



Self-discovery and moral dilemmas in Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* and *Herzog*

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Abstract

This research article examines the themes of moral quandaries and self-discovery found in Saul Bellow's novels *Herzog* and *Henderson the Rain King*. By means of a comprehensive examination of the main characters, Eugene Henderson and Moses Herzog, the research investigates how Bellow depicts the intricate and frequently turbulent path towards self-realization and integrity. The protagonists engage in self-reflective journeys that test their conceptions of morality and identity, exposing the complexity of the human condition in contemporary society. The study compares and contrasts the unique narrative strategies and thematic issues in each novel, highlighting the philosophical and ethical aspects of their travels. This examination provides insights into Bellow's literary investigation of the pursuit of moral consciousness and purpose by probing Henderson and Herzog's psychological and moral conflicts. The results highlight Bellow's lasting influence on modern literature and highlight his deep understanding of the complexities of the human experience.

Keywords: Self-discovery, identity quest, moral consciousness, self, American literature

Introduction

According to philosophers and transcendentalists, the self is an inner light that exists inside people and helps them to look for solutions to life's concerns regarding what constitutes good, right, and perfect behavior. This self-awareness enables people to change who they are and promotes personal development. Moral consciousness and the self are intertwined; moral consciousness may change someone's attitude and impact their general well-being. Distinguished authors have put out a plethora of views regarding the self and moral principles, stressing their applicability to both people and society. The purpose of this study is to support the findings made by different scholars about the concept of the self and to sufficiently illustrate these views.

The Bhagavad-Gita describes the self as amazing and magnificent. Psychologists define the self as the empirical self, sometimes known as 'me', which is typically multidimensional, simple, and unitary. This unity is said to be multi-dimensional and may include plurality. "The self is revealed in its action, it reveals itself and constitutes itself by acting" (Sharma 02). After a great deal of hardship and experience, one comes to understand the self, often referred to as awareness or consciousness, as a conscious process of growth. Rather than being an overnight endeavor, it is a lengthy, step-by-step process involving something weird, magnificent, and complete.

In view of Western philosophers, the ego is the self, and its development is ego-transcendence, or happiness. This is a process of reason and irrational urges, of movement and unconscious transformation. According to Spinoza, the mind and body are only two aspects of a person's existence, and individuality and self-consciousness are mental correlates of limited creatures. Philosophers such as Kant have written extensively about the process of consciousness, also called the knowing of one's self and other traits. Fuller's *Modern Philosophy* explains Kant's concepts of self and consciousness:

Self-Consciousness is not consciousness of that which does the perceiving and knowing. It is consciousness of that

which is known. In the act of self-consciousness the self becomes an object to itself. Therefore, just as I know external objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are presented to me colored and formed by, the kind of mental apparatus I possess, so I know myself, not as I really am in myself, but as I am presented to my real or transcendental ego, the knowing subject, after being worked over and reformulated by the machinery of that same apparatus. (Fuller 225)

Philosophers Spinoza and Hegel have noted similar notions. The existence of the mind, truth, happiness, and emancipation all come together for them.

According to Spinoza, alterations in the mind influence the body, which then has an impact on the mind. The mind is impersonal, unbiased, capable of conceiving and spreading ideas. A basic understanding of thought is the 'truth', and the human mind is full of thought processes that aim to discover the actual truth and help one realize who they really are. A deeper sense of enjoyment develops as a result of this growing association with God's unlimited mind (Fuller 82-83).

The Bhagavad-Gita expands on the idea of the self by describing, "The self is never born, nor does it die. It is not having been. It comes into being. It is unborn, eternal, changeless, ever itself. It is not killed with the body is killed" (qtd. in Yatiswarananda 85). An individual's self-awareness inspires them to get over their dread of dying. Maria E. Badias draws attention to Vedanta's recommendations for those who want to expand their experiences and sense of self. He offers a plethora of answers for self-discovery, based on the idea that we may find all we desire by exploring the self, the essence of who we are (Badias 01). The Upanishads place a strong emphasis on the separation of the ego and the body, seeing the latter as a chariot and the former as its driver. They put out a dual view of the self, linking the individual self with the transcendent Divine soul and the ultimate self, which are one and the same.

