

## ФИЛОСОФСКИЕ НАУКИ

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN “BE YOURSELF” IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

© A. Oke

*Abstract.* We consider the concept of “being yourself” in philosophical thought. This problem is relevant today. The conditions of modern life do not allow a person to express fully his essence, his nature, to live according to his spiritual will. Pursuing certain life goals, a person adapts to these conditions, merges with the crowd and tries to be similar in the actions to the majority, thereby losing his individuality. In the history of philosophy, this problem was considered from the standpoints of S. Freud’s psychoanalysis, I. Kant’s epistemology, F. Nietzsche’s philosophy.

*Keywords:* yourself; personality; consciousness; morality; values

“Just be yourself”, a sentence we are all too familiar with. Often used before a performance, a play, or when you are about to enter an unfamiliar place filled with unfamiliar people; it ironically translates to “be confident and get along with everyone”. “Being yourself” is a tricky concept, because unknown situations warrant very known, identifiable and common responses in all of us. These instinctive reactions are borne from years of evolution; a protective measure against potential dangers. There is no room for uniqueness here. Actions requiring judgement, emotional base, however, are a different story.

The person you are and the persona you project into the world are all based on the delicate, yet intricate workings of your mind. Your ever-changing wants the subtle shifts in your personality and the reasons for these processes have been theorized upon heavily.

Borrowing from the subject of psychoanalysis, we have the Freudian concepts of personality. Id, Ego, and Super Ego, the three forces responsible for the way you behave. Id, the pleasure-seeking center, disregards all moral values and ethics in an effort to satisfy. It controls your so called ‘base’ needs and wants. It is an inborn, primitive aspect of the human psyche, not dependent on external factors. The ego is the rational component. Applying logic and reasoning, it tries to realistically achieve the goals that Id sets. It acts on the so called ‘Reality principle’. Ideally, the Id and Ego must act in harmony for a well-adjusted, flexible personality. The third aspect, the Super Ego, is dependent on the moral codes, ethical values and other notions, preconceived, or otherwise, that one develops as he/she grows. The Super Ego aims at balancing the needs of the Id with the rationality of the ego, to keep both aspects satisfied. It is responsible for the feelings of reproach, guilt. Morally or ethi-

cally ambiguous acts causing a surge of joy, then leading to an immense remorse, are an example of this aspect of our psyche. This is our conscience. It is part of the Super Ego, sharing space with our ideal self. This theoretical, perfect version of ours is shaped by personal moral values, aspirations, goals and ethics. When we compare who we are with our ideal self, and realize our shortcomings, we feel guilt. The ideal self is nigh unattainable, and this guilt we feel at falling short of ourselves, very real and almost always impractical [1, p. 25].

An amalgamation of these three aspects of the psyche, how they interact with one another, sometimes superseding each other, plays a major role in shaping who you are as an individual. The primal needs and wants are the same in everyone. What changes, is your concept of morality. Actions you consider to be morally correct come easily to you while immoral actions are one's you choose to avoid. Then there is amorality. Indifference towards the concept of morality itself, it leaves you free to decide what you want to do, and how you want to do it, without any pretenses, or regard for ethics. The standards you hold your rationality and reason to, and the mindset that guides you mold your thoughts [1, p. 37]. Here, the lines between psychology and philosophy begin to blur. The study of the human mind and our psyche is closely related to the study of our existence, thoughts and cognitions that guide our behavior. The Id does not change, nor does the Ego. Our Super Ego is a regulatory center, using new ideas, adapting to different ways of thinking, ignoring some ways of thought while adopting others as your own. It is the unique quotient, differentiating one individual from another.

Another concept that S. Freud explores is psychosexual development. It traditionally develops in three stages, oral, anal, and phallic; then proceeding to a latent phase. One experiences all these phases in the early formative years, and these intimate experiences that a child goes through during his primary development lead to our individual sexual preferences and forms the basis of our desires and thoughts. Is there a way, then, to predict what sort of a person you will be, how you will think, react, respond? Is it possible to predict a personality? To carefully shape the human mind by curating the things a person is exposed to?

