

On Pride

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I offer a vindication of pride. I start by presenting the Christian condemnation of pride as the cardinal sin. I subsequently examine Mandeville's line of argument whereby pride is beneficial to society, although remaining a vice for the individual. Finally, I focus on, and endorse, the analysis of pride formulated by Hume, for whom pride qualifies instead as a virtue. This is because pride not only contributes to making society flourish but also stabilizes the virtuous agent by creating a virtuous circle between our desire for self-appraisal and our aspiration to act morally. I conclude by underscoring the (virtuous) connection between pride and modesty, concomitantly arguing that humility should be discarded as vicious.

1. Introduction: The Sin of Pride

Pride is identified by the Christian tradition as the Cardinal Sin. In Sirach (verses 12–13) it is said that «[t]he beginning of human pride Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker. For the beginning of pride is sin, and the one who clings to it pours out abominations. Therefore the Lord brings upon them unheard-of calamities, and destroys them completely». By being proud one gives excessive importance to oneself, to the point of neglecting God. Because of that, pride represents the root of all the other vices. Referring to Sirach, Augustine reaffirms that «“pride is the beginning of all sins”. And what is pride but an appetite for inordinate exaltation?» (Augustine, 2008, bk. 14, ch. 13, p. 380). After Augustine, the same reference can be found in Gregory the Great – who speaks of pride as «the queen of sins [...] the root of all evil [...] *the beginning of all sins*» (Gregory the Great, 1844–1850, vol. 3, bk. 31, ch. 45, para. 87, pp. 489–490) – and then in Aquinas: «the Wise Man [*i.e.* Ben Sira, the author of Sirach] [...] said, [*t]he beginning of all sins is pride*». Like Augustine, Aquinas

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adds, «[h]e obviously is speaking of pride as it is the inordinate desire to excel» (Aquinas, 1965, question 84, article 2, p. 67).

The problem of pride, for these religious thinkers, is both that it makes us forget God, and that it makes us focus on ourselves in an inflated way. By being prey to an «obsessive orientation of the self to its own excellence» (Boyd, 2014, p. 250), not only do we lose the grace of God, but we also sever our links with the other human beings. We are vicious because of our vainglory – we imagine we can take God’s place¹ – and because of our arrogance toward others; by thinking of ourselves as superior, we falsely believe in our self-sufficiency, thus forgetting that we instead rely on others for so many aspects of our existence. In so doing, we depart from «the virtues of acknowledged dependence» which reflect our nature of «dependent rational animals».²

«Pride was not created for human beings, or violent anger for those born of women», Sirach (verse 18) continues. *Superbia* – i.e., pride – will only lead us to perdition; on the contrary, humility should be our leading virtue: «The Lord overthrows the thrones of rulers, and enthrones the lowly in their place. The Lord plucks up the roots of the nations, and plants the humble in their place» (Sirach, verses 14–15). And Augustine emphasizes that it is the humble that will be granted heavens, not the proud, for whom there is no room in the Heavenly City. The latter are doomed to live in the Earthly City, which is ruled by «the love of self».³

By being conceived as «a direct challenge to God and to others» (Boyd, 2014, p. 245), pride ends up being the master sin. But what if one does not believe in God? Is pride still a vice, when seen from an entirely mundane, human point of view? Notwithstanding pride’s bad reputation, in what follows I want to

¹ «The conclusion, then, is that the Devil would not have begun by an open and obvious sin to tempt man into doing something which God had forbidden, had not man already begun to seek satisfaction in himself and, consequently, to take pleasure in the words: “You shall be as Gods”» (Augustine, bk. 14, ch. 13, p. 382). As Baasten observes, commenting on Gregory the Great’s *Moralia*, «[p]ride involves an attempt to usurp the place of God» (Baasten, 1986, p. 19).

² Boyd, 2014, p. 246, referring to MacIntyre, 1999. Boyd offers a good reconstruction of the history of pride in the Christian tradition. But see Gregory 2015, esp. for the role of pride in Sirach. For a more general history of pride, see Lyman, 1989, ch. 4. For a general examination of pride, esp. in relation to racial and national identities, see Dyson, 2006.

³ «In fact, this is the main difference which distinguishes the two cities of which we are speaking. The humble City is the society of holy men and good angels; the proud city is the society of wicked men and evil angels. The one City began with the love of God; the other had its beginnings in the love of self» (Augustine, 2008, bk. 14, ch. 13, p. 382).

defend it as a master virtue. My two allies in this task are Bernard Mandeville and David Hume. I shall first show how Mandeville's satirical consideration of morality helps to understand pride as an emotion that does not have the negative effects on others feared by Christianity. According to Mandeville's exposition, pride is a fundamental element for the prosperity of society; nevertheless, it remains a vice for the person who feels it. I shall then next consider Hume, for whom pride is not only beneficial for others but also plays a fundamental role in spelling out the identity of the virtuous agent. I finish by arguing that it is not pride but humility that should be regarded as morally disputable.

