

# АКТУАЛЬНІ ПИТАННЯ ФІЛОСОФСЬКОЇ АНТРОПОЛОГІЇ

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## SEARCHING FOR THE TRUE SELF: THE WAY OF NONDUAL WISDOM

**Purpose.** This paper attempts at analyzing the phenomenon of the human self in the Western and Eastern traditions, its dissociation and alienation in the contemporary world, and meditation as a way to the True Self. **Methodology.** The author used anthropological integrative approach, philosophical hermeneutics, along with transpersonal approach. **Theoretical basis and results.** To overcome the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and alienation, modern individuals need to break through to the spiritual pole that provides them with ever new and deeper meanings; to go beyond the limits of dual thinking to perceive the true nature of their mind. The representatives of the Eastern religious and philosophical schools paid considerable attention to the problem of alienation, loneliness, and the ways of overcoming it. Trying to achieve the state of absolute unity, the Eastern traditions use meditation techniques, which have been developed over the centuries. Meditation contributes to the experience of the unity of existence - the state, in which the very idea of the own self disappears and the «subject – object» unity arises. Reaching the state of nonduality, meditators experience their deep involvement in all that exists. Their mind is filled with absolute peace and harmony; everything has deep meaning and value. They feel freedom. People become existentially absorbed in the world - the changeful world of artists and children, the world where everyone and everything undergo transformations. Meditation leads to the new horizons, to the awareness of infinity and diversity of life. **Originality.** Human integration into the cosmic body of the universe transforms their perception of the world. Returning to the world of space, time, and causation, being unable to escape the world of differentiation, individuals face a new dilemma. This entails internal conflict. To overcome it, they learn to cultivate the unbounded mind. Incorporation of mindfulness into our daily life brings many benefits. However, the molecular mechanisms of these processes are still insufficiently studied. Nowadays, scientists actively explore the effects of meditative, mind-expanding practices on the physical and mental health. **Conclusions.** Since the modern life becomes more tough and complex, people seek the way to a harmonious, balanced, and happy existence. It is therefore no coincidence that the spiritual heritage of the East has attracted vivid attention and considerable interest. The Eastern spiritual practices can be used as a guide to a happy human life.

Keywords: Self; Ego; meditation; nonduality; subject; object; Taoism; Zen.

*What was your original face  
before your parents were born?  
Zen koan*

## Introduction

Despite the increasing number of social groups, organizations, social networks, modern individuals experience the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and alienation. They cannot break through to their higher potential and grasp the true meaning of life. Therefore, the questions «Why should we live life?», «What is our final destination?» that often arise. On the one hand, it seems that this era of commercialized life, body and soul is devoid of spirituality. However, on the other hand, a person demonstrates a burning desire to reach the spiritual pole that enriches our lives, provides us with ever new and deeper meanings – the world without envy, hatred, anger, where dreams become reality, and each of us can cling to the wellspring of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. To get there, we have to say «Farewell» to our limited «Ego» that does not want to recognize others. This breakthrough to God, Absolute, Nirvana, Tao or the True Self is the way home.

Such a breakthrough requires a revision of the entire value system of an individual. These new values must meet the high spiritual and moral orientations and overcome «a horizontal existence, one in which all values are of equal significance – what Barrett calls the «flattening out of values». The urgent psychological and philosophical need of Western man today is a return to the vertical, to some central spiritual ideal principle about which he can orient his life» [6, p. 219].

Condemned to freedom, which is terrifying, modern individuals are necessarily lonely. Each step ahead cut them off from the other people, leaving face to face with their own mental abyss and the world full of catastrophic upheavals, the world that casts doubt on the faith in themselves, humanity, goodness, and justice. The dreams of the Enlightenment about the realm of reason have never become reality; this was evidenced by the terrible social political cataclysms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: classical rationality turned out to be a tool of «the will to power» and a human transformed into an element of economic, social, political, ideological systems.

