

## Pride, Achievement, and Purpose

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The kind of pride I'm interested in tells a story. The shape of the story, roughly, is that there was something challenging that needed to be done to promote or protect some good, and I did it. Sometimes the story is true and the pride warranted, and sometimes it's not. Either way, someone who feels proud of what she's done thereby regards her life as having been at least somewhat meaningful. Her pride motivates her to keep doing the same sort of thing.

In this paper, I'll fill in the details of this account and defend it. I'll begin by distinguishing between varieties of pride. Though pride always involves regarding something good as reflecting ourselves, its varieties differ both in terms of the kind of good that we're proud of and our relation to it. Its objects vary from having a full head of hair or being invited to a VIP lounge to writing a hit song or building a boat for your family. The latter two are examples of *achievement*. Robert Solomon suggests that it is defining of genuine pride that "it is about our achievements in the world" (1976, 345). While I think this is an exaggeration (what I'll call associative pride is also real pride), achievement is certainly one of the paradigmatic objects of pride.

My term for the kind of pride whose object is something we regard as a praiseworthy achievement of our own is *agential pride*. As I'll discuss in the first section, recent psychological literature distinguishes between two varieties of it. In so-called authentic pride, I attribute what I regard as a praiseworthy achievement to some particular and contingent choice or effort that I'm responsible for. I take the achievement to reflect my thin self, as I'll

say – roughly, I regard myself as the subject of free choice undetermined by my inclinations, characteristics, or situation. In this focus on the self as free and responsible, authentic pride is the positive counterpart of guilt. It is naturally expressed in English by saying that someone is “proud of A”, where A is something they’ve done. In contrast, in *hubristic pride*, I attribute my role in bringing about something good to some lasting trait or ability of mine. In such cases it is often apt to say that a person is “proud of himself” or “proud of herself” in virtue of an achievement. Here I take the achievement to indicate that my thick self – roughly, my personality and character, which I need not regard as being up to me – is somehow superior to others. Hubristic pride is the positive counterpart of shame, which similarly focuses on the whole self, even if it is occasioned by an individual act.

In the second section, I turn to the object of agential pride, which I’ve roughly characterized as (apparently) praiseworthy achievement. For something to be an achievement, it must be challenging to bring about, but not every achievement is praiseworthy. While it’s tempting to think that praiseworthy achievements result in good outcomes, it is not easy to say what is good about, say, scoring a goal in the World Cup final or beating a business rival to a big contract. So I maintain that praiseworthiness is more indirectly connected to value. Praise is merited when we meet or exceed challenging and authoritative standards for an activity we’re engaged in, as long as the opportunity cost of engagement isn’t excessive. What makes the standards of an activity or practice authoritative is that it promotes or protects or realizes something of sufficient value. In addition, as with achievements in general, our praiseworthy performance must be competently caused – it must manifest a skill or excellence rather than mere good luck. Agential pride, then, is primarily warranted, roughly, when our skillful performance meets tough, authoritative standards either as a result of free choice or character.

The third section of the paper discusses pride's link to meaningfulness. When we feel agential pride, especially when we do so on account of seeing both the good and the bad aspects of our past contributing to praiseworthy achievements, we experience our lives as having meaning and purpose. Pride, to be sure, is only one element of a sense of purpose, which is a sentiment that also involves being fulfilled by our present activity and faith in future success. But when it is fitting, our life taken as a whole is at least somewhat meaningful. Thinking about the legitimate sources of pride thus helps us understand what makes life worth living beyond pleasure and happiness.

### **1. Pride and Agency**

Any discussion of pride requires some ground-clearing, since it is a complex phenomenon. The first distinction is between pride as a trait of someone we call a "proud person" and pride as an emotion. Generally, when philosophers criticize pride as a vice or sin, they are talking about it as a character trait. Saying that someone is a proud person in this sense conveys, roughly, that she is disposed to think of herself as being superior to (most) others in some significant way, and expects them to acknowledge this by deference and special treatment. Perhaps, as Robert Roberts (2009) suggests, the mark of a proud person is exaggerated concern with one's own status, honour, and personal importance, while the humble person easily and automatically puts such things out of her mind for the sake of some important pursuit. Such pride is a vice. On the other hand, in special contexts, in which someone, say a gay or black person, is regarded as inferior to others, it makes pragmatic sense to talk about pride when the person thinks of herself as *equal* rather than better than others, and expects others to acknowledge this by equal treatment. This variant of trait pride goes together with self-respect, and is no kind of vice.

In any case, my focus in this paper is on pride as an emotion rather than a character trait. It is only loosely related to pride as a trait – it is possible for a humble person to feel (or even ‘be’) proud occasionally. Like all emotions, pride has many aspects, at least typically. Fear is a paradigmatic example. An emotion is triggered by a belief or perception of a state of affairs relevant to what one cares about. In the case of fear, it might be “there’s a snake on the path that might bite me!”. It involves a presentation or representation of the target having a certain property, such as being dangerous in the case of fear. This is sometimes called the emotion’s formal object. Further, there is at least usually a qualitative feel that goes with the emotion. It is possibly associated with bodily changes, such as heart beating faster or sweating. And finally, there’s a motivational element – fear moves you to run away. Emotion theorists disagree about which of these elements are essential to an emotion. I will not try to settle the issue here.<sup>1</sup> What I’ll do instead is focus on pride’s presentational and motivational aspects. My hypothesis is that pride is an emotion that comes in many forms, which are not all equal from a moral perspective. What unifies these variants? In the simplest terms, feeling proud always involves seeing something good as reflecting oneself. Jeremy Fischer’s (2012, 2015) more specific thesis is that when we feel proud of something, we take it to show that we’re living in accordance with our personal ideals. This is something that very different things like possessing something, being member of a group, or doing something might all indicate. In this talk, I’m going to focus on pride that relates to our own agency, and set aside other forms. Importantly, within this category, there is still variety. To orient ourselves, let’s first consider the following brief scenarios:

*Michelle’s Pride*

Michelle works very hard for months, calling on all her resources and abilities, and finally manages to get the Congress to pass legislation that will offer millions of

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<sup>1</sup> For recent attempts, see e.g. Prinz 2004, Deonna and Teroni 2012, and Tappolet 2016.

families support for good quality childcare, significantly reducing the burden on working women in particular. When she signs it into law, she thinks of the effort she's made and feels proud of the achievement.

### *Biff's Pride*

A coven of investors offers \$15 million for a development site Biff bought for \$4 million during the recession, on a tip from a friend of his father's. As he signs on the dotted line, Biff thinks about his superior business acumen, and feels proud of himself.

Michelle's and Biff's pride are both cases of *agential pride*, pride we take in what we see as our own achievements. In psychological terms, both involve "internal attribution", in which "the self is credited as the cause of the event" (Tracy and Robins 2007, 265).<sup>2</sup> But as recent psychological work has highlighted, there are important differences between these two 'facets' of pride. The main difference is in the way in which we take the achievement to reflect us. In the case of authentic pride, we "attribute [...] success to internal, unstable, and controllable causes", while in the case of hubristic pride we "attribute success to internal, stable, and uncontrollable causes" (Tracy and Robins 2007, 522). In both cases, then, we regard ourselves as having done something that reflects well on us (more on this below). But in authentic pride, we regard the success as the result of something like effort, something that we might not have made (it is an "unstable cause"), and that it is up to us to make (it is a "controllable cause"). In hubristic pride, we regard the success as the result of our abilities, talent, or character traits, which are stable features of ourselves that we can't change at will.

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<sup>2</sup> Talk about the self as 'the cause' (or even *a* cause) of an event may make some philosophers wince, but I think the idea is clear.

There are many sources of evidence for the two facets hypothesis. First, self-conscious emotions in general involve either global or specific self-attribution (Lewis 2008, 747). In the first case, the action is seen as reflecting our self as a whole, while in the latter, “an individual’s focus is not on the totality of the self, but on the specific behavior of the self in a specific situation” (ibid.). In the case of negative self-conscious emotions, this is quite clear (Tangney and Dearing 2002). While we’re guilty for specific bad things we’ve done, shame attaches to the whole self – I’m ashamed of who I am (perhaps as a result of some specific act or thought that reveals it to me). It’s no wonder, then, that shame characteristically motivates us to hide ourselves, while guilt motivates making amends for the specific wrong. It would be surprising if there *wasn’t* a parallel distinction in positive self-conscious emotions. It is reasonable to think that authentic pride is the positive counterpart to guilt, and hubristic pride the counterpart to shame. This parallel extends to consequences of these emotions. Psychologists find that both shame and hubristic pride are ‘maladaptive’, that is, linked to bad outcomes for the subject. For example, tendency to feel hubristic pride is negatively related to ‘prosocial’ traits like agreeableness and conscientiousness (Tracy and Robins 2007, Study 2). Perhaps surprisingly, it is also negatively related to self-esteem, and positively related to narcissism and shame-proneness. It seems, then, that people who tend to feel hubristic pride have some sort of anxiety about who they are, and seek to reassure themselves by attributing success to traits or abilities they see as defining themselves. In contrast, tendency to feel authentic pride is linked with emotional stability, self-esteem, and conscientiousness.

There are further empirical sources of evidence for the distinction between facets. In one study, Jessica Tracy and Richard Robins (2007, Study 1) asked people to rate pride-related words for similarity, and found that this generated two clusters, one intuitively matching authentic pride (terms like “achieving”, “self-confident”, “triumphant”) and the

other hubristic pride (“cocky”, “arrogant”, “self-righteous”). Another study (Ibid., Study 3) asked people to describe incidents in which they felt very proud, and found that people who attributed success to effort or specific action thought words from the authentic pride cluster describe their feelings best, while people who attributes success to talent or personality used terms from the hubristic pride cluster. Manipulating the manner of self-attribution (Study 4) further confirmed these results.

Tracy and her colleagues (e.g. Tracy, Shariff, and Cheng 2010) further hypothesize that these two facets of pride serve different functions. Roughly, they suggest that authentic pride has evolved to promote behaviors that help the individual attain or maintain *prestige-based* social status, or “a form of high rank based in part on appraisals of competence” (Weidman, Tracy, and Elliot 2016, 608). It motivates us to seek further occasions on which we can display our skills for social valued achievements. In support of this hypothesis, experimental studies suggest that manipulating people to feel pride leads them to perform better and persevere longer with tasks (Williams and DeSteno 2008). Hubristic pride, in turn, involves evaluating oneself as better in some way than others, as well as feelings of superiority and power (Tangney and Tracy 2010). One hypothesis is that its function is to promote *dominance-based* social status by motivating aggression, intimidation, and manipulation of perceived subordinates (Cheng, Tracy, and Henrich 2010). This is a risky strategy, since such behavior may cause others to dislike the hubristic person. If authentic pride, in contrast, is to promote prestige based on recognition of ability and achievement, it must motivate behavior that doesn’t result in such negative reaction, so it’s unsurprising that it’s linked with traits like agreeability (ibid.).

