

Jesus and the Virtues of Pride

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1. Introduction

In an obituary of his former colleague George Nakhnikian, Edmund Gettier wrote the following:

When I arrived at Wayne [State University], I learned that George had a vision of the future of the department. He was fond of saying to his new group, a group that at that time consisted of Hector [Castañeda] and me, that he realized that he would never be hired by a department of the status that he wished. So if he were to be in such a department he would have to create it himself. The first statement expressed a rather remarkable humility from a man with three Harvard degrees. But the second expressed anything but humility. The second reeked of an optimism, courage, and self confidence not expected in someone who would make the first. Little did I know then that George's vision transferred into action would make my next ten years professionally some of the happiest of my life.¹

Nakhnikian appears here unvain, without conceit, and unpretentious, but ambitious for philosophy and for his assembled circle of philosophers — by Gettier's judgment,

¹ <http://www.philosophy.indiana.edu/people/docs/gn-memorial-book.pdf>.

optimistic, courageous, and self-confident. And, as the last sentence indicates, Nakhnikian's positive attitudes about himself were not an empty, subjective self-esteem, but a virtue that would bear the fruit of effectual agency: he actually built a department where a high flyer like Gettier was happy to work.

Gettier is surprised to see humility combined in a single character with traits that we might be inclined to call aspects of pride: self-confidence, ambition, a secure sense of agency, courage, and independence of mind. He isn't alone in feeling that humility and pride are traits that repel one another. The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that such an intuition is embedded in modern English when it makes the first definition of 'humility' "a. The quality of being humble or having a lowly opinion of oneself; meekness, lowliness, humbleness: the opposite of *pride* or *haughtiness*." Congruently, David Hume says,

Thus *Pride* is a certain satisfaction in ourselves, on account of some accomplishment or possession, which we enjoy: *Humility*, on the other hand, is a dissatisfaction with ourselves, on account of some defect or infirmity (Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions*, Section II).

It's not a bad guess that such a view of humility is a vestige of Christianity, the history of which is peppered with statements like one from Saint Benedict's *Rule*, where he says that in the sixth step of humility the monk "thinks himself a poor and worthless workman in his appointed tasks," and that in the seventh step, "a man not only confesses that he is an inferior and common wretch but believes it in the depths of his heart" (§§139 and 140).

Humility then comes to be thought of as marked by deep shame, social insecurity, timidity, defeatist lethargy, servility, low ambition, and the like — qualities that undoubtedly make odd companions of virtuous pride.

But the paradigm individual for Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth, as well as the earliest (New Testamental) understanding of his character, doesn't seem to fit this self-flagellating conception of humility. In a key passage for the concept of humility (*tapeinophrosunê*), the apostle Paul commends the virtue to the congregation at Philippi saying,

Complete my joy by being of one mind, one love, one spirit, one concern, not in rivalry or conceit, but in humility ceding to others more importance than yourselves, each of you not pursuing your own interest, but also others' interest. Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus who, being in the form of God, didn't regard being equal to God as something to be insisted on, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born as a human being (Philippians 2.2–7).²

We propose an account of humility, inspired by this passage, that takes as its point of departure first, the references to 'rivalry' (*eritheia*)³ and 'conceit' (*kenodoxia*),⁴ and second, the 'not insisting' (*ouk ... hêgêsato*) on the kinds of enhancements that rivals and

² Roberts's translation.

³ *Erietheia* is variously translated, and different translations seem to pick up on diverse aspects of this vice, or diverse vices that go by the name. The Revised Standard Version has 'selfishness,' the New International Version has 'selfish ambition,' the King James Version has 'strife.' In our translation of it as 'rivalry' we try to pick up on the "spirit" of the KJV's sense of 'strife.'

⁴ *Kenodoxia* is translated variously as 'conceit' (Revised Standard Version), 'vainglory' (King James Version), and 'vain conceit' (New International Version).

conceited persons insist on, of which being equal to God would surely be the most extreme case. Just as Jesus' humility consists in his being 'empty' of the claims and perquisites of Godhead,⁵ Paul commends to the Philippians that they 'empty' themselves of vices like *eritheia* and *kenodoxia*. In addition to the anti-humility vices that Paul mentions here, others in the same class that come in for censure in the New Testament are domination (lording it over others; Matthew 20.20–28), hyper-autonomy (Galatians 3.10–14), presumption or arrogance (Matthew 20.20–28), vanity or pretentiousness (Matthew 6.2–6, 16–18), snobbery (James 2.1–13), self-righteousness (Luke 18.9–14), invidious pride (along with its obverse twin, envy; Mark 15.10), and ethnicism and sexism (Luke 10.29–37; Ephesians 2.14–16; Galatians 3.28). This list is not complete, but it will do for our present purpose.

Admitting that 'humility' may sometimes be used for a vice or range of vices (this is what Hume would seem to suggest and emphasize), we propose that the *virtue* of humility consists in the absence of the various vicious forms of pride just listed, and which we'll explore at greater length in the next section. On this account, it turns out that virtuous humility *is* incompatible with pride — *vicious* pride. But not with pride, full stop. Gettier's description of Nakhnikian suggests a conception of pride that differs markedly from arrogance, conceit, and the rest, a virtuous form of pride that combines easily with genuine humility. Indeed, as we'll suggest in section three, Jesus can be taken to be the New Testament's paradigm not only of virtuous humility, but also of virtuous pride. Both virtues are at odds with deep shame and the other kinds of low-mindedness that are sometimes called 'humility.' We close with a brief discussion of those traits, which we

⁵ Christ's condescension is of course not motivated by his emptiness, but by his love.

call the *vices* of humility, with the aim of appreciating more fully the value of their opposing virtues.

