In an age of data addiction where conversions of emotions into Facebook posts and narratives are regular occurrences, a society of people express their deepest emotional issues for the validation of their virtual presence for others and for their own individual validation that their inner life matters.

This observation makes me wonder: Does this validation matter? What I mean is that we must acknowledge that the use of any ideas makes you believe that you own them. Whether consciously aware of it or not, the self takes these ideas and starts to manipulate them for its own validation, its own sense of control and ultimately to avoid the underlying fear of what is unknown.

We like to think that we have invented the freedom of ideas (by creating and affirming the 1st amendment), but it is just as probable, that due to its documentation, freedom of speech has and constantly is inventing us. In other words, since we believe in the idea of free speech, we are fooled into mistaking our actual nature as what it is documented to be (in the same way people think they are accurately reflected on their Facebook pages). Why do we think language/words/ideas confers validation to a reality that pre-existed those ideas?

The words “I think” lead us to believe that we have a “self”, but the reality that pre-exists the word formation “I think” is not an action (called “thinking”) that can be attributed to a property of a thing (called the “self”). Nietzsche called all of this “the seduction of words.”

There are still harmless self-observers who believe that there are “immediate certainties”; for example, “I think,” or as the superstition of Schopenhauer put it, “I Will”; as though knowledge here got hold of its object purely and nakedly as the “thing in itself,” without any falsification on the part of either the subject or the object. But that “immediate certainty,” as well as “absolute knowledge” and the “thing in itself,” involve a contradictio in adjecto, I shall repeat a hundred times; we really ought to free ourselves from the seduction of words!

--Nietzsche in Beyond Good and Evil

I believe in some sense Nietzsche means to say that we should not be so quick to identify ourselves based on theories which have clear contradictions or could be further falsified. Such as Descartes “I think therefore I am”.

It appears that we believe we are things that we believe in. The ideas we create are things that we then claim to believe in, but this already means we are not those things. When people claim to believe in X (God, freedom, self), they are attempting to internalize the belief, trying to be the belief, or making the belief their identity—all of which contradicts the idea of believing since believing implies a distance between the believer and what is believed in. When “we believe”, we are still placing our confidence in something that is not ourselves.

What happens after this realization that we are not ourselves or that we do not have a self? Is this beneficial? Where does this lead?

It relieves us from a false instinct to protect our “selves”, to protect our self-image or to think
that my individual self must have meaning or can be hurt.

Realizing the true unimportance of the value we place on ourselves can be the weight which we lift in order to become what we idealize ourselves as because the doubt, due to insecurity of self, will be stripped. We will have more comic relief than emotional despair within our individual little worlds because we don’t have to take ourselves so seriously.

We can have a more genuine interaction with the world. We can have a new view where no one has control and therefore there is no one to blame. We begin to see our life as a series of extraordinary events rather than blame ourselves for the blandness we’ve obtained. You might say that it seems wrong to relinquish your control, but what if relinquishing your control allows your innate control to act rather than a hypersensitive control which has been adopted from the heightened sense of self?

With this realization, we can see our observations of others as caring. Even in the cases where others appear only self-motivated, we can see this as their own insecurity that they still have yet to deal with.

How do you think limiting or destroying your concept of self could be beneficial?

**What Other Non-Selves Have Written**

“The problem of consciousness (or more correctly: of becoming conscious of oneself) meets us only when we begin to perceive in what measure we could dispense with it...For we could in fact think, feel, will and recollect, we could likewise ‘act’ in every sense of the term, and nevertheless nothing of it all need necessarily ‘come into consciousness’ (as one says metaphorically). The whole of life would be possible without its seeing itself as it were in a mirror: as in fact even at present the far greater part of our life still goes on without this mirroring....”

--Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

“...from what impression could this idea [of self] be derived? This question is impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity...There is no impression [of self] constant and invariable....I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement....The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies.”

--David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*

“The human mind, in its never ending changes, is like the moving water of a river, or the burning flame of a candle; like an ape, it is forever jumping about, not ceasing for a moment...there is nothing that can be called an ‘ego,’ and there is no such thing as ‘mine’ in all the world.... everything is impermanent and passing and egoless....”

--The Buddha, *The Teachings of the Buddha*

“One is what one is not, and one is not what one is.” -- Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

“But the expectation of the self, to be informed in its nothingness--if only I can get out of this old place and into the right new place, I can become a new person--places a heavy burden on travel.”

--Walker Percy, *Lost in the cosmos*

“In New Orleans I have noticed that people are happiest when they are going to funerals, making money, taking care of the dead, or putting on masks at Mardi Gras so nobody knows who they are.” --Walker Percy, *Lancelot*

“I’m not myself today, you see,” Alice said to the caterpillar. “I don’t see,” said the caterpillar.

--Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

“If I hear one more person or narrative tell me to ‘Just Be Yourself!’ I am going to shoot my ‘self’. Does that count as ‘being myself’?”

--Dr. Erik Nordenhaug

*Faculty advisor to the PDG*

The Philosophical Discussion Group (PDG) invites you to consider what it means to NOT BE YOUR “SELF”.

Leave your “self” at the door, come be with us, a few pizzas and sodas, and let’s see what is revealed

**THURSDAY, OCT. 5 @ 4PM IN GAMBLE 200.**