It seems to me that the distinction between these two aspects of pride – or two distinct but related emotions of pride – is well-motivated. To make the distinction do

philosophical work, I'm going to characterize them in terms of their content and motivation, starting with the authentic variant:

*Authentic Pride*

Characteristic expression: "I'm proud of A".

Presentational content: A is a praiseworthy achievement of mine, and specific efforts or choices I made play a significant role in explaining A.

Motivational content: To continue to make efforts and choices resulting in A-like outcomes, to highlight my role in bringing about A.

So, if Michelle is authentically proud of passing the family legislation, it seems to her that passing the family legislation is a praiseworthy achievement, and that her specific efforts or choices play a significant role in explaining why the family legislation was passed. Her pride will be warranted or fitting if these seemings are true. Note that it is very natural here to say that she is proud *of the achievement*, as I've suggested – the focus of pride is on the achievement that she takes to reflect herself, rather than directly on herself. Consequently, what her feeling motivates her to do is more of the same sort of thing. In general, it also seems to motivate promoting awareness of one's role in bringing about the achievement. This is perhaps why there may appear to be something obnoxious about pride. But this may be just contingent – depending on personality and situation, pride may simply (defeasibly) motivate one to be open about one's achievement rather than trying to hide it. This kind of quiet pride is hardly objectionable.

I want to emphasize two things about authentic pride that are not explicit in the above. First, like all varieties of pride, authentic pride remains a self-conscious emotion in that the achievement is seen as reflecting oneself. In this case, the aspect of the self that is reflected in the good thing is the self as the subject of will or power to make choices. This is a *thin*



*conception of the self*. It's not that who I am determined me to act as I did – I could have done otherwise, but I chose to make the effort. I stand apart from my situation, character, and potentially even my ends. That is, authentic pride involves regarding ourselves rather like the 'unencumbered self' in Michael Sandel's (1982) sense, since it doesn't attach to any defining traits, but our power to step back and choose freely.

Second, the content of authentic pride has a *narrative structure*. Roughly: I wanted or decided to accomplish something, I made an effort, and eventually I succeeded in realizing my aim. This has the elements of the classical Aristotelian story structure, sometimes summarized as consisting of an inciting incident (beginning), complication or action taken by the protagonist to solve the problem posed by the inciting incident in the face of obstacles (middle), and resolution, that is, success or failure at handling or transforming the problem (end).<sup>3</sup> It portrays us as temporally extended agents facing challenges in pursuit of something good. This will be important for understanding its relation to meaning in life, which I'll discuss in Section 3 below.

Turning to hubristic pride, here are its defining features:

Characteristic expression: "I'm proud of myself", "I'm proud of my honesty".

Presentational content: A is a praiseworthy achievement of mine, and my superior traits and abilities play a significant role in explaining A. (Alternatively: I have traits or abilities that (most) other people lack, and those abilities are conducive to praiseworthy achievements.)

Motivation: To express, develop, maintain, and advertise the traits I'm proud of – to stay who I am – and to demand acknowledgement and deference on this kind of matter.

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<sup>3</sup> What if one is proud of a spontaneous, instant action? (This question was posed by one of the editors.) It is certainly possible to be proud of, say, an instant reaction that saved someone from falling in front of a train. But insofar as there was no time for choice, effort, and overcoming obstacles, it seems to me that this is a case of hubristic pride (the thought is something like "I'm the kind of person who acts quickly when needed") that is occasioned by a particular action.

If we're hubristically proud of a specific achievement (which I think is possible but not necessary), we focus on the role of our lasting traits or gifts in bringing it about. Because of this focus on our *thick self* – myself as someone defined by personality and character traits, as well as the abilities I take to define the kind of person I am – it may also be said to present those traits as excellent or conducive to achievement. Parallel to shame, I suspect hubristic pride often involves being seen or imagining being seen to excel by others. The story it tells is that I'm an excellent fellow, who can be expected to be more successful than most when faced with challenges, and that the specific achievement that occasions the feeling is an indication or corroboration of this view of myself. Because of this focus on the thick self, it is often appropriate to talk about being proud of oneself, even if the feeling is triggered by a specific thing one has done. This is what is going on in Biff's case, when the successful deal leads him to focus on his superior business nous. It will predictably motivate him to put himself forward on matters related to the present achievement, expect others to listen, and to resist change to the dispositions underlying his performance.

## **2. Achievement, Praise, and Pride**

So far, my focus has been on the different ways in which we take (what we regard as) praiseworthy achievements to reflect ourselves in feeling proud. Now it is time to examine in more detail what praiseworthy achievements are. Doing so will make it clearer when pride is warranted, and will also help see the unity of agential pride better.

