

## Understanding Self-Esteem Holistically: Integrating Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Perspectives

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**Abstract**

Self-esteem is one of the fundamental concepts in psychology that relates to an individual's assessment of his or her own worth. This article aims to examine self-esteem from a philosophical perspective that includes three main dimensions, namely ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The approach used is a literature study by examining various contemporary psychological and philosophical literature. Ontologically, self-esteem is understood as a psychological construct that is subjective but is formed through interaction between individuals and their socio-cultural environments. Epistemologically, knowledge of self-esteem is acquired through a variety of approaches, both empirical and reflective, which include psychometric measurements, behavioural observations, as well as the subjective experiences of individuals. Meanwhile, axiologically, self-esteem holds an important value in human life because it plays a role in the formation of self-identity, mental health, and the individual's ability to adapt and make decisions. The results of the study show that the understanding of self-esteem cannot be separated from the philosophical context behind it, so an integrative approach between psychology and philosophy is needed to understand this concept more comprehensively. Thus, the philosophical study of self-esteem makes an important contribution to the development of psychological theories and practices that are more reflective, contextual, and oriented towards human values.

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### INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is one of the central concepts in psychology that relates to the evaluation of individuals on their own worth (Albarracin et al., 2024; AlHarbi, 2022; Cichocka et al., 2024; Merino et al., 2024; Muris & Otgaar, 2023; Weber et al., 2023). In the development of modern psychology, self-esteem is not only understood as an intrapersonal aspect, but also as a construct influenced by the social, cultural, and life experiences of individuals. Recent studies show that self-esteem has a significant relationship with various aspects of life, such as mental health, psychological well-being, and the adaptability of individuals in facing life challenges. This places self-esteem as one of the key variables in understanding the dynamics of human behaviour (Cui, et al., 2024).

In the last five years, research on self-esteem has developed quite rapidly. Bibliometric studies show that publications related to self-esteem continue to increase and reached their peak in 2024, signalling the high academic attention to this concept (Nabilla, et al., 2025). Empirical research also reveals that self-esteem plays an important role as a predictor in various domains, such as mental well-being, resilience, and academic success (Cui, et al., 2024). In fact, interventions based on increasing self-esteem have been proven to help individuals overcome various psychological problems, especially in adolescents (Mujiati & Kurniawati, 2024).

In addition, recent literature reviews confirm that self-esteem is closely related to social factors, such as social support, recognition from the environment, and interpersonal interaction

(Ding et al., 2022; Karunarathne, 2022; Mehrabi et al., 2022; Rippon et al., 2024; Zhao & Wang, 2023). Self-esteem is not only formed from the reflection of the individual, but also from how the individual is perceived and valued by his or her social environment (Merino et al., 2024; Muris & Otgaar, 2023). Research shows that social support and self-efficacy have a significant contribution to the formation of self-esteem as well as its impact on individual resilience (Mujiati & Kurniawati, 2024). On the other hand, low self-esteem is often associated with various psychological problems, such as loneliness, anxiety, and decreased mental well-being (Wisesa & Purwandari, 2024).

In the context of education, self-esteem is also an important factor in supporting a sustainable learning process. Systematic studies show that the development of a self-esteem-based curriculum can contribute to character formation, learning motivation, and student welfare in a holistic manner (Nuryana, et al., 2023). This shows that self-esteem is not only relevant in the realm of clinical psychology, but also has far-reaching implications in the field of education and human resource development.

However, most studies of self-esteem still focus on empirical and psychometric approaches, while in-depth philosophical studies are still relatively limited (Jiang & Tong, 2025; Jyung et al., 2024; Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025; Padgett et al., 2025; Ratnasari et al., 2026). In fact, to comprehensively understand self-esteem, a philosophical approach is needed that is able to answer fundamental questions about the essence (ontology), source of knowledge (epistemology), and value (axiology) of the concept. From an ontological perspective, self-esteem can be understood as a complex and multidimensional psychological construct. From an epistemological perspective, the question arises about how self-esteem is known, measured, and validated. Meanwhile, from an axiological perspective, self-esteem is related to the values inherent in human life, such as meaningfulness, happiness, and self-actualisation.

Furthermore, the development of self-esteem studies in a global context also shows the need to look at this concept more reflexively and contextually. Self-esteem cannot be separated from the cultural background, social values, and belief systems that surround the individual. Therefore, a philosophical approach is important to examine self-esteem more deeply and critically, so that it is not only understood as a purely psychological variable, but also as a phenomenon that has ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions.

Based on this description, this article aims to examine self-esteem from a philosophical perspective that includes three main dimensions, namely ontology, epistemology, and axiology. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding and enrich the development of psychological theories and practices, especially in understanding humans as beings who are not only rational, but also reflective and valuable.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research, which aims to examine the concept of self-esteem from a philosophical perspective, including the dimensions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is not on the collection of field data, but on the conceptual and critical analysis of various relevant scientific literature sources.

