“Unlike the virtuous, far removed from mediocrity, men of action, whose happiness resides in standing out, seek honour only to convince themselves of their own worth.”

(Aristotle)

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is one of the most popularized psychological concepts of our times, probably due to its practical use in understanding a good part of our journey through life in search of happiness.

* This chapter is heavily inspired by a chapter written in Spanish by the author of this book and two other Spanish colleagues. The material borrowed, which is copyrighted by the authors, is used with the permission of the two other authors, Salvador García and Miriam Díez-Piñol. Source: Dolan, García and Díez-Piñol (2005) Autoestima, estréés y trabajo (Madrid: McGraw-Hill) mainly chapter 3.
Intuitively, we know that “self-esteem” is something desirable and positive, especially if it is balanced and does not end up as self-hate or narcissism.


diagram

Human beings are blessed with an essential and originating self-esteem, which, little by little, is lost as they navigate the seas of mistrust and the desire to control variables beyond themselves, no matter how well the individual has learned to navigate through the Internet in the so-called era of knowledge and information.

SELF-ESTEEM AND PURPOSE IN LIFE

“Self-esteem” according to Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (G. & C. Merriam Co., 1981), is defined as (1) a confidence and satisfaction in one’s own self: self-respect; and (2) self-conceit.

At a deep, existential level we assess ourselves depending on where we see ourselves on our journey through life, or if we are on the right path. The final destination on this road, what everyone is searching for throughout life, is to be happy. Happiness, the Hellenic eudaimonia, is to find the correct destiny and be comfortable with it. Happiness consists of savouring one’s freely chosen path in life. Self-esteem, then, is absolutely necessary to be happy.

Self-esteem is at the centre of a loop: It depends on what each individual does with their life based on, and as a consequence, of their private appraisal of what life is. The real moral task is to become everything one can possibly be with what one is (Aranguren, 1994).

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Part of life’s mission is to assume the responsibility for creating greater health, greater happiness, greater commitment and greater endeavour in the world around us and in ourselves. When this occurs, we increase our real self-esteem.

Self-love is the source of self-conservation and survival as well as awareness of oneself and others. Personal dignity, our own honour, is the axio-prepia; the final goal, par excellence, is making the right values fit together. Loving oneself (self-love) has its biological foundation based on our natural