

## A MORMON CONCEPT OF THE SELF

## PRIDE OR SELF-ESTEEM?

*By Janice M. Allred*

IT WAS FROM OTHER CHRISTIANS, NOT MORMONS, THAT I learned pride is a sin. Of course, I had upon occasion heard pride denounced and humility recommended; it did not escape my notice that pride was considered a vice and humility its corresponding virtue, but after years of Mormon religious instruction, my impression was that pride was certainly a minor fault and humility only one virtue among many. In terms of exhortation, pride received nothing like the attention that sexual sin did and humility was far behind chastity as a virtue.

In the course of my reading, I became aware that a certain kind of Christian upbringing was much harder on pride than Mormonism is, and I concluded that this was more evidence for the truth of Mormonism. For it seemed to me that the pride denounced was often admirable and that, at least in novels, breaking the proud spirit was much wickeder than pride itself. In my mind, pride was associated with independence, achievement, and excellence. Pride was the integrity of the individual that resisted tyranny, never ceased striving for a goal, and refused to compromise standards.

Of course, as I read the scriptures now and then or heard them quoted I realized that they always condemned pride. The disparity between my estimation of the nature of pride and that of the prophets did not bother me for many years. I assumed that the pride they condemned was vanity or arrogance, the vanity that is excessively concerned with appearances and that needs the admiration of others to confirm its admiration of itself, or the arrogance that looks down on others because they are inferior in wealth, breeding, education, or status. In the Book of Mormon the Nephites always seemed to become proud whenever they became rich. Then they started wearing fine apparel and thinking they were better than others just because they were rich and well dressed, and this led them to persecute those they considered inferior. I could certainly understand why that was wrong, although the attitude seemed more

stupid than sinful. Hence, I began to distinguish between good and bad pride, never really asking myself if there were any relationship between them. My inclination, however, was to admire good pride and to consider bad pride a somewhat trifling sin.

So I was surprised to learn that many Christian theologians regard pride as the worst of sins, in fact, as the root of sin. What, you may ask, had induced a faithful Mormon girl to read non-Mormon theologians? Metaphysical questions had always enthralled me but my attempts to explore them were not encouraged nor was my appetite for theology satisfied by the people, programs, and literature that constituted the Church for me at that time. So it was with joy that I discovered the philosophy section of the public library. Philosophy led me to theology where I learned that non-Mormon theologians had a great deal to say about what I had once supposed were uniquely Mormon concerns.

My concept of the nature of pride changed gradually as I considered what I had learned from Christian theologians and as I examined myself and observed others. As I studied the scriptures more seriously, particularly the Book of Mormon, I came to realize that a remarkable agreement exists between Christian theologians and the Book of Mormon prophets on the subject of pride.

I would like to begin my analysis of pride with a point on which I think there is widespread agreement—the belief that there is good pride and bad pride. But first we need to be clear about the kind of thing pride is. It is a mental or spiritual thing—a condition, emotion, judgment, or quality of the mind or spirit. (This may be one reason Mormons have difficulty thinking of pride as a sin. We tend to think of a sin as something we *do*; perhaps it is an inner something, a specific thought or emotion or motive, but we rarely consider sin to be a condition of the spirit.)

Certainly the word pride is sometimes used pejoratively and sometimes as a term of approbation. What then is the relationship between the two concepts? Perhaps they are related as opposites, since good and bad are opposites. But is it possible to have one word denote two opposite things or concepts?

Single words with contrary meanings appear in many lan-

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guages. In English, for example, we have “clip,” which may mean “to cut” or “to hold together,” and “cleave,” which may mean “to separate” or “to adhere closely,” and even “fast,” which may mean “stationary” or “rapid.” This curious feature has been explained by noting that all concepts are based on comparisons; for example, if it were always day, not only would we have no concept for night, but we would have none for day either. This, of course, reminds us of Lehi’s teachings about opposites:

For it must needs be that there is an opposition in all things. . . . Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility (2 Nephi 2:11).

Somehow, opposites are necessary for life and free agency. “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16).

The pairs of opposites Lehi mentions are all desirable/undesirable combinations. This might lead us to suppose that in every pair of opposites, one of the two is good and the other bad. But it’s easy to think of oppositional pairs which do not fit into desirable/undesirable categories; for example, spontaneous/planned, male/female, reason/intuition, give/receive, object/subject, free/determined, community/individual, and dominate/submit. We usually recognize the need to achieve some kind of balance between the extremes

of these pairs. Lehi’s words suggest that this cannot be a settling down at the midpoint for he asserts that agency requires that we be drawn by one or the other. But Lehi is not simply saying that as agents we need to be presented with opposites to choose between; there is a deeper metaphysical meaning in

his idea of the compound in one. Lehi’s insight is that there could be neither life nor existence if opposites were not somehow connected. Life requires growth and the epigenetic principle states that “anything that grows has a ground plan and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole.”<sup>1</sup> Growth, life, agency, and opposites, then, seem to be inextricably related.