The data sources in this study consist of secondary data in the form of reference books, articles from reputable national and international journals, and scientific proceedings published in the last five years (2020–2025). The literature used was selected based on the criteria of relevance to the topic of self-esteem and philosophical studies, the credibility of the publisher, and the theoretical contribution to the development of the concept being studied.

The data collection technique is carried out through documentation, namely by identifying, classifying, and inventorying relevant literature sources. Furthermore, the data were analysed using content analysis techniques and thematic analysis. The analysis process

was carried out through several stages, namely: (1) data reduction by selecting information relevant to the focus of the study, (2) data categorisation based on three main dimensions (ontology, epistemology, and axiology), (3) data interpretation to find patterns, relationships, and conceptual meanings, and (4) inductive conclusion drawing.

To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses the source triangulation technique by comparing various literature from different perspectives. In addition, the consistency of concepts and arguments between sources is also checked to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. With this approach, it is hoped that the results of the research will be able to provide a comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth understanding of self-esteem from a philosophical perspective.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Essence of Self-Esteem in an Ontological Perspective**

In ontological studies, the main question asked is about the nature of the existence of a concept: what self-esteem is and how it "exists" in human beings. Self-esteem is generally understood as an individual's evaluation of his or her own worth. However, ontologically, self-esteem is not a stand-alone entity, but rather a complex, dynamic, and multidimensional psychological construct.

Self-esteem is subjective in nature because it is rooted in the internal experience of the individual, but it is also intersubjective because it is formed through social interaction. This means that the existence of self-esteem cannot be separated from the relationship between individuals and their social and cultural environment. In this context, self-esteem is not only "owned" by the individual, but is also the result of a social process that involves recognition, acceptance, and judgement from others.

Furthermore, ontologically, self-esteem can be understood as a phenomenon that lies at the intersection of cognitive, affective, and social aspects. The cognitive aspect relates to how the individual evaluates himself or herself, the affective aspect relates to the feelings towards oneself, while the social aspect relates to how the individual is perceived by others. These three aspects interact with each other and form a unique self-esteem structure in each individual.

From an existential perspective, self-esteem can also be understood as part of the human effort to find meaning and self-identity. Individuals who have healthy self-esteem tend to be able to accept themselves as a whole, including their strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, low self-esteem often reflects an internal conflict or a mismatch between the ideal self and the actual self.

Thus, ontologically, self-esteem is not merely a psychological attribute, but is a complex phenomenon that reflects human existence as a self-conscious, social, and meaningful being.

### **Self-Esteem as an Epistemological Construct**

From an epistemological perspective, the focus of the study is directed at how knowledge about self-esteem is acquired, validated, and developed. Self-esteem as a psychological concept has been widely researched through various approaches, both quantitative and qualitative. One of the most common approaches is the use of psychometric instruments, such as the self-esteem scale, which are designed to objectively measure an individual's level of self-esteem.

However, this approach raises an epistemological question: to what extent can subjective self-esteem be objectively measured? Self-esteem measurements often rely on self-reports, which are susceptible to biases, such as social desirability bias or an individual's tendency to present themselves positively. This shows that knowledge of self-esteem is not completely value-free, but is rather influenced by certain contexts and perspectives.

In addition to the empirical approach, knowledge about self-esteem can also be gained through a phenomenological approach that emphasises the subjective experience of the individual. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how the individual interprets himself or herself, but has limitations in terms of generalisation. Therefore, an integrative approach that combines empirical and reflective methods is needed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.

In the development of psychology, self-esteem is also influenced by the paradigm that underlies research. Positivist approaches tend to see self-esteem as a variable that is statistically measurable and analysable, while constructivist approaches see self-esteem as the result of contextual social constructions. This paradigmatic difference shows that knowledge of self-esteem is not singular, but plural and dynamic.

In addition, cultural factors also play an important role in the epistemology of self-esteem. The concept of self-esteem that develops in Western culture may differ from that in Eastern culture. In collectivist cultures, for example, self-esteem is more related to social harmony and the role of individuals in groups, rather than personal achievements alone. This emphasises that knowledge of self-esteem must be understood within the cultural context that surrounds it.

Thus, epistemologically, self-esteem is a complex and multidimensional concept, whose knowledge is acquired through various approaches and influenced by the social, cultural, and scientific contexts in which it is studied.

### **The Value and Meaning of Self-Esteem in an Axiological Perspective**

Axiology discusses the value and usefulness of a concept in human life. In this context, self-esteem has a very important value because it is directly related to the quality of life of individuals. Healthy self-esteem contributes to psychological well-being, adaptability, and positive interpersonal relationships.

Individuals with high self-esteem tend to have confidence, are able to face challenges, and have a positive outlook on themselves and the future. On the other hand, low self-esteem is often associated with various psychological problems, such as anxiety, depression, and difficulty in establishing social relationships. This shows that self-esteem has instrumental value in supporting an individual's mental health.

In addition, self-esteem also has intrinsic value because it is related to respect for human dignity. Respecting oneself is part of respecting the existence of human beings as meaningful beings. In this perspective, self-esteem is not only seen as a tool to achieve a certain goal, but also as an important value in itself.