Lacking the metaphysical certainties of the medieval people who knew exactly «how they should conduct themselves in order to rise from a corruptible world to an incorruptible and joyous existence» [11], today we must see that we do not differ greatly from those whom we condemn. We all

need to purify our souls. The modern era has raised questions that cannot be solved within the existing paradigm.

## Purpose

This paper attempts at analyzing the phenomenon of the human self in the Western and Eastern traditions, its dissociation and alienation in the contemporary world, and meditation as a way to the True Self.

## Methodology

The author used anthropological integrative approach, philosophical hermeneutics, along with transpersonal approach.

## Theoretical basis and results

The search for the «Self» is largely a reaction to the conviction that science is able to explain the world and determine human's place in it. Basically, this is due to the recognition that the reality we perceive is not the reality per se, but rather it is constructed by the mind. That is why postmodernity is very sceptical when it comes to the absolute truth. Through the lens of postmodern worldview, everything is an interpretation: we create our own reality by interpreting the world around us. The reality arises through our interpretation of what the world means for us personally [14]. Giving preference to a particular experience over abstract principles, postmodernism claims that the results of our own experience are relative – they are not final and universal. Thus, it tries to introduce a new understanding of an individual within its discourse.

Increasingly, people feel that their familiar world of order and stability gives way to the chaotic, unpredictable world possessing its own rules. Old scientific theories, multiply ideologies and systems of values are destroyed. This leads to the awareness of imbalance, ambiguity of human existence and thus to the new explanation and understanding of reality. To restore the lost ontological equilibrium, people need to adapt their «I» to this paradoxical world.

The problem of human identity, which eludes straightforward formal logical analysis, is a subject of discussion and debate and is still being examined by researchers [2]. The representatives of the classical Western philosophy identified human identity with his/her memory. Identity was linked to the humans' ability to think of themselves as

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«I», which remains identical to itself in different times and places [3; 7].

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Freud divided the human «I» into certain components that conflict with each other: the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. Freud emphasized that the unconscious (including the preconscious) is the central component that constitutes the essence of the human psyche, while the conscious is just a certain superstructure, which is based on and grows out of the sphere of the unconscious.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Derrida introduces a new concept of identity. This identity is not stable or predetermined but rather volatile and changeable: it is generated by individual perception of differences between «me» and «them». Even the concept of ownership is based on the indivisibility and continuity of human «I».

Lacan radically revises the classical concept of the subject. Whereas within the framework of the Cartesian tradition, the individual is seen as a certain substantial integrity, bearer of consciousness and self-consciousness and cultural reference point, according to Lacan, she/he is interpreted as a function of culture and intersection point of various symbolic structures. Culture is not an attribute of the individuals. Just the opposite – the individuals are an attribute of culture, which expresses itself through them. The very individual acts as nothingness, emptiness filled with the content of symbolic matrices.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that a homogeneous person does not exist; a person is always ontologically heterogeneous. There is no single entity as the center of its own. Subjectivity is not something autonomous, on the contrary, it exists as an association of groups of people, social, economic, information machines. The unconscious is never purely individual; it is always more or less collective.

Non-classical postmodern ontology is associated with open dynamical systems that can not be described through concepts based on the binary oppositions. Postmodern thinkers refer to the chaotic, illogical nature of the world, which can only be experienced as a result of empathic connection with the diverse world of people and cultures.

Trying to reconcile the continuity of being with the discreteness of consciousness, modern seekers of the truth appeal to the Eastern mystical traditions based on the idea of the unity of all things and singularity of the world. Eastern spiritual

teachings have gained popularity in the Western world. This interest is an evidence of the spiritual vacuum in the modern society.

Unlike the Western paradigm, the main characteristic of the Eastern philosophy and science, according to Northrop [16], is the non-mathematical, non-technical approach to the universe. The East did not divide the Universe into mechanical details, but sought to overcome the discreteness of culture in order to experience a single continuous reality. As Suzuki emphasizes [17], escape from the reality inevitably leads to the endless separation of its components. However, this separation is not rooted in nature. It is created by the human mind that splits everything into two halves. People perceive the binary oppositions not only as abstractions but as reality itself [7].

