

# Freedom, Will, Hybris and Vanity

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## 1. Definitions

First, some terms that are important for the further course shall be explained.

a) The word *pride* has two main differences in meaning:

(1) It describes the feeling of one's own dignity, the self-respect;

(2) It also describes, as an elementary emotion in psychology, the feeling of satisfaction caused by a person or a situation. This feeling of satisfaction arises when this person or circumstance exceeds personal or social expectations (norms) in some special way. Being proud that one's own friend shows courage would be an adequate example of this.

To make it easier to distinguish between the two definitions, I will call them "*S-pride*" - pride as self-esteem - and "*E-pride*" - pride as an emotion of satisfaction.

The two meanings of the word *pride* can be recognised and distinguished by the following characteristic: "*S-pride*" - pride as self-esteem - when present in a person as a character trait, represents a persistent phenomenon, while "*E-pride*" - pride as an emotion of satisfaction - represents a temporary emotion of short duration.

b) By hubris (pride as arrogance) I mean primarily the feeling of own superiority and, associated with this, the feeling of arrogance, complacency, narcissism and know-it-all manner.

c) *Vanity* is the desire for fame and glory, and the aspiration of always finding oneself in an honourable position. This means that "vanity" is the supreme desire to receive recognition from others, while "hubris" is excessive self-recognition. The opposite of "vanity" is therefore the ability to gain a healthy degree of recognition for oneself even without others, as hermits do, for example (= "hermitism as a character trait").

*Hubris* and *vanity* are related to each other: they are complementary character traits.

Some dictionaries (e.g. by Ozhegov) define "hubris" among other things as an extreme manifestation of the "S-pride". I do NOT agree with this interpretation as it contradicts the definitions. The comparison of these words in different languages has confirmed my opinion that pride and hubris actually have different meanings.

| Lang<br>uage | Pride as self-<br>esteem<br>(character<br>trait;<br>S-pride) | Antony<br>m                | Pride<br>satisfaction<br>(emotion;<br>E-pride) | as<br>Antony<br>m | Hubris<br>(character<br>trait;<br>lat. superbia,<br>gr. hubris) | Antony<br>m                 | Vanity<br>(characte<br>r trait;<br>lat.<br>ambitio,<br>gr.<br>doxoman<br>ie) | Antony<br>m   |
|--------------|--|----------------------------|--|-------------------|---|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Eng.         | pride  | self-<br>abasem<br>ent     | pride  | shame             | hubris<br>(pride in the<br>sense<br>arrogance)                  | humilit<br>y                | vanity   | hermiti<br>sm   |
| Dt.          | Stolz  | Selbste<br>rniedrig<br>ung | Stolz  | Scham             | Hochmut,<br>Arroganz  | Demut                       | Eitelkeit  | Eremite<br>ntum   |
| Rus.         | гордость<br>(gordost')                                       | самоуни<br>чижение         | гордость<br>(gordost')                         | стыд<br>(styd)    | гордыня<br>(gordynja)   | смирени<br>е (smire<br>nie) | тщеслав<br>ие (ts-<br>tscheslav<br>ie)                                       | отшель<br>ничест<br>во (ot-<br>schel'ni<br>tschest<br>vo) |

## 2. Pride and Hubris – one and the same?

I see a certain connection between satisfaction-pride (E-pride), which is related to oneself, and hubris. Self-related E-pride arises when a person exceeds certain expectations and norms in any area. When E-pride as an emotion "overshoots the mark", i.e. when a person feels absolutely superior to everyone in a certain category, then E-pride promotes the consolidation of hubris as a state of consciousness.

I would like to note that both hubris and self-esteem-pride (S-pride) are states of consciousness, whereas E-pride is an emotion. Therefore, it would not be correct to compare hubris with satisfaction-pride (E-pride).

However, hubris is not related to self-esteem pride (S-pride). This is particularly easy to see when you look at the relationship between S-pride and the opposite of hubris, i.e. humility.

S-pride and humility are not mutually exclusive (see table above): a person can be humble and at the same time face himself with dignity. The proof of contradiction shows: If S-pride and hubris were really "relatives", it would be impossible to be S-prideful and humble (= without hubris) at the same time.

**Therefore, self-esteem-pride and hubris (as well as self-abasement and humility) are indeed DIFFERENT states of consciousness and soul.**

In Christian ethics, hubris is considered a grave sin, but in no case the pride (neither of the two forms). Pride, if NOT understood as hubris, is considered neutral (S-pride) to positive (E-pride) by the Christian ethic.

### 3. Free Will and Freedom of Action

Even if it may seem strange at first sight, it is nevertheless interesting to take a closer look at free will in this subject. God has given us, humans, free will, i.e. the ability to make our own decisions. Free will goes hand in hand with the ability to critically judge circumstances.

If we consider the terms "freedom of choice" - "freedom of action" ("свобода выбора, Wahlfreiheit" - "свобода действия, Handlungsfreiheit") dialectically,

**then free will is freedom of choice**, what in turn means that **the will itself is a sub-process of consciousness that makes decisions**.

