A Pauline Response to the Myth of the Autonomous, Normative Self

Daniel Lioy

MAJOR CLAIM: The concept of the autonomous, normative self,[1] which is often idealized in the global North, can be seen as a form of idolatry that Paul condemns in Romans 1:18–32.

Introduction

WESTERN SOCIETIES TODAY FACE many internal challenges related to changing cultural norms. The global North's emphasis on the autonomous, normative self—as well as obsessing over sexuality, identity politics, intersectionality, and so on—is especially pervasive and harmful.

Carl Trueman, a professor at Grove City College, traces how the intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural developments in the West set the stage for the societal pathologies noted above. He does so in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2020) as well as in *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2022).

What appears below is a candid, objective distillation, synthesis, and meta-analysis of the architecture of ideas that Trueman examines, followed by a consideration of Paul's indictment in Romans 1:18–32 of those who reject the one, true, and living God. This includes the direct applicability of the apostle's remarks to the myth of the autonomous, normative self, which engages in sexual behaviors that contradict the teaching of Christian Scripture.

Trueman, while operating from a Reformed Calvinist perspective, approaches the subject of how the contemporary, mythological notion of the self became psychologized, then sexualized, and finally politicized. That said, his evaluation and critique resonate with classic, orthodox Christians.

Concededly, as with any taxonomy that makes broad generalizations, a shorthand like that put forward by Trueman has its limitations, including the possible

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oversimplification of complex, multi-causal phenomena. Yet, despite the provisional nature of Trueman's various classifications, these help to distill important ideas in ways that are cogent and accessible.

For example, consider the following notions that comprise the accepted ideology of contemporary society:

INTERSECTIONALITY: the supposedly immutable hierarchy of oppression against certain groups;

CRITICAL RACE THEORY: insisting that racial identity is determinative as to the entire trajectory of one's life;

RADICAL FEMINISM: not that women should be equal to men, but that women need to be "liberated" from traditional, heteronormative family roles; and,

TRANSGENDERISM: allegedly there are multiple genders, and individuals can fluidly transition between them.

As the upcoming sections detail, *anthropology* is the core issue being debated, namely, one's understanding of what it means to be human.

The Dramatic Transformation of the West's Understanding of the Self

TRUEMAN BEGINS BY FRAMING his historical narrative about thinkers, philosophers, and poets around three theoretical pillars. First is the concept of the "social imaginary" worldview (as described by Charles Taylor). This refers to the complex web of beliefs and assumptions, along with expectations and practices, that are unconsciously shared throughout a culture and shape the lives of its members in dramatic ways.

Second is the notion of the "psychological man" (as described by Philip Rieff). This claims that existential meaning and genuine authenticity are only found within a person, not in the outside world (such as one's community and institutions).

Third is the assertion that there are no moral absolutes. Instead, all ethical discourse in the West is just a matter of a one's subjective feelings, arbitrary preferences, and shifting desires (in other words, "emotivism"; as described by Alasdair MacIntyre).

Trueman uses the preceding triad as the foundation for the superstructure of concepts he sets forth in his treatise. His objective is to sketch how a diverse cast of luminaries—including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud, along with three poets of the Romantic era, William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, and William Blake—have influenced societal thought over the past several hundred years.

In the process, Trueman outlines the dramatic transformation of the West's understanding of the self. The author also delineates how this radically new mythological notion dominates the current intellectual and cultural horizon (ranging from politics to the performing arts to literature to music).

For instance, the modern self is characterized by "expressive individualism," which means that people are truly authentic only when they display outwardly what they are feeling inwardly. Likewise, the modern self equates happiness with an inner sense of psychological wellbeing and satisfaction.

Admittedly, the concept of interiority is not a recent invention. The notion can be found in Aristotle, in Paul's teaching about the inner and outer man, in the kind of medieval mysticism that influenced Luther, in Calvin's insistence on the knowledge of God that comes with the knowledge of self, and so on.

The above notwithstanding, the contemporary understanding of interiority has evolved significantly. As detailed below, there is an emphasis on individualism, materialism, and often neglecting interpersonal relationships.

Furthermore, the modern self sees all things immanently. Here there is nothing beyond the material realm to provide it with any significance or purpose. Every aspect of reality is understood by the limits of what can be detected and experienced through sensory information.