2. Mandeville: Pride and the Counterfeit of Virtue

In *The Fable of the Bees*, Mandeville presents pride as an indispensable element for the wealth of society and for the thriving of a powerful nation⁴:

Pride is that Natural Faculty by which every Mortal that has any Understanding over-values, and imagines better Things of himself than any impartial Judge, thoroughly acquainted with all his Qualities and Circumstances, could allow him. We are possess'd of no other Quality so beneficial to Society, and so necessary to render it wealthy and flourishing as this, yet it is that which is most generally detested. (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, Remark M, p. 124)

⁴ This is how pride is introduced by Mandeville:

As Pride and Luxury decrease,
 So by degrees they leave the Seas.
 Not Merchants now, but Companies
 Remove whole Manufactories.
 All Arts and Crafts neglected lie;
 Content, the Bane of Industry,
 Makes 'em admire their homely Store,
 And neither seek nor covet more.
 [...]

*Fraud, Luxury, and Pride must live,
 While we the Benefits receive.*

(Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, The Grumbling Hive, pp. 34–35, 36)

If pride is lacking, idleness and decadence follow, and society will inevitably perish. Pride is universally taken to be a negative trait of character; yet able politicians, Mandeville claims, can use this passion to make people act in ways that will promote the good of the community at large. As expressed in Mandeville's infamous formula: «Private Vices by the dextrous Management of a skilful Politician may be turned into Publick Benefits» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, *A Search into the Nature of Society*, p. 369)⁵.

When seen from this angle, pride does present a positive aspect, and this depends on its wickedness when considered as related to the individual⁶. If pride remains a vice in the latter case, this is because of Mandeville's description of virtue, which in fact reminds one of the Christian take on it. Mandeville attributes «the Name of VIRTUE to every Performance, by which Man, contrary to the impulse of Nature, should endeavour the Benefit of others, or the Conquest of his own Passions out of a Rational Ambition of being good» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, pp. 48–49). So on the face of it, being virtuous is a rational endeavour that goes against the appetites and emotional impulses that dominate human nature. Real virtue consists in «Victory over the Passions», while «Counterfeited Virtue» is just «a Conquest which one Passion obtains over another» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, Remark T, p. 230). Also, «no Action is such [virtuous], which does not suppose and point at some Conquest or other, some Victory great or small over untaught Nature; otherwise the Epithet is improper» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 2, *Third Dialogue*, p. 109).

Nevertheless, as improper as it might be, counterfeited virtue seems eventually to be the only form of morality human beings can really have access

⁵ On pride in Mandeville, see Dickey, 1990; Tolonen, 2013, ch. 2; Verburg, 2015. On the history of the development of pride in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Lovejoy, 1961.

⁶ According to Mandeville, «not the Good and Amiable, but the Bad and Hateful Qualities of Man, his Imperfections and the want of Excellencies which other Creatures are endued with, are the first Causes that made Man sociable beyond other Animals the Moment after he lost Paradise; and that if he had remain'd in his primitive Innocence, and continued to enjoy the Blessings that attended it, there is no Shadow of Probability that he ever would have become that sociable Creature he is now». This being the case, «the more their Pride and Vanity are display'd, and all their Desires enlarg'd, the more capable they must be of being rais'd into large and vastly numerous Societies» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, *A Search into the Nature of Society*, pp. 344, 346–347).

to. As it happens, reason is far from being the strongest among human motivational principles. When human beings display a virtuous conduct, this is not to be traced back to the working of reason, but to those very passions over which true morality (that is, real virtue) is instead supposed to prevail: «Whereas if Reason in Man was of equal weight with his Pride, he could never be pleas'd with Praises, which he is conscious he don't deserve» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, Remark C, p. 63). Pride is ineradicable from human nature⁷, but pride can be put to good use by «the skilful Management of wary Politicians» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, p. 51) to make society flourish. And if there is any hope that people will behave morally, even though just on the surface, that is because they have pride, and want to appear morally respectable in the eyes of those around them, and be esteemed and admired and applauded by them: «Thus Sagacious Moralists draw Men like Angels, in hopes that the Pride at least of Some will put 'em upon copying after the beautiful Originals which they are represented to be» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, p. 52)⁸.

In the opposition between real virtue and counterfeited virtue provided above, the former comes to be defeated, given what human nature consists in. Those traits of character that are generally depicted as good and to be pursued are in fact just a façade that conceals the real drives that move human beings to action. And the greatest Christian virtue, humility, is nothing but a form of concealed pride:

[T]he humblest Man alive must confess, that the Reward of a Virtuous Action, which is the Satisfaction that ensues upon it, consists in a certain

⁷ «Human Nature is every where the same: Genius, Wit and Natural Parts are always sharpened by Application, and may be as much improv'd in the Practice of the meanest Villany, as they can in the Exercise of Industry or the most Heroic Virtue. There is no Station of Life, where Pride, Emulation, and the Love of Glory may not be displayed» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools, p. 275).

⁸ Mandeville's definition of pride follows his definition of «self-liking» as given in The Third Dialogue between Horatio and Cleomenes: «to encrease the Care in Creatures to preserve themselves», Cleomenes argues, «Nature has given them an Instinct, by which every Individual values itself above its real Worth; this in us, I mean, in Man, seems to be accompany'd with a Diffidence, arising from a Consciousness, or at least an Apprehension, that we do over-value ourselves: It is this that makes us so fond of the Approbation, Liking and Assent of others; because they strengthen and confirm us in the good Opinion we have of ourselves». And Horatio comments that «Self-liking is evidently Pride» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 2, p. 130, 131).