2. The Vices of Pride and Their Vehicles of Self-Importance

On our understanding, we can speak in the singular or the plural of the virtue(s) and vice(s) of both pride and humility, depending on whether we stress the differences among the sub-species of each, or their commonalities. We will mostly speak in the plural, because of our interest in distinguishing the sub-species. The vices of pride, the absence of which constitutes virtuous humility, encompass three general areas of human selfhood: the self as agent, as having special entitlements or privileges, and as a self among other selves. The third area admits division, so we group the pride vices into five species:

- 1) *The prides of distorted agency* (selfish ambition, domination, and hyper-autonomy);
- 2) *The prides of corrupt entitlement*⁶ (arrogance and presumptuousness);
- 3) *The prides of empty self-display* (vanity and pretentiousness);
- 4) *The prides of invidious comparison* (snobbery, self-righteousness, invidious pride, and envy); and
- 5) *The prides of tribal superiority* (racism, sexism, ethnicism, homophobia, etc.).

The two vices that Paul mentions in the Philippians passage cited above — rivalry and vain conceit — belong to the fourth species. But if we translate *eritheia* as ‘selfish

⁶ Of course, it’s the *sense* of entitlement, not the entitlement, that is corrupt. For symmetry of expression we exploit the awkward subjective sense of the word that the Oxford English Dictionary designates as definition “c. The belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment.”

ambition' (NIV), it would be a vice of distorted agency. The larger genus that encompasses all five species is unified by the concern for, or interest in, a value that we call *self-importance*.

'Self-importance,' in our usage here, is a contrived term. As used in ordinary English, the term is perhaps a synonym or near-synonym for 'conceit,' which is one of the vices of pride; we speak of someone as *being* self-important, and we mean that he is conceited. But conceited people are not typically *interested in* being conceited, and might even be horrified by the suggestion that they are. Instead, they are interested in being *important* in a specific way, which we think is suggested by the meaning of the names for the five classes of vicious pride, and which we attempt to specify further by our names for the classes into which we divide the vices. We are saying that the kind of importance that people with the vices of pride are concerned to have involves such things as using one's agency for personal importance independently of the real value of one's actions, taking over others' proper agency, and eschewing others' contributions to one's own agency; having entitlements beyond what is proper to one; getting the (usually) positive regard of others in abstraction from what is actually excellent; and being superior to others and having others be inferior to oneself, either individually or in tribal terms. All of these thoughts or usages are usually less than fully conscious, and often deeply submerged. Rationalization plays a large role in people's self-attributions in this field. We label the five kinds of the vices of pride with what the viciously prideful person is concerned to have or get as a *way* of having or getting self-importance. Accordingly, we call the proximate object of the person's concern a *vehicle* of self-importance. It could also be called a *device* of self-importance.

2.1 Distorted agency

Agency — doing things, being a source of changes by acting — is a way of being genuinely important or achieving importance as a person. This is because, as Aristotle emphasizes, agency, especially as embodied in choice, is a teleologically essential attribute of human beings. To be fully formed as a human being is to be an excellent doer of actions. But what is an action? Action is always an *agent's* doing of *something*; the notion of agency integrates these two aspects. It is not just behavior, but a *performance* (of some behavior) *for a reason*. As such, the identity of any particular action, and thus of an agent's particular dispositions to action, is determined in part by the agent's reasons (either episodic or dispositional). Thus ambition, as the desire to be the doer of great things so as to “*be someone*,” is ethically ambiguous. It involves a conception of personal importance as tied to agency, but it also involves at least a vague conception of the specific nature of the envisioned accomplishment.

Here the principles distinguishing virtuous from selfish ambition are something like this: 1) The more intrinsically good the envisioned accomplishment, the better the possibility of the ambition's being virtuous; whereas the less intrinsically good the envisioned accomplishment, the more it will tend toward selfish ambition. But even more importantly for the subjective virtuousness or viciousness of the ambition is 2) The less subordinate or conditional the envisioned accomplishment is to the personal importance of the agent, the more virtuous the ambition (pride); whereas the more the agent wants the envisioned accomplishment abstractly or only for the sake his own importance, the more the ambition will be a vicious pride, a seeking of self-importance by way of his agency.

Developmentally, the ambitious young person's conception of *what* she wants to accomplish (so as to be important) is probably always somewhat abstract. If her ambition matures toward virtuous pride, she will grow in the depth of her understanding and appreciation of the goal, and so subordinate her personal importance as its agent to the goal's intrinsic value (without ceasing, however, to care about being its agent). Morally speaking, the ambition of the person who wants to do "anything" that will make him famous and powerful, without regard to its intrinsic worthiness, has little to recommend it as a human disposition (maybe he wants to make a name for himself by doing the most amazing stunts on a motorcycle, or she wants to dazzle the philosophical world with her logical pyrotechnics). But if the accomplishment the agent seeks has importance and depth independently of its ability to garner power or elicit admiration, then as it matures, the interest in being the agent of that accomplishment can become virtuous pride. The disorder in the prides of distorted agency is partly that the concern that constitutes them is "vain" or "empty," and so their viciousness partakes of something that is salient in the vices of empty self-display: not the display, but the emptiness. So the (false) value of self-importance in this dimension is agential importance regarded as an end in itself, rather than as essentially tied to genuine achievement.