The above is exhibited in the West's notion of moral right and wrong. Rather than being determined by a transcendent, metaphysical, or supernatural authority, ethical thinking is driven by what enables a person to feel happy.

Also involved is the idea of consent. When an action is given consent, it is regarded as ethically right, whereas the absence of consent labels an action as ethically wrong.

Furthermore, in the West, morality is often viewed through the lens of utilitarianism, namely, what brings the most happiness to the most people. This contrasts with moral frameworks that are grounded in religious doctrine or natural law, which rely on an authority that exists above and beyond mere human experience.

The Sexual Revolution's Domination of the Present-Day Cultural Imagination

THE UPENDING OF MORALITY is most explicitly seen by the way in which the sexual revolution now dominates the present-day cultural imagination. This development is not simply a relaxation and expansion of acceptable ethical standards.

Instead, the sexual revolution is an across-the-board repudiation and overturning of traditional morality. This is evident by the fact that, in just a few generations, there has been a dramatic change in how society understands sexuality and its importance.

For example, consider society's visceral renunciation of the longstanding conviction that the "male" and "female" genders are biologically rooted and scientifically validated distinctions. According to current understanding, "gender" is not binary, but rather fluid, encompasses diverse identities, and varies across cultures and over time.

Additionally, the sexual revolution goes beyond a mere fine-tuning of what is permissible behavior. As noted above, the giving of consent makes an activity morally acceptable, whereas withholding consent makes an activity morally unacceptable. Here, the rules of right and wrong have been so attenuated that violating them carries virtually no public stigma.

The current social and cultural movement is an utter break from the traditional notion of human identity. Specifically, sex is regarded, not so much as an activity, but as the way in which individuals define and describe their personhood.

The foundational reasoning of such arguments displays a lack of coherence, internal contradictions, and a departure from reality. In effect, whatever claims to truth this view makes are discredited, especially since it fosters a pattern of self-destructive behavior among its most zealous adherents.

Nonetheless, it would be shortsighted to downplay, ignore, or dismiss the significance of what has transpired in recent years. As Trueman cogently observes, the "sexual revolution, and its various manifestations in modern society, cannot be treated in isolation." Instead, it "must be interpreted as the specific and perhaps most obvious social manifestation of a much deeper and wider revolution in the understanding of what it means to be a self."

The Historical Trajectory of How the Myth of the Autonomous, Normative Self Evolved

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A MORE nuanced explanation of how the myth of the autonomous, normative self evolved over time. For instance, a longstanding view is that the self and culture are rooted in an external, transcendent, sacred order (as reflected in one's ethnic group, family, and faith community). According to this understanding of reality, personal, private morality, along with how society is shaped, are meant to conform to and imitate what God originally established in creation before the fall of humankind into sin.

Yet, since at least the mid-twentieth century, secular thinkers have argued that either God does not exist or is irrelevant to daily life. Likewise, individuals and institutions (whether public or private, religious or secular) have jettisoned the notion of God and supplanted it with the myth that the self reigns supreme as an autonomous, normative entity over every aspect of life.

Moreover, it is said that a just society exists to resist the oppressiveness of entrenched heterosexual norms. This includes obliterating sexual taboos, repudiating the biblical teaching about gender and marriage, and abolishing the biological family, along with not only tolerating, but also being forced to affirm the validity of abortion on demand, same-sex marriage, no-fault divorce, rampant pornography, and other forms of unbiblical sexual behavior.

The preceding mindset embraces the contestable assertion that the world is sharply divided between two opposing classes or groups. These are referred to as either the oppressors and the oppressed or the victimizers and the victims. Allegedly, the marginalized have the mandate and moral authority to strip the privileged of their status, wealth, and power.

Trueman utilizes various labels to trace the historical trajectory of how the myth of the autonomous, normative self evolved over time. At its most basic level, human selfhood is the conscious awareness people have of who and what they are. This notion includes the ways in which people imagine their purpose in life, what makes them happy, and wherein their freedom is found.

One label Trueman puts forward (which he obtained from Rieff) is the "psychological/therapeutic self." The underlying concept is that individuals find real identity in their inner, emotional autobiography.

