


Most of my character traits - whether commendable or not - stemmed from my background, directly, hammered into me by a rigorous, moralistic education or evolved from the above through mutation and modification. My bookishness belongs to the first category - bequeathed to me by ancestors who, in all probability, had been reading and writing for at least a thousand years - a distinction which most aristocratic families cannot claim and some, do not even wish. Be that as it may, affinity to language and by implication to organized thought is the core of a secretive jewish pride; when the going gets tough, me and my ilk can turn off the outer world on command and attend only to our inner thoughts.

Arguably, self-absorption alters the mind's sense of its continuous existence and identity. Observing the external environment, the 'I' intuits its own geometric continuity; interacting with objects, it is sensibly linked to a chain of causes and effects. Defined as a temporary renouncement of external events, self-absorption, though, leaves real space, anchoring the 'I' squarely only in time; the only sense of continuity, possible for the 'I' when it attends the products of its imagination, is one derived from links between one thought and another - the inner flow of consciousness. Severing the connection to the real world, deprives the 'I' of the means to establish its own spatial or mechanical continuity and its sense of continuous identity depends solely on the frantic march of its own thoughts and images in time. Various psycho-pathologies are associated with excessive self-absorption. Obviously, a mind that defines itself mostly by its inner flow dulls its connection to the external environment. Generally, the more autonomous and independent from its surroundings, the less anchored in real space. Inner preoccupation also defines the 'I' independently of the body, thus enhancing the mind-body problem as well as aggravating the relation to other bodies-minds. Self-absorption should not be mistaken, however, for self-centeredness or narcissism. Whether intuited or imagined, the stream of thought, as William James observed, is always seemingly concerned with things other than itself. Inevitably, though, the more time it spends spinning itself in motion, the more aware the 'I' of its own machinations, the more doubtful of its grounds and the less sure of its drive. Self-awareness can be highly disruptive; like the giant of legend who stumbled in a tunnel when realizing for the first time the complexity of the bodily movements required for his running, the obsessively self-absorbed is prone to paralyzing neuroses.

*I know every side-symptom of self-absorption because I suffered from all of them at some point or another; you could say the tendency is in my blood and nothing associated with it, foreign to me. Even as a young boy I was always immersed in thought; walking to my school, wondering alone in the streets of Rehavia, exploring the valley after a rain storm - there was always something exciting to think about. Most of my friends were the same - what one would expect from the first crop of an experimental transplantation of jewish genes from Europe in the the wilderness of the Near East; almost all of them left. In almost every case, the call of excellence resonated more deeply and strongly as even our parents sadly acquiesced; at the very least, the great majority of us feel we lived up to their high standards and exacting expectations. That was no small feat - at least, not for me: Few things made me happier than the joy in my mother's eyes when introducing me to friends in her bridge parties as her visiting Stanford professor son.*

I can imagine similar scenes in the living-rooms of the Herzls or the Schnitzlers or the Prousts or the Einsteins or in thousand other childhood homes of lesser men like me where proud mothers bragged to their friends through the ages about the success of their bright-eyed boys. The archetypical bond between jewish mothers and their sons nourished people like me in each and every period of history and even zionism could not shutter it. "He who had his mother's unquestioning love, wrote Freud - another classic case from that category - will enjoy for the rest of his life the feeling of an unvanquished conqueror."

In my case, and many others, I suspect, the link between mother and son was a continuation of an earlier connection - for some it was a daughter-father relation and, in my case, a bond between siblings: my mother's named me after her oldest, most beloved brother - a violinist, a philosopher and a womanizer to boot who died shortly before I was born - and, deep down, I always knew that emulating him was the surest way to gain her approval. My thirst for affection must have guided me intuitively how to do so: As a four year old child, I played on a wooden sword my father made as a make-belief violin; a year later, I implored my parents to buy me the real instrument and started taking violin lessons. The choice of philosophy as a vocation came naturally and at a relatively young age; understanding The Poverty of Philosophy required me to familiarize myself with myriad latin terms and obscure theories and, relishing the challenge, I started to read books about philosophy and continued doing so ever since. Soon enough, my philosophical interest shifted to logic; even there I followed my late uncle's footsteps - the doctoral dissertation he wrote in Heidelberg was about the logic of Meimoidus.

 others and Sons