The way you project yourself to the world, is largely based on your way of thought, be it social, racial or contextual. Our consciousness, neatly divided into the unconscious, the subconscious and the conscious includes all our thoughts, some hidden from ourselves, some that we choose to hide from others. The dreams we witness are a projection of exactly such thoughts. Speaking of projecting, we often, either consciously, or unconsciously, make ourselves vulnerable to deduction, through our work, actions, and other manifestations of our ideas. Take a Freudian slip, for example, a case of mispronun-

ciation, ‘slip of the tongue’, which supposedly reveals how you truly feel about certain subject matters.

The unconscious mind, our repressed memories, hidden feelings and emotions. They are often expressed unintentionally through dreams, our jokes, or through Freudian slips. This unconscious self is influenced heavily by the Id, and the Super Ego, shaping our most intimate thoughts, forming our base ideologies, and in turn controlling our actions, the way we speak, joke, and interact with fellow individuals.

The subconscious mind, on the other hand, includes impulses, acts of reflex, feelings of intuition, which usually arise because of our unconscious self.

The conscious part of the brain, influenced by the Id and controlled by the Ego, includes actions and thoughts we are always aware of, which enable us to act civilized, socialize without garnering too much conflict, in other words, maintain societal norms.

These aspects, the Id, Ego, Super Ego, along with the degrees of consciousness make up who you are as a person. They are the ingredients for a system of thinking. How you react to your thoughts, and how you project them into the external world is what being yourself, at its core, is.

Having satisfyingly argued about what we are made of, and how we came to be, the early philosophers moved on to perhaps the most important questions of all, “why and how we think, what our motivations should be, why we are here”. Unraveling the mysteries of the self was and is as difficult as answering age old questions about our universe, maybe even more so.

The basis of everything – without knowledge, there is no you. This knowledge can be innate, acquired, altered, corrected, or outright rejected, shaping your thoughts, your psyche and, in turn, the way you behave. Knowledge can then be said to be the basis of you. Being yourself is integrating all the information you can gather with the knowledge you already possess, form ideas, draw conclusions, and create an outlook on the things that surround you. What you are is a shadow of all the information you have gathered, and how it has shaped your thinking. How you choose to use this knowledge along with how you come across to others affects who you are. First impressions, though often wrong, leave an everlasting imprint. These tidbits of information that strangers first gather when they meet you form the basis of their judgement about you as an individual. Although your true self may differ greatly from their portrayal, to many individuals, it is this exact portrayal that they associate with you. To them, you are just that, a string of sentences, or a fleeting expression, based on which they have fleshed out a character profile complete with your presumed wants, likes, and world view. Your surroundings are a mirror, often showing an unfamiliar face; it does not always line up with your

inner self. Your actions and thoughts may not always coalesce, causing dissonance between how others perceive you, and how you perceive yourself.

Knowledge you gather depends heavily on your perception of your surroundings and subsequent interactions. I. Kant famously proposed that knowledge of the external world is not merely through experience, but through innate, established concepts, referred to as ‘a priori’ concepts. These justifications do not require past experiences, they are and always have been true [2, p. 91].

A toddler is a blank slate without a coherent idea of one’s self. Traces of an identity only begin to appear with a sufficient understanding of the world around us. Ideas begin to take form, you begin to identify with a certain group of people. Individualism, collectivism, whether you think of yourself as an empiricist or a rationalist ultimately serve in the shaping of your personality. Your way of thinking is heavily influenced by the popular culture that surrounds you, opinions and beliefs, propaganda that engages you.

Religion, faith, moral values, beliefs – all help guide our thoughts and actions. Challenging these concepts, fashioning new ideas serve an important role in the development of the individual and society as a whole. F. Nietzsche criticized traditional European morals, and their foundations in Christianity. He aimed at undermining the concepts of faith, and more importantly, moral consciousness. His famous pronouncement of ‘God is dead’ is proof of this. F. Nietzsche believed that Christianity itself, and God as the rightful objective truth does not exist. Knowledge, ideas and morals are constantly changing, and there is no definite purpose. Morality, rules of philosophy, ideologies of man are in continuous motion according to our shifting perspectives. Fluidity of thought, ideas and knowledge is an intrinsic property to be respected [3].

