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**Measure for Mismeasure:
Two Case Studies in the Use of Virtue Epistemology**

“I once was lost, but now I’m found, Twas blind, but now I see.”
From *“Amazing Grace”* by John Newton

Abstract

In order to succeed in one’s endeavors, a person needs to have a proper assessment of their epistemic strengths and weaknesses. As philosophical counselors, you have most likely encountered clients who either do not have an appreciation of what they can achieve, or of what is beyond their grasp. They might be either timid and servile, or exhibit arrogance and hubris. Either way, they do not experience proper pride. As a result, they are not able to set realistic goals or to make appropriate choices, which can result in various epistemic harms.

These kinds of mismeasures of the Self are very common. The problem is, how do we help our clients to recognize and assess their mismeasurements, and help them to achieve the proper pride all human beings have a right to? How do we help them to change their attitudes towards themselves? This paper lays out the theoretical background for thinking about measurements of the Self, utilizing the case studies of two philosophical counseling clients to illustrate various mismeasures of the Self and to show how, with dialogue, education, modeling, and practice, subsequent changes of attitudes towards themselves occurred. With time, these clients have been able to achieve a well-calibrated sense of their strengths as well as their limitations.

Key Words: arrogance, hubris, humility, proper pride, self-respect, servility, timidity, vice epistemology, virtue epistemology

Introduction:

According to Kant, self-respect is something that all persons deserve and have a duty to maintain. We fulfill this duty when we act morally and refrain from doing anything that degrades or denies it. We must take a proper measure of our moral selves while, at the same time, turning away from any vices which denigrate our proper pride and self-respect (Dillon, R. ed., 1995).

Most people have not been educated to realize the utmost importance of living a virtuous life with its contribution to their self-respect, much less what that might entail. Individuals who take a proper measure of their moral selves are rare. There are a multitude of virtues and vices to consider when taking one’s proper measure. This paper focuses on the corresponding vices of timidity and servility and arrogance and hubris, and how they kept two of my clients from experiencing proper pride and self-

respect. It will review the work we did together in philosophical counseling which enabled each of them to obtain a properly calibrated measurement of their Selves.

It is likely that as philosophical counselors you, too, have encountered clients who are timid and servile, arrogant, or hubristic and who suffer from a lack of proper pride and self-esteem. Those who exhibit timidity and servility lack an appreciation of what they can achieve, believing it is beyond their grasp and so it often is. Those who are arrogant value themselves inordinately, making it difficult for them to set realistic goals and to make appropriate choices, all of which leads to difficulties for themselves and others.

People feel anxious and depressed without proper pride and self-respect. Although they might not know the root cause of their dis-ease, they somehow know they would feel better if they could truly feel proud of, and respect themselves, which isn't just a matter of "feeling is believing" (Dillon, 1995). That is why, within the realm of philosophical counseling, the concern is not for a client to feel better, although it is true that by addressing their situation through the lens of a life lived virtuously their mental health will improve. The true significance of addressing these issues is, as Kant pointed out, something of more profound importance – their being able to congeal a solid sense of Self through living a moral life (Massey, S. 1983).

In the modern world of psychiatry, anxiety and depression are situations to diagnose and treat with medications and/or cognitive behavioral therapy in which the client is encouraged to make some adaptations to feel better. The client who is suffering from timidity and servility might be diagnosed as having a passive dependent or avoidant personality disorder. The client who exhibits arrogance and hubris could be given the label, "narcissistic personality disorder." Major depression or an anxiety disorder would either be confirmed or ruled out.

The recognition by the philosophical counselor that their client is suffering from a lack of proper pride and self-respect moves their treatment stance from one of helping the client to feel better through medication and adaptation to educating the client about a moral way to go about things. It progresses beyond how the client feels to how to help himself through a rational and moral approach to his problem. The language becomes about ethics, not adjustment, and about what is justified belief and what is knowledge. If the client wants to go further along a path to self-respect and self-knowledge than what is typically being offered in traditional therapies today, then philosophical counseling can offer him one.