Let's begin with what makes something an achievement. In one sense, we may talk about achievement whenever someone succeeds in reaching their aim. But often we reserve the term for something more exceptional – for “those endeavors that are particularly noteworthy in some respect, and evoke a sense of awe, admiration, and of being impressed”, as

Gwen Bradford (2015, 4) puts it in a recent landmark monograph.<sup>4</sup> As Bradford says, it is such notable achievements that are worth of effort and sacrifice and give meaning and value to our lives. What do these “capital-A achievements” have in common? Let us follow Bradford in distinguishing between what she calls the process and outcome components of an achievement. The process is some exercise of agency, and the outcome an event or state of affairs. An achievement, then, is an event or state that results from the right kind of exercise of agency.

Bradford argues convincingly that it is not the value of the outcome that makes something an achievement (though as I’ll argue below, evaluative considerations matter when it comes to praiseworthy achievements). It can be an achievement to rob a bank, conduct an elaborate prank, or climb Mount Everest. What makes these notable achievements is to be found in the process that results in them, and the causal relation between the process and product. Bradford summarizes her view as follows: “achievements have two parts—the process and the product—where one of these parts (the process) is difficult, and competently causes the other part (the product)” (2015, 25). She further analyzes difficulty in terms of intense effort needed to bring about the outcome, and competent causation in terms of justified true beliefs about causing the outcome, or knowing what one is doing. On this account, achievements are relative – for example, climbing the stairs is not an achievement for me, since it’s not difficult for me, but if you’re a small toddler, it may be an achievement, because it is difficult for you. Achievements are also something that agents are responsible for – bringing about a good outcome by chance or

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<sup>4</sup> Parallel discussions regarding epistemic achievement include Greco 2010 and Pritchard 2010. Unfortunately, I cannot address them in detail in this paper.

good luck doesn't make it an achievement. This is what the competent causation condition attempts to capture.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere, I've suggested that it might be a good idea to refine Bradford's account somewhat.<sup>6</sup> Her view of difficulty struggles to accommodate the sense that an expert at something might not need intense effort to achieve something. My proposal is that we say achievements are *challenging*, where something is challenging if it either requires intense effort, or a lot of skill. As to competent causation, talk of justified true beliefs appears to be too intellectualistic – a football player need not have justified beliefs about the preferability of kicking the ball with the left foot in a certain situation to do so competently. What matters is that success is not due to luck, but rather manifests a skill or competence of ours, where skill is a matter of having various kinds of control over our actions and their outcomes rather than having beliefs (see Fridland 2014 for skill and Sosa 2013 for competence).

In any case, I'm going to assume that something like Bradford's view is the correct characterization of achievement. It is clear that not all things that are achievements according to it are praiseworthy. Consider committing a crime without getting caught, or drinking a whole bottle of vodka by yourself, or achieving a personal best in Pac-man. All these things might be challenging to bring about and thus amount to achievements when they're manifestations of a skill, but praise (and pride) for them would be misplaced. So what is in common to praiseworthy achievements?

The first datum to bear in mind is that praiseworthy achievements are highly varied. They can include brokering a nuclear deal with Iran, painting *Guernica*, winning an Olympic medal, and designing a popular smartphone. Thinking about even this limited range of

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<sup>5</sup> There are clear parallels here with the role of competence in making true beliefs knowledge (see e.g. Sosa 2011).

<sup>6</sup> In my comments on Bradford's book at the Pacific Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, March 31, 2016. A version of these comments can be found online at [https://www.academia.edu/24170947/Achievement\\_Perfection\\_and\\_Pride](https://www.academia.edu/24170947/Achievement_Perfection_and_Pride).

examples suggests two important things about praiseworthiness. First, while some praiseworthy achievements, like the nuclear deal, involve morally good outcomes, most don't. Some outcomes are aesthetically valuable, like *Guernica*. But what about getting an Olympic gold medal or designing a successful smartphone? There doesn't seem to be anything morally or aesthetically good about doing such things – it wouldn't have been any worse in these respects, had someone else been successful. So something other than the value of the outcome must explain praiseworthiness. Second, even if we characterize the achievement as praiseworthy, the target of praise is the agent whose achievement it is – it might be more precise to say that the *agent* is praiseworthy in virtue of the achievement.

So, an account of praiseworthiness must capture its variable relation to value, and show how it attaches to an agent rather than merely an action. To arrive at such an account, let's first ask it is to praise someone in the first place. What is it that we *do* when we bestow praise? Well, typically, we say things like "That was great!" or "Good job!" or "You're the best!" or something more refined that amounts to the same. So it seems to me that praise in general is just the expression of positive evaluation of someone in virtue of a performance of theirs that is good in some way and is competently caused.

To spell this out a little, the aforementioned considerations suggest that to say that someone's performance is good in some way can't in this context entail that it results in a morally or aesthetically or even prudentially good outcome. What other way is there for something to be good? Well, sometimes we regard something as good when it meets a standard for the kind of thing it is – say, a knife is good if it does the job a knife is supposed to do. Something similar goes for activities. Maybe when we praise a performance, we're saying that it meets or exceeds the some demanding, contextually relevant standard, where

the standard may be an absolute one (like a moral or rational requirement), internal to a type of activity (such as the standards of a sport), or simply imposed by the agent's aim.<sup>7</sup>

So, for example, football is an activity or practice that has certain internal standards. A striker's distinctive role, for example, is to seek and avail him- or herself of opportunities to score, which yields a standard for assessing someone *qua* a striker – they're good at it if they find the opportunities there are and effectively make use of them. Part of what we do when we praise someone as a striker is, then, saying that their performance on the pitch meets or exceeds the resulting normative expectations. The other part is that we say this performance is competently caused – it is a manifestation of a skill or disposition that they have, and not some kind of fluke. Otherwise it isn't really their achievement. (Someone might, after all, accidentally score a goal while trying to walk off the pitch.) Such a skill or disposition may be called an excellence, when it involves promoting or honoring some good, where the good may be an absolute one, internal to a practice, or relative to an aim. Indeed, there's a good case to be made that this is all that Aristotelian virtues are, as Julia Annas has argued (Annas 2010).

