

(MORALITY)

## The Cult of the Self

by F.-Ch. Barlet

Court-Appointed Defense Speech for Maurice Barrès versus Quaerens  
To Mister Quaerens,  
From *L'Initiation*, January 1892, pages 5 – 18.

Modern Introduction written by Steven Armstrong, S.I.

The following essay from *L'Initiation* (January 1892) is a spirited defense by F.-Ch. Barlet of a philosophical trilogy by Auguste-Maurice Barrès from 1888-1891, which was popularly known collectively as *The Cult of the Self* or *The Trilogy of the Self*. In it Barrès discusses, among other topics, the evolution of the Self, and the relationship of the Self and Society, and the resulting Service that evolves with the Self. Barrès was influenced by Symbolism, the artistic movement at the heart of the *Salons de la Rose+Croix* in Paris during the 1890s.

In addition to his literary work, Barrès served in the French Chamber of Deputies from 1889-1893, representing the region of Nancy.

Barlet was the *nom de plume* of Albert Faucheux, an important Parisian Occultist and an associate of Papus and Augustin Chaboseau. He served as the Grand Master of the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose-Croix beginning in 1879 on the death of Stanislas de Gauta, and served on the first Supreme Council of the Martinist Order, later known as the Traditional Martinist Order. He was one of the editors of the review *L'Initiation*. (Most of the issues of *L'Initiation* are available online in French at <https://www.martinists.org/l-initiation>.)

Barlet is responding to earlier comments on Barrès's work in *L'Initiation* by "Quaerens" (that is, "a Seeker") in November 1891. In an essay "The Real Plague," he argues that Egoism is at the heart of all the ills that were plaguing humanity at the time, chiefly militarism and misery. In the course of this, Barrès's *The Cult of the Self* is singled out for excoriation.

Barlet's defense consists in distinguishing the selfish egotism, which he, like Quaerens, decries, from the Universal Principle (the One Self) which is within each of us. As our realization of this Divine Self within evolves, we

become capable of higher service in Society.

The Realization of Self, and Service to humanity, our fellow creatures, and our planet continue to be vital to our life on Earth.

Here is the original article, translated from the French.

DEAR RESPECTED COLLEAGUE,

Please allow that by offering you, after many others certainly, all my congratulations on your vigorous article of November 2, 1891, on the *Real Plague*. I confess that the enthusiasm it inspired has happened to be for me, and for more than a reader perhaps, troubled by a painful feeling, because of the work you mixed it with. It seemed to me as if reading a beautiful sentence in itself yet issued by the effect of a judicial error. Let me, I pray you, appeal to your very self, although I was not asked to, if not by a strong desire to submit to you a set of subtle arguments, perhaps, but essential in my opinion, that this cause borrows from the doctrines that we hold dear.

Unlike you, indeed, dear and honored colleague, I believe that the *Cult of the Self* belongs to the purest occultism.

You did not have, I think, the opportunity to read this remarkable *Examination* that comes before the new edition of *In the Eye of the Barbarians*.; you would have seen that what you consider “a simple literary joke, a paradox for the love of art,” is instead a seriously meditated upon doctrine, vigorously spread by lectures or by the press, and which quickly reached out to our youth. The author’s explanations would have you understand also how his doctrine deserves such success, how we should rejoice at it and help it.

Think not that I did not want along with you to criticize selfishness, a principle of multiplicity, and primary source of all suffering.

I cordially applaud your just imprecations against this spirit of evil. But if, by the poverty of language, its name is at the head of the work, it is not the subject of the books of Maurice Barrès, full of a lofty spirituality.

Far from being here in front of this *real plague* whose haughty brutality causes, unrelenting, all the outbursts of generous hearts, we are in this serene atmosphere of principles where the depth and delicacy of thoughts can only be perceived through the firmest quietude of the soul.

In the metaphysical language of this region, *Cult of the Self* no longer means as below, the worship of the personal self, but *the Culture of the Self of*

*Fichte and Schelling*, this Universal Principle which lies hidden in the depth of the human being as in a sanctuary, assaulted, constantly threatened by the Non-self, by the *Barbarians*, who, despite the title, are the true egoists.

