

## 6. Masculinity is Humble, not Prideful

Great thinkers for centuries have recognized *pride* as the most fundamental and insidious human flaw. It is poison in the soil of man's morality.

*"According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind." - C.S. Lewis*



In our culture today pride is exalted as a virtue. Often you hear words like, "Show some pride in your work." "Proud to be American." "Proud parent of honor student." "Don't you have any pride?" Usually we parrot these words mindlessly. On the rare occasion when challenged about what we mean, we will often freeze in confusion or defend our words by insisting that there is bad pride (like "hubris" or "arrogance") and good pride (like "magnanimity" or "self-respect"), and that we all can have both types. This normal view sounds reasonable, but it is denial - like a cocaine addict claiming that there's good cocaine and bad cocaine, and has given the two types sophisticated-sounding names to help rationalize his addiction. Pride is even more addictive.

*"In reality there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortifying it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself." - Ben Franklin*

Pride is normally experienced as a gentle, warm, serene feeling. We relax for a moment and appreciate something good for which, whether we realize it consciously or not, we are taking

some credit. During this moment of relaxation, we give ourselves permission to not think about what we would normally notice nor the potential negative ramifications of our action or inaction.

Pride comes in a variety of disguises and causes many different effects. It has been studied and called by different names depending on the form, effect, and context: such as The Licensing Effect, The Bathsheba Syndrome, Sudden Wealth Syndrome, Sense of Entitlement, the Dunning-Kruger Effect, Platonicity, and more. The following are only a few.

## **Pride's Disguises and Manifestations**

### **Pride, the Licensing Effect**

Many repeatable psychological studies show that “a prior choice, which activates and boosts a positive self-concept, subsequently licenses the choice of a more self-indulgent option.”

- Promised donations to charity leads to the purchase of items of luxury over items of necessity.
- After performing voluntary community service, a person will pay more for sunglasses.
- “Male participants who were provided the opportunity to establish their credentials as being nonprejudiced (eg by disagreeing with blatantly sexist statements) were subsequently more likely to be sexist than were male participants who first responded to more ambiguous statements about women.”
- Shoppers in grocery stores are more likely to buy ice cream or cookies after picking up fresh vegetables, and vice versa – avoiding the middle section of the store in both cases.
- After committing an altruistic act, a person is more likely afterward to purchase \$50 designer jeans than a \$50 vacuum cleaner, and less likely to donate to charity.
- Following only a *decision* to perform community service, study participants agreed more strongly with statements such as “I am compassionate”, “I am sympathetic”, “I am warm”, and “I am helpful”.
- Etc.

These studies conclude furthermore that “participants’ expressing only *an intention* to commit a virtuous act is sufficient to license a more self-indulgent choice.” To amplify matters, this effect occurs unconsciously in nearly all cases. When we do something good, we feel we deserve to do something self-indulgent, and we don’t know it. We don’t even have to be doing something that is actually “good”. *Feeling* good about ourselves – merely establishing or confirming what psychologists call a “positive self-concept” - is sufficient.

If I feel good because people admire me for any reason, even if they don’t know me personally – let’s say that I’m Bill Cosby, Bill Clinton, or Tiger Woods, as extreme, famous examples – I automatically feel permission to indulge in decadent behavior, to be lazy, and to repeat the behaviors that give me the most pleasure. If I make a lot of money and it shows, I’m seen as successful. I get positive feedback from people, and I feel that I deserve to be a little self-indulgent. It is nearly impossible to be popular, let alone wealthy and/or famous, and not be affected by pride in this way.

*“I’ve never known anyone to have gotten an enormous amount of fame who wasn’t, at a minimum, confused by it and had a very hard time making decisions.” - Paul Simon*

The effect is amplified by the fact that new technologies have enabled the leisure time, entertainment, and an environment of income scalability that has the power to bestow practically anyone with fortune and/or fame at the push of a button, regardless of merit or virtue. A century

ago, in order for a person to double his income, he would have to produce twice as much, working twice as long or hard. Not anymore. You can create something once, electronically, let machines or computers do the work, and make millions of dollars sitting on your ass, or showing your ass, or playing games, or having a popular YouTube channel. Think of Britney Spears, the Kardashians, our sports heroes, or practically anyone who is rich/famous. We laude them with attention, which makes them feel good, giving them license to be bad, or at least ignorant and negligent. It also can engender the spectator with toxic envy, for no good reason.

*Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. – Matthew 19:23-24*

This also applies to self-help authors, motivational speakers, and evangelists who are sufficiently convinced that they are helping so many people that they *deserve* to live in luxury and extravagance. Or, the executives at many large corporations and banks, who, by all sober accounts, have manipulated laws to insulate themselves (justifiably in their minds, since they are so “important”) from the consequences of their bad decisions. As we saw in 2008 – they don’t have skin in the game, they get their bonuses anyway, their “fuck you money”, and the workers/taxpayers get stuck with the bill.

*Wealth is thus bad ethically only in so far as it is a temptation to idleness and sinful enjoyment of life, and its acquisition is bad only when it is with the purpose of later living merrily and without care. - Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

With regard to all “successful” people, we trust market forces behind the assertion that “they get paid what they’re worth”, which makes them feel more important/valuable, increasing their pride yet more. However, when we take a hedonistic culture and amplify it with technological scalability, we can observe that pay is not proportional to value (certainly not for life and liberty), and that we are promoting pride, greed, and vanity. This economic system, saturated with flagrant selfishness and disregard for others, rather than the free-thinking virtuous pursuit of rational self-interest, is a distant cry from what Capitalism’s founding fathers had in mind. Our political and economic systems have evolved into gross distortions of the originals. We’ll get what we deserve, pride before the fall, unless we wake up.

In our new virtual world, without an “importance gage” based on more tangible survival pressures, our awareness can easily and safely slide from one object to another with no immediate negative outcome. It is thus very easy and tempting for me to filter out of my awareness the data that does not make me feel good about myself and to amplify in my awareness whatever it is that does make me feel good. Our newest electronic devices and social technologies (FB, Twitter) are perfectly suited for this type of filtering, intensifying the temptations of virtual image-building even more. I am free to imagine myself as moral, righteous, loving, funny, intelligent, interesting, popular, authentic, etc; even if an empirical sense-based examination suggests the opposite. If someone criticizes us in the virtual world,

we can simply “unfriend” them. We can easily block any feedback that we find undesirable. All of us, but children in particular, are vulnerable to a technologically-assisted socialization that raises our self-concept, engendering a kind of delusional narcissism.

### **Pride, Disempowerment and Sense of Entitlement**

Nearly synonymous with The Licensing Effect, the term “sense of entitlement” casts a wider net for pride, capturing the fact that it extends all the way down the socio-economic ladder. Rather than being rooted in an elevated self-concept, a sense of entitlement is bestowed upon a person when they become convinced that they are a helpless victim of malevolent forces beyond their control. Regardless of its veracity or lack thereof, the relentless drumbeat of “you are powerless because of systemic discrimination,” for example, eventually makes a person believe that they are indeed an innocent victim, and that they deserve to receive compensation and care (typically in the form of money, of course) that they have earned only because of their status as a victim. This belief sinks in deep, below consciousness, so lo and behold, they actually become what they’ve been taught that they are - *powerless*. It’s easy to find “leaders” all too willing to grab more power. These leaders, the messengers, have come to believe it too, and they feel guilty, so more money is allocated to the powerless, and the viscous cycle is subsidized and reinforced at all levels. Unwittingly, maybe unintentionally, the powerless victim has been instilled with pride – the sense that they are *entitled* to receive without expending any effort or giving anything in return, that they *deserve* compensation for having their power usurped.

### **Pride, Feeling Superior**

Probably the most often recognized source of pride is when a person experiences a favorable comparison over someone else. When I win at anything, when I feel better than another person for any reason, I feel good. This is pride. Competition is not bad in itself, it is a necessary truly masculine Yang value. However, when it not balanced by authentic feminine Yin energy – wisdom, cooperation, compassion, concern for others – it becomes easily addictive. When we constantly compete and are obsessed with winning simply to get another dose of pride, we are vulnerable to taking advantage of others while our pride blinds us to the reality that we are doing so. We are wired to repeat pleasurable behaviors, and it takes a conscious act of free will to understand it, let alone do anything about it. If we continue to take pleasure in favorable comparisons, our virtue will be reduced to least common denominator behavior, which is the opposite effect of good and healthy competition. As long as I take pride in being better than the guy next to me, I don’t have to work so hard. Imagine the Nazi concentration camp guard who takes pride in his concern for life on earth because he spends his spare time planting trees while his co-workers do not. Imagine modern-day Americans who take pride in recycling efforts while they unconsciously participate in the rapid destruction of the foundation of terrestrial life, the soil and water.