That there is an intimate connection between opposites is apparent when we realize that if two things were completely different, we wouldn’t think of them as opposites. Opposites are different values of the same thing. For example, “hot” and “cold” refer to temperature. The word temperature covers the whole range of values of the phenomenon which “hot” and “cold” describe. This demonstrates that one may use a single word for two opposite meanings by using quantifiers or other contextual clues to indicate the precise meaning.

With this in mind, let us ask again; “Is there bad pride and good pride, and are they opposites?” Several

dictionaries agree that pride may be either inordinate, unreasonable self-esteem or reasonable, justified self-esteem.

The phenomenon that pride describes is, of course, the self and its evaluation of itself—self-esteem. Perhaps bad pride is too much self-esteem and good pride is the right amount.



However, there is a problem with this suggestion. The scales of pride and self-esteem in common usage don't seem to fit; that is, on the self-esteem scale "good" and "desirable" are on the high side, while on the pride scale "bad" and "undesirable" are on the high side. We think of self-esteem positively and seldom think that one might have too much self-esteem. In fact, having too little self-esteem is usually regarded as an undesirable condition. Perhaps "good pride" is simply synonymous with "self-esteem." But then, where does bad pride fit in? Is it something else entirely?

And what about humility as the opposite of bad pride? Certainly humility is not what we mean by good pride. Its dictionary definition closely aligns it with the concept of low self-esteem. "Humility is the state or quality of thinking lowly of oneself." This core definition is repugnant to most of us; it goes against our ideas about self-esteem. Humbling or humiliating oneself, or putting oneself down, is not regarded positively. It is clear that if pride and humility are opposite extremes of self-esteem, they also do not fit the self-esteem scale as it is generally accepted. Perhaps the virtue of humility needs to be defended. Is there something positive about it? We will return to this question later.

Now, let's consider whether or not what we've been thinking of as good pride is the same thing as self-esteem. First we need to be clear about what good pride is. Our original intuition was that it is linked to excellence and achievement. Whenever we say "I am proud of x"—x being something we have made or accomplished—then pride is the emotion arising from the judgment that x was well done. It is the glow of pleasure that comes when I am able to apply some set of standards to my work and say to myself, "I did a good job." It is a combination of pleasure in the excellence of the work itself and satisfaction that I accomplished it.

Good pride, however, is not always an emotion. It may be a disposition or characteristic of a person. For example, when we say of someone, "He takes pride in his work," we mean that he has certain standards which he sets for himself and does whatever is required to achieve excellence in his work. When we say "He is a proud man" or "They are a proud people" in a complimentary sense, we mean that they have certain achievements or traditions which, judged by certain objective standards, are of excellent quality and that they take pleasure in their past achievements and look forward to continuing that tradition of excellence. For our purposes, we can call this type of pride "self-respect." I'm not advocating that people generally do this. "Self-respect" is usually a better synonym for pride as a characteristic than as an emotion. Otherwise we would have to say, "I respect myself for painting that picture," which is not the same as, "I'm proud of that picture."

Now, what is self-esteem? There is a large body of literature available on that subject. Here is a representative definition: "Self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness; it indicates an attitude of approval or disapproval toward the self; it indicates the extent to which the individual considers himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy."<sup>2</sup> In this defi-

inition, the term "self-esteem" refers to the whole continuum of values of worthiness of the self, using "high self-esteem" and "low self-esteem" as quantifiers. I suspect most people use the term this way, and they generally agree that high self-esteem is necessary to happiness and achievement.

How similar is this to self-respect as we have defined it? Self-respect is definitely based on accomplishment. We respect ourselves for what we have accomplished or for the capacities or virtues which we have proven ourselves to possess. The definition of self-esteem given above seems to agree. It says that our approval of ourselves depends on whether or not we consider ourselves to be "capable, significant, successful, and worthy." But couldn't we consider ourselves significant and worthy even if we felt unsuccessful and incapable and even if we generally disapproved of ourselves? And if self-esteem is a precondition of achievement, then isn't it something deeper and more basic than self-respect?

