

A Cure for Our Narcissistic Culture

America is in the thrall of a new addiction.

The old standbys, alcohol and drugs, continue to destroy individuals, families, and friendships. The COVID lockdowns made things even worse, with men and women turning to booze and pills for solace against loneliness and lost jobs. Meanwhile, the flood of [fentanyl](#) across our southern border is killing tens of thousands of Americans every year.

But another addiction—often hidden, but as old as the Garden of Eden—is on the rise and has lately received a fair amount of press. This condition rides under several flags: [Narcissism](#) is its deadliest form, but a broader term is self-obsession. [More and more](#) Americans view themselves as monarchs subject only to their own whims.

Now, to take a healthy interest in ourselves is normal. To focus on our jobs, children, and our own needs is natural and even admirable, as it demonstrates a healthy dose of self-reliance and the more primitive drive for self-preservation.

But some people have wandered beyond the norms of self-love and self-interest. These are the folks, young and old, male and female, whose gaze remains steadily on themselves and on their own wants and needs.

In short, they have become addicted to themselves.

There are plenty of [giveaway signs](#) that someone is self-centered. One metric I would suggest stems from G.K. Chesterton's [All Things Considered](#): "It is the test of a good religion whether you can joke about it." In a similar fashion, it is the test of a well-balanced person whether he can laugh at his own foibles.

However, many people are [unaware](#) of their egotism, so how might egocentrics recognize their own self-obsession? This act of awareness is surely difficult, as self-obsession by its very nature blinds us, prevents us from seeing ourselves, even dimly, as we really are.

Let's suppose, however, that some people do become aware that they are living in a prison of the self. Perhaps they applied Chesterton's idea to themselves. Maybe a friend told them they had an ego the size of the Grand Tetons. Whatever the case, what means of escape from those iron bars and brick walls of personality are then available?

These prisoners might do well to turn to the [Twelve Steps](#) of Alcoholics Anonymous. Here is a program that has saved multitudes from addiction and that might help those seeking to break free from their self-centered lives and engage more fully with those around them.

The first three steps of this program involve recognizing a "Power greater than ourselves," which means "turn[ing] our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." To take these first steps requires self-addicts to recognize that they are not the center of the universe, that they often have no control over all that happens, and that some greater force—God, fate, whatever power they choose to recognize—is at play here.

Following this puncturing of the inflated ego comes a "searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." The self-centered look again into their beloved mirrors, only this time with different eyes. They see themselves, yes, but with the warts and blemishes they'd earlier ignored.

A few more steps bring participants to two crucial directives: listing the people they've harmed and making amends with them when possible. Has their selfishness caused them to ignore or make light of a friend's dire situation? Did they wound a co-

worker with their supercilious cracks and jibes? If so, it's time to take steps to rectify the situation.

Meanwhile, the Twelve Steps require participants to keep a running tally of failures and successes, perhaps ending each day with an examination of conscience and a desire to do better.

For those who wake one morning sick unto death of the egotistical monkey on their back, for those who are bone weary from dragging around the chains of a monstrous ego, the Twelve Steps offer a new pair of glasses and a chance to engage life outside of the self.

And with the new year fast approaching, now's as good a time as any to make that change.

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