## **Pride, The Dunning-Kruger Effect**

.....”is a cognitive bias in which low-ability individuals suffer from illusory superiority, mistakenly assessing their ability as much higher than it really is.” This seems self-explanatory. I choose to not elaborate here, at least not yet. Google it if you want.

## **Pride, Platonicity**

It’s the observation that we don’t know what we don’t know, and don’t want to admit it. We are shamed for saying “I don’t know” from a very young age. In school we are rewarded for getting the correct answer, and punished for saying “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure.” We respect people who show confidence and have answers, and we discourage doubt. We are conditioned and socialized to want to be one of these people, so in haste we err. We strive to present ourselves as knowing more than we actually know, whether we realize it or not. It works for its desired effect: We are admired. Besides making us primed for licensing, we don’t really care about our ignorance, because we already have credit for having knowledge, which is more important than the content of the knowledge itself. In this state, of Platonicity, we think we know more than we do, and this makes us vulnerable to wrong beliefs (eg I know that all swans are white, because all the swans I’ve ever seen are white), that lead to bad predictions (eg I will never see a black swan). Platonicity is a term borrowed from economist/philosopher Nicholas Nassim Taleb, elaborated in his book *The Black Swan*.

## **Reducing Pride. “the complete anti-God state of mind”**

Most of us cannot imagine a life without pride, or we just reject the notion outright. Go ahead and ask people what role pride plays in their lives. Most people will say that they really don’t see *pride* as a problem unless it rises to the level of *arrogance*, even though we have no definitive distinction between these two words. Few of us study why pride has been referred to as “the utmost evil” by many Christian and non-Christian thinkers, nor do we deeply introspect on it ourselves. It is very easy to dismiss this entire uncomfortable topic with a wave of the hand and say “it’s just semantics.”

*How can I, or anyone, understand the effects of pride unless I have observed for myself the absence of it? It’s the same with anything that’s potentially very addictive.*

- Take caffeine for instance. How can I be sure that it does not have much of an effect as long as I continue to drink my daily cup of coffee or Diet Coke or whatever? The truth is, I cannot. I must quit consuming all caffeine for at least a month or so, and then try it again, before I can recognize its effects.
- Another example is sugar. Combining all sources (ordinary table sugar plus sugar added to other foods, but not counting naturally occurring sugar like in milk and ripe fruit) the average consumption of sugar per person in the US and Europe is currently at about 140 lbs per year, up from 8 lbs per year in 1800, and essentially zero lbs in 1500. At these modern astronomical levels, it takes a tremendous effort to remove it from our diet. Yet this effort, a temporary removal followed by a re-introduction to previous levels, is what would be required for a person to make an authentic claim as to its actual effects.

Of course, the extent and duration of the of the abstinence would have to be subjective, but there can really be no other sure way.

- Another example is food itself: only by occasionally fasting; can I understand hunger, satiety, and the many physiological and psychological effects of eating food.

The same is true with pride. Like caffeine, sugar, and food; pride is massively abundant and it widely accepted as normal in today's Western world to have as much as you want. In order to determine its effects, the first step is to remove pride by subtracting all sources of it. To put this another way, I cannot know how my nervous system processes an elevated self-concept due to praise and admiration unless I can observe what happens when they are no longer present. The only way to accomplish this would be to refrain from all pleasurable behaviors and temptations, especially the respect of others; and to do so for a period that sufficiently allows me to observe my experience in the absence of the greatest number of potential sources of pride. Take at least a week off of work, and instead of going on vacation; stop facebooking, shut off the phone, no emails or texts, and even shut off everything electronic, (150 years ago, you'd have no electronics anyway) and to the greatest possible extent, don't produce or consume anything (even food for a few days), and avoid all contact with others. This seems almost impossible in today's world, but centuries ago, this would have been a lot easier. Do the best you can. This is the *virtuous* application of the "just do it" mentality/physicality, that of a "man of action". Then re-enter society and continue living as before. This practice, a type of asceticism, may sound extreme, difficult, demanding and, dare I say, masculine: but it is the only way to introspect on pride. *(Some religious people have noted that if the duration of this self-denial lasted forty days, it comes very close to the original intention of Lent: To experience humility. By reducing pride, we weaken our ego boundaries, our "selves", and have a chance at entering into communion with God.)*

It may not be necessary, indeed it may not be possible, to eliminate pride completely even in the short term, let alone the long term; but this doesn't mean that we should not try. It is then possible that a man can feel pride in having reduce pride, and even pride in having reduced the pride he feels in having reduced pride, and on and on, ad infinitum. Isn't this still pride? Yes, but this type of second, third, and fourth order pride is successively watered-down; and the man is giving himself a chance at being motivated by virtue instead of vice. As the foundation of vice, the less pride the better.

