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# NARCISSISTIC CALL FOR METAPHYSICS

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## Abstract

Contemporary culture is often described as narcissistic, with extreme forms of solipsism becoming increasingly prevalent in mainstream thinking and perception of the world and the self. Narcissism represents a human existence trapped in profound subjectivism, where the individual's existential aspirations exceed the possibilities offered by the world they create and rely on. Efforts to use all available resources to achieve personal goals can lead to frustration and create a toxic atmosphere in interpersonal relationships. This paper explores the existential paradox of man and offers a possible explanation by extrapolating the anticipation of the transcendence of his existence from a theological perspective. The theological perspective presented here is an integral part of metaphysical reasoning and has the potential to offer a solution to the challenges posed by narcissism and the naturalistic conception of the world.

*Keywords:* creation theology, limits of science, narcissism, naturalism, metaphysics

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, scholars and researchers in the humanities have shown increased interest in the phenomenon of narcissism [1]. This is largely due to Christopher Lasch's book, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), as well as the rise of psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. Additionally, there has been a recent increase in people's sensitivity to conspiracies and hoaxes. The impact of the C-19 pandemic has led to a significant deterioration of several indicators in this area, particularly in relation to psychological problems, affecting both children and adults [2]. While the concept of narcissism has gained traction in the field of medicine, and the diagnosis of *Narcissistic Personality Disorder* is being studied, there is still no universally accepted definition of narcissism [3]. The causes of narcissism's emergence and the exact mechanisms that operate in the psyche and mental world of a narcissistic person in each context and environment are not fully understood.

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Narcissism is a complex phenomenon that cannot be fully grasped with the tools of humanities or natural sciences alone. Metaphysical considerations may be necessary to fully understand it. Metaphysics will be understood here as a contemporary concept, which involves perceiving reality.

The theological perspective is an integral part of this perception. In our context, we primarily focus on the biblical story of creation and the narrative of the birth and salvation of the nation of Israel. These contain the foundations for understanding subsequent applied meanings in human history. The theological content of 'origins' holds important messages that can help us unravel the many problems and challenges that come with narcissism.

## **2. The paradox of narcissism**

Narcissism is a phenomenon that is often considered to be a part of anthropology, and therefore it is believed that every person has some degree of narcissism. It is crucial to recognize and address this behaviour to prevent harm. However, it is important to note that the extent to which narcissism is displayed can have negative effects on the individual, their family, and society. As Hlad et al. point out in their study, mastering soft-skills, especially in adolescents, is challenging nowadays, because “societal advances play an important role in the tendency toward risk-taking behaviour, which is accompanied by an enormous amount of new information that forms a complicated web that is difficult to navigate” [4, p. 288]. A narcissistic individual is overly focused on their own needs and ambitions and may use relationships and people around them to achieve their goals. This is why individuals with narcissistic personality disorder often struggle to manage their emotions in stressful situations and may have diminished levels of empathy and other soft skills.

The narcissistic personality type is characterized by a strong desire for personal gain and achievement in all activities and relationships, regardless of the depth of interaction. Extreme anthropocentrism, as seen in narcissism, is demonstrated by prioritizing personal pleasure, joy, and satisfaction of desires and needs, or the expression of negative emotions, before considering the resulting consequences. The individual with narcissistic tendencies requires constant stimulation from their immediate or distant surroundings to alleviate feelings of boredom, emptiness, and dissatisfaction. This is why, despite the initial pleasure and amusement brought on by new experiences, people, or surroundings, the effect eventually weakens and the individual returns to a state of boredom and emptiness.

The narcissist's inner emptiness can lead to behaviours and decisions that are considered antisocial or do not conform to cultural norms. This is due to their constant need for novelty, such as seeking new relationships, jobs, or groups. Boredom masks their lack of fulfilment from their past achievements, possessions, or experiences. When interpreting phenomena such as leaving a company, community, or partner, it is important to consider the contexts mentioned above. Therefore, it is important to exclude subjective evaluations unless clearly marked as such. Arguments based on subjective evaluations such as boredom, loss of

meaning in relationships, or unfulfillment in social environments may reflect the initiator's narcissistic nature rather than an objective assessment of the situation.

