

BIGOTRY: SELF-ESTEEM FOR THE FEARFUL AND INSECURE

by Rutherford

We all need to feel important and worthy and to believe that we are ‘good enough’.

For some, their sense of self-worth is the result of having accomplished a goal requiring determination, effort and sacrifice and one which, at first, we may have been unsure of our ability to achieve.

For those who have no such hard-won accomplishments however, a sense of self-worth can only be achieved by elevating happenstance to the status of a virtue by convincing themselves that their worth is established by things for which they can claim no credit, such as the nation in which they were born, the colour of their skin, their sexual orientation, or the faith or socio-economic class of their families.

(It’s a remarkable co-incidence isn’t it that, whatever the characteristic may be that is held tenaciously as a source of pride and worth, is always what he – and it is usually a ‘he’ – just happened to be born? It must be terrifying to realise that one’s source of worthiness is the result of an accident of birth.)

When someone’s sense of worth is based on such arbitrary foundations, it is vital that **nothing** can be allowed to contradict the claim to worthiness bestowed by being white, British, heterosexual, wealthy, Christian, able-bodied, right-handed or... and which allows them to feel superior to those unlucky enough not to have been born ‘like me’. (We might call this the difference between self-worth based on ‘I am better than I was’ – and self-worth based on ‘I am better than he or she is’.)

When those whose self-esteem is based on such accidents of birth encounter others who appear to get along just fine – or worse, actually prosper and succeed – without such benefits, they are confronted by proof that this ‘special quality’ upon which their worth depends, is not, in fact, all that valuable. To re-establish the vital importance of the happenstance that is the basis of their self-esteem, the ‘Other’ must be demeaned – not so that they will know their place, but so that we can be reassured of ours.

(It is worth noting that, as Jung observed, our most potent negative stereotypes are actually reflections of things we detest within *ourselves* because they threaten the Self-image we need to maintain if we are to believe that we are ‘okay’. These things we fear about ourselves are often pushed into the unconscious – from which they are then projected onto The Other in the hope that, by punishing *them*, we can delude ourselves into believing that we have successfully excised it from ourselves.)

In philosophy and psychology, *ressentiment* is one of the forms of resentment or hostility. The concept was of particular interest to some 19th century thinkers, most notably Friedrich Nietzsche. According to their use, *ressentiment* is a sense of hostility directed toward an object that one identifies as the cause of one’s frustration, that is, an assignment of blame for one’s frustration. The sense of weakness or inferiority complex and perhaps even jealousy in the face of ‘the cause’ generates a rejecting/justifying value system, or morality, which attacks or denies the perceived source of one’s frustration. This value system is then used as a means of justifying one’s own weaknesses by identifying the source of envy as objectively inferior, serving as a defense mechanism that prevents the resentful individual from addressing and overcoming their insecurities and flaws. The ego creates an enemy in order to insulate itself from culpability. ([Wikipedia](#))

If you need to be wealthy to feel ‘good enough’, you will oppose social programmes; if your self-esteem depends on being ‘A Man’s Man’, you will despise members of the LGBT+ community. By battering women, belittling our children, bashing gays, blaming Jews or immigrants, supporting policies that punish the poor, or waging war on the Enemy-of-the-Day, we are trying to convince ourselves that We are not like Them and that We are therefore among Life’s winners – and let the Devil take the hindmost. This isn’t politics, it is exorcism – and it has been known to kill.

Every act of conscious learning requires the willingness to suffer an injury to one’s self-esteem. That is why young children, before they are aware of their own self-importance, learn so easily; and why older persons, especially if vain or self-important, cannot learn at all. (Thomas Szasz, U.S. psychiatrist)