Pleasure he procures to himself by Contemplating on his own Worth: Which Pleasure, together with the Occasion of it, are as certain Signs of Pride, as looking Pale and Trembling at any imminent Danger, are the Symptoms of Fear. (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, p. 57)

If talking of humility makes any sense, this is in terms of «the Passion of Shame» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, Remark C, p. 64), and shame, far from corresponding to that humility so much praised by the divines as the virtue that brings us close to God and our fellow creatures, is just the other face of pride itself:

The Reverse of Shame is Pride, yet no Body can be touch'd with the first, that never felt any thing of the latter; for that we have such an extraordinary Concern in what others think of us, can proceed from nothing but the vast Esteem we have for our selves. (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, Remark C, pp. 66–67)⁹

That being said, it is the case that for Mandeville in both pride and shame «the Seeds of most Virtues are contained» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, Remark C, p. 67). Both passions spring from vanity and the desire for honour and praise, which are intrinsic to human nature. Notwithstanding Mandeville's declaration that real virtue corresponds to the refusal of that very nature – «but I see no Self-denial», Mandeville complains, «without which there can be no Virtue» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, Remark O, p. 156) – it is pride that allows human beings to adopt that countenance that allows them to live together harmoniously, thereby improving their condition in ways that would be precluded if real virtue were in place¹⁰. Mandeville, therefore, turns what for the Christian narrative is

⁹ In Remark R (1988, vol. 1, p. 209), Mandeville says: «Do but increase Man's Pride, and his fear of Shame will ever be proportion'd to it; for the greater Value a Man sets upon himself, the more Pains he'll take and the greater Hardships he'll undergo to avoid Shame».

¹⁰ «Ashamed of the many Frailties they feel within, all Men endeavour to hide themselves, their Ugly Nakedness, from each other, and wrapping up the true Motives of their Hearts in the Specious Cloke of Sociableness, and their Concern for the publick Good, they are in hopes of concealing their filthy Appetites and the Deformity of their Desires; whilst they are conscious within of the Fondness for their darling Lusts, and their Incapacity, barefac'd, to tread the arduous, rugged Path of Virtue» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, Remark T, pp. 234–235).

completely vicious into something that, although not virtuous, is nonetheless to be considered at the root of the civilizing process of mankind¹¹.

It is a merit of Mandeville that he unmasks the hypocrisy that lies at the heart of the Christian treatment of pride. If pride is to be condemned, this is not so much because it represents an offence against God, but rather because it threatens to cut ourselves off from other people. Yet, Mandeville shows that the result of the working of pride is the exact opposite: given our tendency to exaggerate our importance and our need to be acknowledged by others, pride reveals itself to be fundamental in establishing those bonds among people that permit society to thrive. Ultimately, pride is also beneficial to the individual, as it adjusts one's character to properly fit into society in accordance with one's temper¹². Even so, in Mandeville's picture pride remains a vice. This is due to his «anatomy» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, The Preface, p. 3) of human nature, which he regards as prey to intrinsically degenerated passions, desires and appetites.

3. Hume: Well-founded Pride

If we look at Hume, the picture changes again. Like Mandeville, Hume too views pride as a trait of character that is fundamentally advantageous, both individually and socially. However, Humean pride lacks those ethically negative aspects that are still present in Mandeville's depiction of it. This is due to Hume's different approach to morality, which is not seen by him as a rational endeavour, but instead as an outcome of the sentimental nature of human beings. The exposure of morality by Mandeville as hypocritical is the outcome of the still lingering influence of the Augustinian tradition in his approach (see Herdt, 2008, pp. 307–308). On the contrary, Hume conceives human nature and the morality that follows from it as entirely naturalized, consciously leaving behind all possible religious assumptions. In this new scenario of thought, pride fully

¹¹ «[A]fterwards, our Pride, Sloth, Sensuality and Fickleness are the great Patrons that promote all Arts and Sciences, Trades, Handicrafts and Callings; while the great Task-masters, Necessity, Avarice, Envy, and Ambition, each in the Class that belongs to him, keep the Members of the Society to their labour, and make them all submit, most of them chearfully, to the Drudgery of their Station; Kings and Princes not excepted» (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 1, A Search into the Nature of Society, p. 366).

¹² See in this regard Mandeville's description of the effect of pride on two people, one with an active temper and the other with an indolent one, in The Third Dialogue between Horatio and Cleomenes (Mandeville, 1988, vol. 2, pp. 109–119).

acquires the status of virtue. Hume's account represents one of the most convincing vindications of pride as virtue; to understand why, it is now necessary to tackle Hume's view on pride in more detail.

Hume provides a composite explanation of pride in line with his associationism, as developed in *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Pride – and its opposite, humility – are passions that are structured according to a «double relation of ideas and impressions» (Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 5, para. 5). When the idea of a certain thing that we find pleasant is related to the idea of ourselves, it causes in us an agreeable impression, the impression of pride. The same goes with humility, the only difference being that the thing associated to ourselves is painful, thus provoking a disagreeable impression when related to ourselves (see Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 2, para. 4; bk. 2, part 1, sect. 5, para. 5; bk. 2, part 1, sect. 9, para. 6). Notwithstanding the complex constitution of pride and humility, Hume also says that they are experienced as unitary and simple impressions, without consciously going through the different passages just mentioned¹³. So pride is recognised by us in phenomenological terms as «that agreeable impression, which arises in the mind, when the view either of our virtue, beauty, riches or power makes us satisfied with ourselves» (Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 7, para. 8).