Alongside its virtues approach, philosophical counseling also supports the dictum to "Know Thyself." Being prepared to follow the truth of oneself wherever it leads often requires a person not only to learn some unpalatable truths about themselves, but also to do something about them. It is hard to admit feelings of inferiority and superiority. At the same time, they so often cause clients to turn away from what is good, while frustrating them in their attempts to achieve their goals. Therefore, it behooves the philosophical counselor to better understand these common mismeasurements of the self and what they can do to help clients gain measurements which are more accurate.

The value of philosophy lies in its application to real life. Through the explication of two case studies, one involving a client who suffered from timidity and servility, and the other from arrogance and hubris, I will demonstrate how the theoretical world of virtue epistemology can be practically applied in peoples' actual lives. In these cases, my clients and I used philosophy to find intelligent substitutes for blind impulses and to provide guidance to a better life through better conduct. Thus we were able to

sort out the complexities of their lives using the best available philosophical theories, providing them with relief from their difficulties, and helping them to develop wisdom in their approaches to future issues and problems.

What is Virtue Epistemology?

Virtue epistemology is concerned with intellectual virtues - characteristics that promote intellectual flourishing and enable excellent thinking. In contrast with moral virtues, which are concerned with the moral aspects of living well, intellectual virtues are the deep personal qualities or character strengths of a good thinker or learner. They include qualities like curiosity, open-mindedness, honesty, intellectual courage and tenacity (Annas, J., 2013)

Intellectual virtues help us to take our proper measure by enabling us to recognize when we do or don't know a given thing. They enlighten us as to when our presuppositions might be faulty, help us to recognize epistemic injustices, aid us in knowing what not to do and how not to be. They assist in cultivating intellectual virtue in general.

Vice epistemology, a reciprocal area of study, concerns itself with intellectual vices. As Aristotle taught, any virtue is to be found between two corresponding vices, each one of which represents an excess or a deficiency. Intellectual vices are defined as personal intellectual failings that have a negative impact on our intellectual conduct. For example, a person can be very knowledgeable and intellectually gifted while also being intellectually hasty, lazy, dishonest, arrogant, servile, distracted, superficial, careless, or closed-minded (Cassam, Q., 2016).

Although the word "vice" may sound harsh to some, the Latin root of the word is, more neutrally, a fault or defect. Simply put, vices are behaviors that don't work. The point of calling them vices is to suggest that they are somehow blameworthy, or at least worthy of analysis and criticism. Without a proper understanding of epistemic vices, it becomes more difficult to assess our faulty ways of thinking, to know how we are obstructing our attempts to know things, and to be able to transmit knowledge accurately (Turri, J., et.al, 2019).

This paper concerns itself specifically with the virtues of proper pride and self-respect, along with their corresponding vices – timidity and servility and arrogance and hubris. Using two case studies, I want to show how findings from virtue epistemology were utilized to help them, and how valuable that process was. I want to illustrate how the clients were helped to take their proper measure and to come to a place of proper pride and self-respect.

From the beginning, philosophers have underscored the importance of proper pride and self-respect for achieving happiness. Aristotle wrote about proper pride as being the bona fide appreciation of one's worth. It was an essential dimension of the virtuous person. Centuries later, Hobbes again affirmed that an individual valuing himself appropriately was of the utmost importance. Hume also stressed that well founded pride was essential to a person's honor.

Self-respect was the cornerstone of Kant's ethic. He defined it as due respect for oneself and considered it the most important moral duty, constituting the supreme condition for all morality. Within this ethic, the person has a duty to maintain her self-respect, which requires her to act in certain ways and forbids others. She must know what morality is, she must choose her own, and she must act in accordance with corresponding virtuous behaviors (Dillon, R., 1995).

Many problems ensue for persons whose self-assessments are not accurate. For example, a close-minded person is often arrogant. This type of person has a distorted sense of agency. She doesn't take in relevant information opposed to her way of thinking. As a result, she cannot accurately assess her beliefs about what she can and cannot achieve and about what she should and shouldn't do. This leaves her prone to making bad choices.

Arrogance and hubris, also known by terms such as narcissism, self-righteousness and vanity, represent vices which lead one to excesses of pride. A person who exhibits these vices will never achieve proper self-respect. Characterized by unhealthy forms of high self-esteem, these vices depend on one's perceived superiority to others. No matter whatever else they might appear to be doing, self-enhancement and social acceptance are the person's main aims. Values he or she has come to thoughtfully endorse for themselves do not exist for this type of person (ed. Carter, A. and Gordon, E., 2017).