That very use of the expression egoism or egotism is easily explained. Staunch advocate of the Fraternity as one can be, it is impossible to interpret it as a complete abnegation of our own person on every occasion. Is it not clear that dedication must have its limits? Personally, I could never understand, but, as a vulgar degeneration, the legend that shows us the Buddha (a superhuman being who has renounced the splendors of Nirvana to educate humankind) ended his heavenly mission by throwing himself to the mercy of the tigress in search of prey for her cubs. No: each of us has our mission, our role (persona), our character to play in this world. It places us above a series of beings of a lower order, against which we have to save it; defending it against any external danger, removing all that is opposed to the fullness of its expansion is therefore a must.

Thus there are two versions of egoism!

One is aggressive, absorbent; it is a devouring center; it is the vulgar egoism, *nothingness in action*; the destructive plague you so rightly vowed to loathe.

The other, solely resistant, is initially unshakable to become a radiant center; it is the philosophical egoism of Being that watches over its very essence, *freedom*.

The first carries both *pauperism* and *militarism*; the hideous war of conquest! It is the war of the Barbarian.

To the second relate dignified and fortifying poverty; the cleansing war of defense, protection of the *Homeland*, of the *Self*.

It is the Barbaric Egoism that creates the Egotism of the *Self*; moreover, there lies the cause of the mystery in occultism. If the *Barbarians* are at war, it is to the satisfaction of the lower desires, while the *Self* that is defended by the Egotism against them is the source of the highest human sentiments; it is the inner humankind, this delicate seed that must grow constantly as the rationale of present humankind, and hope for its future.

Hear the statements so crisp and so elegant of Maurice Barrès on this point:

I understand that we will talk about solidarity: The first point

was to exist. And if you feel free from the Barbarians and truly the owner of your soul, look at humanity and seek a common path for you to commune.

... Ah! Let the moment come where the Unconscious will have me advance up the ladder of beings, that I embrace the Universe in all awareness! Then I will have reached that Self that is complete, that is my principle and my end, and the impulse of my culture. I will be absolute consciousness; I will be the Divine!

And this formula too:

“A common need agitates each and every one of us, defend our Self, then expand it to the point that it contains everything.”

Is not this a full Initiation? Are not its purpose and necessary preliminary effect clearly indicated there? Do you not recognize at all that which in occultism we call *psychic culture*? The Γνωθι σεαυτόν of ancient Initiates?

Knowing, wanting, daring, *keeping silent*. Is not this imprisoning the *Self* in the citadel of the individual conscience, protected from the attack of the Barbarians, in order to freely cultivate it? Besides, see the very code of Fraternity: the Gospel; how many examples does it not offer to us regarding the defense of the Self? The indignation against the Pharisees; the merchants in the temple chased with the whip; Christ's mother even pushed away as a foreigner when the esoteric unfolds; and the order given to him to leave his next of kin, and the statement that the Gospel takes war outside with inner peace!

The thing is that devotion, like any force in nature, becomes widely fruitful, and reaches the magical hills of the Fraternity only on the condition that it is *universalized*. If it is individualized, if it allows itself to fall into the *nets* of pity, it will perish there in favor of the forces of unimportant things. Undoubtedly a superb role, perfectly proper to provide what Buddhists call a rich *Dewachen*, but not to raise us up to the sublime spheres of the Fraternity. Remember, dear colleague, this beautiful fiction of the initiate Bulwer Lytton, entitled *Zanoni*. As this disciple of Mejnour, an initiate for centuries just as he was, yields to pity for Glyndon, and to individual love, his transcendental faculties are disturbed, fade, and he eventually dies, whereas the implacable Mejnour, master of the *Self*, survives to continue the great work.

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Do not fear that such a doctrine could be disfigured, by revealing itself, in the midst of the Barbarians: such a high spirituality is not to touch them. One cannot taste it unless knowing, like Philip, “to understand oneself as a moment of an immortal thing.” It must be “a Self that desires to keep itself, know itself, in front of fantasy, taste, pleasure, the much vivid wandering among the young and sensible beings.”

One must in order to enjoy this high culture, oppose “those who live as in a perpetual *Mardi Gras*, under formulas borrowed from the fashionable costumer.” One must “know and be willing to strive to grow.”

These are indeed chosen souls that Maurice Barrès prepares for us through the cult of the Self; he creates the breeding ground of that fraternal humanity your generous soul wants with all its heart. His disciples are the initiates of tomorrow for whom we will only have been the weak precursors. What makes me think that they may well be as many as we wish, is that the cult of the Self adds to its high qualities the advantage of being the transcendent morality best suited to the spirit of our time and to the providential movement of progress.