If this is what praise is, we can tentatively say that someone *merits* praise when her performance meets or exceeds a demanding standard and is the manifestation of an excellence. But this tentative formulation must be qualified, since it fits some non-praiseworthy achievements, like committing a crime without getting caught, or counting all the blades of grass in Boston. In a slogan, if it ain't worth doing, it ain't worth doing well. Some activities, practices, and aims that set standards for performance are not worth participating in or having. Consequently, meeting or exceeding the expectations derived from such standards isn't praiseworthy. Other practices and aims, however, are worth our while. This is evident when they directly involve promoting some moral or aesthetic good.

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<sup>7</sup> This line of inquiry was suggested to me by Francesco Orsi. The idea that an agent's aim in action involves imposing a standard on oneself is developed in Lilian O'Brien's unpublished work (see also O'Brien 2012).

But that's not necessary. For example, participating in market economy, which is, roughly, a practice of voluntarily exchanging goods or services for a price, is a worthwhile activity, at least in conditions in which it is conducive to the satisfaction of the participants' preferences. The free market as an institution provides real benefit to people. That's why doing well by its internal standards, like clinching a deal or designing a winning product, can amount to a praiseworthy achievement, even if it directly benefits only the successful person or company, and its pursuit is motivated by self-interest. To have a term for it, let's say that when the practices, activities, or aims promote, honor, or realize a sufficient amount of some genuine value, the standards they involve are *authoritative*.

Does meeting authoritative standards suffice for praiseworthiness? Not quite. Imagine that Neville Chamberlain could have negotiated Hitler down in Munich in 1938, and prevented World War II from happening, but used up his energy and willpower building a beautiful model of Victorian London railways in his basement. Even if it would have been a praiseworthy achievement in some other context, here it seems absurd. Because it's *you* who potentially merit praise on account of your performance, it also matters what *else* you might have done. If the opportunity cost of your performance is too high – if it means doing badly with respect to more important values – you don't merit praise for it. I don't think it's possible to be very precise here, so I'll just say praiseworthiness requires the absence of *excessive* opportunity cost.

When these conditions of praiseworthiness are put together with the earlier thesis regarding authentic pride, we get the following basic fittingness or correctness condition for it (I will discuss some extensions below):

*Fitting Authentic Pride*

S's authentic pride for A is fitting if and only if A is a competently caused performance of S that meets or exceeds a contextually relevant, authoritative, and

challenging standard without excessive opportunity cost, and S's effort plays a significant role in explaining S's success in A-ing.<sup>8</sup>

It seems to me that Fitting Authentic Pride yields the right verdict for the cases I've mentioned. A veteran diplomat's authentic pride for brokering a peace deal in Indonesia is warranted if she has made a successful effort to exercise the many skills needed for such work, because helping bring peace is a morally good thing. An athlete's winning a medal in a tough competition warrants pride, as long as the sport in question promotes or realizes genuine values, such as fairness, friendship, sense of belonging, and happiness – and, let's bear in mind, participating in the sport doesn't have an excessive opportunity cost. A clever bank robbery, in turn, isn't a praiseworthy achievement, since it doesn't promote or realize important values, and most likely does have an excessive opportunity cost – the thief could have used his cleverness for something better.

What about hubristic pride? Here's my thesis for hubristic pride that is focused on a particular achievement:

*Fitting Hubristic Pride*

S's performance-focused hubristic pride for A is fitting if and only if A is a competently caused performance of S that meets or exceeds a contextually relevant, authoritative, and challenging standard without excessive opportunity cost, and S's superior personality or character traits or talent play a significant role in explaining S's success in A-ing.

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<sup>8</sup> Does praiseworthiness (and fitting pride) also require that the agent performs A for the right reasons, and not, say, as a result of deception, coercion, or (where inappropriate) self-interested calculation? I suspect that this is the case, but I cannot argue for it here. If so, the analysis needs an additional necessary condition. (I owe this suggestion to Lilian O'Brien.) Relatedly, some might think that the action must be freely performed for pride to be fitting. I set this important issue aside here, but I do want to note that we might think that an unfree performance isn't really the due to the agent herself, and is thus already ruled out by the condition as I've stated it.



This formulation shows perhaps better the unity of authentic and hubristic pride. Both involve the agent competently causing praiseworthy performances. Yet the differences are equally clear, though they are a matter of degree. I take it that some sort of effort is needed for any achievement, and that many if not all performances will to some extent manifest the character or personality of the agent. The crucial thing for the fittingness of hubristic pride is that *sometimes* success is better explained by lasting traits, or indeed talent, of the agent. It may be that someone's courage explains why they stood up to a bully (at the right time and in the right way), for example. Such a person would have also run in a burning building to save a child or led the charge against an entrenched enemy, had the circumstances called for it. At the same time, it is possible for someone who isn't particularly courageous to stand up to a bully at the right time and in the right way, meriting authentic pride instead. I can't claim that I can offer a satisfactory analysis of what makes one element of an explanation more fundamental than another. The consolation is that this is a general issue, and whatever is the best solution in the philosophy of explanation in general should work here as well.