A person can, in one sense, achieve "objective" or social agential importance while being motivated by self-importance; this would be just an instance of the general possibility of "doing the right thing for the wrong reason." Conversely, it is at least imaginable that through a mistaken sense of the value of some trivial accomplishment, a person might achieve virtuous subjective importance (virtuous agential pride) by subordinating his interest in personal importance to the excellent achievement of the

trivial end. The humility that corresponds to the vice of selfish ambition is the lack of concern to acquire self-importance by way of achievement. This is not the same as a lack of concern to achieve this or that, and is compatible with virtuous pride in achievement. A person who is humble in this way may very well aim at great things, such as musical accomplishment, wealth, or intellectual acuity.

Domination and hyper-autonomy distort human agency in other ways. The domineering person seeks to take over the agency of another as a way of gaining or maintaining self-importance. By failing to respect the other's agency in this way, he violates one of the standards of justice, instantiating the spirit of the slave master. He also embodies something of the spirit of the envious or invidiously proud person, who construes the other as a rival in the contest for self-importance and seeks to establish his own self-importance by his superiority and thus to the disadvantage of the compared person. The hyper-autonomous person wants to be independent of others' agency for the sake of his self-importance, as though his importance would be reduced by co-agency with others, and so is similarly unjust. He fails, as it were, to give credit where credit is due. He is also ungenerous and, thus, ungrateful. In his stinginess with credit, he tends to underestimate others' contributions to his successes, and so is rendered less capable of happily receiving those contributions as the gifts they are. To the extent that he does acknowledge outside help, the acknowledgement is painful; it wounds his pride. One kind of humility, then, is to be purged of the vices of domination and hyper-autonomy, and so to be free to be just, generous, and grateful.

2.2 *Corrupt entitlement*

Entitlements or privileges, especially when they are not widely shared, both *derive from* social importance and *indicate* — and thereby *generate* — social importance. By ‘social importance’ we mean something like reputation or recognition in the eyes of others (especially those regarded as socially important others), whether that recognition is deserved or not. Entitlements can be important social devices. For example, it seems both just and prudent that scholars who have proven research programs and records of achievement should be entitled to funding in preference to less successful and capable scholars. *As scholars*, the more capable and productive ones really are more important than the others. Arrogance or presumptuousness is most obvious where someone’s behavior, words, or thoughts express or imply a claim to entitlement that the claimant obviously doesn’t have, as when a man thinks that his being wealthy and influential entitles him to treat women as mere objects and devices of his own pleasure, and to disregard their implicit legitimate claims to be treated with dignity and respect. But even legitimate entitlement claims become in a way arrogant when they express the concern for self-importance, as contrasted with a legitimate concern for whatever warrants the entitlement. For example, a scholar might, by her excellence, have legitimate entitlement to receive a prestigious grant, but if she values the grant primarily as bringing her prestige, she instantiates the spirit of arrogance.

We noted that the vices that turn on agency can show also an element of “emptiness,” and we see the same thing in those that turn on entitlement: even if the scholar’s entitlement claim is objectively legitimate, its being made or enjoyed from the motive of private self-enhancement — what we’re calling self-importance — gives it a

hollow character. The fact that the vices of pride that turn on entitlement strongly tend to involve claims to *special* entitlement connects them with the vices that ride the vehicle of comparison or superiority, such as snobbishness, self-righteousness, and invidious pride. The entitlement claim in arrogance is also a claim to be personally superior to those who lack the entitlement. By contrast, the person who humbly claims an entitlement makes no claim to personal superiority as either the ground or the value of that entitlement.⁷

2.3 *Empty self-display*

Many, though probably not all, human beings enjoy a bit of limelight. Subjectively, limelight is a reflected kind of light: by “shining,” you project yourself in such a way as to evoke an emotional impression on the part of a spectating audience. That impression, which may be admiration, awe, shock, outrage, or envy, is reflected back to you as an impression of yourself. If you are vain, you will construe that impression as a reflection of your value as a person — in particular, the kind of importance that we are calling ‘self-importance.’ On the account of pride that we are promoting, it is crucial to distinguish this kind of self-construal from another self-construal that is also a product of reflected “light” and also a sense of one’s importance — though not self-importance as we are attempting to delineate it. This is the kind of reflection-dependent self-construal that object-relations dynamic psychologists theorize to be the basis of a healthy self-concept. In the model, the baby beholds the admiring, loving eyes of the mother (also of course the tender sounds and touch of the mother’s voice and body — this works for blind babies as well!) and thereby forms an impression

⁷ Valerie Tiberius and John Walker make this point in their paper, “Arrogance,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (4): 379–390.

of his or her self as lovable and valuable.⁸ The nurturing light of the mother's gaze is pretty different from limelight, even though both evoke a self-impression of importance. If the child grows up with a healthy sense of herself, she may later still enjoy a bit of limelight, but the enjoyment need not be in the self-construal as self-important — the mode of vanity. In fact, her solid sense of proper pride provides something of an inoculation — though not a guarantee, we think — against vanity, since in some or many cases the empty satisfactions of vanity function as substitutes for the real satisfaction of feeling oneself to be loved. Also, a person with a well-established vice of vanity may respond to genuine love with emotions of satisfied vanity. Such a response can be very frustrating to the one who loves her, both because she doesn't enter into a *relationship* of love with him, and because she doesn't receive his love *as love*, but as her own glorification. The person who doesn't seek self-importance by way of others' admiration, awe, shock, outrage, or envy has, in this respect, the virtue of humility; and the person whose enjoyment or seeking of such limelight is minimal may be called humble in comparison with the run of ordinary human beings.