To overcome the dissociation of their «I», the individuals must go beyond the limits of dual thinking to perceive the true nature of their mind. The common human mind is absorbed by the concepts of duality, but the pure mind is not inclined to this false thought. Intellectual phenomena arise and disappear, but from a fundamental point of view they are empty. The mind does not exist in ever-changing external phenomena. As a result of careful observation we realize that the mind is emptiness. All concepts of duality are dissolved through this awareness.

Thus, Eastern sages do not oppose themselves to the environment. They perceive themselves as a part of integrated, holistic system. Rejecting the idea of active reorganization of the world inherent in the Western mentality, they tend to perceive Human – Nature unity, recognize Nature's hidden rhythms. They are aware that all elements of the world including themselves are the different aspects of the spiritual unity. For instance, Zen teaches us to respect and love nature, to live its life. Zen claims that nature is in us and we are in nature.

The representatives of the Eastern religious and philosophical schools such as Advaita Vedanta, Yoga, Buddhism, Taoism paid considerable attention to the problem of alienation, loneliness, and the ways of overcoming it. «This realization of unity with eternal Being overcomes forever ideas of alienation and meaninglessness, and a new and boundless freedom is experienced. The yogi knows that he is no longer bound to the vicissitudes of a transmigrating ego; his enlightenment experience

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has forever removed the ego-illusion, the source of human vice, and feelings of separateness, of alienation. He has discovered by direct experience that the real is the identity of samsara and nirvana, the pure unity without distinctions. Now, freed from egocentricity and its endless cravings in his intense awareness of identity with the Absolute, the yogi becomes master of his fate instead of the slave of an unreal ego. No longer ego-centered but centered in the eternal One, his ethical behavior is henceforth characterized by its spontaneity and all his conduct will be altruistic» [6, p. 222].

The configuration of the Western worldview is based on the existence of the subject and object; and «I» takes on its identification. «The fundamental neurosis of the European civilization is that it tends to perceive «I» according to the image of the God-creator and rejects that behind the «I», which is precisely the result of structuring the continuum of experience into «I» and «non-I» through the lens of particular time and place, there is a much more comprehensive reality» [1]. On the contrary, the Eastern mystic teachings claim that the true nature of reality is nondual and all binary oppositions are either unreal or inaccurate descriptions that are used for convenience.

Taoist worldview is not focused on the human: humans are not superior to the nonhuman world. The basis of the Taoist worldview is one unified pulsating Cosmos and all its manifestations. Taoism like any philosophical worldview is a peculiar way of perceiving and understanding the world – the world where Tao is the highest and ultimate reality, natural order of existence, absolute beginning and absolute value, which is manifested in being and at the same time is merged with the cosmic body of being. It is the supreme law of the universe, its substantial basis, and the principle of its emergence.

The universe and all its manifestations are inextricably linked organic unity growing out of deep, secret, hidden Tao. Everything that you can think of is within this principle. Taoist universe operates according to invariable natural laws. As a part of Cosmos, humans can become aware of these laws and act in accordance with them following the principle of Wu Wei. Wu Wei is the special kind of «joining the flow of existence», merging of the individual «I» and Qi, unity of subject and object.

The purpose of Wu Wei is to achieve a state of perfect equilibrium, a «soft, invisible» power.

When people live in accordance with Tao – the rhythms of the cosmic elements – their actions are completely natural. They find the right place in the world, they are deeply involved in Being, and the active subject is «dissolved» in the spontaneous behavior that is consistent with Tao. As Mason put it, «One thing basic to the Taoist belief is a re-definition of «self» or «ego». Taoists believe that the way we try to stand outside ourselves in the attempt of self-observation is the source of most, if not all, of our unhappiness and loneliness, simply because in order to observe as such, we must see our «self» as separate from other «selves». This creates many unnecessary and troublesome illusions, and is based on an untrue assumption: that organisms are mutually exclusive... The goal of Taoism isn't to obliterate the ego, simply because this isn't possible. In order to stop ourselves from seeing ourselves as separate, we must see ourselves as separate, which creates a never-ending paradox. The goal instead is to keep our attention on the greater whole, the process to which there is a pattern, which is known to always return the source» [13]. For the Taoists, the personal self arises from everything and is expressed in everything, that is, it does not have an independent essential structure. Being deeply aware of the true reality, the Taoists perceive themselves as a part of the Tao cosmic way.