Persons with this kind of distorted agency tend towards selfish ambition, domination, and pretentiousness. They can be racist, sexist, vain, or presumptive. They behave arrogantly while thinking of themselves as superior and are filled with self-importance. It is common to feel anger and resentment towards these people. These are normal responses provoked by having been treated as an object in a world where the hubristic person can be the only subject.

On the other hand, servility amounts to deliberate self-abasement. It is degrading. The person who suffers from this vice is often turned into the mere plaything of others, making her, in essence, into a "thing." Timidity, an accompanying vice, is also self-abasing. The timid person has an over-riding fear about being exposed as stupid or as lacking in talent and ability. He or she is prone to self-silencing due to not wanting to be noticed.

People who are timid and servile cannot assume a consistent attitude of self-respect because, like the hubristic person, their evaluation of their worth is sensitive to social acceptance rather than to values they have carefully thought about and can whole heartedly endorse. As a result, they engage in constant and extensive self-monitoring in order to insure they conform to what they believe is expected of them. Their lack of confidence in themselves brings a corresponding lack of incentive to improve their performance, a downward spiral which does not lead towards either happiness or success (Tanesini, A., 2021).

Virtues can be taught by example, explicit instruction, dialogue, and practice (Masala, A., and Webber, J., eds. 2016), all of which are conditions philosophical counselors are in a good position to provide. A distinguishing feature of philosophical counseling is its recognition of the importance of virtues in living a good life and in its distinct encouragement of utilizing virtues in concrete situations (Tukianen, A., 2010). The two case studies presented here illustrate how relevant philosophical theories from virtue epistemology can be put into practice, as my clients and I applied them to their unique life situations.

Virtue Epistemology brought to Life in a Case Study of intellectual Timidity and Servility

When we started working together in the summer of 2014, Danna (not her real name) reported going in and out of depression. She felt she had lost her focus. She didn't know how to get around to having a real life. Her life lacked balance, in part due to her habit of never saying "no." As a result, she often

lacked energy to accomplish things important to her and there was no time left for the creative things she enjoyed doing.

Although Danna had obtained a master's degree in landscape architecture in 2009 and was therefore eligible to become a Certified Landscape Architect, she had never gotten things together to get her license, something she still hoped to accomplish. For some reason, she had not taken advantage of her degrees with all they stood for and the opportunities they can provide. I wondered if, being Hispanic and a woman, Danna suffered from the effects of feeling inferior and of having low self-esteem, and if these states had, over time, pulled her into a downward spiral characteristic of those who have learned to be servile and timid.

It is not uncommon for people in minority groups, and for women, both of whom have been marginalized, to internalize the negative judgments and attitudes that those in the majority and those in power hold towards them. They become ashamed of what they perceive to be their limited intellectual qualities and adopt self-abasing and negative stances towards them. (DePaul M., and Zagzebski, L, ed., 2003). Danna's self-abasing habits were important factors in not obtaining her license in landscape architecture, which would have contributed to her proper pride and self-respect.

Danna's parents, immigrant laborers from Mexico, earned a minimal family wage from the sweat of their backs. From observing her parents, she learned how to work physically. But, having learned to devalue themselves from the surrounding society at large, and having had little education, they did not know how to teach Danna to properly value her intellectual achievements, much less guide her in knowing what to do with them. Their lacks proved to be obstacles to Danna's success. (Badru, R., 2021)

Through imitation of her parents and her unconscious acceptance of her enculturation, she ended up with strong tendencies to be both timid and servile. These vices led to her feeling fatalistic about her limitations and her life. Rather than designing and creating gardens, the work that is fitting for a licensed landscape architect five years out of college, Danna was working as a manual laborer in a white man's landscaping business.

Being servile involves thinking of oneself as being of lesser value than other people. The servile person responds to others with behaviors that seek their acceptance while turning themselves into an object of the other person's inclinations. (Tanesini, A., 2021) It is a kind of borrowed self-worth. Being of use to others was something that Danna said was uplifting to her. In and of itself, that can be taken as a good thing. But she also mentioned that almost everything about her life seemed fake. This caused me to wonder if some of her being of use didn't also fall into the category of seeking acceptance, of attempts to ingratiate herself to others in order to feel accepted and that she belonged. This meant her subservient actions lacked sincerity, which we explored as a reason for her life feeling phony.