Most discussions of self-esteem do fail to distinguish it from self-respect. That the two are distinct can be made clear by two considerations. The first concerns measuring self-esteem. The psychological concept of self-esteem arises from the observation that certain attitudes and behaviors generally go together, that a positive attitude toward one's capabilities and worth is correlated with independence, the ability to achieve goals and establish satisfying personal relationships, and a generally cheerful attitude towards life. To explain this correlation psychologists postulate the concept of self-esteem. Being scientists, they naturally want to measure it. But certainly self-esteem is subjective; it cannot be measured directly, so psychologists have to content themselves with measuring its objective manifestations, namely the statements subjects make about themselves and their observable behavior or accomplishments. For this reason self-esteem is often identified with the attitudes and feelings that a subject expresses. But some people whose achievements and competence would generally be regarded as superior nevertheless disparage themselves and their achievements, while others boast of their capacities but seem to have done nothing to prove them. Such apparent discrepancies between theory and observation do not cause psychologists to abandon the hypothesis that high self-esteem leads to achievement and positive attitudes and satisfying relationships. Instead they fall back on the immeasurability of self-esteem. Since the subjectivity of self-esteem is at least partially unconscious and we do not even have direct access to our own self-esteem, they can always assert that a person's self-esteem is whatever the theory and his attitudes and behavior show it to be. The immeasurability of self-esteem thus means that the theory of self-esteem is untestable, that it is in reality a postulate rather than a theory, and that the concept of self-esteem must be something more basic than the concept of self-respect.

The second consideration that distinguishes self-esteem from self-respect concerns methods for increasing self-esteem. Since the manifestations of self-esteem are generally held to be intrinsically good, most of us have come to accept the idea that everyone needs high self-esteem, and that it is worthwhile to help

those who have low self-esteem to increase it. The attempt to raise self-esteem can begin from either the behavioral or the attitudinal half of the self-esteem complex. We sometimes try to increase a person's self-esteem by telling him that if he will just believe in himself, he will be able to accomplish all he desires. On the other hand, he may be urged to set goals and then to achieve them in order to feel better about himself. Neither of these methods succeeds in increasing self-esteem. They both confuse self-respect, which is based on achievement, with self-esteem, which is not. The initial insight that self-esteem is the cause of certain attitudes and behaviors is lost, and self-esteem becomes identified with its measurable manifestations.

It may be retorted that acquiring self-esteem is accomplished step by step; a simple desire for self-esteem, a willingness to take the risk, is enough. A small amount of belief in oneself can lead to achievement; achievement leads to more faith, which leads to more and greater successes. But the desire or faith has to come from outside the attitude-behavior complex. The decision to strive for improvement is made by the deeper self, which must first consider itself worthy of becoming a better self.

The basic difference between self-esteem and self-respect is that the first is unconditional, while the second is conditional. Unconditional love is the elusive good we are looking for in our search for self-esteem. It cannot be identified with behaviors or attitudes that we attempt to measure or acquire.

We have been considering the relationship of good pride and bad pride to the concept of self-esteem. We have identified good pride with self-respect and concluded that it is not the same as self-esteem. We also decided above that the idea of bad pride as too much self-esteem is not correct, because the idea of too much self-esteem doesn't make sense. But caring too much for the self in relationship to others does make sense; in fact, that is what we mean by selfishness. What is the connection between pride and selfishness?

Selfishness, like pride, is not universally condemned. Although it is generally considered a vice, it has been defended as a virtue. This contradiction is related to the ambivalence we feel about the nature of pride. The confusion in both cases arises from our uncertainties about the self. The concepts of pride and selfishness are both about the self, but pride is the broader concept; selfishness is one manifestation of pride.

An important insight for our understanding of the sin of pride can be gained by examining what is sometimes called the problem of selfishness or altruism. A cynic would say that all actions are fundamentally selfish. Philosophically, this view is called psychological egoism. This theory of human motivation states that people always do what they want to do, that they always act to promote their own interests. Understanding the reasoning behind this view can help us avoid the confusion that makes it difficult for us to distinguish between good pride and bad pride. Imagine a conversation between a freshman and a sophomore.

Sophomore: Everyone is selfish.

Freshman: I don't think so. My little brother acted unselfishly

at his birthday party. He had the first choice and he chose the smallest piece of cake.

Sophomore: He probably doesn't like cake.

Freshman: Yes, he does and it was his favorite kind.

Sophomore: Then he likes praise better than cake. He expected to be praised for being unselfish.

Freshman: Mothers are very unselfish. They always take the smallest piece of cake.

Sophomore: I don't think they always take the smallest piece and even when they do, they do it because they want to.

Freshman: Certainly no one forces them to. That's why they're unselfish.

Sophomore: They know that cake isn't good for them.

Freshman: Then it would be to their best interests not to take any at all.

Sophomore: The real reason they take the smallest piece is that they like peace better than cake. They don't want to hear anyone else complain about having the smallest piece.

Freshman: What about the saint who spends years serving in a leper colony? What's in it for him?

Sophomore: Probably praise or fame.

Freshman: What if he serves for years and doesn't get any? What keeps him going?