2.4 Invidious comparison

Superiority and its complement, inferiority, are persistent facts of human life, and our institutions depend on our ability to discern such differences. It would be disastrous to select candidates for medical school randomly, as it would be in any number of other crucial human enterprises. We can't do without competition, grades, and pecking orders. The prides of snobbery, self-righteousness, invidious pride, and envy all ride the vehicle

⁸ D. W. Winnicott, *Babies and Their Mothers* (Cambridge, Mass: Perseus Publishing, 1987).

of such graded differences. For any dyad, these prides all say, “I am better because you are worse” —or, in the case of envy — “I am worse because you are better (and I’d like to do whatever it takes to turn the tables).” That is, the comparisons are invidious, that is, to the discredit of the other party. And the matter that is credited (or discredited) is personal importance in the sense of self-importance. Because of my superior associates, discipline, righteousness, skill, wealth, or whatever, “I am more important because you are less so.” Notice that the transition from *better at math*, or *wealthier*, or *more beautiful*, or *more sophisticated*, or *more skilled*, etc., to *more important as a person* is a leap. The latter doesn’t follow from the former. A person with the virtue of humility sees the graded differences among human beings, all right, but doesn’t infer that the less skilled, beautiful, etc., are less important. Above all, she doesn’t see herself that way in relation to the others.

2.5 Tribal superiority

People come in many varieties: black, white, and various other shades of color; “normal” and “disabled” in various ways: blind, deaf, kinetically challenged, mentally challenged, and severely disfigured; striking ethnic differences of custom, dress, language, and taste; differences of sexual orientation; etc. Some of these differences are so immediately striking, so strange to members of another group, as to evoke fear and disgust (possibly mutual) upon presentation. To say that these emotions constitute a barrier to deep human fellowship, mutual respect, and love, would be to understate the matter. One of the apostle Paul’s great themes is that the completely universal love of Christ, expressed in his incarnation and atoning death, has “broken down the dividing wall of hostility” constituted by such species of strangeness (Ephesians 2.14). In Christ

“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2.14, Galatians 3.28). This hole in the dividing wall in one’s heart, this evacuation of the sense that members of one’s own tribe are more “human,” more important as persons, than are the members of a contrasting tribe, is, we think, essential to the humility that contrasts with tribal superiority. It is broken open by Christ’s love, and is traversed to the other side of the now absent wall of pride, where the “different,” “strange,” other is seen to be *not* fundamentally different after all, but a beloved fellow traveler on life’s way. Of course, the humble will continue to notice tribal differences, many of which are very hard to miss. But because of their openhearted view of the other, they’ll be disinclined to interpret the noticed differences as grounds for self-importance: “we are different from you” no longer means “we are better than you.”

The vices of tribal superiority are not quite identical with the “wall” of separation between “tribes,” though we think they constitute a major part of it. The reason is that the strangeness of the other might evoke a fear that is independent of the construal of the strange other as inferior or superior to members of one’s own tribe. What appears to us very different from normal can easily seem grotesque and scary until our perceptual orientation adjusts. Here is an example. When Roberts’s daughter Beth was about fifteen months old, he went into the bathroom and shaved his beard off clean. Beth had never seen her Papa without a beard. When he came out, Beth got a horrified look on her face, screamed, and ran away. That man looked strangely Daddy-like, but so grotesquely deformed! Beth was momentarily alienated from her Papa, but her alienating mental state

doesn't seem to have been pride. Her construal didn't have the shape of thinking, as it were, "That man looks so weird, he must be inferior to us normal people."

Whether the wall of separation is simply fear or one of the many vices of tribal superiority, a powerful strategy for breaking it open to let love and respect flow back and forth across the gap is to bring the parties together physically and socially. This sometimes happened between Jews and gentiles in the early church, and it sometimes happens between ethnic and racial groups in today's church. It happens between members of rival gangs in Father Greg Boyle's ministry at Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, and between the "normal" assistants and the core members with mental disabilities of Jean Vanier's L'Arche communities all over the world.⁹

3. Jesus and the Virtues of Pride

3.1 Introductory Comments

We began the paper observing that the notion that humility is inconsistent with the virtue of pride, as illustrated in Gettier's obituary of Nakhnikian, seems to be propagated by the Christian tradition — paradoxically so, given the stark contrast between humility as so conceived and humility as the New Testament conceives it. The New Testament has some claim to authority in this matter, inasmuch as it seems to be the major historical source in the West for conceiving humility as a virtue.¹⁰ The foregoing account of the vices of pride and the corresponding variants of virtuous humility is a

⁹ See Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010) and Kevin S. Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love, and Disability* (London: Continuum, 2009).

¹⁰ Though one could make a case that Socrates exemplified a kind of humility, neither he nor his near philosophical successors made this disposition a theme in their discussions of the virtues, while the heroic tradition of Homer, which left its signature on Greek ethics, seems strongly resistant to humility.

philosophical elaboration of what appears to be the New Testament's conception of humility, which in turn is modeled on the person of Jesus of Nazareth as exemplar of the virtue. But how does the *virtue* of pride stand in relation to the New Testament presentation of Jesus? We now turn to an examination of this question.