The causes of pride are numerous, from qualities of our mind (for example, «wit, good-sense, learning, courage, justice, integrity», Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 2, para. 5) and body (for example, «beauty, strength, agility, good mein, address in dancing, riding, fencing, and [...] dexterity in any manual business or manufacture», Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 2, para. 5), to whatever is related to ourselves (for example, «[o]ur country, family, children, relations, riches, houses, gardens, horses, dogs, cloaths», Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 2, para. 5). Among those causes virtue stands out:

For if all morality be founded on the pain or pleasure, which arises from the prospect of any loss or advantage, that may result from our own characters, or from those of others, all the effects of morality must be

¹³ «THE passions of PRIDE and HUMILITY being simple and uniform impressions, 'tis impossible we can ever, by a multitude of words, give a just definition of them, or indeed of any of the passions. The utmost we can pretend to is a description of them, by an enumeration of such circumstances, as attend them: But as these words, *pride* and *humility*, are of general use, and the impressions they represent the most common of any, every one, of himself, will be able to form a just idea of them, without any danger of mistake» (Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 2, para. 1).

deriv'd from the same pain or pleasure, and among the rest, the passions of pride and humility. The very essence of virtue, according to this hypothesis, is to produce pleasure, and that of vice to give pain. The virtue and vice must be part of our character in order to excite pride or humility. What farther proof can we desire for the double relation of impressions and ideas? (Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 7, para. 4)

Hume establishes a straight link between virtue and pride, presenting pride as a necessary element for our development as virtuous agents. This link relies on the fact that we are related at the sentimental level; thanks to sympathy, we react to the opinions of one another and depend on those opinions to draw a correct picture of who we are, both in our eyes and in the eyes of others. In turn, this same sympathetic interconnection among human beings is what gives rise to the common point of view from which we morally assess ourselves and other people.

This is not the place to deal with the specificity of Hume's explanation of the formation of the moral point of view (for a discussion of this point, and for secondary literature, see Greco, 2018). Suffice it to say here that, like Mandeville, Hume too argues that pride cannot emerge but in a context that is social, within which pride reveals itself as a fundamentally beneficial trait. Differently from Mandeville though, pride for Hume is not a private vice that happens to be advantageous to society; pride is virtuous, both at the individual and collective levels, since it is the passion responsible for shaping the virtuous agent. The novelty in Hume is his identification of the virtuous agent with the proud person; it is a key element of ethical behaviour that the virtuous agent be indeed proud of his or her ethical character. This marks a stark difference not only from the Christian tradition but also from Mandeville, with whom Hume's treatment of pride has otherwise so much in common. In Hume, in fact, not only does pride allow people to be more proactive, thus making them capable of succeeding in their activities and of contributing to the good of society; being proud is also a trait that deserves to be praised for its own sake (see Taylor, 2015, ch. 5.4).

For this to happen, however, pride needs to be regulated: «An excessive pride or over-weening conceit of ourselves is always esteem'd vicious, and is universally hated» (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 1). As noted by Gabriele Taylor, pride is «an emotion of self-assessment» (Taylor, 1985), that is, it is a passion (to use Hume's terminology) that is self-directed; the proud person focuses on himself or herself, and this may have the unfortunate result of

making the proud person odious to others. It is a general rule that «the proud never can endure the proud» (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 7); besides, more often than not, our pride is nothing but a form of vanity¹⁴. However frequent this may be, this is not always the case. There is, in fact, a subtle but clear dissimilarity between our feelings of pride and vanity. Alison McIntyre explains this clearly:

[T]he qualities that give rise to pride will be the same as those that give rise to approval from others, but in feeling pride in the face of praise, one's attention is directed, by the principles of sympathy and authority, to the grounds for the praise. On Hume's account, praise intensifies pride because it indicates grounds for pride, not because it constitutes ground for pride itself (T 2.1.11.9; SBN 316–24). (McIntyre, 2014, p. 154)

Eventually, Hume's description of the truly proud person diverges from that of the vain person. His advocacy of true pride is freed from any form of hypocrisy and validates pride as an important moral passion. The distinction between «proto-pride» and «well-founded pride» in Hume drawn by Pauline Chazan (see Chazan, 1992 and 1998, ch.1) comes to our aid in further clarifying this point.

Chazan moves from the observation that there may occur situations in which pride arises inappropriately. Take the case, Chazan argues, of an acrobat who is proud of the public's admiration of her agility and flexibility. This admiration, and consequent pride, contributes to realising the consciousness the acrobat has of herself as someone with those particular gifts. And yet, Chazan stresses, there is no certainty that the public admires *her*, as opposed to admiring, for example, a well-performed exercise, without considering the performer. The acrobat may well continue to believe, erroneously, that the public admires her; what is given is the pleasure of the public, but the pride the acrobat feels may not correspond to what, in reality, this pleasure refers to. This, for Chazan, is a case of proto-pride, and differs from pride proper in that it is a deceptive interpretation of the pleased response of others as if this were directed to us as owners of the admired quality. A case of proto-pride is also presented by Hume when he describes the vain guest at a banquet who boasts about the

¹⁴ It is not by chance that Hume often talks of «pride or vanity» (Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 2, para. 6; bk. 2, part 1, sect. 10, para. 10; Hume, 1983, vol. 3, ch. 68, para. 7). For the relation between pride and vanity in Hume see Reed, 2012, and Galvagni, unpublished manuscript.

success of the event as if he himself had organized it (see Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 6, para. 2).