Sophomore: He thinks that God will reward him in the next life. He's a bit peculiar but he does it for that reason.

Freshman: But what if he's not a saint but a humanitarian who doesn't believe in God but wants to help suffering humanity?

Sophomore: He does it so that he can approve of himself for doing his duty.

Freshman: What about the person who donates a large sum of money to charity anonymously?

Sophomore: He does it because of the sense of personal satisfaction he derives from doing so. It gives him a warm glow to think of the good he's doing.

There are several good arguments against psychological egoism, but, of course, they are beyond the scope of this paper. There is only one point I want to make here: That which permits the psychological egoist to go on making his claim, despite his having to back up on such claims as that all motives are for physical gratification, fame, or power, is the phenomenon of egocentricity. The egocentric predicament states that it is impossible for me to directly apprehend another's inner reality. A corollary is that I can only act upon my own motives; whatever the nature of these motives are, they must be mine. (This is, of course, free agency.)

We can thus tell the cynic that he seems to be defining egocentricity rather than selfishness. All men must be selfish in the sense that their wants and desires are their own and they must act upon their own motives, but there is a difference between the man who wants to do good to others and the one who does not, between the man who is interested in promoting the welfare of others and the man who is indifferent or hostile to others' good. This difference is what is meant when we characterize one person as unselfish and another as selfish. The sin of pride is inextricably related to being a self.

But pride is not sinful because it is a sin of self any more than the essence of selfishness is egocentricity.

So far we have decided that the idea of too much self is not useful in understanding what pride is. Let us now turn to the other meaning of inordinate—unlawful or going beyond what is justified or reasonable. Perhaps pride is the unreasonable or false estimation of the self.

How should the self be esteemed? Mormon ideas about the nature of the self strongly affirm the ultimate worth of the individual self. The ultimate constituent of the self is intelligence which was neither created nor made. Selves are particular from all eternity. “These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they” (Abraham 3:19). This also says that the individuality of spirits entails differences between them. Selves are susceptible to or capable of enlargement or advancement, but only in accordance with law. Perhaps the sin of pride is trying to advance or enlarge oneself in unlawful ways.

What is the condition of selfhood? Self-consciousness, the ability to know myself as an object or to think about myself as a self, is widely held to be an essential condition of selfhood. Another analysis of opposites might help here. Let’s try to understand what a self is in terms of the opposite of the self. What is the opposite of the self? Two possibilities come to mind: others and the world.

Studies of the development of the human ego can yield fascinating ideas concerning the nature of the self. According to certain studies in child development, the infant begins life in a state of oneness between himself, his mother, and the world. Sometime during the first three years of life a child is born as a psychological being possessing selfhood and the consciousness of a separate identity. Learning to perceive himself or herself as an object is an important part of this development. The child learns that his or her body is in the world but that it is different from other objects because it is under his or her control. Finding another will in opposition to his, learning that the mother does not always want what the child wants, is the beginning of knowledge of other selves.<sup>3</sup> Apparently the spirit not only loses consciousness of the pre-existence and the knowledge and experiences which it gained there, but it also loses its self-consciousness and must gain a mortal self-consciousness as well as a mortal body.

It is through the body that the self is identified, seen, and understood to be separate, and it is through the mind or spirit that the self is transcended or enlarged. To understand what is meant by transcendence, think about what is involved in the act of knowing. To know an object—for example, a tree—is to somehow bring it within, to comprehend it. (Both meanings of “comprehend” apply.) To know an object is to be able to form a mental image of it when it is not present, to have memories of one’s interactions with it, to be able to imagine or project future or possible interactions with it as well as to have an idea of the kind of thing it is. The self is also transcended in its interactions with other selves. By sharing

knowledge, emotions, and experience with others we can somehow make them our own.

But even in its transcendence the self remains particular. My mental image of a tree is not the tree itself. My experience of your experience is not the same as your experience. Neither is your experience the same for you after you share it with me and receive my view of it. Thus, in interacting with the world and other selves, the self builds its self-concept, its worldview, and its concept of others. Every self contains the world or, rather, a view of the world. Part of being a self is having a world-view. The soul must create or construct the world for itself—not, of course, without input from physical reality and others—but it cannot apprehend the thing in itself or experience directly the thoughts of others.

This is, of course, the philosophical concept of egocentricity. The psychological notion of egocentrism is somewhat different. It has to do with the immature cognitive abilities of children who cannot yet construct the world as the mature adult does. The egocentrism of the child includes being unable to distinguish between transient and abiding aspects of reality (mother no longer exists when she leaves the room), between subjective and objective aspects of reality (my stomach-ache is the world), and between universal and particular aspects of reality (every man is daddy).<sup>4</sup> Thus, from the psychological point of view, egocentrism is overcome by developing a worldview that fits reality. Perhaps spiritual maturation can overcome philosophical egocentricity.