The concept of narcissism reveals an inherent contradiction: individuals crave social connections and relationships yet engage in behaviours that ultimately isolate them from their communities, leaving them unable to maintain their place within them. The justification of this paradox in the light of psychology or sociology remains unanswered. This suggests that humans possess an inherent inconsistency and disorder that complicates their existence. However, the individual has a passion for life and a drive to achieve a quality of life that is only imagined. This idea directs attention to a fundamental understanding of human nature and the world. It raises the question of whether this idea is attainable or unattainable, real, or imaginary. This allows for the exploration of narcissism in metaphysical contexts, including the inquiry into reality and virtual reality concerning the connection between an individual's subjective perception and the objective reality in which they exist.

### **3. Theological references**

The story of creation provides the theological grounding for the essence of man, his hidden and visible attributes, and the ecosystem in which he plays a leading role. Kondrla and Pavlíková argue that “it is only in the area of spiritual values that a person can turn his attention away from the problems of his own existence and is able to prosocially evaluate a given situation with respect to the other people around him” [5, p. 109] so that individuals can only shift their focus from their own problems and evaluate a situation in a prosocial manner with regards to others in the realm of their spirituality. The term “the area of spiritual values” pertains to theological contemplation on human existence and humanity. Pavlíková and Tavilla argue that perceiving the presence of timeless moral laws is crucial for authentic individual existence since “the universal validity of laws implies the necessity of repetition, which is at the heart of the process of creating things, events, and also individual moral decision-making” [6, p. 107-108].

The first sentence of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), corresponds to the theological concept of God's self-existence or unconditioned being, which is beyond the understanding and terminology of space-time. God is a concept that surpasses human understanding and language. The creation of the universe is marked by the emergence of space-time and the principle of causality, where all things have a cause for their existence outside of themselves and are interconnected. The concepts of good and evil are also intrinsically linked to God. In metaethics, this is moral realism, which is objectivist in nature.

The creation story places man at its epicentre, as he is created “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26). The interpretation of this Hebrew statement is twofold. The first meaning is that humans possess attributes like those of the Creator, making them stand out among created beings. They are considered the “crown of creation” and have the responsibility of administering the “garden of Eden” (Gen. 1:28). The second level of meaning refers to the relationship between God and humanity.

“To be created in the image of God” means to be in a relationship with one's Creator and to be before His face. This implies subordination to God and the mandate of stewardship entrusted to man. Man is not autonomous but is objectively related to the source of his origin, a reality over which he has no mandate. This reality frames the functioning of man's life and the entire ecosystem. The coherence of the various subsystems of creation is ensured by its origin, as described in the book of Genesis where it is stated that “it was good” (Gen 1:31). It is also important to note that God created both man and woman, as stated in Genesis 1:27. Both genders are equal, free, and share the same stewardship mandate. They are to relate to the absolute horizon that is the cause of their existence. Both men and women carry within them an “image of eternity” that is irreversibly embedded in all aspects of their lives and in everything they create. It is important to note that neither gender is superior or inferior in this part of the creation story, and hierarchy is not a theme or problem.