Buddhist schools teach that the individual self does not exist. The subject – object duality is an illusion. The doctrine of Hinayana treats the human personality as an illusory and emphasizes the idea of the not-self and the absence of the self. For Mahayana thinkers, the very existence of human personality is delusive. Followers of Dzogchen are aware that mental images of things and emptiness are inseparable. Overcoming the binary patterns of thinking, an individual realizes that she/he is one with the object. Through meditation the Dzogchen follower learns that thoughts are not real.

The deep Eastern philosophical ideas are concentrated in Zen. Zen strives to rise beyond the formal logic and grasp the world in its nonduality. Only through personal experience can the essence of life be realized. The practice of Zen aims to open the eyes of the soul and see the basis of life. The truth is revealed as the absolute simplicity and naturalness of life. This is the limit of life in general, where there are neither deaths nor births.

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Trying to achieve the state of absolute unity, the Eastern traditions use meditation techniques, which have been developed over the centuries. Meditation acts as a means of addressing the binary oppositions of culture. It contributes to the experience of the unity of existence [7]. Meditation allows us to perceive the reality that can not be expressed verbally. To see the world as it is, we need to abandon the comprehensive activity of our mind, stop it, empty the mind, and eliminate our verbal power over the world.

Meditation purifies anxious mind and makes it more flexible. It eliminates any mistake and contradiction and prepares our mind for a new experience and intuitive perception of reality. Meditation is the best way to overcome automaticity of thinking, eradicate existing patterns of behavior, and develop human abilities and talents [7]. Since their early childhood, people lose contact with the unconditional reality and experience alienation from the world. During meditation, humans get rid of this poor state of mind experiencing a total cessation of the process of conscious thought – thought that Zen calls the «wrong thought». This is exactly what happens when a person experiences Samadhi – the state in which the very idea of her/his own self disappears and the «subject – object» unity arises. This is a state of enlightenment; quite, tranquil, silenced nondual mind; total «Self – Absolute» merging.

This state leads to a syncretic vision of the world. The individual awakes and realizes her/his eternal essence perceiving the unconditional reality as a «clear mirror». Reaching the state of nonduality, the meditator experiences her/his deep involvement in all that exists. Meditators perceive the world in completely unexpected yet real perspective; they see things in their true form. Their mind is filled with absolute peace and harmony; everything has deep meaning and value. Anxiety, fear, and tension become less important and not so unbearable. Humans understand that life and death, good and evil, spirit and matter are two different aspects of the same Unity. They feel an unusual silence of the mind. In this silence (or void) the sources of all activities are at rest. This is a state of pure existence – the initial form of human existence.

Coming back to the world of the conscious activity, meditators feel that Being has changed. Another self with a wide worldview, where there is no

room for hatred, envy and fear, replaces the old one. Individuals are no longer tied to their false mental constructs. They feel freedom. Human mind is completely changing. People become existentially absorbed in the world – the changeful world of artists and children, the world where everyone and everything undergo transformations. Meditation leads to the new horizons, to the awareness of the infinity and diversity of life.

Meditation helps to get rid of the personal status-role frame, collection of ideas, concepts, mistaken notions and dreams that our mind usually generates. It allows the individual to experience the current moment, «here and now» in all its true fullness. Being aware of the fact that they program their emic reality, humans become free in their actions and perception of the world; move beyond their symbolic territory; stop identifying themselves with this or that role and finally with their false Ego. «There are only two ways of living in life. One is to live it from the very core of your being – that has been the way of the mystics. Meditation is nothing but a device to make you aware of your real self – which is not created by you, which need not be created by you, which you already are. You are born with it, you ARE it! It needs to be discovered. If this is not possible, or if the society does not allow it to happen...and no society allows it to happen, because the real self is dangerous – dangerous for the established church, dangerous for the state, dangerous for the crowd, dangerous for the tradition – because once a man knows his real self, he becomes an individual. He no longer belongs to the mob psychology; he will not be superstitious, and he cannot be exploited. He cannot be led like cattle, he cannot be ordered and commanded. He will live according to his light, he will live from his own inwardness. His life will have tremendous beauty, integrity» [9].

