most people. Since they regard “self” as a reference to their entire being, they think that without self-awareness they would cease to exist!)

The term “reflexive” obviously indicates a *function*, thus the soul’s function of self-awareness is like a *contraction* or a bending on itself to know itself as object-to-itself.⁴ A bad analogy might be seeing one’s reflection in a mirror – “bad” because an immaterial soul is *imageless*. The point, however, is that **self-awareness is a function, and as such, it is the major faculty (or function) of the human soul.**⁵ No man could live a normal life on earth if he lacked this autonomous reflexive function, indeed, without it, there could be no development of the intellect and will - those other faculties (functions) of the soul. The ability to *use* the intellect and will totally depends on a *user* - a self-aware being. Without self or self-awareness “who” or “what” would run the show? – **that’s the real question!** Life *with* self-awareness is obvious, but life *without* self-awareness is literally *unthinkable*.

⁴ Duns Scotus (b.1266), the great Franciscan theologian, held that how the *one common essence of human nature* becomes an *individual* person, is due to what he called a “*contraction*” – i.e., individuals being a “*modification*” or “*contraction*” of man’s “*un-contracted*” common essence. Since another term for “*contraction*” is “*reflexion*”, we agree that the *cause of individuation* (individual selves or persons) is the function of *reflexive* self-awareness, a contraction “*imposed*”, as it were, on the *un-contracted* common universal. The *common essence of human nature*, however, is *not* self-awareness, *not* “*I am*”, nor any *individual* being or “*person*”.

⁵ Some theologians held that the nature of the soul was nothing more than *its functions*. But if these functions ceased, then man would be out of a soul – lose his soul. Without self-awareness, however, “*who*” would be out of a soul? **No one!**

For anything to *function* there are two requirements: 1. there has to be some *mechanism* in place, and 2. there has to be some *fuel* to run it. Given the fuel, this mechanism is the mind's ability to bend on itself, know itself - know "I exist". In general, people regard this "mechanism" to be in their heads, minds or physical brains – witness people who try to "silence" their mind or stop thinking altogether. What most do not know, however, is that the *fuel* that runs the reflexive mechanism comes directly from the center of their being – physically experienced, at least, just below the navel. Although people are not really aware of this connection, they might notice that when *centered* in themselves, the mind's "thinking" is greatly reduced. This is why, to find God, many people look to the *still* center of their being; yet, *without* self-awareness they could not do this because there would *be* no "center" - or any "within" – none. Anyone who can look "within" has a self he can look into! Without reflexive self-awareness there is no *one* to look into - nothing to look into. (It is somewhat facetious that people look within themselves to find their "true self" when self is the one looking in!) No question, self-awareness ("I exist") creates a *circumference of individuality that like every enclosed circumference, has a center*. Without self-awareness there would be neither circumference (individuality) nor "center" – i.e., no one to look *within himself* or experience any *interior life* at all.

This reflexive "function" (self-awareness) is *never* under man's control, he cannot turn it off or on, he has no say or *power* over it – *not ever!* The "fuel" that generates this mechanism (self-awareness) belongs to no man. Just as man never created himself he can never get rid of himself.⁶ All he can do is *use* what he has been given to become the best *person* he can be. Thus every man - for better or worse - *creates his own unique person* ("who" he becomes), even though he did not create or bring himself into existence.

Self as Person

In early Christianity, "person" was defined as a "*property*" of human nature". *Person* was *not* the *essence* of human nature (*essence* defined as "*what*" something is), rather, person is a *property* of human nature - "*property*" meaning *ownership*.⁷ So "*what*" every human being *owns* is his own human nature, is responsible for *his own* thinking, own behaviors - desires, pursuits, etc. In other words, he is master of himself, the *agent* governing his own existence - in short, he is his *own person*, his own incommunicable *self* that can never be "another". So while "essence" defines *human nature* or "**what**" all human beings share in common,

⁶ The idea self can get rid of itself is an oxymoron. The idea ("*to get rid of self*") goes no further than getting rid of the soul's *self-centeredness* (ego) that people want out of the way so God can be seen as the *true center of their being - true center of their self, that is*. Nobody wants to get rid of their self-awareness because without it, "*who*" could ever be *aware of a "divine Center" - aware of God?* **No one!** The early fathers' saying "*Man is created Theocentric*" is only true so long as man *has a center*. Without self-awareness there is no center, no circumference, no within or without, no awareness of self - or God.

⁷ Tertullian (165-220) is credited with the definition of "person" as a *property*. Both philosophically and theologically, however, all "*properties*" of human nature are said to be *accidental* to its *essence or true nature*. Thus an *accidense* (Latin) has no independent, self-sufficient existence, but exists only in another being, substance, or in another accident. As opposed to "*substance*", *accidents* may change, *disappear*, or be added, while "*substance*" remains the same. Thus the "faculties" of the human soul are regarded as the "proper" *accidents* of the human soul - meaning, that even if they ceased to function, there would be no change in the *essence* (or *substance*) of human nature.