However, there is a second part to the creation narrative. The problem itself is related to the issue of freedom. The Creator gave man specific instructions regarding his freedom. Man was allowed to eat from all the trees in the garden, except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If he ate from it, he would surely die (Gen. 2:16-17). Man was capable of hearing, perceiving, comprehending, comparing, analysing, and understanding what God said. Simultaneously, he was able to decide what to do with God's instructions. In his natural, physical state, man was able to live in harmony with the earth, and in his spiritual state, he was equipped with the ability to communicate with heaven. This duality - temporality and eternity - is intrinsic to every human being and must be viewed in the context of narcissism. The issue at hand is that of man's disobedience. The tempter, acting as an external influence, presented man with the choice of consuming from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with the alluring promise that “you will be like gods” (Gen. 3:5). Man chose virtual reality and, as a result, became disconnected from actual reality. Kondrla claims that the consequences of Adam's disobedience in Genesis 3:15-24 were fatal, resulting in disrupted relationships between God and man, man and woman, and man and the ecosystem [7, p.22-24]. The once ideally attuned coherence of relationships within the complex of creation has become out of tune, rendering the functionality of the whole system unsustainable. It will require intervention from “outside” for man to live and fulfil his mandate of stewardship. The mandate of stewardship is deeply embedded within man, along with the associated ambitions. However, due to his failure in Paradise, man also possesses a weakness for virtual reality and unrealistic dreams, which he will never be able to rid himself of. This existential conflict is well-captured by the wisdom of Kohelet, who said, “He has made everything beautiful in its time.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 states that God has set eternity in the human heart, but no one can fully comprehend His works from beginning to end. This verse offers insight into the paradox of man's narcissism.

#### **4. We want a king!**

The concept of man's experience in paradise encompasses the nature of his existence, the character of freedom, and the reality of the corruption of all creation. It is an objective perception of reality, even though the ecosystem's coherence has been disrupted. Despite this, man remains conscious of the existence of ultimate authority and relates to it. The relationship between man and God may be disrupted, but it remains contingent, which has practical implications for human thought and action. Man, experiences accountability to God and is conscious of his state of alienation and sin. God, as an agent of absolute authority, is present in man's perception of the world, creating important boundaries of freedom and legitimate incentives in the exercise of his stewardship mandate. Israel can be seen as a prototype of humanity, manifesting, and materializing universal characteristics of both objective and subjective senses. The nation was chosen by God for the fulfilment of his sovereign plans. we can find similar elements in the Christian tradition as mentioned Maturkanič et al. [8, p. 30-32].

In the context of narcissism, the first book of Samuel describes a significant moment in Israel's history: the decision to have a king of their own. Until now, the Israelites had considered God as their king (1 Sam 12:12), but this is about to change. Their daily experience had been the reality of their own corruption and God's presence and help, which was an objective aspect of reality. However, with their demand for a king (1 Sam 8:19), a radical change takes place. Humans consciously close themselves off from objective reality and create their own subjective reality. The passage from 1 Samuel 8:20 "We will be like all the other nations, and our king will go out before us and fight our battles", illustrates this point. In their freedom, humans often give preference to their own ideas and desires, elevating them above the objective state of things. This can lead to anthropocentrism, in which humans define the ends, instruments, and means of achieving their own ambitions. According to 1 Samuel 8:11-18, the decision to have a king will result in severe consequences, including the loss of children, crops, and increased taxes to sustain the new system. This passage highlights the irreversible consequences of human decisions.

In contrast to his initial failure in Paradise, which was caused by an external stimulus, this time the stimulus is internal, originating from within man. It is a consequence of the failure in Paradise, after which God intervened and severely restricted man's access to His sphere of being and working. As a result, man is now severely limiting God and denying Him access to man's sphere of being and action. The nation of Israel aims to emulate the surrounding nations, adopting contractualism as the defining principle of its identity. This shift prioritizes the culture and philosophy of neighbouring nations over divine guidance. In today's society, we discover similar elements as stated by Maturkanič et al. [9]. The consequences of this decision are evident in subsequent events, as the nation's king proves unable to address the challenges of life. Israel regretted its decision, but returning to the original order was not possible. The only option was to seek God again, to call upon Him and ask for divine intervention (1 Sam 12:19). This cycle - freely departing from God and freely returning to Him - constitutes an