One's conscience is informed, not by a heteronormative, patriarchal, misogynistic, and systemically racist society that is cruel, degrading, and inhumane, but by a person's empathy and sympathy. What a person instinctively feels becomes the sole basis for making decisions that have ethical ramifications.

The above mindset gives rise to the present-day notion referred to earlier as "expressive individualism." Admittedly, given the pervasiveness of this mindset within the culture of the global North, even Christians exhibit it in some ways.

Nonetheless, a more radicalized version of expressive individualism has become the basis for the spread of socially liberal, consumerist/consumptionist, and antinomian attitudes. For instance, it is claimed that everyone has a distinctive core of emotions, intuitions, and sentiments. Moreover, these must be allowed to develop, as well as be publicly voiced and enacted, for one's identity and potential to be fully actualized.

The "romantic self" picks up on the idea of turning inward, along with going back to an idealized, rural existence. In this way of perceiving reality, true morality is determined by what impulsively looks and feels right to those living in harmony with nature.

The "plastic/pliable self" refers to those who affirm the notion of an independent, self-consciousness. They also reject any real dependency on others, which leads to an overemphasis on being self-reliant.

These individuals imagine they can reconstruct their personal identity whenever and however they wish. Allegedly, by exploiting technology (including the mutilation of bodily appearance through puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and irreversible surgical procedures), everyone can rise above their innate biology (particularly, their sex assigned at birth).

The preceding mindset is reflected in the slogan, "You create you." It is also a form of transgenderism (namely, to exceed the bounds of one's gender). In turn, transgenderism serves as a gateway to transhumanism (namely, to go beyond the limits of one's corporeal restraints).

The intent is to redefine who and what an individual is with the lofty ambition of being totally liberated from (or to be unshackled by) the confines of one's physical embodiment. Advocates claim that through advancements in genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and so on, humankind can achieve a quantum leap in intelligence, strength, and lifespan (including the eradication of mortality) to become *homo deus* ("god-man").

So, on the one hand, the modern self renounces the biblical teaching of a transcendent Creator, who alone is glorious, holy, and all-powerful. Yet, on the other hand, there is the self-absorbed goal to transcend the limits of one's humanity and ascend to a higher plane of endless, conscious existence. In short, this is a disembodied, libertarian anthropology.

The basis for the above crypto-gnostic view is the belief that one's anatomy and physiology are neither fixed nor required to abide by the fossilized, repressive, ethical norms imposed by heteronormative society. Rather, all aspects of human nature—especially one's sex/gender—are fluid, malleable, and ever-evolving (particularly in response to trendsetting cues, prescriptions, and norms).

The "sexual self" builds on the preceding ideas by equating personal identity with sexuality and sex (rather than seeing these as a function of who people are). For this reason, people are categorized according to their sexual desires, whether straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender, and so on.

Moreover, the sex drive becomes the all-defining center and meaning of a person's identity. Indeed, it is asserted that those who experience high levels of contentment and satisfaction feel free to explore their sexual desires.

One's inner, imagined notion of their "sexual self" even takes precedence over their biological sex. This explains why such assertions as "I am a woman trapped in a man's body" or "I'm a man trapped in a woman's body" are now part of a militant social dogma to which everyone must conform.

Because personal preferences about sexual desire and orientation are treated as ironclad truth claims, they become the basis for charting the ethical path one follows. So, to be truly authentic, one must be willing to acknowledge and act on their unique desires, even if these are considered off limits by those who embrace traditional values.

The "politicized self" considers heteronormative society's disapproval of one's sexual desires as a moral offense, as well as a form of harassment, violence, and tyranny. Those who feel stymied to express their sexual preferences claim they have been unfairly stereotyped, marginalized, and harmed by strict codes of conduct.

Any attempt, then, to challenge someone's right to personal happiness is labeled as a wicked or even illegal act. So, if heteronormative society outlaws certain sexual orientations and activities, it is tantamount to the criminalization of particular sexual identities. Stated another way, it is a dehumanizing attack on the core personhood, dignity, and worth of an individual.

The modern self regards the above circumstance as so odious that the authoritarian state, as reflected in longstanding, Western ideals, must be toppled by means of a culture war centered on issues of race, gender, and sexuality. It is claimed that through sexual revolution, all white, male, hegemonic power structures can be demolished, resulting in political liberation.

