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Feeling of Self-Worth (Selbstgefühl) in Else Voigtländer (1882–1946)

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In *Vom Selbstgefühl* (1910) (identical to *Über die Typen des Selbstgefühls*), Else Voigtländer undertakes an accurate analysis of a category of feelings named “feeling of self-worth” and its types.

With this concept (first employed by Lipps), she refers to those feelings in which we experience our own value. Confidence, self-affirmation, pride, vanity, shame, cowardice, haughtiness, remorse, embarrassment, ambition, self-abandonment and self-esteem belong to this class (Voigtländer 1910: 5). Common to these feelings is that we experience ourselves as elevated or depressed, as low-spirited or heartened, and that this experience makes us aware of our own value. She defines the feeling of self-worth as follows: “an affective valuating consciousness of one’s own Self which each of us has and which is subject to fluctuations” (Voigtländer 1910: 19, own transl.).

Feelings of self-worth display three features: 1) Qualitative Feel: When our feeling of self-worth is elevated, we have a pleasant experience, while a degradation in our feeling of self-worth is experienced as unpleasant; 2) Awareness: we become aware of our own value. Such awareness cannot be reduced to an objective judgment about ourselves (we can judge ourselves to be talented, but this positive judgment does not lead to a feeling of pride); 3) Self-Awareness: they are accompanied by an awareness of the Self, which might occupy a central or peripheral position (Voigtländer 1910: 54).

There are two main types of feelings of self-worth (Voigtländer 1910: 21–22): a) *Vital feelings of self-worth (vitalen Selbstgefühl)* are instinctive, natural, and innate. They are unconscious and unrelated to our achievements. They are the affective background orientation that is characteristic of each individual (a person can be confident or tend to self-affirmation, while others by nature have the opposite tendency); b) *Conscious feelings of self-worth (bewusstes Selbstgefühl)* are neither innate nor unconscious, but fluctuate in accordance with our achievements and defeats, and depend on our attitude towards life. This kind presupposes the objective appreciation of one’s own accomplishments and, thus, they imply a “split of the self” (*Teilung des Selbst*) (Voigtländer 1910: 21).

Similar concepts in contemporary philosophy (though developed independently of Voigtländer) are Keshen's notion of "self-esteem feelings" (Keshen 1996: 3-4) and Kristjánsson's notion of "self-conscious emotions" (2010: 83).

Primary Sources:

Voigtländer, Else 1910. *Vom Selbstgefühl*. Leipzig: Voigtländer Verlag.

Secondary Sources:

Keshen, Richard 1996. *Reasonable Self-Esteem: A Life of Meaning*. Montreal: McGill University Press.

Kristjánsson, Kristján 2010. *The Self and Its Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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