During the 19th century, the idea of the self and the divine light inside people was stressed by writers like Theodore

Dreiser, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralf Wildo Emerson. Emerson emphasizes the value of the self in several of his works, including *Over-soul* and *Self-Reliance*. Thoreau's *Walden* delves into enlightenment via nature, and Dreiser's books articulate analogous philosophical concepts. The search for moral awareness and identity was also explored in literature by American authors such as Saul Bellow. In twentieth-century American novels, the moral concern revolves around the individual's struggle to separate itself from surrounding images, myths, stereotypes, and values. Many novelists, like psychologist Carl Rogers, suggest that individuals may create problems and tensions within themselves when their self-concept is tied to others' perspectives on their personality, rather than their own experiences. This highlights the importance of separating oneself from external influences. Bellow's protagonists encounter comparable obstacles in several social domains as they endeavor to assert their uniqueness and ethical resilience. They stress the goodness of mankind and the essence of the soul, for fear that evil will submerge it into this world. They struggle to get their voices heard in a culture shaped by materialism, pride, and conflict. These societal factors have a profound effect on the characters written by American writers and their works.

The concepts of self and moral consciousness are explored in the novels *Herzog* and *Henderson the Rain King*. *Herzog* emphasizes the hero's quest for self-awareness, whereas *Henderson* looks for a greater truth in contemporary America. *Herzog* understands that death is inevitable and expresses this moral concern and deep sensibility in his letters. He acknowledges his flaws and errors in order to strive toward living a meaningful and moral life. In order to shed insight on the protagonists' motivations and emphasize the need of self-awareness in the pursuit of truth, the story examines their interactions with reality teachers. Thus, this paper examines how Saul Bellow's novels *Herzog* and *Henderson the Rain King* deal with moral quandaries and self-discovery.

Unraveling the self: henderson's journey and ethical conflicts

Henderson is a rich guy who is unhappy with life and longs to know greater truths and his own noble character. When he visits tribes in Africa, such as the Wariri and Amewi, they enlighten him about the true nature of humanity. He is roused from slumber by King Dahfu, who imparts life lessons to him. This event enlightens his particular self, causing him to grasp the notion of greater reality tied to the self and return to his city. According to Bellow,

"[Henderson], the absurd seeker of higher qualities is a character most like him. Although the scene is Africa, *Henderson the Rain King* is a personal idyll a Myth that serves the cause of personal transcendence, the primitive, the voice of civilization, the heart of darkness, the heart of light." (Bellow MT, 14)

The novel highlights the significance of moral truth in a thorough and inner examination of the text by celebrating a key message via a philosophical romance where the hero seeks solutions through a series of episodes.

Bellow through *Henderson's Journey in Africa*, explores the ideas of consciousness and social reality. The main character separates from American consumerism and sets off on a journey with Romilayu, an African guide who provides spiritual direction. In order to reach universal

timeless validity, the story delves into the notion of consciousness and social syndrome, expanding its ramifications beyond contemporary reference. The main character changes from a lesser type of species to a higher type, searching for harmony and noble attributes in modern society. Bellow's novel achieves global timeless value by going beyond allusions to the present. Henderson encounters high order transcendentalist ideas in his quest for significance beyond the earthly world. Driven by his experiences and a desire for something greater, he sets off on a journey throughout Africa since he is unhappy with his normal existence. His search is an expression of his yearning for something more admirable.

Henderson sets off on a voyage throughout Africa, coming across various indigenous cultures including the Amewi tribe. Romilayu leads him to the Amewi riverbed and the Hinchagara plateau, where oxen are worshipped. Thoughts of his wife and kids trouble Henderson, but he ultimately forgets about them. He encounters Dahfu, the Wariri King, and Itelo, an English-speaking prince. Henderson finds out about the tribe's love for their livestock, as well as for the queen. But the cattle go on, heading for the water. Henderson is in charge of making sure the water supply is inspected and ready for usage. He chooses to use western technology to tackle the issue after discovering that the area is overrun with frogs, which seem weird and contagious. Henderson makes several unsuccessful attempts, such as poisoning and dredging. After deciding to employ bomb technology to eradicate all frogs, Henderson is humiliated when the bomb goes off and blows out the reservoir. This experience can be concluded as a test of consciousness and self-awareness perfection. The frog story represents the sins that must be eradicated during purification as the path to consciousness and self-awareness is a path of personal development. Later, Henderson travels to meet Dahfu, who is being accompanied by Wariri soldiers. He wants to change his personality in order to become a guy with more understanding after realizing that his existence is average. He is awakened to the consciousness of Being and Becoming by Dahfu, which permeates man's life with a greater reality that is known. Dahfu says,