important dynamic in the workings of humanity and the mind. Máhrik et al. [10, p. 46] describe the Kierkegaardian concept of *teleological suspension pattern*, according to which “if objectivity corresponds to the phenomenological aspect of reality, what is *out there*, subjectivity on the other hand corresponds to the consciousness of a person, who reflects the objective side of the world.” In this context Akimjak et al. [11, p. 52] draws attention to the importance of truth as a category referring to objective reality and truth in the subjective sense, because “life in truth is the life of the individual in whose epicentre the truth of God’s word is revealed, as the higher power of the transformation of man and the core of the message which he is to convey further.” In essence, the rejection of external reality and preference for an internal reality that fails to satisfy individuals leads people to seek something beyond the world they control and define. This dialectic provides a better understanding of why a narcissist strives to have “his king” while simultaneously being dissatisfied with that king and seeking something better, more perfect. It is believed that individuals have an “echo” from paradise in their unconscious, which leaves an indelible mark on their identity.

## 5. Metaphysical invitation

The contemporary revival of metaphysics is founded on a more intricate comprehension of the notions of reality and existence. While Aristotelian metaphysics focused on analysing the philosophical constructs of the definition of being and the primordial causes beyond the physical realm, contemporary metaphysics aims to explain the inherent and universal aspects of reality that are not limited to our immediate senses, descriptive models, or thought constructs. Instead, reality is viewed as an open phenomenon that encompasses meta-stories, natural sciences, humanities, ethics, and religiosity [12]. Questions about the meaning of being are mirrored by the need for coherence. “We seek coherence between law and life, between word and deed, between promises and fulfilment, and between love and trust. In summary, there is a desire to find a sense of connectedness in life” [13]. Is the meaning of the world explicable in terms of naturalism? Is there an absolute explanation for the comprehensibility of the world? Is there a Theory of Everything (TOE) that, once revealed, will unlock all the mysteries, and provide answers to all questions? In the current discourse on the nature of the world, it is argued that strict Hawkingian naturalism, which posits that “all philosophical questions can be answered by physics” [14, p. 32], is untenable. Instead, the criterion of coherence points towards metaphysical considerations and categories that must be explored to understand present phenomena within a given culture or society.

The naturalistic worldview is facing increasing challenges, particularly due to the lack of satisfactory answers within naturalism to questions of coherence in the ecosystem and metaethical concerns regarding the moral perception of reality. A world without external justification is devoid of meaning. Together with Polkinghorne, we hold the view that it is necessary to implement insights from all scientific disciplines into a metaphysical discourse on the nature of the world and life as “the world is not merely mechanical. It has always been known that humans

are not mechanisms or automata, as we possess the power to choose and act in the world, albeit limited. We cannot fly, but we have agency. If we can act in the world, then there is no reason to think that God cannot act in the world as well. Twentieth-century science has broadened our view of the physical world, which we can conceive of as a world in which we are inhabitants, acting in it and helping to bring about the future. However, moral categories do not belong to science, nor does the question of what happens after death” [15]. In examining narcissism and therapeutic interventions, it is impossible to avoid ethical and moral questions, including the nature of love, the importance of empathy, the limits of self-assertion, and the justification for personal sacrifice for the greater good.

Narcissism can have a detrimental effect on both the individual and their social environment. Those with Narcissistic Personality Disorder may struggle to positively contribute to their social group and may also struggle to maintain consistent values and morals, as these can be influenced by their mood, emotional state, and personal ambitions. One cause of the collapse of the ethical systems of contractualism and virtual ethics is identified here. According to Carson, the crisis of ethics is due to philosophical pluralism, which lacks an absolute – “Even at the academic level, ethicists who are committed to pluralism are attempting to create a consensus morality based on certain social commitments. For instance, they recognize that human beings are persons who demand mutual respect. They also assume that reason is sufficient to evaluate the relative merits of concrete elements of competing moral systems, but insufficient to evaluate the moral systems themselves, since that would be a violation of philosophical pluralism” [16]. Philosophical pluralism does not have an absolute point of reference to which individual ethical attitudes, positions, and values can be related. Without an ethical framework with the weight of an absolute category, individual concepts fall into the category of relativistic constructs whose validity cannot be reasoned with respect to other constructs claiming a universal mandate. According to McGrath, “reason fails to deliver a morality suited to the real world in which we live. And with this collapse in confidence in universal and necessary criteria of truth, relativism and pluralism have flourished” [17]. The absolute framework must be of the nature of external reality and therefore cannot be a construct of any culture, social group, or human cognitive potency. Metaphysical concepts, including theological reflection on the phenomena under study, thus have their justification.