When making decisions, the will takes into account different sources of information, such as the subconscious, knowledge, psychological attitudes, perception of external circumstances, motivation, inner values, morals and conscience decisions.

Since any decision transfers the future into the past, **any decision of the will transfers the own future of a system to which this will belongs into its past**. In this way, **the sequence of decisions of the will forms the "course of one's own time" of the corresponding system**.

The human being resides always in some system, which concerns the relationship to other human beings and in general to his environment. The possession of free will (= *freedom of choice*) enables the human being to EXCHANGE this system against another system, i.e. he or she can go beyond the limits of the existing system and CHANGE into a system with a different system-constituting concept (or create a completely new system). Changing jobs, like other "revolutions", are thus exemplary for the expression of free will.

Complementary to this, *freedom of action* enables people to act efficiently within a given system: He or she knows its rules (= properties of its elements and the relationship between them) and therefore can act efficiently (= freely) within this system. However, the "freedom of action" (= efficiency of action) does not allow a human being to CHANGE the system, i.e. to exceed the limits of the system. A good example of freedom of action is a bee in a beehive and an ant in an anthill.

Corresponding behaviour models are described in psychology as *competitive* (for freedom of choice) and *cooperative* (for freedom of action).

### 4. Will, Hubris and Vanity

But what does all this have in common with hubris? There is a direct connection here: hubris is directly related to the competitive model of behaviour, and humility - to the cooperative model of behaviour. Of course, the extremes, i.e. an extremely competitive or cooperative pattern of behaviour, occur very rarely in real life.

This means that hubris naturally presupposes the extreme competitive spirit. It drives a person to a constant fight, in the very broadest sense of the word, to have more than others. This "to have more than others" can refer to any "things" that have value in a particular society: useful objects, money, power or many admirers. Such an attitude to life, when it takes on extreme forms, leads to the destruction of the world surrounding the haughty person, to war in all its

forms, i.e., armed conflicts, economic and other conflicts, all aimed at destroying the opponent.

The extreme sense of rivalry, without which hubris could not even exist, can lead to the situation that the competitiveness of a haughty person is also transferred to his or her relationship with God. This is precisely why hubris is qualified as a deadly sin in Christian ethics.

It is interesting to note that none of those who are overzealous and one-sidedly committed to freedom of choice ever call for hubris, but instead call for competition: what hypocrisy or lack of understanding!

Humility also requires extreme conformism. With all its typical mechanisms and their consequences.

One of the consequences is total self-denial. Total self-denial and a life that is led exclusively according to the rules of "the given system" have the effect that the human being only executes the will of the "system maintaining instance". He or she becomes a comfortable and conformist "material" for this instance, which can do everything it wants. In the end, an absolutely humble person gives up his or her free will, that is, he or she rejects the gift and intentions of God. An attitude to life that takes such extreme forms leads to a complete levelling of the inner world of a humble person.

This is why calls to total humility, such as "forget yourself completely, give yourself completely to serving something or someone" have no less negative consequences than calls to total competitiveness. Absolute humility leads not only to personal problems (due to unconscious frustration or the unconscious suppression of one's own wishes and needs), but also to social problems (a conformist society loses the inner drive for development; in such a society, as in a competitive one, interpersonal relationships deteriorate, i.e. everyone pays attention to whether others are conforming enough).

Furthermore, calls for absolute humility can be selfish, with the aim of making it easier to manipulate the "humble" and thus strengthening his own power.

If a person is in a "healthy" state, i.e. does not deviate extremely from the "norm", then his or her self-assessment is roughly in the middle on a "hubris-humility scale".

Humility and hubris are *attributive opposites* with regard to the attribute "self-esteem compared to others". The ratio should be appropriate and this varies from person to person, from society to society, from one historical period to another.

It is safe to say that both purely hubris and purely humble people are abstractions. Those who insist on their existence dehumanise the human being.

Vanity and hermitism are also *attributive opposites* with regard to the attribute "the importance of how the outside world judges you". Vanity presupposes a cooperative model of behaviour (I do everything to win the recognition and praise of others), whereas in the case of hermitism a competitive model of behaviour (it makes no difference how other people judge me) counts.

Thus, a competitive behaviour model promotes both hubris and hermitism, whereas a cooperative behaviour model promotes vanity and humility: Therefore, one should not be surprised to meet a hermit who suffers from hubris or a humble person who suffers from vanity.

## **5. How to get rid of Hybris and Vanity**

In my view, there is an extremely efficient way to REALLY free oneself from hubris or vanity, i.e. to keep them in check up to a possible or reasonable limit.

Creative work, of whatever kind, indeed what we are capable of, is not our, not human, but God's work. We are merely His - more or less effective - implementers.

**The formula is simple: Everything I can do comes from God, but I myself am only a implementer.**

With such an attitude in life, man gives neither hubris nor vanity a chance to gain the upper hand in any way, because the reason for feeling superior is gone: It is not YOU who have created something, but GOD. You have only the role of "catching" the ether, i.e. Nature.

Such an honest inner attitude towards one's own role in Nature proves to be the best "antidote" for hubris and vanity.

## **6. Acknowledgement**

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