"...that some people find satisfaction in Being. Being others were taken up with becoming. Being people have all the breaks. Becoming people are very unlucky, always in a tizzy... having to make explanations...if I had really been capable of the alert consciousness which I required I would have confessed that Becoming to come out of my ears...Time to Burst the spirit's sleep wake up, America." (Bellow HRK 136)

Further, Henderson takes part in the rain-making ritual of the Wariri tribe and is made Rain King, or SUNGO. He joins Dahfu and sets out to find Gmilo, who is said to be the reincarnation of Dahfu's father. After Dahfu is killed by the imprisoned lion, Henderson finds out he must become the next king. Carrying a lion cub possessing Dahfu's spirit, he makes his way to America. This is a tale of a hero on a spiritual quest that narrates his attempts to flee contemporary society and search for basic necessities of existence, emphasizing his path to enlightenment.

Henderson understands that death is the ultimate conclusion of life since he has experienced it. He runs away after experiencing this freedom, signifying spiritual enlightenment. Henderson's voyage resembles a spiritual journey, which is only possible when one exists with moral

consciousness. The story tackles the notion of spirituality and moral consciousness. Henderson sets out on a quest to reject his former self and talks with Dahfu and Romalayu in an effort to comprehend the ultimate reality. He is inspired by the tribe to become self-aware. Henderson searches for a way out of the moral and spiritual disarray in his final scene in Newfoundland, which represents self-awareness. He investigates spiritual elements such as myth, nature, philosophy, and allusion in an effort to integrate individual being, existence, and non-existence and to create a cosmic vision.

Inner turmoil: herzog's search for meaning and moral quandaries

A psychic man who transcends prejudice and possesses natural fairness is prone to epiphanies. They may access the realities of nature, which may be enigmatic to the traditional human intellect, by letting go of their ego. Those who want greater truth, however, are aware of the mystique surrounding awareness. Herzog communicates his profound insights about the ego and moral consciousness with friends, family, and coworkers. His theories center on mental travel. The protagonist of the novel Herzog must negotiate the intricacies of a chaotic and abundant universe. In an abundant world, he pursues self-discovery as a scholar and political philosopher. He is disoriented and depressed after divorcing his first wife and being married to a Catholic. He turns introspective and starts sending letters to well-known people to share his innermost thoughts. He eventually learns that there is love in the world from people and settles into his Ludeyville house, accepting things as they are. In order to live a satisfying life, Herzog proposes that people should embrace a new outlook on life that is founded on the law of the heart and reestablish global connections. He prioritizes developing human traits like happiness, humility, and unity, choosing happiness over pain and pride over estrangement. Herzog's central query is the nature of the self and whether it necessitates individuality or universal ties.

Herzog's voice in the present world is distinctly 'Bellovian', shaped by his emotional and personal experiences as he makes an effort to connect his spirituality to the contemporary environment. Herzog is a personable individual who reacts enthusiastically to events and has a lively sense of life. His senses, feelings, and intellect allow him to investigate his environment, other people, and himself. He transforms everything into a human reality with the aid of his conscience, vision, and vigor. The novel opens with a silent allusion to Herzog's strangeness, which may have resulted from his desperate letter-writing efforts to reach out to the outside world. Herzog's need to be a part of his community again is reflected in this typography:

"One corner of his mind remained open to the external world. He heard the crows in the morning. Their harsh call was delicious. He heard the thrushes at dusk. At night there was a barn only...he saw roses winding about the rain spout... He looked keenly at everything but he felt half blind." (Bellow Herzog 08)

It is possible to say that the self-examination he does is both very subjective and true. Herzog acknowledges his own shortcomings and errors.

In addition to being philosophic monologues that reflect his life's issues and interpersonal interactions and make him feel like nothing in the world, the letters also function as an apology for his weakness, a declaration of his underlying

intentions, and a way to achieve mental stability. Herzog's letters are not just existential allusions but also an expression of his sanity through his refined nomenclature. He never stops thinking about this, recognizing that the body is like a cross, "In this view the body itself, with its two arms and vertical length, was compared to the cross, on which you knew the agony of consciousness and separate being" (Bellow Herzog 117). He keeps fostering philosophical notions about humanity, existence, and the soul.