This is not to say that proto-pride is not a real passion; the acrobat and the vain guest both feel pride to all intents and purposes. The difference between proto-pride and well-founded pride is that what results from proto-pride is a self-consciousness that is unsteady and dependent on the fortuitous occasions in which one happens to feel pride for something that in reality could be associated with us only by chance, if at all. There is a difference between simply feeling pride, which can occur in situations like that of the acrobat and the vain guest, and feeling to be worthy of pride¹⁵. The latter case implies being conscious that one's pride is due to the appreciation bestowed upon those qualities of our person that really belong to us and individuate us. A pride of this type is not derived from transient pleasures that are only incidentally connected to the person feeling this passion, but from an evaluation of the qualities of the person that may be called virtues in their own right.

Chazan moves from this distinction to argue that it is possible to pin down a stable sense of self by referring to well-founded pride. She calls it a «non-metaphysical self», since it does not correspond to the bundle of perceptions Hume discusses in the chapter of the *Treatise* (bk. 1, part 4, sect. 6) devoted to personal identity. On the contrary, the passion of pride allows us to conceive the self as a unified agent. Such a different perspective on the self in Hume is highlighted by numerous scholars¹⁶, and emerges from the positive self-

¹⁵ On the difference between simply feeling pride and the consciousness of being worthy of praise, see Árdal, 1989. This point was also amply developed by Adam Smith (see Smith, 2002, part 7, sect. 2, ch. 4). On the same note, according to Gabriele Taylor, the attitude of the vain «is not that of a person who is secure in her self-esteem. On the contrary, she seeks to find her own value in the judgement of others. She therefore will tend to take pleasure in every favourable opinion about herself which she can gather, and be depressed by any adverse one, quite regardless of its appropriateness or truth. She clings to the opinions of others since on these hinges her self-evaluation. But this leaves her in a precarious position, for the response of others is hardly something to be relied upon, especially if what satisfies the vain is flattery rather than honest conviction. Others may not wish to play the game, may change their minds, and so on» (Taylor, 2006, pp. 72–73).

¹⁶ For example, Jane McIntyre says that «Book 2 depicts the role of the passions in the creation of a self which is unified through time. It details how the Humean self can be affected by its past and concerned with its future» (McIntyre, 1989, p. 557). According to Amélie Rorty, «[t]he idea of the self produced by pride is that of the self as an agent, with a concern for its future, an agent who has reasons to weight the motivational force of her passions, to give them a ranked priority beyond

evaluation generated by our feeling justifiably proud for who we are. «But tho' an over-weaning conceit of our own merit be vicious and disagreeable», Hume notices, «nothing can be more laudable, than to have a value for ourselves, where we really have qualities that are valuable» (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 8). The self-confidence supplied by a well-grounded pride roots our sense of being a recognisable individual, with a clear practical identity:

[A]nd 'tis certain, that nothing is more useful to us in the conduct of life, than a due degree of pride, which makes us sensible of our own merit, and gives us a confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprizes. Whatever capacity any one may be endow'd with, 'tis entirely useless to him, if he be not acquainted with it, and form not designs suitable to it. 'Tis requisite on all occasions to know our own force; and were it allowable to err on either side, twou'd be more advantageous to overrate our merit, than to form ideas of it, below its just standard. Fortune commonly favours the bold and enterprising; and nothing inspires us with more boldness than a good opinion of ourselves. (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 8)

Commenting on the nature of the proud person, Tara Smith claims that «[t]he proud person is his own in the truest sense, by winning his own approbation. Self-evaluation is what counts. The good opinion that a proud person seeks is his own» (Smith, 1998, p. 75). This is true for Hume too, since it is only from within himself or herself that eventually the proud person can obtain the final confirmation of his or her value¹⁷. Such self-confirmation, however, finds its

previously experienced pleasurable intensity and duration» (Rorty, 1990, p. 258) Similarly to Chazan, Gerald Postema too observes that «[t]he self of which we speak here is not the subject of the philosophical debate over personal identity famously discussed in *Treatise*, Book 1. Rather, the self of *Treatise*, Book 2 is the focus of “the concern we take in ourselves” (T 1.4.6.5; SBN 253), our “present concern for our past or future pleasures and pains” (T 1.4.6.19; SBN 261). This is not a metaphysical substance, but the relatively (but contingently) stable focus of practical concern. This self, Hume tells us, can only exist by contextual comparison» (Postema, 2005, p. 267). On this sense of the Humean self, see Greco, 2015.

¹⁷ This is acknowledged by Gabriele Taylor as well: «The discussion of the Humean system has made it plain that an analysis of pride must be in terms of the agent's own view of the situation, where this includes both, how he sees his own role within this situation, and his evaluation of this or that aspect of it» (Taylor, 1980, p. 392). Note, however, that in the end Taylor considers pride

surest support in our acknowledgement of the importance of ethics in defining who we are¹⁸. Other people's opinions as carried by sympathy do matter in our feeling positively or negatively about ourselves – «the mind of men are mirrors to one another» (Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 2, sect. 5, para. 21), Hume says – but only a judgment on ourselves asserted from the common point of view of morality possesses that stability that allows us to acquire a firm consciousness of ourselves.