We noted above that the five classes of vicious pride encompass three general areas of human selfhood: the self as agent, as entitled, and as a self among other selves (the prides of empty self-display, those of invidious comparison, and those of tribal superiority all turn directly, though in different ways, on relations with other selves). These dimensions of human existence are generic and unavoidable in the constitution of selfhood, fundamental aspects of human life, and they bear on individuals' importance — not just the false value of *self*-importance, but the real importance of persons. People can be important for what they do, for what they are entitled to, and in virtue of their relations to one another. Also, they belong intimately together, because they all intersect: most of our agency is exercised in social contexts in which we direct, or are directed by, others, act in concert with others, or see ourselves in our relations with others. In such contexts we are on display before others, and are aware of being so; and contexts of action and co-action are ones in which qualitative differences among persons are on display, and in which comparisons of competency and excellence and tribal identity are inevitable because programs of action require them. Also, entitlements and privileges of agents are often determined by agents' comparative competence or excellence. Virtuous prides such as self-confidence, secure agency, aspiration, pride in one's work, sense of dignity, self-respect, personal authority, pride in associates, group belonging, and secure collegiality, are excellences with respect to the same dimensions of character with respect to which

the vices of pride are defects. Instead of distorting human agency, proper pride enhances and completes it; instead of corrupting one's sense of entitlement, proper pride grasps and serves real entitlements for good reasons; instead of empty self-display and invidious comparison, proper pride disposes to intelligent, purposeful self-display, and makes needed and appropriate comparisons for essential reasons; and instead of tribal contempt for members of out-groups, proper pride includes a sense of belonging both to one's more immediate community and to "the family of man" that encompasses every human being on the face of the globe.

Actions that exemplify virtues usually exemplify more than one. Thus a courageous action can display compassion or generosity or forgivingness or justice, a just action can also be compassionate, and so forth. But acts of virtuous pride and acts of virtuous humility seem to be even more tied together in actions than other pairs of virtues. Humility is the absence of one or another vice of pride, and this absence is often driven by, or coordinated with, such virtues as justice, generosity, and gratitude, because such virtues tend to rule out or mitigate the vices of pride. For instance, since generosity as a virtue is exemplified only if and to the extent that the other's wellbeing or pleasure is the aim, it requires a mitigation of motivation in the ways characteristic of the vices of pride. But if virtuous pride is a positive self-construal in terms of one's agency, one's dignity, or one's entitlements, it would seem to encourage humility in a special and different way, namely, by being a proper and genuine satisfaction of a basic human need of which the vices of pride are a perverse and false satisfaction. The fact that the vices of pride speak to the same psychological need as the virtues of pride marks the special intimacy between them. We propose that this point is illustrated in the life of Jesus.

As the Philippians passage suggests, the whole gospel is a story of a condescension on the part of the Son of God. A condescension is an act in which a *high* being voluntarily *lowers* or *humbles* himself. It is thus a kind of action in which both pride and humility are discernible. The voluntariness and the presupposition of a high point of commencement make for the potential offensiveness of the action. If someone makes it too obvious that he condescends to us, we may construe his action as invidiously conceited — think that he is putting us down and enjoying his superiority and our relative inferiority. But a condescension need not be so motivated, and if we humbly acknowledge the difference in elevation between us and the other, we may receive it with gratitude. The post-biblical Christian tradition has stressed the humble side of the condescension of God in Christ, exemplified not only in his incarnation, but also in his service to his disciples (John 13) and his voluntary submission to the will of the Father (Luke 22.42). But as we attempt to show in the rest of this section, the New Testament equally depicts Jesus as virtuously proud: he acts with confidence, assertively leads and commands his disciples, teaches with authority, debates his critics with independence of mind, serenely both claims and forfeits his entitlements, courageously faces a painful and ignominious death in the interest of the highest conceivable achievement, has a high view of his identity, and makes explicit his compassionate commitment to human beings of every stripe and tribe. Furthermore, we can discern in the teaching of Jesus that he encourages his disciples to imitate him in many of these respects.

3.2 *Jesus' Sense of His Agency*

The virtuous pride of agency is an implicit confidence in one's ability to act and accomplish good things. It is having high aspirations for oneself. Jesus is said to have called disciples to himself at the beginning of his ministry:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him (Matthew 4.18–22).

Apparently, Jesus has a plan, and he acts decisively and self-confidently. Apparently, also, others picked up on his secure sense of himself and his purpose, which at this point was only dimly known to them; for they are said to have dropped what they were doing and taken up with him. What is it like to be confident of one's agency in this way? If this is a kind or dimension of pride, it isn't a self-congratulatory feeling, but a largely implicit sense or construal of oneself as capable. We say *implicit* because the focus is not on oneself but on the action or on the aim of the action; yet, in contrast with humility, it is a self-construal and not an absence of self-construal, because there is no confusion about who is acting, or who aspires to high things. In desiring to accomplish significant things, the agent wants to *be* the one who accomplishes them. Proper ambition (for oneself) is one of the marks of virtuous pride.

The entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5.1–7.29) is an expression of Jesus' authority as a teacher. He persistently challenges the prevailing authorities (Pharisees and scribes), criticizes their conduct (which ought to be exemplary but isn't), and even revises some of the authoritative teachings of Scripture (Matthew 6.21–22, 27–28, 31–33, 38–41). At the end of the Sermon, the evangelist says that “when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes,” who taught them by way of interpreting authoritative texts. Yet Jesus' teaching is not domineering, and so exhibits the humility that is domination's absence. He is not coercive, but calls and invites. And the invitation seems not to be driven by a desire to exert power over others' hearts and minds for the sake of the importance such power affords. Rather, he teaches for the sake of his hearers and those whose lives they will affect.

In arguing that Jesus exemplifies pride in such actions as calling disciples and teaching, it may seem that we've both stated the obvious and failed to support our claim that pride can be virtuous. It takes a *lot* of chutzpah to walk along the shore of a lake and call out to the fishermen to drop what they're doing and make a life-commitment to oneself. And for a young Jewish man to sit before a crowd of his disciples criticizing the older religious teachers of his day and even revising the Scriptures (!), if it's pride, it might be thought to be the kind called hubris, or perhaps delusionary grandiosity.

