

Be True to Myself? I'd really rather Not ...

True to Self – or God

Apparently, the Girl Guides (Girlguiding UK, or something, it's now called) have recently re-written the Guide Promise, removing the pledge of loyalty to "God and the Queen", and replacing it with being "true to myself". What an awful thought! Many people, when they hear that sentiment, think of the phrase "To thine own self be true", Polonius's parting words to his son Laertes, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act 1, Scene 3, line 78). But there, it has been suggested, something else is meant. The best account I know is found in the *Shakespeare Quotes* section of the **e Notes site**, which I will quote in full:

"Polonius has in mind something much more Elizabethan than the New Age self-knowledge that the phrase now suggests. As Polonius sees it, borrowing money, loaning money, carousing with women of dubious character, and other intemperate pursuits are "false" to the self. By "false" Polonius seems to mean "disadvantageous" or "detrimental to your image"; by "true" he means "loyal to your own best interests." Take care of yourself first, he counsels, and that way you'll be in a position to take care of others. There is wisdom in the old man's warnings, of course; *but he repeats orthodox platitudes with unwonted self-satisfaction. Polonius, who is deeply impressed with his wordliness, has perfected the arts of protecting his interests and of projecting seeming virtues, his method of being "true" to others.* Never mind that this includes spying on Hamlet for King Claudius. Never mind, as well, that many of Polonius's haughty, if not trite, kernels of wisdom are now taken as Shakespeare's own wise pronouncements on living a proper life." (*Italics are mine*) (No personal author is cited) <http://www.enotes.com/shakespeare-quotes/thine-own-self-true>

At best, the Polonius sentiment is concerned with selfishness, and in this great age of self, self, self, the prospect of the Girl Guides' organisation helping further to promote this, in the minds of the young, is very depressing. The author of the above specifically mentions the idea of the "*New Age self-knowledge that the phrase now suggests*", and it is well known that in much New Age thinking, divinity is said ultimately to rest *in the self*, either as a present reality, or as a desired future goal; the delusion of self-divinity, or of people seeking divinity for themselves, is equally a prospect of disaster and horror; idolatry is surely involved.

The Christian view, by contrast, is that people – as they are *now*, unlike what they were when God created them – are very imperfect ("Deceitful beyond measure", a Biblical prophet says), and that even the long, hard task of self-improvement by way of doggedly practicing virtues, and removing tendencies to sin, can only be of partial effect, not change one's essential nature. You and I are at best God's "work in progress", and there can only be progress if the *self* is successively, progressively, broken, sloughed off, the ways of God replacing them; even then, we cannot return to our original state *in this life*. But if we can, as much as possible, destroy, remove and obliterate self, and put on God, then we are at least moving in the right direction.

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