According to Gabriele Taylor, Hume is convinced that «we are proud of qualities etc. only in so far as they are likely to gain the admiration and approval of society» (Taylor, 1985, p. 26). Yet, this is an imprecise reading of Hume. Validation by society alone is insufficient; only when our pride is indeed a solid, reflectively sustained «pride in virtue» (see Baier, 1980 and 1991, ch. 8; Besser, 2010; Taylor, 2011 and 2015, ch. 5) can we consider ourselves as fully-fledged virtuous agents. It is our taking part in virtue for Hume that reinforces our sense of ourselves through the passion of pride, not just the superficial fact that someone shows interest or applauds us – be it an audience for whom we are performing, or the whole of our society judging us (think in this sense about a recalcitrant who does not agree with the mainstream of his or her community, for example an anti-Fascist in Fascist Italy)¹⁹. Jacqueline Taylor nicely articulates this:

[T]he virtuous person is not proud of her virtue simply because others approve of her, nor does she act virtuously to gain others' approval. In possessing the traits of kindness and pride in virtue, she has traits that others value, and which make her praiseworthy in their eyes. The

to be a vice. Given her neo-Aristotelian stance, whereby the fully virtuous «get their reasoning right, they possess practical wisdom, a kind of knowledge or sensitivity», pride – especially when it takes the forms of vanity, conceit, and arrogance – ends up focussing excessively «on the self and its position in the world, [becoming] destructive of that self and [preventing] its flourishing» (Taylor, 2006, pp. 2, 1).

¹⁸ For Tara Smith too, «[w]hile the feeling of being pleased with oneself may arise for all sorts of reasons, admirable and not so admirable, the virtue of pride occurs only as an outgrowth of authentically moral practice. The feeling of pride must be harnessed to morally right belief and action in order to reflect the virtue of pride». And then, «[p]ride is the commitment to achieve one's moral excellence» (Smith, 1998, pp. 75, 76).

¹⁹ The capacity that pride in virtue gives us to stay true in the face of contempt, or explicit hostility, from our community opens up interesting developments regarding the relation between Humean pride and political dissent. However, this inquiry requires more space than can be devoted here. I wish to thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out to me.

approval of others is a recognition that she is valuable, and her response of pride is an affirmation of her self-worth. [...] Pride makes us aware of ourselves as the possessor of valuable qualities, the value of which is shared by others who admire or esteem us for these qualities. (Taylor, 2011, p. 271)

On her part, Annette Baier speaks of a «mutual reinforcement» between pride and virtue:

The merger of corrected pride with the moral sentiment is seen not only by the fact that pride accompanies discernment of virtue but by the fact that pride may accompany virtue, so that one's own discerned pride in virtue will be a further proof of virtue and a further occasion for pride. Virtuous pride in virtue reinforces both pride and virtue, so that pride and the moral sense become lost in one another. (Baier, 1980, p. 417)

With pride in virtue we are justly proud of ourselves as the possessors of those virtuous traits that define us as virtuous agents. When this happens, a virtuous circle is established between virtuous action and self-esteem, with the result that our moral character comes out stronger. So pride in virtue constitutes both a form of self-evaluation, in the form of the self-respect we develop as bearers of virtuous characters, and a motivating drive to act according to virtue. In fact, although pride for Hume is not a direct motive to action (see Reed, 2012; Taylor, 2015, ch. 2.2), nonetheless – in Tara Smith's words – it «heightens and fortifies one's commitment to other moral virtues», serving «as an engine of morality [...] propelling a person's moral growth». In this sense, pride can well be taken as a «healthy love of self» (Smith, 1998, pp. 81, 82, 85). Smith does not examine pride from a Humean perspective, but what she says in this regard suits Hume well²⁰.

4. Pagan Virtue

Hume offers a sophisticated illustration of what pride consists in that helps us to put this passion in the right light. Pride indeed revolves around the self and

²⁰ Arnold Isenberg says something similar: «Pride, from a psychological standpoint, is pleasure taken in the possession of some quality that one deems valuable [...] A *genuine* and *reasonable* pride, from the ethical standpoint, will depend on a comprehensive and just sense of values» (Isenberg, 1980, p. 358).

discloses itself within a social dimension: «Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue, beauty and riches; have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others» (Hume, 2007, bk. 2, part 1, sect. 11, para. 1). We resonate with others, and our self-appraisal is directly affected by the feedback we get from those around us. In this continual rebound of reciprocal assessments we test our self-esteem, hence putting on the line our very sense of ourselves as agents. This is partly related to Mandeville's belief that pride is a necessary vice, in which by centring on ourselves we all the same make society prosper. The sharp difference is that for Hume pride is not a vice, even less a sin²¹. Pride, Hume tells us, is a virtue, and this is basically because thanks to pride the moral agent becomes visible. In so doing, pride works as «a meta- or regulative virtue» (Herdt, 2008, p. 313), putting in motion a reflective process of self-confirmation that is dependent on the sympathetic nature of human relations:

Who indeed does not feel an accession of alacrity in his pursuits of knowledge and ability of every kind, when he considers, that besides the advantage, which immediately result from these acquisitions, they also give him a new lustre in the eyes of mankind, and are universally attended with esteem and approbation? And who can think any advantages of fortune a sufficient compensation for the least breach of the *social* virtues, when he considers, that not only his character with regard to others, but also his peace and inward satisfaction entirely depend upon his strict observance of them; and that a mind will never be able to bear its own survey, that has been wanting in its part to mankind and society? (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 6, para. 6)²²

²¹ Consider in this regard Hume's defence of luxury from the accusation of being vicious, as presented in *Of Refinement in the Arts*. As Hume remarks, «[i]s it not very inconsistent for an author to assert in one page, that moral distinctions are inventions of politicians for public interest; and in the next page maintain, that vice is advantageous to the public? And indeed it seems upon any system of morality, little less than a contradiction in terms, to talk of a vice, which is in general beneficial to society» (Hume, 1985b, 280). Mandeville is never mentioned in *Of Refinement in the Arts*, but it is plain that he is the main target of Hume.

²² Jennifer Herdt quotes this passage too, and adds: «Were we not capable of pride, and through sympathy capable of having our pride damaged or reinforced by the ways others assess us, we would not be able to act in accordance with moral judgments that strain against our own self-

In this progression toward the affirmation of a well-grounded self, ethics plays an indispensable role. It is in fact pride in virtue that provides solidity to our selves as moral agents, guaranteeing that the qualities for which we praise ourselves, and are praised by others, are not transitory and accidental, but essentially belong to our characters.

Notice that Hume never presents morality as hypocritical. There can, of course, be cases in which our abiding by virtue is insincere. But this is not always necessarily so, nor do these cases prove anything with regard to morality as a universal fraud. The crucial point is that within the Humean framework virtue is the product of a human nature that reveals itself through passions and affections such as pride, and the closer morality is brought to human nature, the less morality can be seen as hypocritical. On the contrary, when morality is detached from human nature – as is the case with Mandeville, who considers human appetites and desires as degenerate because of a moral standard based on reason and self-denial – it is easy to reduce morality to nothing but a masquerade. Things go even worse when morality is made dependent on religion; Hume's defense of pride also proceeds through a head-on attack against this latter way of understanding morality.

Hume deems virtuous a trait of character that is either useful or immediately agreeable to other people or to oneself, and pride is indeed useful and agreeable to the person who possesses it (see Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 14). In making us sensible to our own merit, and in giving us confidence in our projects and enterprises, pride is by all means virtuous, since someone who is self-aware of his or her own true value will be more successful in his or her undertakings²³. However, pride can also be useful and agreeable to others, thus meeting all the four criteria for a trait of character to be virtuous in Humean terms. By being self-reliant, we can grow well-balanced connections with those around us, developing a more precise sense of other people's individualities and of the relations they have with us, ending up treating them in morally appropriate ways. Thanks to pride, we can thus be recognised and valued by others as «a safe companion, an easy friend, a gentle master, an

interest or limited generosity. We would not, in short, be able to sustain the practice of morality, although we would still display natural virtues in some limited contexts, showing generosity toward friends and care for our dependent children (T 316–24)» (Herdt, 2008, p. 313).

²³ This applies to pride understood both as a moral virtue and as an intellectual one. On intellectual virtue in Hume, see O'Brien, 2018.

agreeable husband, or an indulgent father» (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 3, para. 9). Far from being egoistic, pride is the passion that makes us reach out to other people, and that is possible because pride gives us that self-assurance that stabilises our identity as moral agents.

When pride is framed in those terms, it is naturally paired with «modesty, or a just sense of our weakness» (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 1). «[A] genuine and hearty pride, or self-esteem, if well conceal'd and well founded» (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 11) will not be blatantly exhibited. It is part and parcel of such a passion to be controlled and self-regulated, thus being vented with due regard to other people's pride and sense of themselves. If humility is ever felt in those circumstances, it never «goes beyond the outside» (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 11). Modesty and humility should not be confused with one another (see Baier, 1991, p. 206; Martin, 1992, p. 287). The former is in harmony with the sensible self-awareness acquired through a well-founded pride:

Modesty may be understood in different senses, [...] [b]ut its most usual meaning is when it is opposed to *impudence* and *arrogance*, and expresses a diffidence of our own judgment, and a due attention and regard for others. In young men chiefly, this quality is a sure sign of good sense; and is also the certain means of augmenting that endowment, by preserving their ears open to instruction, and making them still grasp after new attainments. (Hume, 1998, sect. 8, para. 8)

We show modesty when we recognise our own limits, and this is not a denial of pride, but instead its very confirmation²⁴. Instead, being humble is almost certainly a sign of a vicious character in Hume's eyes. When arguing about the various expressions well-established pride can take, Hume mentions «*heroic virtue*», or «greatness and elevation of mind», as it manifests itself in traits of character such as «[c]ourage, intrepidity, ambition, love or glory, magnanimity,

²⁴ «[A] generous spirit and self-value, well founded, decently disguised, and courageously supported under distress and calumny, is a great excellency, and seems to derive its merit from the noble elevation of its sentiment, or its immediate agreeableness to its possessor. In ordinary characters, we approve of a bias towards modesty, which is a quality immediately agreeable to others: The vicious excess of the former virtue, namely, insolence or haughtiness, is immediately disagreeable to others: The excess of the latter is so to the possessor. Thus are the boundaries of these duties adjusted» (Hume, 1998, sect. 8, para. 10).