At the beginning of our work, we could not know exactly what would be involved in her lifting her depression, gaining focus, and getting what she considered to be a real life. She was somewhat aware that her negative self-assessment was unwarranted and that she had adopted a survival strategy in a world where all the Hispanics she knew were valued little more than cattle. We did agree that if she wanted to make progress towards her goals, she would need to make some essential changes.

From the start, I felt there was a good prognosis for a positive outcome. Danna recognized that she had suffered for many years from these acquired vices, she had the ability to observe herself, and she had

the motivation to change. I was confident she would take the necessary steps called for in order to transcend her current situation.

We both agreed one essential task she would need to accomplish was to gain a proper measure of her intellectual self and come to a place of proper pride. She would need to notice the moments when she was being timid and servile. In the sessions that ensued we problem solved ways she could have responded to situations with proper pride and self-respect rather than behaviors which denigrated her. In on-going situations, she began to learn and to enact new behaviors which were more fitting to her capacities.

The first dream a client has after beginning counseling often gives clues to the fundamental projects that need to be accomplished in her work. Danna's dream was no exception. In her dream a big storm came during a family reunion. Her father was cooking. Wind tore down the structure in which everyone was gathered. In the end, everyone was safe. One of the men in the scene had planted things in sandy soil. Nearby a woman was supervising a crew of landscapers. All the equipment was neat and organized. Everyone was working together proudly as a team.

We both thought the storm represented her anger at her family, especially her dad, who never questioned the authority of the white man. Her anger would provide her with the motivation to break down the self-abasing structure she had grown up with which had led to the degradation of her personality, but it wouldn't destroy her family, whom she deeply loved.

The man who planted things in sandy soil reminded her of what she had been inclined to do as a result of her pessimistic and fatalistic stance towards her intellectual capacities. She judged herself to be limited, resigned herself to her alleged shortcomings, and fatalistically "planted" things in soil that would never sustain growth.

The hope in Danna's dream is indicated by the woman who is supervising a crew of landscapers. She seems to be the woman Danna would become as the result of her current and sustained efforts. She would then be working in a capacity suited to someone who has a masters' degree in landscape architecture. Rather than doing the manual work herself, as she was then doing, she would be supervising and teaching others how to do it. The neatly organized equipment and cooperative workplace indicated she would be accomplishing this task in a manner which would bring her proper pride and self-respect. As things turned out, over a period of years Danna has worked hard and come a long way towards becoming that professional woman.

Life has an interesting way of providing opportunities for people to learn what they need to. Counseling can help with this implicit education by making moments seemingly designed for "higher" learning on the part of the client, explicit. Through the process of Danna becoming more able to recognize her timid and servile ways, and through the process of dialoguing about various, more virtuous ways to handle these situations, over time she gained the self-control necessary to enact them while we watched her proper pride and self-esteem gradually increase.

Over the years, we worked together on a number of agreed upon tasks which, adding them all up, enabled her to reach her ultimate goal of having proper respect for herself. Some of them included identifying her fundamental project, which enabled her to set better boundaries around herself and her time, gave her life more structure, and made it easier for her to say "no." She also established a legitimate landscaping business which now supports her financially.

My approach to philosophical counseling includes working towards my clients' stated highest good in whatever situations they find themselves in. This, in and of itself, naturally brings proper pride and self-respect, no matter what else we are working on. So, for example, when one of her prospective clients suggested she turn over her plans for the job before he had even agreed to pay her, Danna was able to refuse, knowing she would hurt herself, and him, by acquiescing to his request. She did not have to undergo the humiliation of not getting paid for legitimate work. Rather, she walked away with increased respect for herself.

Another big victory came when Danna was able to stand her ground with a truck engine manufacturer who did not want to make good on her recently purchased engine's warranty. Instead of collapsing under their side-stepping ways, she collected all the paperwork and photos needed to prove she was right – that the engine they sold her was indeed faulty. Because of her diligence and intelligence, they had to make good on her claim. Even though she felt intimidated, by this time into our work she had developed a strong desire that others bestow on her the respect she deserved, and she got it!