In giving my account of the fittingness conditions of hubristic pride, I've implicitly suggested that it can be fitting, at least in principle. I think that's indeed the case. But note that there are dimensions of evaluation of emotions that go beyond their fittingness or correctness. Michelle Mason (2003), for example, defends the view that contempt is fitting or correct, roughly, when someone ranks low as a person in virtue of falling short of a legitimate interpersonal ideal of the person. But she notes that this still leaves open the question of whether it is ever morally appropriate to feel even fitting contempt toward another, since some might argue such low regard is incompatible with equal respect for persons. We can similarly ask whether authentic and hubristic pride are morally appropriate when they're fitting. In the case of authentic pride, there seems to be little reason for concern. It doesn't involve objectionable attitudes towards others or towards oneself. There's nothing

morally wrong with rejoicing in having brought about something good, when the rejoicing involves the acknowledgement, as it were, that it might have been different and might be different again in the future. Taking pride in one's free choices may even be entailed by self-respect, which is perfectly compatible with respecting others equally. Hubristic pride, in contrast, may be inherently morally problematic. In part this is for reasons analogous to those for which some reject contempt. It does, after all, involve a comparative and hierarchical element: you take yourself to be superior to others, at least in some important respects. Insofar as it motivates one to demand deference, it may result in obnoxious and even aggressive behavior – though it must be admitted that such motivational influence could be counteracted by other character traits. The other issue is self-regarding. Hubristic pride seems to involve a kind of bad faith, to use a Sartrean term. In regarding oneself as fixed now and for the future, it closes its eyes from the importance and possibility of choosing anew. Nor does it motivate self-improvement – why fix it if you don't think it's broke? Even if we're excellent in some respect, who among us couldn't use improvement in some area?

Now for some qualifications. The fittingness conditions I've given talk about meeting or exceeding standards. But isn't it sometimes fair to be proud of having made an honest try at it, even if one ultimately fails? This is no doubt true. There are two ways to accommodate this within the present framework. One possibility is that praise is appropriate for instrumental reasons, even though it isn't strictly speaking fitting. This might be the case with a child who makes a serious but rather inept attempt at drawing a portrait, for example. The other possibility is that there are many challenging standards at play, and the agent is a success according to some of them. If you almost win a tennis game against Roger Federer, you've already succeeded at many challenging tasks characteristic of the game – you must have served and returned pretty well to get so close.

It is also pertinent here that even competent performances are subject to luck. It is not fully within our control whether we succeed at challenging tasks – the world must co-operate. Someone who fails might have done exactly the same things as another who succeeds. Do they merit as much praise and pride as someone who got lucky? The case is an exact parallel to consequential moral luck. It seems our commonsense intuition is to praise the successful more. For example, according to James Watson, Linus Pauling would very likely have discovered the double helix structure of DNA, had Watson and Frances Crick not beat him by a few weeks or months, largely thanks to their access to sneakily acquired data from Rosalind Franklin (Watson 1968). I can't try to settle here whether consequential luck should count. But I'm fairly confident that other forms of luck, such as constitutive luck in terms of having ability or talent, and circumstantial luck in terms of opportunities to exercise one's capacities, do not undermine merit. Some people deserve more praise than others just because they happen to be able to meet more challenging standards, even if both make equal effort. If two students work equally hard (and all else is equal), and one gets an A and the other gets a D, the A student can be more proud. Similarly, if two firemen are equally brave, but only one ever needs to rush into a burning building, he is the only one who can take pride in his performance. Since being entitled to take pride in what we've done is one of the things that make our lives go well for us, this is just another reminder that luck plays a major role in our well-being. This may not be fair, but as they say, life ain't fair.

### **3. Agential Pride and Purpose**

I already mentioned that Capital-A achievements are often seen as one source of meaning in life. Praiseworthy achievements are an even better candidate. In this section, I'm going to argue that agential pride is itself a component of finding one's life meaningful, and that

when it is fitting, life does have at least some meaning. This helps us think about what sort of things make life meaningful.

It is a plain fact that sometimes people find their lives meaningful and sometimes meaningless. Think, for example, how a political activist who has dedicated two years of her life to get her candidate elected might feel after she narrowly loses to a short-sighted narcissistic bigot in a winnable campaign. At least temporarily, she might feel that her life is pointless. She might lack the will to go on, fail to see anything to strive for. Most likely, she would still go through the motions of everyday life, but in a detached way. And she might look back and feel worthless. I believe that the experience of meaninglessness or lack of purpose consists in a set of feelings like these. Unlike many other sentiments, it is not only focused on the present, but involves attitudes towards the past and future as well. As the psychologist Roy Baumeister and co-authors (2013) put it, “meaning is about linking events across time, thus integrating past, present, and future”. I don’t believe experiences of meaning or meaninglessness need to involve explicit beliefs to the effect that one’s life is meaningful or meaningless – one doesn’t need to possess the concept of meaning to feel like her life lacks purpose. Indeed, one might believe that one’s life is meaningful (perhaps because it’s comforting to think so) while nevertheless experiencing it as meaningless. As in other cases, our subjective take on things isn’t exhausted by our beliefs (cf. Arpaly and Schroeder 1999).