and all the other shining virtues of that kind» (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 13). It is the case that Christian thought denounces them as vices, but Hume strongly disagrees:

Accordingly we find, that many religious declaimers decry those virtues as purely pagan and natural, and represent to us the excellency of the *Christian* religion, which places humility in the rank of virtues, and corrects the judgment of the world, and even of philosophers, who so generally admire all the efforts of pride and ambition. Whether this virtue of humility has been rightly understood, I shall not pretend to determine. I am content with the concession, that the world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride, which secretly animates our conduct, without breaking out into such indecent expressions of vanity, as may offend the vanity of others. (Hume, 2007, bk. 3, part 3, sect. 2, para. 13)

Again in Mandeville's footsteps, Hume acknowledges that although humility has been constantly advocated as a virtue, «[t]he world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride». Yet, in opposition to Mandeville, Hume does not see the praise of the world as inevitably inauthentic. If we want to find hypocrisy, we should instead look into the conduct of those divines who appear to be so fond of humility²⁵. Virtue and vice are dependent for Hume on people feeling pleasure and pain, which is a fact of experience that is derived from an unbiased observation of how human nature expresses itself. This being the case, if we take

²⁵ This is how Hume describes their behaviour in *Of National Characters*: «It must, therefore, happen, that clergymen, being drawn from the common mass of mankind, as people are to other employments, by the views of profit, the greater part, though no atheists or free-thinkers, will find it necessary, on particular occasions, to feign more devotion than they are, at that time, possessed of, and to maintain the appearance of fervor and seriousness, even when jaded with the exercises of their religion, or when they have their minds engaged in the common occupations of life. They must not, like the rest of the world, give scope to their natural movements and sentiments: They must set a guard over their looks and words and actions: And in order to support the veneration paid them by the multitude, they must not only keep a remarkable reserve, but must promote the spirit of superstition, by a continued grimace and hypocrisy. This dissimulation often destroys the candor and ingenuity of their temper, and makes an irreparable breach in their character. If by chance any of them be possessed of a temper more susceptible of devotion than usual, so that he has but little occasion for hypocrisy to support the character of his profession; it is so natural for him to over-rate this advantage, and to think that it atones for every violation of morality, that frequently he is not more virtuous than the hypocrite» (Hume, 1985a, footnote 3, pp. 199–200).

humility and all the other «monkish virtues» professed by Christian religion, like «[c]elibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, [...] silence, solitude» (Hume, 1998, sect. 9, para. 3), they are most of the time only productive of suffering and unhappiness:

[T]hey serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment [...] on the contrary, [...] they cross all these desirable ends; stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. (Hume, 1998, sect. 9, para. 3)

Monkish virtues, including humility, artificially force humanity in a direction that is both unnatural, unreasonable, and deeply vicious. Quite the contrary, what has been blamed as «the beginning of all sins» is, in fact, one of the basic ways human nature unfolds, and a necessary component of a virtuous life. «[S]omeone reared under conditions of constant humiliation will likely not develop a strong understanding of her place in the community», Margaret Watkins notes, «what she has to offer in relationships, or perhaps much of a sense of herself at all. But even those reared in better circumstances will discover vulnerabilities – holes in the self's mosaic that need patching by the loving care of friends, family, and lovers. For Hume, this is a sign of humanity, not vice» (Watkins, 2019, p. 184). Be proud! Hume exhorts us, since that is the best way to promote virtue, while humility makes ourselves as well as others equally miserable. By advancing pride, Hume is therefore both putting aside religious morality and distancing himself from those attempts of downgrading ethics to nothing but a mockery of human narcissism, thus encouraging a pagan virtue²⁶ that is respectful of human nature and its constitutive passions.

²⁶ «Hume's moral philosophy, then, is an explicit attempt to restore a fully pagan ethic, one that does not pay even lip service to Christianity. A character driven by pride and love of glory is frankly virtuous in Hume's eyes. He utterly rejects an Augustinian moral psychology, no longer employing it even for satirical effect. There is no contrast between true virtue and apparently virtuous actions produced out of the desire to be loved and respected» (Herdt, 2008, p. 314). On the revival of pagan ethics, see Casey, 1991.

5. Conclusion

In this essay, I have offered a vindication of pride. I started by presenting the Christian condemnation of pride as the cardinal sin; by pivoting on the self, pride both represents an affront against God and it draws us away from our fellow human beings. I then asked what is the status of pride for those who do not move from a religious perspective. In particular, I asked if pride is still a trait of character pernicious to other people. To answer this question, I examined Mandeville's line of argument whereby pride can indeed be beneficial to society at large, although remaining a vice for the individual. Thus I argued that Hume's account is an improvement on that of Mandeville. Hume's view of morality as the outcome of human nature as seen in sentimental terms brings out the strengths of pride; pride is not vicious for the person who feels it, nor does the person need to assume a hypocritical countenance in his or her relations with others because of that. On the contrary, pride stabilizes the virtuous agent by creating a virtuous circle between our desire for self-appraisal and our aspiration to act morally. When seen through the Humean lens, pride reveals itself to be valuable both for the individual and for the community, hence qualifying as a virtue to all intents and purposes. Also, pride so understood allows us to appreciate modesty to the detriment of humility, which should instead be discarded as vicious.

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