“*person*” solely defines “**who**” an *individual* or *particular* human being is. *Human nature* (**what** man is), then, is a “*universal*”, while *person* is a singular or “*particular*” (**who** someone is). Thus Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are of the same identical human nature, but were not the same *self* or *person*. While the *property* of human nature is *to be* one’s own self (a unique *person*), **the common essence of human nature, however, is not “self” - not an individual person, nor any particular being.** What makes for *differentiation* is self or person, and **not human nature.** “Obviously, “**what**” man is, then, is a *universal*, whereas “**who**” a man is, is a **particular individual person or self.** Given that “*person*” and “*self*” both answer the question of “*who*” a *particular individual* is, they are synonymous terms. Were there *no person or self*, then **who** would ever think of asking “**Who?**” No “*one*”! It is because *self* is always a reference to a *particular* individual that the question “**Who?**” arises. (The idea human language is based on *no communicable human experience* is absurd. All language is the expression of some experience).

What is *responsible*, then, for the *differentiation* or *individuation* of man’s common human nature is the *property* of human nature that man knows and experiences as *self* or *person*. Thus to know the true *cause of individuation* is simply to “*know thyself*”. Obviously, **self is not the essence of man’s human nature, on the contrary, self is the property of human nature, the property responsible for the individuation or differentiation of man’s one common human nature.**

Individual vs. Individuation

For just about everyone, “*individual*” refers to a *material*, physical entity. Even Aristotle defined “*individual*” as a “*numerical one*”. As he saw it, human nature was a composite or union of a material body and an immaterial soul – the soul being the *life* of the body. For him, reference to “*individual*” (or “*individuality*”) is always to something *material* or physical – *quantitative*, that is. But if one can count heads (*individuals*), one *cannot* count human natures – human nature is *not quantitative*. (By definition, no universal is “*quantitative*”). Interestingly, since Aristotle (unlike Plato) held there was no “*soul*” without a body, he granted neither body or soul any eternal life.⁸

Since everything that exists is a material *individual* “*something*” - atom, molecule, seed, plant, animal or human being – to be an “*individual*” means to be some discrete *material* entity, and hence, some *sensory object*. As pointed out, however, *material individuality* cannot account for being an incommunicable *human person*; if it did, then every material “*thing*” (atom or molecule) would be its own independent “*person*” or “*self*” - for which there is no evidence. To account for a human “*person*” or “*self*” requires something *more* than being an *individual physical* body. (Keep in mind, given time, all material bodies become a heap of *undifferentiated* ashes anyway - “*dust*” the Bible calls them). Since no *material body*, then, can account for *self-awareness* or *consciousness*, then no *material individual* body constitutes a *person* or *self*. **In short, physical** (material, quantitative)

⁸ For Aristotle, the only thing *eternal* in man was his “*contemplative faculty* – “*that*” in man that would *eternally* “*contemplate the ‘One’*”. Based on the ancient definition of *human nature* as a composite of *body-soul-spirit*, this *contemplative faculty* would be man’s *spirit* - *not* his “*soul*”.

individuality does not account for “individuation”. Self is no individual material being or entity.

Perception vs. Awareness

Just as it is an error to mistake *material individuality* for *individuation* (self or self-awareness), there follows the proverbial failure to differentiate between *perception* and *awareness*. *Objects-of-perception* are solely *material sensory objects*, whereas the sole *object-of-awareness is self*. Where the senses can only look outward, the human soul looks inward. For the philosophers, this was the major difference between animal and man, between a *sensory* soul and a *human* soul - “Know Thyself” was a *human* prerogative. Where the senses only *perceive* material objects in the environment, the major function of the human soul is to look inward - *to know itself*. For the soul *to know itself*, however, it has to *be an object to itself*, otherwise there would be no “subject” to know. Thus man only “knows himself” as “*object-of-the-subject*” or “*subject-of-the-object*” - same thing, *subject is “I am”, object is “Myself”*. It goes without saying, as an *object-to-itself*, the soul is not some *sensory perceptual* material object or image - indeed, the human soul admits of no sensory “objects” or images. (Where the imagination plays on sensory objects, the human soul is *incapable* of “*perceiving*” sensory objects or images). So keep in mind, “*perception*” belongs solely to the animal *sensory* soul (material objects), and *not* to the *human* soul (which is solely *aware* of itself).