We are now ready to understand the relationship between pride and self-esteem. If pride is a false estimation of the self, in order to understand how the self should be estimated we need to know how self-esteem should be acquired. But to talk about acquiring self-esteem is to begin with the mistaken assumption that self-esteem is like a possession, something that the self can gain and add on to its existing self. But self-esteem is the essence of the self—the self’s idea of what a self is. This is another way of saying that self-esteem is unconditional. It is not based on my being *my* self, but *a* self.

You will recall that we distinguished self-esteem from self-respect by showing that self-esteem is unconditional while self-respect is conditional. We might now say that self-esteem is universal while self-respect is particular. My self-esteem is based on my concept of what a self is and what it can be, how it relates to other selves and how it should relate to other selves, what the world is and what the self can accomplish in it. My self-respect is directed toward myself, the qualities that I have developed and the achievements I have made. Self-esteem emphasizes potentialities while self-respect emphasizes actualities.

It is clear that we need to amend our definition of pride. If my self-esteem is based on my being a self, then true self-esteem regards others as being equal in value to the self because they are also selves. The false self-esteem of pride considers itself to be *the* self. Pride, then, is the false estimation of the self in relationship to others. Most people will assent to the proposition that all selves are of equal value. This does not mean

that few people are proud, but that pride goes deeper than propositional knowledge; it goes as deep as my love for myself.

Behind pride is the conviction that I am the highest good because I am I. As a proposition, this is simply too ridiculous to be believed, so pride must disguise itself in some universal proposition or interest. We can see how this happens by examining the position of the personal ethical egoist. The egoist has one moral principle: "I should promote my own interest." To justify this ethic he must either claim that he is more important than anyone else, or he must revert to a universal ethical egoism and say something such as, "The greatest good for the greatest number will be achieved if everyone looks out for his own interests." Few, I think, would maintain the first. In other words, when the personal ethical egoist reflects on his code he must universalize it. Similarly, the belief behind pride is pre-reflective.

There is a reason why we are so confused about whether pride is good or bad. The insidious nature of pride is that it attacks us at our good points and corrupts them. To insinuate itself into our lives, to become respectable, pride must disguise itself.

Pride has made itself respectable today by calling itself self-esteem, by obliterating the distinction between self-esteem and self-respect. Since self-esteem is regarded as a psychological necessity for happy, achieving human beings, our savants have set about telling us how to acquire it. Either we are told that we should think well of ourselves and that we can do this merely by trying, or we are told to set goals for ourselves, that when we accomplish them we will feel good about ourselves.

In fact, conditional self-esteem is pride, and when we urge people to acquire it we are inculcating pride. Those who seek self-esteem through achievement fluctuate between arrogance and despair—arrogance if they reach their goals, despair if they do not; despair, when upon reaching their goals they discover that their goals were shallow or insignificant or that they still do not feel good about themselves, arrogance when they see all those who have not achieved what they have. Arrogance and despair are the two sides of the pride that bases its self-esteem on conditions—arrogance when the self succeeds in persuading itself that it is important because of its special talents and accomplishments, and despair when too much concern with truth dispels the illusion.

We sometimes try to encourage self-esteem by teaching that everyone is unique or special. But then being unique is not unique so why is it special to be special? This encourages pride because it assumes that we are only worth something if we are unique in some way when the truth is that it is our sameness, our all being selves, that makes us intrinsically good. The idea of universal uniqueness feeds pride because it feeds our desire to be indispensable. We are all indispensable in two ways: we are indispensable to ourselves; and, being eternal, we cannot be dispensed of. However, we are not indispensable to anyone else in the sense that they cannot get along without us. God is, of course, indispensable to all of us. Thus my desire to be indispensable to others is the desire to be as God to them

or to swallow up their selfhood in my own, in other words, pride. Many people sin by trying to be indispensable.

Pride is essentially competitive; it pits one ego against another. In our highly competitive culture, competition, if not regarded as an unmitigated good, is generally considered to foster excellence. Thus, pride becomes respectable by calling itself ambition, success, and competition. The false notion behind this kind of pride is that the self cannot be happy unless it is better than someone else. The competitive imperative of pride is "I must win because I am I." When I think about it, I realize that this is, indeed, the motivation behind winning. I do want to win because I am I, not because I am the best. I try to make myself the best because I want to win.

In the discussion of self-respect, we found two elements in the emotion of pride, the pleasure in the thing that I am proud of and the pleasure in the fact that I did it. As long as I am thinking of the thing created or the act accomplished I am not glorying in myself, but when the second element predominates I am being seduced by pride. After God created the earth, he saw that *it* was good, not that *he* was good.