Stated in this abstract way, that reaction is plausible. But in the larger context of the Gospels' witness to Jesus' character and wisdom and the intuitive reactions of his most intimate contemporaries, the suggestion that Jesus was vicious or deluded becomes far less so. It is true that he was a super-extraordinary human being, but the considered

judgment of the church that developed around him is that he was both fully human and the best of human beings. That Jesus was an extraordinarily virtuous human being is our supposition in this essay.

3.3 Jesus' Sense of His Entitlements

The virtue of pride that we call entitlement serenity is a dispositional self-construal in terms of one's entitlements that are connected with one's importance as a person. The connection between entitlements and importance can be either that the entitlements are partly constitutive of one's importance, or that they indicate one's importance—say, one's importance as occupying a social role, or as having generic human dignity. The corresponding vice of pride is arrogance or presumptuousness, which is a tendency to “insist” on one's entitlements in the interest of one's self-importance, especially the kind of self-importance that is invidiously comparative or “empty.”

Entitlement serenity is a secure sense of one's entitlements such that one claims them when it makes sense to do so because of the real value of the entitlements. But depending on circumstances, it doesn't always make sense to claim one's real entitlements, or even desire that they be honored. And in these circumstances a person with entitlement serenity serenely forfeits his entitlements. We see both kinds of case in the New Testament witness about Jesus. For example, Jesus claims devotional precedence over family: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10.37–38). These are strong entitlement claims. And in the eleventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the writer comments that Jesus “began to upbraid the cities where most of his mighty works had been

done, because they did not repent” (vs. 20). Apparently, Jesus thought he had the right to complain, given who he was and what he had done, making the import of his mighty works clear enough to elicit repentance from the inhabitants of these cities. Furthermore, it made sense for him to complain, perhaps as a warning to his present hearers or to reinforce the impression of the mighty works’ import as he understood it. His complaints need not be motivated by a petulant “need” to defend his “dignity” against those who belittle it.

But equally, the serenity of entitlement serenity allows that when there is reason not to claim one’s legitimate entitlement, the person who has this dimension of virtuous pride can forfeit the claim. Perhaps the most striking and significant example of this in the gospel story is Jesus’ abstention from self-defense in his trial before Pilate. Though falsely accused of many things, he remains silent (Matt. 26.62; 27.12–14). By Pilate’s lights, Jesus appears a bit slow on the uptake: “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” (Matt. 27.13). And then, when horrors escalate considerably — mere accusations become brutal beatings, contemptuous mockery, and condemnation to death — Jesus’ remarkable calm remains. The contrast between what Jesus is due and the treatment he willingly receives could not be starker.

We noted that arrogance is most striking when an agent’s actions imply a claim to entitlement that she clearly doesn’t have. The virtue of pride that we call “entitlement serenity” is most striking in the opposite sort of case, where the agent obviously *does* have claim to an entitlement, but is unruffled when that claim goes unrecognized (or worse). This virtue bears a superficial resemblance to a related vice of humility, servility. In their low view of themselves, the servile underestimate what is due them, and so

sheepishly allow others to trample their rights. While those with the virtue of entitlement serenity might look externally like human doormats, their willingness to suffer injustice is born not of weakness, but strength — the inner strength of pride.

Here is another example, not from the life of Jesus, but from that of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was a very self-confident person and one who knew how to call in his entitlements when there was good reason to do so. But President Lincoln had an exceedingly arrogant general named George McClellan. John Hay, Lincoln's personal secretary, recorded the following incident in his diary. After McClellan became general in chief, Lincoln, Secretary of State William Seward, and Hay went to visit McClellan in his house. A servant told them the general was at a wedding and would come back soon. When the three men had waited about an hour the general did come back, and

without paying any particular attention to the porter who told him the President was waiting to see him, went up stairs, passing the door of the room where the President and Secretary of State were seated. They waited about half-an-hour and sent once more a servant to tell the general they were there, and the answer cooly [sic; Hay scratches out the word 'cooly'] came that the general had gone to bed.¹¹

Lincoln's role as President entitled him to deference and respect from his generals, and this entitlement entailed a symmetrical *lack* of entitlement on the part of his generals blatantly to ignore a visit from him. McClellan's action expresses arrogance inasmuch as it constitutes a false claim to be entitled (because of his importance) to ignore the President's visit. Hay concludes the diary entry, "Coming home I spoke to the President

¹¹ Quoted in William Lee Miller, *President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman* (New York: Vintage Books), 173.

about the matter but he seemed not to have noticed it specially, saying it was better at this time not to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity” (ibid.). We want to say that this episode of equanimity about McClellan’s slight exhibits two virtues: Lincoln’s *humility*, in not “insisting” on his status as President, and his underlying *pride*, in having enough serenity or presence of mind about his entitlements to be *able* not to insist on those entitlements as supports for his self-importance.

We have pointed out that the same action or psychological episode can exemplify more than one virtue, and that virtuous pride and virtuous humility are more intimately tied together than many other pairs of virtues. The reason is that both are “about” the self, humility being the absence of concern for self-importance and pride a dispositional construal of the self as important. We might be tempted at this point to say that the virtues of pride and humility are in fact just one virtue, the virtue of being uninterested in self-importance because of being adequately satisfied that one is important as a person. We resist this temptation for a couple of reasons, wanting to say, instead, that pride is a particularly apt *support* for humility and (perhaps) that humility, as a kind of purity of heart, can facilitate proper pride. First, pride and humility have long been thought to be different virtues, and it does sound odd to say they are identical. But a second reason is the more important one. While humility *can* be importantly supported by pride, it can also be supported by other virtues, in the absence of any very impressive degree of pride. It can find support in justice or love, virtues that don’t essentially make reference to the self. Or a person may be so devoted to a cause or ideal (perhaps an artistic or political ideal) that self-importance loses its attractions for her.