In the context of education, self-esteem has an important role in shaping students' character and learning motivation. Students with positive self-esteem tend to be more risk-taking, more open to new experiences, and have higher intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the development of self-esteem is one of the important goals in the educational process.

Furthermore, in the social context, self-esteem also has implications for relationships between individuals. Individuals who have healthy self-esteem tend to be more able to appreciate others, show empathy, and build harmonious relationships. Conversely, low self-esteem can trigger defensive, aggressive, or withdrawing behavior from the social environment.

Thus, axiologically, self-esteem has a very broad value, both in individual, educational, and social contexts. Self-esteem not only contributes to individual well-being, but also to the creation of a healthier and more harmonious society.

## **The Relationship of Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology in Understanding Self-Esteem**

The three philosophical dimensions—ontology, epistemology, and axiology—are inseparable in understanding self-esteem as a whole. Ontology provides an understanding of what self-esteem is, epistemology explains how we know self-esteem, while axiology explains why self-esteem is important.

The three are interrelated and form a comprehensive framework of understanding. For example, an ontological understanding of self-esteem as a social construct will affect how we measure it (epistemology) and how we utilize it in practice (axiology). In contrast, the values we consider important (axiology) can also influence the way we define and understand self-esteem (ontology).

In the practice of psychology, the relationship between these three dimensions is very important. Without a clear ontological understanding, the concept of self-esteem can become vague and difficult to operationalize. Without a strong epistemological foundation, measurements and research on self-esteem can lose validity. Meanwhile, without axiological considerations, the use of the concept of self-esteem can lose relevance and meaning in human life.

Therefore, an integrative philosophical approach is needed to understand self-esteem more deeply. This approach helps not only in the development of theories, but also in practice, such as in counseling, education, and psychological interventions.

## **Implications of Philosophical Studies of Self-Esteem in Psychology and Education Practice**

The philosophical study of self-esteem has significant implications in the practice of psychology and education. In the field of counseling, an ontological and epistemological understanding of self-esteem can assist counselors in designing more appropriate and contextual interventions. Counselors focus not only on improving self-esteem scores, but also on understanding the self-meaning that counselors have.

In education, this study encourages a more holistic approach in student development. Self-esteem is not only seen as a result, but also as a process that is influenced by the learning environment, social interactions, and individual experiences. Therefore, teachers and educators need to create an environment that supports the healthy development of self-esteem.

In addition, this study also has implications for the development of psychological research. The philosophical approach encourages researchers to be more reflective of the assumptions underlying the research, as well as to open up space for more diverse and contextual approaches.

Thus, the philosophical study of self-esteem makes not only a theoretical contribution, but also a practical one in various fields related to human development.

## **Synthesis: Towards a Holistic Understanding of Self-Esteem**

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that self-esteem is a complex and multidimensional concept that cannot be partially understood. A philosophical approach that includes the dimensions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology allows for a more holistic understanding of these concepts.

Self-esteem is not just a self-assessment, but a reflection of human existence as self-aware, social, and meaningful beings. Knowledge of self-esteem is gained through a variety of complementary approaches, while its value is reflected in its contribution to the quality of life of individuals and society.

With an integrative approach, self-esteem can be understood not only as a psychological concept, but also as a philosophical phenomenon that has a deep meaning in human life. Therefore, the development of self-esteem studies in the future needs to continue to integrate

psychological and philosophical perspectives in order to produce a more comprehensive, reflective, and contextual understanding.

## CONCLUSION

The philosophical study of self-esteem shows that this concept has a broader meaning than merely an individual's assessment of oneself. Ontologically, self-esteem is a psychological construct formed through the interaction between personal experience and the influence of the social and cultural environment. Self-esteem is dynamic and evolves over time, reflecting the existence of humans as self-aware beings in need of recognition. From an epistemological perspective, the understanding of self-esteem is obtained through various approaches, both quantitative and qualitative. Measurements through psychological instruments provide an overview, but are not yet fully able to capture the subjective experiences of individuals. Therefore, a more integrative approach is needed so that the understanding of self-esteem becomes more comprehensive and contextual. Axiologically, self-esteem has an important role in human life. Healthy self-esteem contributes to psychological well-being, self-confidence, and the ability to establish positive social relationships. In addition, self-esteem is also related to respect for human dignity, and thus holds fundamental value in both individual and social life. Thus, the three philosophical perspectives — ontology, epistemology, and axiology — complement each other in providing a complete understanding of self-esteem. This approach confirms that self-esteem is not only theoretically important, but also has practical implications in the fields of education, counselling, and human development. Future researchers are encouraged to develop integrative measurement tools that combine quantitative scales with qualitative reflective methods to capture both the objective and subjective dimensions of self-esteem. Educators and counsellors should design intervention programmes that not only aim to raise self-esteem scores, but also foster a deeper, value-based understanding of self-worth rooted in cultural and personal contexts. Additionally, cross-cultural studies on the philosophical foundations of self-esteem are needed to enrich global psychological discourse.

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