### Originality

Human integration into the cosmic body of the universe and the awareness of the unity with everything transform perception of the world. The feeling of unity and pure existence can be experienced in relation to any aspect of life. Returning to the world of space, time, and causation, the human is faced with the fact that her/his shallow «I» tries to

raise the head again and bad thoughts come into the mind. This does not mean that the spiritual practice was useless. We have to observe our

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thoughts, recognize them, and then reject them. Indeed, in the light of the pure reason everything comes out from the shadow. Zen Masters say: «The emergence of bad thoughts is a disease, and treatment – do not let them develop». Unable to escape the world of differentiation, humans face a new dilemma. This entails internal conflict. To overcome it, they learn to cultivate the unbounded mind. Transcending different levels of development, self disintegrates with the previous level without rejecting it completely. As Ken Wilber emphasizes, «The point is that because the self is differentiated from the lower structure, it transcends that structure (without obliterating it in any way), and can thus operate on that lower structure using the tools of the newly emergent structure” [18, p. 94]. Every moment humans create themselves, their thoughts. This affects their further thoughts and actions. Any time they can change the aspects of their existence. They are responsible for their future and for the future of the mankind.

Leaving the metaphysical realm of the Eastern mysticism, let me stress that today more and more people are engaged in the practice of meditation.

Its positive impact on stress, anxiety, depression, chronic diseases is well-known. Incorporation of mindfulness into our daily life brings many benefits. However, the molecular mechanisms of these processes are still insufficiently studied. Nowadays, scientists actively explore the effects of meditative, mind-expanding practices on the physical and mental health [5; 9; 11].

### Conclusions

Since the modern life becomes more tough and complex, people seek the way to a harmonious, balanced, and happy existence. An ancient formula «Ex Oriente Lux» takes on a new meaning today. It is therefore no coincidence that the spiritual heritage of the East has attracted vivid attention and considerable interest. The Eastern spiritual teachings exist in an «open space»: they are not trapped by the only one ultimate truth. On the contrary, they perceive the world through the multi-faceted lens. In this world of nonduality all life forces are directed toward harmony and balance. The Eastern spiritual practices can be used as a guide to a happy human life.