Another mistake is to think that to look outward or inward is just a matter of choice – not so! Man only looks outward *through the glasses of self-awareness*. Though conscious of himself looking out, it is not consciousness that looks out, rather, it is solely the senses. **Self-awareness and perception are two entirely different functions, different natures with totally different effects.** The senses only *perceive* material objects while consciousness is solely *aware of itself*. People, however, regularly mistake “awareness” for “perception” - and vice versa. Because of this mistake, man has a penchant for projecting *his* self-awareness onto objects, animals, other people – even God. This is because *he only knows “the other” according to how he knows himself*. Yet neither animals, objects, nor God are self-aware beings, this is solely a *human* prerogative.⁹ So just as the senses are *incapable* of looking within (or inward), so too, self-awareness (or “consciousness”) is *incapable* of looking out (or outward).¹⁰ We could give many examples of contemplatives making this mistake, one being the idea they (themselves) are really no different than a tree, a chair, or some sensory object - totally absurd! The point is that no physical, material individuality can account for individuation – i.e., for the experience “*I am*”, *I exist*”, *I think*” etc.

⁹ To think God is a self-aware being is to make God into man’s own self-image. As for being “aware” of God, if all awareness is *self-awareness*, then, strictly speaking, man can never be “aware” of God. Man can be aware of *his own* awareness of God, which *awareness*, however, is *not* God. God is beyond awareness, consciousness or self.

¹⁰ While “self-awareness” is the true nature of *self*, “self-perception” is the definition of a “false self”. “*Perceiving*” one’s self as a sensory object or image is **not** to “*know thyself*” at all!

Effects of self-awareness

Self-awareness is responsible for man's *experience* of "life", "being", "soul", "self", "energy" and all his *emotional or affective experiences*. It is responsible for man's "*interior life*" of being able to *look within* himself and *experience a "spiritual" dimension* beyond his sensory body. Self-awareness is man's experience of having a *center* in himself, of his being a discrete individual *person* or *entity*, it is even his experience of *oneness with God*. There are many other subtle experiences due to self-awareness or self. In fact, without the awareness "I am", "I exist", man *as we know him* would not exist. As for the true *essence* of man's *universal* human nature, this is "*Universal Man*", *Man*, however, that **no individual** person or self could ever know so long as there is any self (self-awareness or consciousness) remaining. The true essence of man's human nature is **no individual person** or *particular* being. In truth, the *eternal essence* of man's common *universal human nature* is known only to *its Creator*, and it is solely this "*Universal Man*" (and *not* any individual self or person) that it eternally one with its Creator. It is this "**Oneness**" of the *unknowable* essence of God and *unknowable* essence of Man that God revealed as everything Christianity knows and calls "**Christ**".

Man as Spirit

According to the ancients, to Paul and the early fathers - even "scripture" - man is a composite of body-soul-**spirit**. That the medieval theologians omitted the "*human spirit*" is the major problem with their theologies.¹¹

Nothing so keeps man grounded to life on earth as the *faculties of the soul* - indeed, this is what they were created to do. Knowing this is why "spiritual adepts" tell us we must have no-mind, no-will (or desires) and no-self - why? *Because they keep a man grounded, down to earth, keep him from soaring to God beyond himself*. So there is certainly *more* to man than these faculties of the human soul. Holding man to being solely a union of body and soul is totally off the mark. The **spirit** is man's true "spiritual life", his *mystical* dimension *beyond* the souls' *faculties*. While the *spirit* is not God, it is the vehicle by which God is revealed to man, communicates to him, and by which man encounters God not only in himself, but in all creation. A *spiritual* man, then, is really a *contemplative* man, the *spirit* raising him *beyond himself* to a dimension of existence apart from all he knows as his "body-soul-and self". It is this mysterious *spirit* in man that longs for and is *drawn up* to "*That*" which alone can fulfill his entire human nature - whatever that may be. He does not know "*What*" It is that draws him, he only knows "*That*" It **Is**.

¹¹ Western Theology literally did away with the "spirit". Its theologians divided the *intellect* into a *higher and lower* part - the "higher intellect" supposedly taking the place of the "spirit"! (This is one reason the Eastern Church ignores Western theology). For the East, "**mystical theology**" is the only "theology" it recognizes - i.e., a theology based on man's *experiences* of God and not on his *intellectual* prowess, as the West does.) If Western theology were totally scrapped, the only ones to miss it are those who *depend* on their intellects (beliefs) *instead* of their "spirits" for the *Truth*. The spirit is "*that*" mystery in man that truly sees and knows God and, in eternal life, shares in the *essence* of the Godhead's *Triune eternal life*.

This *human spirit* is not a soul, not a self or a body; it is also not an “energy” or anything man thinks is a “spiritual” energy. It is *because* man’s “**spirit**” is **non-experiential** it is a *mystery*. Yet it is this mystery in man that contemplates (sees) and knows God, and is the medium that unites the infinite and finite in eternal life. Where the “eye of the soul” is solely on *itself* – i.e., “*the eye with which I see God is the same “eye” with which God sees me*” – **the eye of the spirit**, on the other hand, is **selfless** – sees neither subject nor object (self nor God). Man often wonders “*what*” it is in himself that sees, knows and unites him to God, he wonders because he knows it is **not** his mind, intellect, will-power or even his self. He only knows this mystery is “*that*” in him that is most akin to God. St. Paul explained that just as the soul has *its own physical* body, the **spirit has its own spiritual body**, and that it is this *spiritual body* (not the soul’s *physical* body) that is resurrected into eternal life in God.