Through repeatedly taking her proper measure instead of the one imposed upon her, Danna came to regard certain forms of acting, thinking and feeling – those befitting a person with proper pride - that she hadn't allowed herself to consider before our work together. This knowledge and wisdom enabled her to restrain herself from what she came to regard as actions that were not worthy of herself.

As her self-assessments became more accurate, Danna has been better able to make the right choices for herself and has been able to demand that others respect her in a manner that is consonant with her accomplishments. Although Danna decided it was not worth it to her financially and time wise to pursue certification in landscaping, she has gone on to obtain other more immediately needed certifications, such as a soils and a tree specialist, areas of special concern to her. Danna's is one example of a mismeasure of the self that was exchanged for a more accurate measurement, one that entailed proper pride and self-respect – something undeniably of great value.

Virtue Epistemology Brought to Life in a Case Study of Arrogance and Hubris

People who are arrogant don't necessarily see themselves that way. It is likely that, when asked, they would say they don't approve of such behavior. It seems harder to admit that one believes one is superior to others than to admit one's feelings of inferiority. When you think about it, do you know many people who will openly profess that they are better than other people?

And yet, arrogance causes many problems, not only for the arrogant person herself, but also for the people around her. Because of her conceit, she is often close-minded, unwilling to consider other people's viewpoints. Her arrogance can cause her to disparage the work of others and not to give credit where credit is due. She will hold onto rigid positions to ward off realizations that would undermine her confidence in the correctness of her ideas. It is likely she will respond to threats with anger. In any situation, none of these behaviors can be said to contribute to the basic virtues of goodness and truth, nor are they indicative of proper pride and self-respect. (Tanesini, A., 2021)

Although confronting a client who is in denial about her arrogance could be helpful to her in the long run, in the short run it is likely to be a futile enterprise. More probably, she will have a fear of failing and of looking bad that will cause her to be defensive and even aggressive. However, if life provides your client with an opportunity to recognize her arrogance while she is in the process of counseling, it

becomes possible to teach her about her arrogance and hubris and how it hurts not only herself, but also others. Fortunately, that is exactly what happened in this case.

My client, Nancy (not her real name) lived through a childhood which made it difficult to develop good character. Known as moral bad luck (Williams,B.1981), hers was not the kind that often comes from having been born into poverty or racism. Her moral bad luck came from having a narcissistic mother who wanted her, above all else, to be admired by other people. It also came from having been sexually molested.

Nancy remembers that, in the eyes of her mother, she and her sister were never good enough. The two of them came to believe they were in peril if anyone saw them as they really were. This led to over-riding feelings of shame and chagrin – feelings that are a long way from proper pride and self-respect. In order to compensate for this lack, Nancy put a lot of time and effort into becoming the “golden girl” that her mother wanted her to be, all the while losing touch with those qualities that were authentically hers.

When Nancy was 10, she was sexually molested by a trusted neighbor. When she told her mother, her mother gaslighted her, immediately whisking the situation away by saying that it was impossible that this could have happened. Her 10-year-old psyche did the best it could, but still, the incident brought about a great deal of shame which deformed her life and her sense of self. An outward sign of this deformity showed up when she developed scoliosis within the year after being molested.

The stone wall her mother put up that day caused Nancy to feel she could not get through to others, even when she was being most authentic. This led her to withdraw, to hide and to keep secrets. With a lack of real contact with the world, all she had left to help her to become someone were her narcissistic defenses: her hubris, arrogance and false pride.

In response to all of this, Nancy started to become strategic, always looking for the chance to become who her mother wanted her to be, and to appear as someone who had not experienced sexual trauma. Often that involved making other people secondary to her project of becoming a star child for her mother. She would objectify people, be strategic in using them, look at others with cold eyes, and often become passive-aggressive. Rather than responding from her heart, she was always trying to figure out how to “play it,” to manipulate situations so she was on top, the best. She felt justified in ignoring others’ needs in order to satisfy her own.

On her way to becoming her mother’s star child, Nancy obtained a Ph.D. from Kings College, married a wealthy diplomat, and lived on the banks of the Seine. Between that time and when she began working with me in 2001, she became aware that something was wrong. Occasionally she lost confidence in herself, leaving her unable to sustain the good impressions she had worked so hard to create. She noticed at times that she felt inadequate and afraid. Then she would distance herself from others, not wanting them to see her in such a state. Since the other side of arrogance is servility, she had a hard time saying “no.” She often tried to accommodate herself to people who felt entitled to get what they wanted from her.