The Consequences of the Autonomous, Normative Self's Hegemony in the West

To discern the consequences of the autonomous, normative self's hegemony in the West, we begin with Trueman's discussion of two different ways of thinking about the world (as articulated by Taylor). First, *mimesis* (from the Greek term for "imitating") considers the world as having a given order and meaning. Likewise, people discover that meaning and conform themselves to it.

Second, *poiesis* (from the Greek term for "making") regards the world as nothing more than raw material out of which everyone constructs their own meaning,

purpose, and destiny. Expressed differently, the world is comparable to a giant blob of playdough over which a person can impose his/her will.

Here the autonomous, normative self is like a deity that is free to explore and create its own personalized reality (including its own concept of existence, of meaning, of the entire universe, and of the mystery of life), yet without any pushback from others. This mindset overemphasizes individualism, in which the all-out pursuit of happiness and the rituals associated with self-fashioning take center stage in one's life.

Next, Trueman draws attention to Rieff's delineation of three different types of worlds. "First world" cultures are predominantly non-Christian, and devise ethical codes based on widely accepted myths.

In contrast, "second world" cultures are established on some sort of faith in God. Like "first worlds," "second worlds" anchor their moral outlook on what is transcendent and external.

"Third world" cultures reject moral imperatives being linked to anything metaphysical and sacred. Instead, ethics are defined by one's personal interests. Since there is nothing and no one above the autonomous, normative self, people become the sole basis for their attitudes, priorities, and actions (all of which are beyond critique, disapproval, and regulation).

Many believe that society exists to satisfy an individual's psychosexual needs and appetites. For instance, colleges and universities traditionally were centers of learning to educate, train, and mentor students.

Now many of these organizations have devolved into platforms that promote controversial and extreme views, organize disruptive protests, and damage the reputations of those who disagree. In turn, this has led to what some have declared to be a declining quality of faculty, a politicization of scholarly disciplines, an intolerance of opposing views, and a constricting of academic freedom.

Moreover, other institutions and communities (including churches) must accept and accommodate the above prevalent outlook. Any law, regulation, or organization that becomes an obstacle to a preferred outcome is deemed illegitimate.

If required, compliance is maintained through various enforcement mechanisms, such as updated guidelines for speech, housing regulations, school curriculum, employment laws, adoption standards, and so on. This can sometimes lead to a form of strict behavioral control, which may inadvertently contribute to feelings of isolation, division, and extremism.

A failure to virtue signal one's fealty to the new authoritarian teaching often invites outrage, scorn, and vilification (including animus toward historic Christianity), especially through social media fatwas (or strident assertions of condemnation).

Dissenters are frequently seen as suffering from a serious mental illness that is labeled as *phobic* (for example, homophobic, transphobic, and so on).

Moreover, free speech is condemned as a means of oppression, a tool of linguistic hatred, and an instrument for psychological harm. In some cases, free speech that runs counter to prevailing narratives may be regulated, restricted, or prohibited.

Concurrent with the preceding developments is a marked shift throughout the global North in its cultural attitudes toward traditional Christianity. In general, as various observers of societal trends have argued, until around 1994, the West seemed largely positive in its sentiment toward Christianity. Then, for roughly the next two decades, the West adopted a more neutral posture. Finally, around 2014, the West embraced an increasingly negative, antithetical stance toward Christianity.

The widespread repudiation of Judeo-Christian moral values has led to an antagonistic view of orthodox Christianity as an incomprehensible, contestable, fringe sect. Indeed, biblically-based ethics are not only regarded with suspicion and hostility, but also considered to be an existential threat to the axiomatic views favored by many left-leaning radicals (including their desire to usher in a progressive utopia).

The above reality explains why devout followers of the Lord Jesus increasingly find themselves to be social pariahs. This is particularly so among elitists within education, politics, corporations, journalism, and entertainment. Justifiably, in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI observed that the "light of Christianity" was "flickering out all over the West."

Also noteworthy is Rieff's concept of *deathworks*. This is described as an all-out attack upon anything considered to be of utmost importance to the entrenched culture.

So, for example, Rieff labels "third worlds" as being an "anti-culture." In keeping with what was stated above, the moral frameworks and civilizations connected with the "first" and "second worlds" are so oppressive and restrictive to the freedom of the autonomous, normative self, that they must be spurned, dismantled, and invalidated.