Watching and listening to the disputes of my children, I have been struck by the realization that the younger they are the sooner they forget what the argument is about. The controversy deteriorates into a competition to determine *who will win*. Pride takes us away from the complexities of issues and reduces all controversies to the competitive imperative.

Self-sufficiency is a well established Mormon virtue. However, in the early days of Mormonism economic self-sufficiency was defined as the self-sufficiency of the entire Mormon community, not the self-sufficiency of the individual family. Pride easily disguises itself as self-sufficiency, independence, and self-reliance.

If the absolute meaning of these concepts is meant, these are obviously extreme examples of pride; a self that is sufficient to itself is a self that is isolated from God, others, and the world. This is madness if not an impossibility. No one is independent from everything. In a given context, the independence of the self is only relative. As a virtue, self-reliance or self-sufficiency simply means that one does for himself what he ought to and doesn't ask others to take care of him.

The temptation here is to exaggerate our own contribution and to forget what we owe to God and others or to retreat into our private lives and ignore, as much as we can, the difficulties and obligations of community. If we are all self-sufficient, independent, and self-reliant in some ways, we are all beggars, dependent, and in need of succor in other ways.

Pride can also disguise itself as free agency. It take the virtue of accepting responsibility for one's own actions, feelings, and choices and then corrupts it. A popular phrase now is, "taking control of my life." This can be good if it means examining my life to see if I am really doing what I want to do and not simply drifting, if it means deciding what my aspirations are and taking steps to achieve them. But if it means refusing to let others make demands on me, or asserting myself just because I believe I have the right to do so, or refusing to help

or sympathize with others on the grounds that they chose their own difficulties, then it is pride.

Since pride disguises itself as virtue, how can we recognize it? One thing is certain: if we don't look for it, we won't find it. Sometimes pride is easy to see in others, but until I can see it in myself I have not really understood it. As C.S. Lewis said, "If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed."<sup>5</sup>

One sign of pride, then, is the inability to recognize it. It is important to realize that the deception of pride is self-deception. As soon as we begin to see pride's falseness we have taken the first step in overcoming it. For this reason pride cannot abide criticism. Criticism, of course, means analysis and evaluation, not simply fault-finding. This doesn't necessarily mean that the proud man wants praise from others; the vain man does, but if I am really proud I might disdain the good opinion of others, caring only for my own. Neither is wanting a good opinion of others always necessarily a sign of vanity. I may want to please others because I care for them and value their friendship.

Another sign of pride is its concern with appearances. While this may be simple vanity, it may also be the outward sign of a deeper pride. Status symbols are important to pride because they are the proofs of superiority. Status symbols may be any number of things: fine apparel, success in the world, or a certain kind of education, but they are always measurable in some way. They are the conditions that a certain way of life demands for its self-esteem.

We can look for pride in our relationships with others. The proud person dominates and manipulates others; he treats them not as selves of equal value with himself, but as objects or means to his own ends.

Once we have recognized pride, how can we overcome it? Can we do it by developing humility? In other words, is humility a positive thing, something more than the absence of pride? Three aspects of humility are suggested by our definition of pride as the false estimation of the importance of the self in relation to others. These three aspects of humility—truth, love, and service—provide three antidotes to the poison of pride.

The first is truth. Since deception is at the heart of pride, only truth can dispel it. Remember that the deception of pride is primarily self-deception. Of course, the self may try to persuade others to go along with its lies in order to bolster its belief in that which it wants to be true.

Knowing the truth about ourselves requires self-examination, so to cure our pride we must turn inward. But if our self-esteem is actually pride, where will the courage for this venture come from? How can the self give up the lies which enable it to maintain its selfhood?

Another antidote to pride is love, the love which opposes the enmity which is the essence of pride. If I can love my neighbor as myself, then certainly I have overcome pride. But if my self-love is pride, the illusion of my own preeminence, then I cannot offer it to anyone else; to do so would destroy my selfhood.

We are sometimes told that the key to love is service, that by serving others we will come to love them. Might not service, indeed, be the antidote to selfish pride? But if I pursue service as a duty for my own self-improvement, am I not using it to build my pride? If we simply try to use truth, love, and service as the means to self-improvement, to rid ourselves of the defect of pride, then pride has corrupted our enterprise and it will fail.

We must turn to the source of truth and love, the one who is the supreme exemplar of service, Jesus Christ. And we must come in humility. In this case, humility does mean self-abasement. It must be negative before it can become positive.

If you haven't been fidgeting and squirming and wanting to cry out that in our definition of pride we have forgotten the most important thing, then you should ask yourself why you didn't notice that we left out God. We should have said that pride does not recognize God or that it is a false estimation of the self in relationship to God.