Pride deprivation sounds very hard. It's easier to remain in our virtual realities and simply imagine what pride reduction would feel like. The result is fruitless: When we imagine a life without pride, because of our lifelong dependence on it, we instantly think of sadness, helplessness, failure, laziness, depression, humiliation, feeling insulted, and other forms of sloth – the ordinary pain-body (as Eckhart Tolle calls it). We have all felt these forms at one time or another, but they need not constitute our only frame of reference. To keep the pain of sloth at bay, we let in some pride. Pride protects itself insidiously. It infects and cripples our imaginations. It renders us completely blind to the most powerful virtue, pride's only antidote, its opposite: Humility. Only humility has the power resist the temptations of the pride. That's the difference between caffeine, food, and sugar on the one hand, and pride on the other. Removing caffeine removes a stimulant, that's all. Little is gained. Going without sugar will change your sense of taste and maybe make you healthier.... maybe. Not eating any food will eventually kill you.....not really an accomplishment. However, going without pride – and all its sources – can give us insight into the crown of virtues, humility.

**Note:** The Licensing Effect studies also demonstrate that it does not occur if the prior altruistic act is not voluntary. If the motivation to perform community service is attributed to an external agent, a person's relative self-concept does not increase. In other words, a person does not feel pride if they perceive that they are being coerced to be good. Most of us agree that this passes the commonsense smell test. However, what do we do with this finding?

One interpretation would be to suggest that, in order to prevent pride and its effects, we should force people to do good deeds, to be generous, to cooperate, to share, etc. That way, they will be good without feeling pride and license. (We should be like Totalitarian Communists). But this then suggests that we should relinquish individual freedom and responsibility to an external agent (lawmakers, governments, parents), and do so on a large scale. Take away a significant degree of freedom. Make laws that force good behavior and punish bad. Give control over to a leviathan. *(Some religious people would call this approach Idolatry, obeying a false god, which would lead to oppression, slavery, suffering, and destruction. This makes sense to me).*

Another would be to say "Aha, see, pride is good, because it motivates good behavior, we should encourage it, not discourage it." (We should be like Ayn Rand Objectivists). But then this leads to the licensing effect, to hedonism ultimately. Or does it? Just because I am more likely to reward myself after performing a good deed does not make me a bad person, does it? I deserve to be rewarded for being good, right? But, then how much am I being rewarded, is it in proportion to my altruism? And am I actually doing something good, or do I just perceive myself as good because I want pride and have the best intentions in my heart or because people "like" me on Facebook? And who decides if I am good? Me? Who answers all these questions? Consensus? *(Some religious people would say that Original Sin was disobeying the voice of God, so we are exiled from Paradise - meaning that we have eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, so we alone, in absence of verbal directives from God, must take responsibility and pay the consequences for all our decisions between good and evil, right and wrong, true and false. Furthermore, regarding how we feel about our decisions, we should feel the same level of pride - absolutely zero - as if the voice of God was still speaking to us as an external motivator as He did when we were in Paradise. In other words, embrace individual freedom, try to be good, make choices, and do everything without pride, only humility. This make sense to me, too.)*

When I carry these interpretations out, my mind tends to go in circles a bit, but then it settles on the notion that my confusion stems from the fact that I simply lack the basic feminine Yin characteristics of natural cooperation, intuition, and wisdom to balance my corrupted masculine Yang values. That seems likely, is consistent with what I've come to learn, and is therefore my contention.

So I have another approach: I assume humbly that I am neither smarter *nor* wiser than centuries worth of great thinkers that have warned us about pride. Especially if I have not done the hard work of pride deprivation, I am always struggling - just barely cognizant of how pride is operating below consciousness to influence my thoughts and behaviors. So it seems that the wise thing to do, in the interests of life and liberty for all of us, is to oppose external control, take responsibility myself, and simply always try my best to do the right thing regardless of how it makes me feel. Show to myself that I can be good without laws to coerce me. If my actions make me feel good, I must be hypervigilant against rewarding myself. Use my free will. If I suspect that I might be indulging, that suspicion is enough to make me stop. If people respect me because I am "successful", yet they don't know me well, reject their respect. This is the work required of liberty. In some religions there are expressions: "Glory to God" (not to "Glory to Me!"), "Praise the Lord" (not "Praise Me"). These now makes sense to me. And to see this clearly, I don't have to be religious, only humble.