When the mask of Nancy’s persona occasionally slipped, she would become aware that all was not well. In order to help herself, she created opportunities to return to a more authentic self. This included involving herself in several different therapies, divorcing her husband, following her passion to become a writer, and moving to New Mexico, a place well known for its appeal to artists.

When Nancy and I began working together, I was still seeing things through a psychological lens due to my early my training as a transpersonal psychotherapist. Much of our work then involved my propping her up in various ways. In part due to her high intelligence and her privileged life experiences, and in part due to the reductionistic lens I had learned to see things through, we did not at that time understand her main problem as stemming from a lack of self-respect. Though we made some progress towards her living the kind of life she wanted to live, we had still not gotten to what has proved to be the most important issue preventing her from having an honestly good life - the acting out of vices on either side of proper pride and self-respect. This resulted in her ending up with a Self divided against itself, unable to manifest these primary virtues in her daily life.

Just when we were both in a position to make the best use of it, providence provided us with some moral good luck. At that time, Nancy was finding it difficult to find a place to live. Out of a feeling of desperation, she became ruthless, trespassing onto another person's property in order to try to obtain a soon-to-become available home she narcissistically believed she should have. Caught in the act, this illegal and immoral situation provided us both with an opportunity to see how ruthless she had been her whole life in order get what she believed she deserved as she desperately tried to be her mother's star child. It also provided her with an opportunity to find her moral compass and to begin to desire good character above all else.

During our ensuing dialogues, we debriefed this situation many times over. Through this direct confrontation with herself, a gold-mine of the rich layers of Nancy's psyche became available to us. As her stories about herself fell away she saw through her ego and broke into a place of emptiness. She had not known how bad her arrogant behaviors had been. She wondered just who that ruthless, arrogant, self-serving person was and how she could have been her?

Nancy described this dramatic event as a chastening. She was boldly shown who she was rather than who she was pretending to be. The experience of realizing this was not a bed of roses. As she saw her past self more clearly, she often didn't want to get up in the morning. She frequently groaned when thinking about who she was. She cried about how deluded and misguided she had been and about how many of her efforts were wasted. There was a kind of torture in those moments of flashback in which her often impure motives were re-lived.

At the same time, Nancy understood that this was what needed to happen so she could redeem her life. Through this dramatic and traumatic event, she reclaimed her birthright to self-respect. She started making clear decisions instead of trying to manipulate. She saw others as the subjects of their lives, rather than as objects in her own. Rather than the envy and false pride she had previously been acting out around others, she experienced genuine caring and good feelings towards them.

Although the circumstance had been humiliating and humbling, she was happy for herself. Nancy told me she could now live the way SHE had always longed to live. She had more agency, was better able to solve problems, and to say "no" and make it stick. Her mind was quiet, no longer torturing her, and she was able to slow down and relax.

As she dropped the need to impress and please others, she made progress into a whole different way of being. Nancy started to reflect on her life with an eye towards what would make it more fertile and meaningful and honing it in order to live without compromise. She moved away from the psychological and aesthetic to the moral, and she became more clear about how to continue her progress along these

lines. These were some of the fruits of her labors as she became the moral person she deeply wished to be.

“Free, at last! Free, at last! Thank God, I’m free at last!” Nancy proclaimed in one of our dialogues. This is a proclamation every philosopher understands. To experience it coming to fruition in another person due to the work we had done together was, for me, a beautiful and satisfying moment.

Conclusion

As has been illustrated, my clients and I labored together, often intensely and over a period of years, as we focused on eliminating their vices and working towards proper pride and self-respect. As you have read and so can imagine, examining their vices up close and personal was not always an easy task. At the same time, both clients expressed enjoyment over forming living relationships with what were previously unknown philosophical theories. They brought the abstract sounding “virtue epistemology” to life as they examined more carefully their ill-conceptions and took advantage of opportunities to improve themselves. (Tukiainen, A.) As they learned to appraise themselves through the lens of their own values and to live accordingly to them, their sense of self-worth became secure, and they happily became more successful in their endeavors.

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