Among others, we are equal in being selves, though our particularity makes us different, and our obligation to others is to esteem them as ourselves. God is on a different level. "I am the Lord thy God; I am more intelligent than they all" (Abraham 3:19). We are to abase ourselves before him. The people of King Benjamin were awakened to a sense of their nothingness and their worthless and fallen state by being taught about the goodness of God (Mosiah 4:5). After seeing God, Moses said, "Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" (Moses 1:10).

I fear that we Mormons are uncomfortable with the idea of self-abasement. We dwell so much on our potential godhood that we sometimes forget the difference between potentiality and actuality. We have aspired to be God so long that it is hard to remember how wide the gap is between us and him. But if we cannot understand our own nothingness in relation to God, then we cannot worship him. And if we are too proud to worship him, we are in grave danger of being able to worship nothing but ourselves.

"Come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit," Jesus says, offering us the love whose only condition is that we accept it, "and I will heal you." After the pain of the broken heart comes the joy of healing.

As a mother's love gives her baby the sense of its own worth and her faith in him and his ability to grow draws him into the world, so we can grow when our self-esteem is based on God's love for us. When we know that we can receive forgiveness for our sins, we can have the courage to open ourselves to self-criticism. When we can esteem ourselves just because we are selves with the potential to grow, we can esteem others and hope for their growth. When service is embarked upon because God, to whom we have submitted ourselves, has commanded it, the paradox of sacrifice can take place as Jesus promised. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24).

It is the nature of selves to be self-transcendent. Pride does not recognize this and thinks it can keep its selfhood private. But the self grows by reaching out to the world and others and, with truth, bringing reality within, possessing it, not as an exclusive but a shared possession.

He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever (D&C 88:41).

That is the kind of being God is, and he wants us to be like him. But, we can't achieve godhood by launching ourselves upon a program of self-improvement in which we utilize our inner resources. We must submit ourselves to him.

It should be apparent that I have developed a concept of pride that agrees with the traditional Christian theologians in considering pride as the basic sin, the sin of the spirit which is in rebellion against God and at enmity with all others.<sup>6</sup>

A careful study of the Book of Mormon teachings on pride reveals that it is surprisingly close to traditional Christianity in its estimation of the nature of pride. In fact, Book of Mormon writers equate pride with a state of sin. The phrase "pride of their hearts" is used often to describe the state of those who have deliberately rejected God. In designating the wicked the Book of Mormon often simply calls them "those who are proud and do wickedly," thus setting forth the inward and outward aspects of sin. Pride is rarely listed as one sin among others but is usually considered to be the source of other sins. In the Book of Mormon the proud person sins against others as well as God. He does not esteem his neighbor as himself; instead he supposes he is better than others. This pride leads to envy, strife, persecutions, and a struggle for power and gain that finally leads to the destruction of an entire civilization.

But don't we learn in the our Mormon Sunday School and Seminary classes that the greatest or most serious sin is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, the second is murder, and the third adultery? That we teach this is evidence of our failure to think seriously about the nature of sin and of our tendency to think of sin basically as acts.

A little understood verse in the Doctrine and Covenants casts doubt upon the enterprise of enumerating and rating sins. Not forgiving, it says, is a greater sin that whatever sin we are not forgiving someone for (D&C 64:9). Not forgiving, like forgiving, is basically an inner attitude. The failure to forgive is so serious because it is a rejection of the Atonement. Not forgiving is a failure of the self to establish the right relationship with God and others—in fact, pride.

In reference to the three greatest sins of Mormonism I will just remark that these are special sins in the sense that they can be committed only by those who have entered into advanced covenant relationships with God. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost can only be committed by someone who has received a special type of revelation. There is no forgiveness for murder, only for those who have entered into the new and everlasting covenant with God. Remember that the people of

Ammon were forgiven for their murders. The seriousness of adultery for those in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage is related to the breaking of that covenant. As deliberate acts of rebellion, these sins are sins of pride, unmistakable signs of what has already taken place in the heart.

But if pride is rebellion against God, why should it be a danger to Church members who believe in God? Rebellion is from the inside and it never begins as open rebellion. In the Book of Mormon pride is never mentioned as a sin of the Lamanites. It is always the once righteous Nephites who succumb to pride, and Moroni warns us that we have the same problem. He is speaking to us as members of the true Church of Christ when he says:<sup>7</sup>

And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts (Mormon 8:36.).

We have seen that pride is at the root of our relationship with God and others and that more than rightmindedness and good intentions are required to root it out. Because pride wants to think well of itself, it is the greatest temptation for those who aspire to righteousness and its subtlest disguise is that of righteousness.