In a similar vein, Rousseau claims that at birth people are inherently moral creatures whose instincts and sentiments are misshapen by their environment and culture. Put another way, it is a corrupt society, not a fallen self, that is the repository of and catalyst for evil.

There are also such Romantic writers as Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake, who each emphasize an emotive intuition of reality. It is alleged that for the autonomous, normative self to be genuinely authentic, it must discover and freely act on the inner, pristine voice of one's (sexualized) nature.

Yet, by throwing off all moral restraint, those championing pervasive self-indulgence have unwittingly spawned the destructive forces of ethical nihilism, chaos,

and anarchy. Then, as competing factions battle one another for power, privilege, and cultural supremacy, it creates a toxic and divisive environment.

Trueman discusses what Taylor calls "expressive individualism" and Rieff labels the "psychological man." These notions of personhood contribute to the radical redefinition of human sexuality.

Furthermore, Trueman spotlights the works of Nietzsche and Marx, who politicize the concept of the self. Freud and Reich go further by sexualizing the self.

The result is that sex moves from a physical act to the basis for defining one's inner identity as an innately satisfied and fulfilled human being. In brief, *homo eroticus* ("sexualized man") replaces *homo adorans* ("worshiping man").

Each of the above thinkers pave the way for the rise of the therapeutic self, along with the constructs of sexual and gender identity. Those who adopt this view of reality experience cognitive dissonance between how they perceive their gender versus the sex assigned to them at birth.

Absent are any notions of people being created in the image of God as either male or female, who, though fallen, are redeemed through faith in Christ. Embraced is the mantra of being liberated from allegedly repressive and abusive forms of heteronormative sexuality, as well as the racist, colonizing political structures imposed by an obsolete and impotent moral order.

Emphasis is placed on one's feelings and psychological impulses. These become all-defining, especially as each person looks inward to indicate who they are as unique, sexually liberated, and self-determining individuals.

Furthermore, true personhood is equated with self-consciousness (in other words, the ability to operate as a sentient, free, and intentional agent). According to this view, an unborn fetus, a newborn infant, and people suffering from severe forms of dementia, do not possess a minimal degree of self-consciousness.

For the preceding reason, it is allegedly lawful to deny such entities any rights and treat them in non-personal, inhumane ways (including such state-sanctioned, culture-of-death atrocities as abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia). The logical outcome of this line of reasoning is that if one human being is disposable, then every human being can become disposable.

Classic orthodox Christians view reality (both physical and metaphysical) quite differently from the above cruel utilitarian formula, including the equitable treatment of the weak, the vulnerable, and the excluded in contemporary society. Instead of promoting the myth that the autonomous, normative self is the measure of all things, followers of Christ consider God to be the sovereign Creator and Scripture to be the highest revelatory authority.

Paul's Indictment in Romans 1:18-32
of Those Who Reject God

THE PRECEDING THEOLOGICAL STANCE is validated by an examination of Paul's indictment in Romans 1:18–32 of those who reject God. This includes the direct applicability of the apostle's remarks to the myth of the autonomous, normative self, which engages in unbiblical sexual conduct.

To begin, Paul explained that God, who reigned from heaven, made known His "wrath" (v. 18) against all forms of wickedness. Manifestations of His righteous judgment in the present anticipated the final day of reckoning.

People used profane thoughts (especially about God) and debased behavior (especially between people) to hold down the "truth" about God's eternal existence and sovereign rule. All such efforts were futile, for the Creator would never permit anyone to restrain the knowledge of His sacred character and the reality of His invisible qualities from being disclosed in creation.

In verses 19–20, Paul declared that God has made the truth of His existence obvious to all humankind. Scripture reveals that the Lord, who is "spirit" (John 4:24), is invisible (Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27); yet, even though the physical eye cannot see the Creator, His existence is reflected in what He has made.

Moreover, Paul explained that since God brought the universe into existence, He has made His "invisible attributes" (Rom 1:20) plainly clear. This included the Creator's "eternal power" and "divine nature."

Indeed, since the dawn of time, people have an instinctive awareness—which is reinforced by observing creation—that there is a supreme being. So, they cannot reasonably justify their decision to reject the Creator and refuse to submit to His will.

