

Pride : Greek hyperêphania

‘It is from within, from the human heart that evil intentions come: ... pride’(Mark 7:21-22)

‘He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly’(Luke 1:51-52).

‘Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness ... insolent, haughty, boastful’(Romans 1:28-30).

‘People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power’(2Timothy 3:2-5).

‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’
(James 4:6 and 1Peter 5:5).

1. One form of pride is pride based on externals like beauty, wealth, status, honours, or reputation. Self-adulation and vanity based on such things is quite foolish as most people see through it, and any adulation they may offer is usually a pretence. This form of pride is widespread and dangerous, but it is not as dangerous as the forms we are about to describe.
2. A more dangerous form of pride is that associated with power. Such pride can lead to a refusal to submit to appropriate authority, an exaggerated self-confidence, a false sense of independence and at times a dominating ambition that over-rides others.

Common life-experiences (ultimately the breakdown of health and the process of dying) usually expose the error in self-sufficiency and the folly of self-complacency. Everything we are and everything we have is gift, so what on earth are we doing abusing our power to put others down and exalt ourselves? God is the creator; we are creatures. In the words of Jesus: 'I am the vine, you are the branches ... Without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5).

3. Even worse is intellectual pride: the pride of refusing to accept or trust anything that fails to make sense to one's own over-rated intellect. Such a failure to recognise the limits of reason itself and of one's own reason in particular is an indication of a profound blindness and stupidity, but such is the power of the ego that we can fall victim to such folly without recognising it. An important safeguard against this kind of pride is to form the habit of checking our opinion against that of others, and of seeking advice and not making the mistake of thinking we always know best.

Teresa of Avila warns us:

‘There is no poison in the world which is so fatal to perfection as having a too high opinion of oneself’(Way, 12).

Likewise John of the Cross:

‘A humble person does not dare deal with God independently, nor can he be completely satisfied without human counsel and direction. God is desirous of this, for to declare and strengthen truth on the basis of natural reason, he draws near to those who come together in order to know it’(Ascent II, 22,11).

4. The worst form of pride and the most difficult to ferret out and to overcome is pride in what a person considers to be his or her 'spiritual achievements'. Thanks to the wonderful gifts God has given us through our family and our education and the opportunities that have come our way, and especially the people who have loved us, our lives have been enriched in so many ways. God's grace gives us a certain refinement and attraction and deepens our capacity to give and receive love. If you would care to recall some very special moments of grace you will remember that you received them with humility and gratitude. When the moment of grace passed its effects remained and we found ourselves immensely enriched.

Father Marie-Eugène reminds us that it is then that temptation comes: ‘Temptation comes, subtle and unawares. It comes almost necessarily, so tenacious is pride. The soul uses these spiritual riches to exalt self and to attract notice, to serve a need for affection or for domination, or simply to make its personal ideas triumph. One’s personality, idolatrous of itself, is substituted for God; and what is received to be used as an instrument and a means, it uses to impose itself’(I want to see God, page 399).