Mutatis mutandis, the same goes for the experience of meaning. Consider, for example, a scientist who has made several important contributions to a flourishing research project on virus-based cancer medication, and is poised to make more. It is easy to imagine her thoroughly engaged with her work – her being “gripped or excited” or fulfilled by it, as Susan Wolf (2010) puts it. If she thinks ahead, she has a kind of confident hope for the future. She has an attitude of trust or faith in future success and her own importance for

achieving it. And, most importantly for my purposes here, she has a positive attitude toward her past actions. Which attitude? I believe that it is agential pride, as I've described it above. Recall the story that agential pride tells. Making use of the analysis of praiseworthy achievement above, it goes something like this: There was a problem or an opportunity, I made an effort that was intense or took a lot of skill, and consequently met or exceeded tough expectations involved in a worthwhile activity, which resulted in success that merits anyone's praise. Someone who emotionally sees her life in these terms doesn't experience it as pointless or wasted. This is a matter of degree – one praiseworthy achievement is hardly enough to cast positive light on a person's entire past. If we look back and take pride in many things, or better yet, see even our mistakes and failures as essential parts of a path leading to some shining achievements, we will feel that we have served a purpose. To be precise, I don't think we need to actually *feel* proud of what we've done to find it meaningful. It suffices that we look at our record and register with satisfaction that pride would be merited. This might be just an implicit sense we've done well – I don't know how much time Nelson Mandela, say, spent thinking about his efforts, but his beaming visage certainly gives the impression that he knows he hasn't wasted his time.

Of course, someone who feels agential pride as a result of a broad survey of their past might still think there's nothing to look forward to. That's why the fullest experience of meaning in life involves all the temporal dimensions – backward-looking, present-directed, and forward-looking emotions. Someone who has all these emotions feels like her life *matters* – it's a good thing she has lived and she has reason to go on living. She has what we sometimes call a "sense of purpose". In effect, I'm here proposing to analyze sense of purpose in terms of a complex of emotions that present our lives as mattering and making a positive difference. We might think of it as a sentiment, or a disposition to have these different constitutive feelings in different contexts (cf. Dolan 2014).

So far, I've talked about pride's role in *finding* one's life to be meaningful. One reason this is of interest is that for life to *be* meaningful just is for it to be *fitting* or *correct* for us to find it meaningful, or so I've argued (Kauppinen 2012, Kauppinen 2013). This is a kind of fitting attitudes analysis of the concept of meaningfulness or meaning in life, rather than a view of what makes life meaningful. I believe this is the best way to capture what is at issue in our everyday concern for meaning.<sup>9</sup> When we worry about our lives being meaningless, we worry, in effect, that it wouldn't be warranted for us to have feelings of pride and fulfilment.

If someone's life is meaningful to the extent that agential pride and other emotions constitutive of a sense of purpose are fitting, it follows that the kind of things that make pride fitting are central to a meaningful life. And this seems right. Consider the kind of people who are our paradigms of meaningfulness. It is people like Gandhi or Cezanne or Piaf who easily come to mind. They're all people who successfully pursued something of great moral or aesthetic value, giving it everything they had. Their performances are certainly praiseworthy, and manifestations of excellence.

There is also a *prima facie* challenge to this approach. People often say that one thing that makes their life meaningful is their personal relationships. Yet it can feel odd to say that these love and friendship merit pride (or admiration for that matter). I have two lines of response to this challenge. The first is to emphasize that relationships are created and maintained by doing things, at a minimum doing things that serve other people's needs and desires, or at least take them into account as constraints in our planning. They also involve exercising empathy, taking the trouble to listen, negotiating disagreements, being emotionally open about oneself in ways that make one vulnerable, and so on.<sup>10</sup> Insofar as

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<sup>9</sup> I've observed elsewhere that some questions sometimes discussed under the heading "meaning of life", such as why there is something rather than nothing, are distinct from these first-personal concerns (Kauppinen 2016).

<sup>10</sup> I owe these suggestions to one of the editors.

there are values at stake that go beyond our self-interest, it is actually fitting to take pride in such actions and activities. And indeed we find that people whose children are physically and spiritually well-nourished do take pride in what they've done for them, and couples who have stuck together for decades through thick and thin sometimes exude a quiet pride. My second line of response is to emphasize that sense of purpose also has other elements, perhaps most relevantly feelings of fulfillment. Such feelings might be particularly appropriate in the context of personal relationships in which we do our part. Again, in my view such relationships supervene on patterns of actions that we take, and don't just consist in some kind of feelings toward each other. Fulfillment drawn from such relationships is only merited when we really act as friends or lovers should.

Turning to the implications of the analysis, focusing on the fittingness of pride (and other positive agency-focused emotions) helps in substantive inquiry into the kind of features that make a life meaningful. In previous work, I have highlighted the connection between the narrative structure of pride and the shape of a meaningful life (Kauppinen 2012). Here, I want to emphasize a different aspect of it. According to some philosophers, the meaningfulness of someone's life is a function of the good consequences that they bring about, understood in terms of welfare or other values.<sup>11</sup> For meaning consequentialists, it doesn't matter *how*, or indeed *why*, someone brings about the positive outcomes. And this is the problem with it.