When man glories in his own righteousness he becomes self-righteous. Pride disguised as righteousness is pride at its most spiritual and most sinful. Self-righteousness leads to the persecution of others. First, the self-righteous man makes up his own rules. Of course, he doesn't think of them as his own rules; he bases them on the commandments, but they reflect his understanding of the commandments—they are his rules for keeping the Sabbath Day holy or his measurable objectives for increasing spirituality. After making up his own rules, he judges others by them and condemns them because they don't conform to his standards of righteousness. He may persecute them by imposing his standards on them, causing them to acknowledge his superiority if he persuades them he is right and, perhaps, to despair of their own righteousness. If he is in a position of power, he may persecute them by trying to force them to accept or obey his standards or by denying them positions of responsibility and respect. And for all his persecutions he claims divine sanction.

I can never know God as long as I am self-righteous. If I imagine that my limited and relative moral standards are the same as God's, if I imagine that my righteousness is the same as God's, if I imagine that because I have pleased God in one respect that I have his total approval, then I imagine that there is very little difference between myself and God.

Stripping myself of pride is, I suppose, at least a lifetime effort. No sooner have I divested myself of the fine apparel that pride offers me than I discover that I have been deceived into accepting another of its disguises. None of the formulas or definitions or insights into the nature of pride and how it can be



detected which I have offered here is absolutely guaranteed to reveal pride. Recognizing pride requires spiritual insight, and overcoming it requires outside help.

### NOTES

1. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (W.W. Norton and Co., 1968), p 92.
2. Stanley Coopersmith, *The Antecedents of Self-Esteem* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1967), p 5.
3. Louise J. Kaplan, *Oneness and Separateness: From Infant to Individual* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p 15.
4. David Elkind, *The Child's Reality: Three Developmental Themes* (Hilldale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associated, Publishers, 1978), p 85, 86.
5. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1943), p 99.
6. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. 1, Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), pp 186-203.
7. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book Company, 1970), pp 415-416.

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### ACCOMMODATION

Willene sighs as Elise looks to see  
if Beth saw her tuck her garment  
sleeves to accommodate her new dress  
which is a little bare in the arms.  
Beth resolutely looks away.

Only a Mormon would design a nylon garment  
hanging at the one end to the knees.  
And at the other: sleeves.  
Only someone caught in the eternal round  
of eavesdrop and peek by God,  
devil, and Brethren.

Willene remembers the relief at dispatching  
the first. At thirteen, she had, as her mother  
said, "developt." More than mirrors showed  
her new self: her shadow when she turned  
sideways; rounding third base after a solid hit,  
the whole world in motion; the uncle who ruffled  
her bangs when she wanted his Old Spice bearhug.

One day too much thinking about the good  
and bad of breasts convinced Willene  
that if she didn't quit it, God would plant  
cancer there. She loosened her straps,  
hunched her shoulders, but it was no good.  
Nothing could make her not jut out, not check  
to see how the flat girls looked.

And breasts were everywhere. Billboard  
women poured out of strapless gowns  
to sell Chiclets, Smirnoff, CrackerJacks.  
Women in Maidenform bras plucked chickens,  
danced at the Waldorf-Astoria, took first  
in the Indy 500. On the day that breasts  
became too much to bear, Willene squinted  
at the sky and hissed, "All right, take both  
of them, but leave me be." God not only stopped  
bothering her after that—they got along fine.

The dismissal of the devil must have begun  
the first time she decided she could get  
into trouble without him. Or realizing  
that sin would not have caught her  
in the first place if she had not been afraid  
in some way. The devil seemed to have gone the way  
of Clearasil, saddle shoes, and hula hoops.

They smile at Willene's battle of the breast,  
but Beth and Elise reject her dismissal  
of Satan, even when she insists that life's  
easier without him. Nothing though can make

the Brethren fade. Dark suits. Clean shaven  
as real estate, the Politburo, Amway. And  
why they live so long? Maybe too busy to die.  
Maybe so wanting to finally live right, they hang  
on for one more day. Maybe seeing the limits  
in those waiting to take their place.

The priesthood. The garment of the priesthood.  
Some members left the Church when the Brethren  
shortened the garment length. But not those  
who tell faith-promoting stories of Saints  
unscathed (in the places that garments make safe)  
by flood, fire, or airplane crash. Such faith  
accommodates the loss of a bit more limb.

Prayer is over and breakfast, and the other  
two are gone. Sorting her dirty clothes,  
Willene sees she has enough for only  
one full load. That would mean washing  
her garments with other clothes. Beth  
and Elise do—and no one says not to.  
And besides a second load would take  
her day's subway fare. But it would mean  
washing her garments with other clothes.  
The free spirit thinks about what  
she can really let go, then makes two  
small piles, sighs, and goes to the laundry room.

—LORETTA RANDALL SHARP