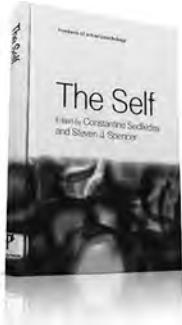


REVIEWS

*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications*



The Self

Edited by Constantine Sedikides and Steven J Spencer

Psychology Press, 270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, USA. Website: <https://taylorandfrancis.com/>. 2007. xii + 364 pp. \$59.95. PB. ISBN 9781138006195.

All reflection is self-reflection. However, the book under review does not mention that Hindus began this introspection of the self, long before contemporary psychology was born.

This book, edited by Constantine Sedikides and Steven J Spencer, studies the human brain which, according to the neuroscientists writing here, produces what we term the 'self'. This empirical approach is needed since anti-psychiatry movements begun in the latter half of the last century continue to deny medication and proper non-psychanalytical therapies to vulnerable populations. Sedikides and Spencer's volume goes a long way in helping mental healthcare professionals take concrete decisions in lessening the agonies of both the mentally healthy and the mentally ill. For instance, Geoff MacDonald's chapter 'Self-Esteem: A Human Elaboration of Prehuman Belongingness Motivation' (235–57) successfully reconciles both sociometer and terror management theories. Beginning his chapter, MacDonald recapitulates the necessary conditions for qualia to be called selves:

The first step in providing such an [evolutionary] account [of the human self], agreement on a definition of the self, has proven difficult. There appears to be more consensus as to the psychological processes that involve the self than the exact nature of the self, *per se*. There is some agreement that the self is involved in at least

three main processes—reflexive capacity (the ability to depict oneself in relation with one's environment), representational capacity (the ability to mentally represent personal attributes), and executive function (the ability to exert control over one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) ... Any definition of the self should account for a common thread among these processes (236).

This common thread which MacDonald identifies is ancient: the anxiety of imminent death, not merely a sense of subjective mortality, which is the focus of non-empirical enquiries about death. While discussing death, these are the findings that have repercussions in real-life palliative care:

The theory begins from the premise that, as humans developed sophisticated cognitive abilities, the ability to project the self into the future led to the realization that death was inevitable. TMT proposes that this realization would have led to an omnipresent potential for paralyzing terror. The theory suggests that such terror presented an important survival challenge by creating overwhelming anxiety and chronic inaction. TMT argues that this problem was solved by the construction of cultural worldviews that offered relief from the terror by providing a route to immortality. Culture can offer literal (e.g., life after death) or symbolic (e.g., being remembered for great works) immortality to members who live up to its value systems. In this view, fear of death is said to have provided the motivation to create community structures that supersede the individual (e.g., religion), as well as the motivation to adhere to the value systems that permit entry into those community structures. Relief from anxiety comes from being a valuable member of a meaningful cultural system. Self-esteem is defined as feeling that one

is living up to the standards of one's culture, as this provides protection from death via literal or symbolic immortality. Importantly, in this view, the need for self-esteem was an evolved adaptation in response to death awareness. High self-esteem quells the paralyzing terror that led to chronic inaction and thus was selected for through evolutionary processes (241).

Thus, we see that what MacDonald has pointed out in this chapter, while building on the works of other scientists, is in fact, an affirmation of Martin Seligman's understanding of psychology as more of praxes, which had been reduced by Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts as a disease-curing mechanism, to one of positive affirmation. It is another thing that Seligman's total discarding of psychoanalysis too needs critiques.

While the 'Terror Management Theory' was discovered by Tom Pyszczynski, Jeff Greenberg, and Sheldon Solomon, they cannot explain how to precisely overcome this existential terror, first articulated as such, in the Western world, by that arch-Christian modernist, Søren Kierkegaard. In this otherwise excellent book, there are no mentions of Kierkegaard without whom all possible definitions of the self in Western science are incomplete. Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon miss the point that their understanding of terror draws from the works of Søren Kierkegaard.

One further point needs commenting: the book under review raises interesting issues about modesty as a psychological trope. Constantine Sedikides, Aiden P Gregg, and Claire M Hart have this cautionary note about our conceptions of 'ourselves' in the chapter 'The Importance of Being Modest' (163–84). From this chapter, we learn how we deceive ourselves while pretending to grow in our interior lives. These insights about modesty will help us to stop playing the holiness game within ourselves: 'Self-enhancement is pervasive ... Individuals consider themselves to be better than others on a variety of traits ... regard skills they possess as diagnostic of valued abilities and skills they lack as nondiagnostic ... claim credit for their successes but reject responsibility for their failures ... selectively forget feedback pertaining to their shortcoming ... see their own

future, but not that of their peers, as unrealistically bright ... and go to great lengths to appear moral without necessarily being so' (165).

What folk wisdom and the *Yoga Sutra* taught us, that we ought to actively rid ourselves of pride, through modifying our emotions, is proven right. This book, through controlled and experimentally rigorous studies, proves the truths of Hinduism. Nevertheless, as has been pointed out, the book misses in crediting Hindu insights of the self for arriving at its conclusions and also does not cite Kierkegaard. But for these two lacunae, this is a better book on self-fashioning than the likes of Stephen Greenblatt could ever come up with.

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The Interior Castle: Study Edition

Teresa of Avila

Translated by Kieran
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NE, Washington DC 20002-1199,
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George Edayadiyil, a Carmelite of Mary Immaculate, in his books, *Exodus Event: Its Historical Kernel* and *Israel in the Light of the Exodus Event* proves that the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt to Israel, from slavery to freedom, was, and still is, a model for the journey from the *vita apostolica* to the *vita contemplativa*. That is, the Hebrew Scriptures, erstwhile known as the Old Testament, gesture and fashion typographically the motif of the journey as an interior one. To use St Teresa of Avila's nomenclature: a journey into 'the interior castle'. Neither is the exodus as a type for all future interior journeys or St Teresa's journey to the interior castle unique.

This journey and the methodology for reaching 'the interior castle' has been well mapped earlier