3.4 Jesus' Sense of His Standing Among Other Persons

The vices of pride that belong in the self-among-selves dimension are vanity, pretentiousness, snobbery, self-righteousness, envy, invidious pride, conceit, and the many variants of tribal superiority. They have to do either with other people's regard as a source of self-importance, or with rivalry with other people for self-importance. We call the corresponding virtues of pride *self-respect* and *sense of dignity* or *personal gravity* (where gravity has to do not just with one's demeanor, but with one's inner sense of self). We earlier pointed out that this sense of one's own dignity or glory is the kind of (largely implicit) self-construal that is built up in the infant from her awareness of the mother's loving, valuing gaze. The person who is virtuously proud in this dimension gladly displays his excellences before others when such display is justified or required by circumstances. He is not falsely modest, not retiring or unwilling to be on display, not embarrassed by limelight nor does he flee it, but secure in his importance or dignity as a person among others, as someone whom others ought to respect as he respects himself. He may well be superior to another person in this regard or that, and aware of this superiority, but does not take pleasure in his superiority as such. He may "pride himself" on some skill or accomplishment, but it will be because of the excellence of that skill or accomplishment and not because it makes him superior to this other person or that, or to some class of persons. His self-display and sense of superiority are neither rivalrous nor vain, not for the sake of self-importance, but for intrinsically important matters as he sees them.

The Gospel of John depicts Jesus as aware of his dignity as seen and appreciated by the divine Father, and properly interested in it and in having it recognized by his

fellow human beings. His dignity supports and is supported by his aspiration, which is, in obedience to the Father, to give his life for the redemption of the world. Thus on the night before his self-sacrifice he prays,

Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. . . . I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made (John 17.1–2, 3–5).

Earlier he had said to the Pharisees,

When you have lifted up [that is, crucified] the Son of man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him (John 8.28).

In his self-concept Jesus is concerned above all for his standing before God the Father, and in particular, God's loving approval.

With respect to his standing before other human beings, Jesus three times compares himself, in the twelfth chapter of Matthew, to things that are thought to be great in the Jewish religious tradition. He says that he is greater than the Temple (v.6), greater than the prophet Jonah (v.41), and greater than King Solomon (v.42). Is Jesus bragging here, as though trying to impress his disciples for the sake of building up his importance? We are reminded of a story about an encounter between Alvin Plantinga and O.K. Bouwsma. Apparently, Plantinga was having trouble getting Bouwsma to take the

ontological argument seriously, and, perhaps in exasperation, asked him, “Well, what if you heard a voice from heaven booming, ‘I am that being than which no greater can be conceived’?” Bouwsma thoughtfully paused a moment, and replied, “I’d say, Congratulations!!” We think this story is amusing because Bouwsma’s reply seems to imagine patronizing God by going along with his childish vanity in making sure that people know how great he is. But of course, if God exists, it *is* important for people to know how great God is, important for their sake and for the sake of the justice of the universe. It is comical to imagine that the importance of this knowledge lies in the satisfaction of God’s pretentiousness. The same holds for the greatness of Jesus, assuming he is who he claims to be.

At a few places in the Gospels, people worship Jesus — Matt. 14.33 (disciples in a boat), Matt. 15.25 (a Canaanite woman), Mark 5.6 (a demoniac), John 9.38 (a man blind from birth) — and he registers no objection. The worship of Jesus is made appropriate by his identity and the interpersonal relationship that the worship represents. That is the notable difference between Jesus’ interest in being worshiped and Donald Trump’s. Jesus’ interest is an interest in being in *communion* with his worshipers, in a relationship of mutual caring consciousness, each party being appreciatively attentive to the other as he or she is, especially in their goodness. While clearly recognizing differences in greatness, the communion is pure of invidious rivalry and invidious superiority. In contrast, the non-mutual logic of Trump’s interest is, you worship me so I’ll feel HYUUGE.

Perhaps because of the intimate connection, for Trump, between being worshiped and being elected, Trump is not choosy about *who* worships him. The more the

worshippers, the merrier the Donald. In this, he contrasts with Aristotle's great-souled man, who

will be pleased in a moderate way at great honors conferred by good people, thinking that he is getting what he deserves, or even less than he deserves, because there could be no honor worthy of total virtue.

Nevertheless, he will accept such honors, on the ground that they have nothing greater to confer on him. But honor conferred by ordinary people or for unimportant reasons he will utterly despise, since it is beneath him.¹²

This way of thinking might be thought to make the GSM's pride both more and less virtuous than Trump's. It's possibly more virtuous if we interpret the GSM's discrimination as intending to favor the more accurate assessment of the GSM's worth: good people are better judges of true virtue, so their esteem is more likely to indicate real virtue in the GSM, and the GSM, in contrast with Trump, wants real excellence and not just empty adulation. On the other hand, Trump offers everybody equal opportunity to celebrate him, while the GSM's contempt for the praises of "ordinary people" seems rather ungenerous and uncompassionate. Wouldn't it be more virtuous to be compassionately touched by the ordinary people's enthusiasm for himself, even if their opinion has little epistemic value? But it seems pretty clear that Trump's enthusiasm for the people's enthusiasm has little to do with *their* actual persons (as Jesus' compassion did) and everything to do with Trump's self-importance. The GSM's pride is a healthier form of self-preoccupation than Trump's because his notion of greatness of self is truer.