Shifts in the modern morality systems, for example, from that of a “master morality” towards “slave morality” affects how we develop as individuals. Values once regarded noble, happiness, strength, wealth, power, virtue are vilified. Morals of restraint, charity, submission, meekness are considered noble. Pride is evil, a human bowed in forgiveness is pure. These periodical changes in systems of morality have an overreaching effect on how you think. They affect who you are and who you will become [3, p. 68].

F. Nietzsche argued that ideas of equality have allowed for demonization of the qualities that make people stand out, such as intelligence and motivation, and for the subsequent adoption of shortcomings and failures as qualities one should possess to be a good human. A sense of inferiority is thus relabeled as meekness. This causes suppression of inborn attributes an individual may possess, and the adoption of likeable, popular constructs to better fit with the surrounding world. Skilled, overachievers stay masked under shrouds of the mundane, and the small differences that make us unique are shunned.

Societal norms thus have a far-reaching influence on your development. Exposure to new ideas and philosophical knowledge only make it more difficult to ascertain who you are. Being yourself is easy if you are ignorant. Cognitive dissonance, refusal to change, sticking to what you first learnt as the absolute truth make it easy to flesh out a personality. Newfound knowledge almost always requires some level of adjustment to your inherent information and your world view as a whole.

Questioning authority, challenging previously assumed notions is of the most importance when it comes to your personal development. Blind faith is the first step towards becoming a thought-slave. Free will, freedom of thought and the right to question are important aspects to fully express yourself. Curiosity, intuition, and ingenuity is an integral part of learning. To further one's understanding, develop rooted thoughts and to express your ideas is very important to establish yourself in the world.

How you behave also depends on other conditions: level of comfort, familiarity, and other individual preferences. You choose to express a different part of yourself when placed in different situations. To not fall prey to peer pressure, and to be as true to yourself as you can be is essential to the idea of being yourself. An independent aspect of your personality is brought to the limelight according to the need. These aspects of your personality are shades of light, coming together to make a single ray of white. You need to consider all your faults, goals, wants, opinions, ideologies, mannerisms and emotions to be 'You'. The absence of even a single colour throws everything out of balance; and so, shine on.

### References

1. Freud S. *The Ego and the Id*. Seattle, 2015.
2. Kant I. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.
3. Nietzsche F. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The author encloses gratitude to the scientific supervisor Candidate of Philosophy, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Science Methodology Department Chernova Yana Sergeevna for in-depth support and help while writing the article.

Received 29 January 2018

Reviewed 2 March 2018

Accepted for press 5 April 2018

**Information about the author:**

**Oke Advait**, Student of Medical Institute. Derzhavin Tambov State University, Tambov, Russian Federation. E-mail: okeadvait@gmail.com

УДК 1 (091)

**ЧТО ЗНАЧИТ «БЫТЬ СОБОЙ» В ФИЛОСОФСКОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ**

**Oke Advait** – студент медицинского института. Тамбовский государственный университет им. Г.Р. Державина, г. Тамбов, Российская Федерация. E-mail: okeadvait@gmail.com

*Аннотация.* Рассмотрен концепт «будь собой» в философской мысли. Данная проблема является весьма актуальной в настоящее время. Условия современной жизни не позволяют человеку выразить свою сущность и натуру в полной мере, жить согласно его духовной воле. Пытаясь достичь определенных жизненных целей, человек приспосабливается к этим условиям, сливается с другими и старается действовать так же, как и они. Так человек теряет свою индивидуальность. В истории философии данная проблема была рассмотрена с позиций теории психоанализа З. Фрейда, эпистемологии И. Канта и философских идей Ф. Ницше.

*Ключевые слова:* сам; личность; сознание; нравственность; ценности

**Список литературы**

1. *Freud S.* The Ego and the Id. Seattle, 2015.
2. *Kant I.* Critique of Pure Reason. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
3. *Nietzsche F.* On the Genealogy of Morality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

**БЛАГОДАРНОСТИ:** Автор выражает благодарность научному руководителю кандидату философских наук, доценту кафедры философии и методологии науки Я.С. Черновой за всестороннюю поддержку и помощь в написании статьи.

Поступила в редакцию 29.01.2018 г.  
Отрецензирована 02.03.2018 г.  
Принята в печать 05.04.2018 г.