Consider, first, the following fanciful scenario. The people of a formerly great republic that continues to possess world-destroying weapons are conned into electing an impulsive, vengeful bully as president. Before the president-elect receives the nuclear codes, however, he goes for a rare walk in the woods of one of his vast estates. By chance, there is a

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<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Smuts 2013. I agree with Smuts' point that it is not necessary for us to find life meaningful for it to be such. But for the kind of reasons I'll discuss in the main text, I believe he goes too far in arguing that only being causally responsible for the good matters (though his view is more nuanced than I can discuss here).

hunter trying to shoot a duck a mile away. He misses the target, and bullet happens to fly all the way to fatally hit the president-elect instead. Suppose that the president-elect would, in fact, have initiated a war killing a million people, had he ever taken office. Does the shooting suffice to confer meaning on the life of the hunter? The consequentialist will say that it does. But the analysis of meaning in terms of pride and related attitudes helps see why it doesn't. For the action is not intentional under the description of saving lots of people, or even killing a dangerous leader. These outcomes do not reflect the agent's self in any way, and do not redound to his credit – it is not competently caused, in Bradford's terminology. So there is no justification for pride or other positive attitudes, and consequently the agent's life isn't more meaningful because of the action. However, we can still say that it's a good thing, all things considered, that the hunter did what he did, and that the world would be a worse place, had he not existed. We might even loosely say that his life has some significance because of the accident. But this shouldn't be confused with his life being meaningful in the personal sense.

Another issue with meaning consequentialism is that it makes no difference to meaningfulness whether bringing about a good outcome is an achievement of ours. Robert Nozick (1974) makes this vivid by imagining a Results Machine, which can bring about any outcome with the press of a button. Thaddeus Metz (2013) uses this thought experiment to argue that the degree to which we exercise our capacities matters for meaningfulness. If meaning has to do with fittingness of agential pride, it is easy to see why this is the case. Pressing the button to bring about, say, world peace is not a particularly praiseworthy achievement. The outcome, to be sure, is of great value, but praiseworthiness also involves meeting challenging standards as a result of manifesting an excellence, and that is not the case here.



We can also exploit the links between pride, achievement, and meaning in the other direction. After all, we might wonder what's good about achievements beyond their possible instrumental value for some other good. Some theorists, such as Thomas Hurka (2000) and Gwen Bradford (2015), maintain that all capital-A achievements are intrinsically good. But this is difficult to believe. Consider winning a medal in the Olympics. It's plausibly somehow good for the winner, but is it good from the point of view of the universe? Does everyone have an agent-neutral reason to promote this outcome, rather than someone else's victory? My view is instead that achievements are only good *for* the achiever, and that this is the case only when the achievement is praiseworthy – more precisely, when they're praiseworthy in the way that warrants agential pride. The reason why these achievements are good for the achiever is plain by now: they contribute to the meaningfulness of her life. And other things being equal, it is better for us to lead more rather than less meaningful lives.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper, I've examined the nature and varieties of agential pride and its relation to achievement and meaning. I've borrowed the distinction between authentic and hubristic pride from recent psychological research, and tried to make more precise for philosophical purposes. Authentic pride in specific praiseworthy achievements seems to be morally innocent, while hubristic pride in one's thick self is at least typically questionable.

Whether pride is fitting depends both on our performance being praiseworthy and due to us in the right way. I gave various criteria for meriting agential pride. The extent to which pride is merited is a function of all the considerations taken together: the degree to which the performance exceeds the relevant standard for the activity, the amount of value that is involved in the activity (and possibly the independent value of the outcome), and the

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<sup>12</sup> This is, to be sure, a controversial assumption. I briefly defend it in Kauppinen 2016.

degree to which skill is needed for success and to which the outcome is due to the agent's own exercise of skill or other competence. There's then the further question of what primarily accounts for the agent's competent performance – effort or lasting traits.

Quantifying any of these is impossible in practice, and I have no formula for how they should be weighed against each other. It is possible that by carefully considering variations of cases, we might be able to arrive at conclusions regarding the relative weight of, say, effort and the value of the outcome, but I have not attempted this here.

Let me finish with a quick suggestion regarding the role of anticipated agential pride in rational decision-making. I believe that it is sometimes a good *heuristic* to ask ourselves which option would likely merit most pride, when it is otherwise difficult to make the choice. The way that heuristics work, in general, is that we substitute an easier question for a difficult one on the assumption that the answers are closely enough correlated (cf. Kahneman 2011). It is not unusual, I think, for people to think of some choices from the perspective of anticipated regret, along the lines of “Would I regret going to the party tonight instead of studying?”. This regret heuristic works by focusing our attention on the long-term consequences of our actions, which may help us overcome our natural tendency to be biased towards the near term benefits. But it often doesn't suffice when it comes to some of the choices that determine the course of our whole lives, like the choice of a career or starting a family. Here the tough question is something like “Would it be better for me to be a journalist or an accountant?” In such situations, we might well realize that whatever we choose, we'll grow into the role, and won't come to regret having made the choice – I myself could have become a historian, but the possibility is now so remote that I can barely imagine it. But even in such cases, we can ask ourselves which kind of life is likely to merit more pride and admiration. Just as the regret heuristic counteracts our natural near-term bias, the pride heuristic counteracts our natural hedonistic bias, our tendency to evaluate options in

terms of their likely contribution to our pleasure or happiness. Thinking about pride focuses our attention on the kind of things that make our lives meaningful. When we would otherwise underappreciate the significance of such considerations, it is a wise way to approach life choices.<sup>13</sup>

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