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## У ПОШУКАХ ІСТИННОГО Я: ШЛЯХОМ НЕДУАЛЬНОЇ МУДРОСТІ

**Мета.** У статті зроблено спробу проаналізувати феномен людського «я» в західній і східній традиціях, його дисоціацію і відчуження в сучасному світі та медитацію як шлях до Істинного Я. **Методологія.** Для проведення дослідження був використаний антропологічний інтегративний підхід, надбання філософської герменевтики, а також трансперсональний підхід. **Теоретичний базис і результати.** Для подолання відчуття самотності, ізоляції та відчуження людині необхідно прорватися до духовного полюсу, який надасть їй життю нового і глибокого сенсу; вийти за межі бінарного мислення, щоб сприймати справжню природу свого розуму. Представники східних релігійно-філософських шкіл приділяли значну увагу подоланню відчуження від себе й від світу та направляли людину на її шляху до її справжнього дому. Для досягнення стану абсолютної єдності східні традиції використовують медитативні техніки, які розроблялися століттями. Медитація сприяє переживанню глибокої причетності до всього суцього: це стан, в якому зникає сама ідея власного «Я» і виникає єдність «суб'єкт – об'єкт». Людина бачить речі в їх дійсному вигляді, її свідомість набуває стану абсолютного спокою та гармонії, коли все має значення та цінність. Це є стан свободи. Арена розуму повністю змінюється. Людина стає екзистенційно поглиненою світом. Це світ митця, а також і світ дитини, який трансформується кожен мить, і разом із ним трансформується і сама людина. **Новизна.** Інтегрування з космічним тілом всесвіту, усвідомлення єдності з усім, що існує, змінює сприйняття світу. Повертаючись до світу, обмеженого простором, часом і каузальністю, усвідомлюючи неможливість уникнення світу диференціації, людина опиняється перед новою дилемою, з якою раніше не зустрічалася. Це тягне за собою внутрішній конфлікт, подолання якого необхідно навчитися, продовжуючи перебувати у цьому світі, уникати розрізнення, тобто розвивати у собі неприв'язаний розум. Інкорпорування медитації у повсякденне життя приносить чимало користі. Проте самі молекулярні механізми цих процесів ще й досі недостатньо вивчені. Сьогодні сучасна наука активно досліджує вплив медитативних практик, що розширюють свідомість, на фізичне і ментальне здоров'я людей. **Висновки.** Оскільки сучасне життя стає все напруженішим і складнішим, людина шукає вихід, який поверне її до гармонійного, зрівноваженого і щасливого існування. Тому зовсім не випадковим є те, що духовна спадщина Сходу привертає суттєву увагу та викликає глибокий інтерес. Східні духовні практики можуть стати дороговказом до щасливого життя.

*Ключові слова:* Я; Его; медитація; недуюальність; суб'єкт; об'єкт; Даосизм; Дзен.

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**Цель.** В статье предпринята попытка проанализировать феномен человеческого «Я» в западной и восточной традициях, его диссоциацию и отчуждение в современном мире и медитацию как путь к Истинному Я. **Методология.** В процессе исследования был использован антропологический интегративный подход, достижения философской герменевтики, а также трансперсональный подход. **Теоретический базис и результаты.** Для преодоления ощущения одиночества, изоляции и отчуждения человеку необходимо прорваться к духовному полюсу, который привнесет в его жизнь новый глубокий смысл; выйти за пределы бинарного мышления для восприятия истинной природы своего ума. Представители восточных религиозно-философских школ уделяли значительное внимание преодолению отчуждения от себя и от мира и направляли человека на пути к его настоящему дому. Для достижения состояния абсолютного единства восточные традиции используют медитативные техники, которые разрабатывались веками. Медитация способствует переживанию глубокой причастности ко всему сущему: это состояние, в котором исчезает сама идея «Я» и возникает единство «субъект – объект». Человек видит вещи в их истинном виде, его сознание характеризуется состоянием абсолютного покоя и гармонии, когда все имеет значение и ценность. Это состояние свободы. Человек становится экзистенциально поглощенным миром. Это мир художника, а также и мир ребенка, трансформирующийся каждое мгновение, а вместе с ним трансформируется и сам человек. **Новизна.** Слияние с космическим телом вселенной, осознание единства со всем, что существует, меняет восприятие мира. Возвращаясь в мир, ограниченный пространством, временем и каузальностью, осознавая невозможность бегства от мира дифференциации, человек оказывается перед новой дилеммой, с которой ранее не встречался. Это влечет за собой внутренний конфликт, преодолению которого необходимо научиться, продолжая находиться в этом мире, избегать различия, то есть развивать в себе непривязанный ум. Инкорпорирование медитации в повседневную жизнь приносит немало пользы. Однако сами молекулярные механизмы этих процессов до сих пор недостаточно изучены. Сегодня современная наука активно исследует влияние медитативных практик, расширяющих сознание, на физическое и ментальное здоровье людей. **Выводы.** Поскольку современная жизнь становится все более напряженной и сложной, человек ищет путь, который приведет его к гармоничному, уравновешенному и счастливому существованию. Поэтому совсем неслучайно то, что духовное наследие Востока привлекает существенное внимание и вызывает глубокий интерес. Восточные духовные практики могут стать путеводителем к счастливой жизни.

*Ключевые слова:* Я; Эго; медитация; недуальность; субъект; объект; Даосизм; Дзен.

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