Herzog understands that although happiness, self-actualization, and self-development are desirable outcomes for humans, they are also difficult to attain. He dreams of peace and a free, chaotic universe. Herzog's moral and intellectual search for himself is what propels him on his voyage into the outside world. He discovers that the excessive material wealth and spiritual sterility have dehumanized the surroundings. Heroes such as Herzog experience moral uneasiness and internal turmoil while trying to make things better. They discover insanity and a stifling of the unique self, witnessing the loss of mankind. These survival tales, which address issues of human existence and role in the cosmos, portray the hero's thinking as the source of pain. They also research historical awareness, which is obsessed with the fallout from cataclysmic events, revolutions, and wars. This awareness struggles with the metaphysical possibilities of historical reality, which has conditioned it.

The focus of the novel Herzog is on self-development and selfhood, which are difficult but worthwhile endeavors. Recognizing the significance of independence and self-reliance for realizing the potential of the soul, Herzog promotes self-reliance and spiritual oneness. But he also stresses the importance of love and community, as these things are necessary for real fulfillment. Herzog's viewpoint emphasizes how crucial these components are to reaching genuine pleasure. According to the novel, Herzog's self-awareness and moral consciousness enable him to see human pain and express compassion for the well-being of others. He longs for freedom from consumerism and an endless supply of both good and bad life. Herzog's goal is to achieve a greater level of realization that is devoid of self-loathing. He upholds humanism and shows concern for the well-being of others, exemplifying the good character or inner light that all people possess. All people possess an inner light or noble nature, which is the source of Herzog's compassion and care for the world and other people.

Conclusion

Materialism and a host of other issues of the modern world cause disillusionment, annoyance, and rivalry. However, by carefully using their skills and efficiency, people have the luxury of becoming great and escaping the tragedy of humanity. Great philosophers highlight that realizing one's own limitless potential is essential to leading a fulfilling life. This strength and achievement are increased by morality because moral knowledge makes a distinction between good and bad. The significance of moral principles for uplifting society and raising moral consciousness is emphasized by several faiths and notable intellectuals. A type of awareness known as consciousness directs one's thoughts, allowing them to carry out their tasks flawlessly and behave in accordance with their understanding of right and evil. The self is essential for changing one's personality and

character, and realizing the peaceful, contented self that is inside oneself and is perpetually trouble-free, sufficient, and leads to eternal fulfillment is the path to complete serenity.

In Bellow's novels, the idea of the self is explored, and protagonists are shown as self-aware, private individuals who embrace their true selves. They also have a strong sense of moral responsibility and a strong desire to bring about world peace. Bellow primarily aims to elucidate the concept of the self and underscore the significance of moral principles. Despite obstacles from both society and themselves, his heroes seek to define who they are and accept their moral conscience. Bellow's protagonists are those who pose basic questions about who they are, emphasizing the need of human healing and breaking free from worldly bonds. They urge society to break free from moral deterioration and navigate modern American life towards their true selves, much like a mariner.

The narrative of *Henderson the Rain King* tells the tale of a man who awakens his spirit and travels to Africa in search of enlightenment. He discovers that death is unavoidable as well. He gains fresh perspective and awareness from the voyage, and he discovers the reality of the life force's existence within humans. He is joyfully realized as a spiritually enlightened person upon his arrival in Newfoundland. Henderson is therefore looking for the self's identity. Herzog is a mental protagonist who, by his quest for self-development and self-discovery, aims to bring his inner and exterior worlds into harmony. Herzog's moral consciousness and the existence of the true self are the causes of his pursuit of introspection and self-awareness. Herzog's journey for self-hood and self-development is depicted in the novel. Herzog believes in the magnificence of the human heart and the significance of striking a balance between opposing forces.

Thus, in his works, Bellow delves into the yearning for one's noble essence and identity, connecting it to ethical awareness. An individual's ethical traits are reinforced and strengthened by both virtues. The author emphasizes the complementary nature of virtues and moral consciousness in his writing, which reflects a purposeful search for significance beyond the daily existence of man.

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