By seeing the intricate design of the universe, people—who bear God's image—can innately understand certain aspects of His nature (v. 21). Regardless of humanity's mental prowess and educational attainments, the Creator's assessment is that they are morally deficient (v. 22).

Verse 23 draws attention to a descending hierarchy of idolatry, beginning with the veneration of humans and moving to the worship of birds, animals, and reptiles. Expressed differently, people invent gods and goddesses patterned after various forms of life (Deut 4:15–18; Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11). In turn, the enslavement of some people to idols leads to their alienation from the one, true, and living God.

Because of idolatry, God deliberately abandoned the Gentiles to their depravity (Rom 1:24). So, instead of attempting to restrain their wickedness, God simply allowed their objectionable behavior to run its course. Specifically, the Creator

removed His influence and permitted fallen humanity's willful rejection to produce its natural and inevitable consequences, which in this case were deadly.

Paul was writing from Corinth, the location of Aphrodite's temple. At the time he penned Romans, this shrine housed hundreds of temple prostitutes who were used sexually as an act of worship to pagan deities. These degrading acts were believed to provoke the gods and goddesses into doing similar acts, which resulted in increased crops and larger families.

Such religious prostitution was common in Roman culture. In this way, many individuals traded the truth about God's existence and rule for a "lie" (v. 25), particularly when it involved idol worship.

As noted earlier, through people's attitudes and actions, they revered created things, rather than the all-powerful Lord. As a counterweight to humankind's perverted acts, Paul burst forth in praise to God and sealed the exclamation with an "Amen."

In verse 26, we read for the second time that God intentionally abandoned humankind, but in this case it was to degrading passions. Yet, unlike the immorality committed by the cultic prostitutes, these sexual sins were private.

Individuals perverted God's gift of physical intimacy in the context of marriage by shamelessly engaging in homosexual acts. Men and women exchanged "natural relations" (between men and women) with "unnatural" relations (men with men and women with women).

Paul literally said those of the same gender "burned with intense desire" (v. 27) for one another. As a result of such indecent behavior, people received the divinely-sanctioned "penalty," namely, the scourge of indulging their sexual perversions.

In verse 28, we read for the third time that God actively abandoned people, but in this case it was to a morally reprehensible way of thinking. People not only refused to acknowledge the Creator's existence, but also to submit to His will.

Expressed differently, the reprobates put God's sensible boundaries out of their thoughts, and He responded by surrendering them to a distorted view of reality. Out of this mindset arose all kinds of evil deeds.

Verses 29-30 list the indecent behaviors condemned in verse 28. Paul categorized the conduct of the morally degenerate into four clusters of active sin: wickedness (the opposite of righteousness), evil (the profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness), greed (the relentless urge to acquire more than one needs), and depravity (a constant bent toward immorality). These four basic kinds of deliberate, objectionable behavior in turn express themselves in specific ways.

For instance, those whom God abandoned are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters; they are insolent, arrogant,

and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless (vv. 29–31).

The despicable conduct of these individuals was not due to ignorance of God's commands (v. 32). Rather, they sinned despite their limited awareness of the Creator, making them all the more culpable.

Even worse, these individuals applauded the preceding objectionable practices among others. Perhaps seeing their peers do these sorts of activities filled the instigators with a sense of self-justification. In any case, they received what they deserved, namely, death or eternal separation from God.

Conclusion

THIS ESSAY PRESENTS a candid, objective distillation, synthesis, and meta-analysis of Trueman's two recent works. In these treatises, he explains how the myth of the autonomous, normative self arose and became the catalyst for the sexual revolution.

The essay first considers the dramatic transformation of the West's understanding of the self. Second, the discourse explores the sexual revolution's domination of the present-day cultural imagination. Third, the essay traces the historical trajectory of how the myth of the autonomous, normative self evolved. Fourth, the discourse details the consequences of the autonomous, normative self's hegemony in the West.

Fifth, and finally, the essay sets forth Paul's indictment in Romans 1:18–32 of those who reject God, including its applicability to the myth of the autonomous, normative self. Despite often being idealized in the global North, it is a form of idolatry that the apostle condemns.

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Note

1. An earlier version of this essay was published in June 2022 as a blog article on the website of South African Theological Seminary. Weblink: https://sats.ac.za/blog/2022/06/22/the-autonomous-normative-self-by-professor-dan-lioy/