The evidence of this assertion goes back to very important observations that we will find perfectly set in the work of Maurice Barrès.

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Let us first consider the cult of the Self on the philosophical viewpoint. Morality based on pure sentiment is no longer acceptable today, however high its expression; the one driven by common sense is not enough either. Put in defiance against all our religious or scholarly instincts, we want to only obey the doctrines founded on experimental science.

Positivism, which was their first expression, turned first into utilitarianism with Stuart Mill and Spencer, then into monistic pessimism with Schopenhauer rehabilitated, and Hartmann, the philosopher of the Unconscious. But you know what anguish these subtle and cold morals torment us with. Similar to some mathematical demonstrations, they prove themselves without convincing us; they are like automatons living but without souls, to pull us along; they advance without going anywhere.

Now that spirit, the warmth that they lack, is given to them by the cult of the Self while synthesizing the forms of their evolution. The fatal

step is accomplished through it, here is crossed the threshold that separates naturalism from spiritualism. Thus, by reading Maurice Barrès, one wonders if it is still Goethe, Spencer, or Hartmann that we are hearing; if not rather Spinoza, Shelling, or Wronsky.

Hear these lines:

Here is first the reason for being of this scientific morality:

“Not finding in their entrance into life, a master, axiom, religion, or prince of men<sup>1</sup> that impose on them, the sincere youth should first serve the needs of their Self; the first point is to exist.”

Here are their results:

We are the ones creating the Universe; such is the truth that permeates every page of this little work. Hence the conclusions: the Self discovers a universal harmony as it has a wider and sincere consciousness of the world. This is understandable, it creates in accordance to itself; it is sufficient that it actually exists in a universe that is solely that of its thoughts, to see prevail the beautiful order according to which the designs of a lucid mind will necessarily adjust to each other!

Here is, finally, the purpose much higher than that of pessimism:

“Thus, through vivid expansion, the Self will melt in the unconscious. Not disappear there, but extend for itself the inexhaustible forces of humanity, of universal life.”

You have noticed, undoubtedly, that the spiritualism of Maurice Barrès is still wholly Indian; it is closer to what among us we call esoteric Buddhism; this is still the character of its current opportunity. The Buddhist Protestantism is indeed, by the subtlety of its metaphysics, the natural intermediary between positive philosophy and spiritualism. The reason is clear: it is negative as our science, in that it thinks primarily to *receive* for its own benefit; but at the same time as it has its foot rest on our individual egoism, its head rises to the highest metaphysical regions. A great occultist has clearly defined it by calling it “spiritualized egoism.” We must rise to still more detachment to attain that providence-like spirituality by forgetting ourselves for universal redemption. It is surely difficult and rare to get there directly from our deep individualistic analysis. This is why esoteric Buddhism is more easily spread among Protestant peoples who have suffocated their sentiment the more, or

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(1) A very remarkable Trinity the author is careful to point out; it indeed marks the different powers in History, with their chronological order giving the law of evolution.

among scholars exclusively impassionate by accuracy<sup>2</sup>. Here at home, India attracts by its positivism but repels by its dryness; Maurice Barrès entertains it through conscious activity; conserving it in the Nirvana.

Let us examine the sociological point of view:

The above quotations have already shown to you how much it takes for the philosophical doctrine of Barrès to inflict a harsh denial upon his political views. There is however in their consistency such interesting observations that they deserve more attention.

Notice first how this doctrine is essentially democratic.

Let us review the definition of the *Barbarian*, it is not the uneducated being at all; Barrès strongly denies this heresy:

By what gross professional obsession would I separate humanity in artists, makers of works of art, and non-artists? If Philip complains to live under the eye of the Barbarians, it is not because he feels oppressed by humans without culture or traders; his grief is to live among beings whose vision of life is a dream opposed to the one that he conceived of it, even if they were also gifted scholars.

The *Barbarian* is the usual pedantic, inflated with the undigested science of others; he is the “system-person mounting the pessimistic donkey”; the satisfied individual who suffocates under the mask of *conventions* “under the formulas borrowed from the fashionable costumers” all the protests of oppressed nature to his advantage.