¹² *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 4.3, translated by Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Jesus' pride, in contrast with both, is not a form of self-preoccupation at all, but a deep and largely implicit sense of his personal importance and competence, in dependence on the Father. That kind of pride is fully compatible with, and tends to support and be supported by, humility. Indeed, in his willing communion with the sorts of worshipers the GSM would scorn, Jesus exhibits not only virtuous pride, but also three forms of humility: those consisting in the lack of vanity, the lack of conceit, and the lack of tribal superiority.

3.5 Virtuous Pride of Disciples

Jesus teaches his disciples not to parade their good actions (alms-giving, praying, fasting) before others so as to be seen by them (Matt. 6.1–6, 16–18). When the hypocrites fast, they put on gloomy faces to impress people with their piety and thus be admired for their religious zeal. Jesus says that “they have their reward” — assuming, presumably, that their efforts to be admired bear fruit. The humble, by contrast, anoint their heads, wash their faces, and smile cheerfully at passers-by, as though they were not suffering for God. Or rather, if these morally serious people are not yet fully humble, by doing these things they may hope to starve their desire to be admired, and thus make progress toward humility.

Yet Jesus also teaches his disciples, “Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5.16). Very similar behaviors, it seems, may express either hypocritical pretentiousness or virtuous ambition. The difference lies in the doers' aims: the one aims to be admired, the other to elicit praise for God. But it seems the proper aim is not just praise *for* God,

but also praise *from* God.¹³ In commanding his disciples not to seek the admiration of other people, Jesus three times (Matt. 6.4, 6, 18) repeats the phrase, “and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Assuming that the disciple’s reward is the Father’s approval, the picture of virtuous pride would be this: that the disciple, without interest in being admired by her fellow human beings (though *not* without interest in being virtuously loved and respected by them), secure in her sense of the loving approval of her Father who sees in secret, confidently does her good works in part so as to be seen by her fellow human beings. Her purpose in so doing is that they too might glorify her Father. Her pride would be her self-confident agency, an agency that imitates, in a distant similarity, the agency of Jesus himself. We can see that for the purposes of biblical moral psychology, the notion of *approval* is morally ambiguous: it may be empty admiration, adulation, and hoopla (even envy is a kind of approval — a bitter one, which pretentious and vain people may be happy to receive); or it may be morally qualified respect and love. Love at its finest is mutual; but it is of the nature of love to approve what it loves — at least that aspect of the object that evokes the love. And what is more worthy of approval than love? Mutual genuine love is thus mutual glorification: each member of the dyad glorifies the other, and in thus making herself lovable glorifies herself in the reflection of the other’s love. Each, feeling herself loved by the other, feels her own glory, thus begetting confidence in her value, a basic security in her agency, and a serenity about her entitlements that gives her flexibility about claiming them.

¹³ Cf. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 1–15.

The Vices of Humility

If virtuous pride is a largely implicit, reliably high, though not unrealistic, self-construal in the areas of one's selfhood, basic agency, and entitlements, then the vices of humility will be corresponding reliably low self-construals in the same areas: deep dispositional shame, social insecurity, timidity, glory intolerance, obsequiousness, servility, defeatist lethargy, slovenliness, pusillanimity, and the like. Each of these vices merits exposition in the interest of contrastively highlighting features of virtuous pride. However, we are already a couple of thousand words over our word limit.

When it comes to an agent's dispositional construal of her own value as a self, self-respect is the relevant virtue of pride. Deep shame — a pervasive tendency to think and feel oneself to be without value — is the correlated vice of humility. It is compatible with dispositional self-respect to be, on occasion, so painfully arrested by your inadequacies that they fill your emotional vision. Indeed, it is within the context of an abiding sense of one's inherent value that vivid shame is most healthfully felt. But someone with the pitiable vice of deep shame so fixates on her inadequacies (real or imagined), so takes them to heart, that she is rendered insensitive to her own dignity.

Such partial self-blindness can both feed on and feed into other vices of humility, but it is distinguishable from them. The person with defeatist lethargy, for instance, has a severely deflated sense of her own agency, whereas the servile are affectively oblivious to their just entitlements. Since doing important things is a ground of personal value, and since entitlements can both indicate and generate social importance, it can be easy to make the emotional-evaluative inferences from "I can't do anything right" and "I don't have anything coming to me" to deep shame's "I am worthless." And the vicious

inferences can go the other direction, too. But on a biblical worldview, according to which every human being, as a creature of God, has valuable selfhood, some kind of agency, and the entitlements that go with these, deep shame, defeatist lethargy, servility, and the other vices of humility are always epistemically unrealistic cognitive-affective distortions.

Conclusion

We have distinguished virtuous from vicious pride. Virtuous pride is confidence about one's value, confidence about one's agency, and serenity about one's entitlements. Virtuous pride is thus contrary not only to vicious pride — vanity, pretentiousness, arrogance, presumptuousness, envy, invidious pride, snobbery, self-righteousness, conceit, selfish ambition, and the like — but also to vicious humility. The latter finds expression in deep shame, servility, and a variety of other unrealistically low dispositional self-construals. Virtuous humility, by contrast, is not a self-construal at all, but rather an absence of the concern for self-importance, and thus an insensitivity to that “value's” varied vehicles. Characteristically, virtuous humility is coordinated with, and partially grounded in, such virtues as justice, generosity, and compassion; but it is also typically supported by that strong sense of oneself as having value, agency, and entitlements that, we have argued, is virtuous pride.¹⁴

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