There is nothing *eternal* about the *functions* of the human soul - nothing eternal about self-awareness, consciousness or “self”. God creates no person, self, or particular individual, God only creates “*what*” man is - i.e., his one *common human nature*. It is each individual that creates or develops his *own person* - “*who*” he is and how he lives his life. But in the end, God is no respecter of *persons* or “*who*” someone is. It is how man has fulfilled *the human nature* God created him *to be* that matters, for this alone has eternally life with and in God.

Conclusion

The true nature of “self” is **the** major faculty (or function) of the human soul. As the awareness of *his own* existence, this function is responsible for individuating man’s common human nature into individual *selves* - every man knowing and experiencing “I am”, “I exist”. So the *function* of self-awareness or consciousness is to **individuate** man’s universal human nature into individual persons or selves. As human beings, *all are alike and no different*, but as individual selves or persons, *none are alike and all are different*. So while “human nature” defines *every* human being, “person” or “self” only defines “*who*” a *particular* individual is. Thus we could define “**Self**” as **the state of being an individual person** – “*person*” being what it means to be *unique, incommunicable – different*. While no man created *human nature*, it is how he **uses** the faculties he has been given that *creates* or determines the *person* he becomes – “*who*” he is. (As noted elsewhere, God did not *create* a Hitler or a Mother Teresa. Each individual freely chooses the person he becomes).

Self, then, is obviously not a “being”, not just a “word” or cognitive construct, and certainly not an “illusion”, rather, self is everyman’s *experience* “I exist” - simple as that. It is this self-awareness or consciousness (“*I, me, myself*”) that *causes individuation* – i.e., the simple awareness of *one’s own existence*, of being *one’s own person*. **Without this, man as we know him would not exist.** The importance of “self”, then, is that without it, this planet would be only fit for animals – *sensory* beings, that is.¹²

¹² As already pointed out, everything in existence is some *individual* material “thing”, and as such, it is solely an *object of sensory perception*. *Material individuality*, however, is not *what individuates*. Matter alone cannot account for any experience of self or self-awareness, nor can the senses - all that man *perceives* - account for anything *eternal*. So the question is this: is there *anything* man is “*aware of*” that is eternal - or has eternal life?

There is really no great mystery about “self” or man’s self-awareness. The real mystery is the true nature of “*what*” remains when it is gone – has ceased to function. With the cessation of self-awareness, all the *experiential effects* it generated are gone in the blink of an eye. And what *were* these effects? They were the *experience* of “*being*”, of “*life*”, “*soul*”, “*energy*”, “*mind and will*”, “*interiority*” (within-ness), the “*affective system*”, even the awareness of “*being one with God*” - all these experiences are suddenly blown out and gone forever! Now there is no center (God) and no circumference (self). In truth, this “blow out” (or cessation) is the only *death-experience* man will ever experience – could ever have, in fact. So take away self-awareness with all its *experiential effects*, and the real question becomes “***what is the true nature of what remains beyond all self?***” **This is the real mystery of man and the real question he needs to have answered.**¹³ No idea in the mind could ever come up with a satisfactory answer to this mystery, only God can *reveal* the true nature of “*what*” remains beyond all self and individuation. Since only the Creator knows the *true essence* of man’s *common human nature*, only God can reveal *its eternal oneness with God*. I have written a book about this *revelation*, and its title is *The Real Christ*.

THE END

Some food for thought: Some time ago, listening to the quiz show *Jeopardy*, one of the questions was “*What is the name of the German psychiatrist who had a patient say to him, “Doctor, I have no self”?*” No one on the panel knew the answer - which turned out to be “*Doctor Alzheimer*”. For people who want to get rid of their “self”, at least *Alzheimers* might be one way to go.

I have never advocated the idea of “getting rid of self” - why? Because no one knows what self is – until it is gone. Until people get to the Unitive State (what some call their “True Self”), all they know of self has been what Jung called the “ego-self”. But who has ever advocated getting rid of the “True self” and its union with God? NOBODY! No human being can go beyond this Unitive State or could even think about doing so. Going beyond one’s (*self’s*) union with God – *in this life* at least – is solely God’s doing for God’s own purposes.

¹³ The reason I never had an interest in the true nature of *self* is because the simple awareness “*I exist*” is a human *given* – obvious, simple, *undeniable*. That this awareness (“*I am*”) is *eternal*, however, *this* is a whole different question and one man should ***really be concerned about!***