## **6. Conclusions**

The theological perspective of metaphysics sheds light on narcissism and highlights the importance of understanding human freedom. Healthy freedom is not about self-realization without limits and restrictions, nor is it about unlimited choice in an anthropocentric sense. Rather, freedom is a dialectic of possibility and limitation, where limitations are subjective expressions of consent. Setting clear and transparent boundaries is a conscious act of submission and respect. When boundaries are unclear or not set wisely, disorder and dysfunction can occur. This issue is particularly important in child-rearing, education, and the organization of society. The limits of freedom are becoming a challenge for AI

experts to address, not only ethically but also legislatively. However, the story of creation demonstrates that it is possible, knowable, and feasible to fine-tune what is allowed and what is forbidden as mentioned Kondrla et al. [18, p. 21-24].

The second level of reflection on narcissism concerns imagination, virtual reality, and vision. Mental health inevitably involves the ability to realistically assess one's own potential within the context of the ecosystem. Ethical attitudes of respect, empathy, and humility are based on the metaphysical fact that humans are not rulers but rather servants entrusted with managing things. The story of creation emphasises the humility of man before the gift of life, which he has been given to administer. It also highlights man's respect for the majesty of God, who is the ultimate authority for judging man's motives and actions. To seek answers to moral questions, autonomous ethics must be balanced with heteronomous ethics. This ensures a robust concept of ethics. In metaphysics, it is important to approach the claims of humanity with objectivity and avoid narcissistic tendencies. Kondrla et al. have confirmed that love, service, friendship, and empathy are necessary attitudes for fulfilling the mandate of stewardship over the ecosystem [19, p. 81-84].

The third dimension recognizes disappointment, pain, and failure as integral parts of a healthy human story. It is important to acknowledge that striving for perfection, whether for oneself, others, or society, is a utopian projection of the human ego that refuses to accept the truth about itself. Kondrla et al defend a similar position in the interpretation of the social teaching of the church [20, p. 173]. The creation story includes the presence of alienation from oneself, from nature, and even from the source of life in the absolute sense. Alienation, disharmony, pain, and disappointment are inevitable aspects of life that must be acknowledged and integrated into one's personal narrative as part of their identity. It is important to recognize and accept these realities objectively, without subjective evaluations. The creation story serves as a reminder of the metaphysical paradox of human existence: we were created for eternity, but our own disobedience has caused us to lose our claim to it. [21, 22, 23] The concept of eternity is a horizon of hope and expectation. Visions, aspirations, and anticipations emerge in the minds of all human beings beyond it. It is our responsibility to assess their coherence with the ecosystem and their harmony with God's design, which each of us bears the seal of. [24, 25, 26] The danger of narcissism arises when one assumes the position of a "king" instead of remaining a servant while making this assessment. In the first case, narcissism can deepen and take on destructive forms. In the second case, it can serve as a catalyst for becoming aware of one's own limitations and the impossibility of achieving absolute ambitions. Maturkanič et al. agree that knowledge of one's own problems is a prerequisite for successful therapeutic and pastoral intervention [27, p. 64-65], not only in the case of narcissism. It is important for individuals to develop their potential and make positive contributions to the social entities they are a part of, such as family, business, church, or society [28, 29, 30]. This remains a consistent objective for every narcissist, regardless of whether they acknowledge it or not.

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