All their beliefs, all their feelings are Court coats hanging obsolete and flabby on unworthy souls! - They contradict the unconscious by eluding to play the character for which they were fashioned from all eternity - Soldiers, judges, moralists, educators, to distract the fools from the terror you put them in, let them be clearly exposed under your harsh reasoning, the remorse of surplus and the imbecility of most among you.

Now where do we find them widespread, these barbarians living in a “continuous” Mardi Gras? Where? If not in the social category that likes to proclaim, according to their appetites, even more than from their duties: *the ruling class!* It has known, as had in the past religion and nobility, its time of greatness and good work. However, its downfall is for the most part in the corruption of the *end of century*.

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(2) This is what explains the success of the Theosophical Society in England and America, and its failure in France.

Here we see the great law of evolution that Lejay will show us in his next book: the succession of the three Trinitarian principles in the form of nobility, bourgeoisie and people, to achieve their synthesis. The bourgeoisie cycle is ending: the torch of civilization is now passed on to democracy; the social form to approach the still idealistic reign of Fraternity must currently pass through it. "The popular soul is the guardian of virtues past and keeps the tradition of the race; within it like in the interior of a crucible where any action bears its share of immortality, the future is coming."

However, the People are not a *Barbarian*, and also one of the ultimate goals of the Self free from barbarism is to participate in the happiness of the people. The cult of the Self is completely democratic:

The people are not a Barbarian because they live by instinct, are spontaneous, natural, and true.

Humankind united by a common passion creates a soul. Each person possesses one within, but does not even know it; only in the atmosphere of a large gathering, in contact with some passions that strengthen the science that, forgetting itself and its small thoughts, it allows its unconscious mind to expand.

The popular soul is born from the sum of these unconscious minds. To create it, only workers will do, common people, more spontaneous, less tied by small interests than the thoughtful minds. It is similar to each of those who compose it, and is identical to none. It surpasses any individual in wisdom, vitally. What it decides spontaneously are the necessary conditions for life.

Also, how cherished by Barrès is this collective spirit!

"What is the soul of the people? I want to shudder with it, understand it through a detailed analysis, and, for love finally get to be the conscience of it."

These feelings belong to the third degree culture of the Self; I recall the expressions that indicate it, as they are essential to another *social* viewpoint.

It is not enough that the Self existed; as it is alive, it must be cultivated, acted upon mechanically (study, curiosity, and travels).

If it is hungry again, give it action (seeking fame, politics, industry, and finance).

And if it feels too dry, follow your instinct, love the humble, the poor, those who make the effort to grow.

Do not you perceive in this Trinitarian program the essential quality without which democracy almost always perished: the hierarchy!

Not the artificial, tyrannical hierarchy, that by self-preservation and lack of anything better, we take from the old legacy of past civilizations; but this natural hierarchy that confirms equality, ensures freedom, and develops fraternity, because it is based on the natural growth of the Self from Instinct up to Intuition. Here, authority is the essential, real value.

At the bottom the Self that seeks to grow by mechanical action, opens its seeds -The Laborer.

In the middle the liberated Self emerges in full force as an ardent social laborer: in charge of the State, glory, industry, high finance, and government, the class which truly and rightly directs political society.

At the top the Self, which rises up to the love for the humble and the weak, that forgets itself into devotion, the true nobility, that of the soul.

Let us add to that the state described elsewhere where “the Self has expanded to the point of including All.” Will you not have both of the major degrees of *Initiation* and the classes of this *Synarchy*, which is based on sacred science!

Such is the true significance of the cult of the Self. That is how it must lead to this social form for which you call the advent, where there will be no *Barbarian*, or they will be stifled. I do not mean war and poverty (necessary tests for still many centuries to come), but their hideous caricatures: the militarism by which might is right, and pauperism, the shameful side of opulent egotism.

It would remain to see through which institutions this fruitful cult of the Self could be promoted. However, I dare not even extend this much long defense. Besides, you have undoubtedly seen that institution. The vigorous satire of Maurice Barrès pretty well denounces it too:

It is a public education, fairly free in its ideas to develop in every one our own originality, instead of mutilating it in an academic mold; fairly widespread to present itself to every capacity; and finally quite complete and synthetic enough to lead each student exactly to the special rank which he or she is capable of.

I cannot demonstrate to you here its possibility. However, here is much more than enough, I hope, to convince you, dear colleague, that the cult of the Self must meet the most legitimate aspirations of your generosity.