

http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2008/01/generosity_shames_greed_1.html

Generosity Shames Greed

Around the world and through history, VIRTUE//VICE lists are a staple of ethics and religion, behavior and belief. The current “On Faith” questions involve a VICE list: “In Christian theology, there are Seven Deadly Sins: pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and sloth. Which of these do you think is the worst? Which is most prevalent and harmful in our society today?”

GREED is my choice. It’s both the worst and, in our society today, the most prevalent and harmful. But before supporting my choice, I must make two *adjustments*:

.....The Seven Deadly Sins are broadly “in Christian theology,” but specifically they are a vice catalog within Roman Catholic ethics. In the English language, they are not known to have appeared together until 1711. Further, virtue/vice catalogs precede Christianity in classical (Greek and Roman) and Jewish literature.

.....Generally, Christian ethics treats first of virtues, only thereafter of vices. Traditionally, the virtues are seven: four classical (prudence, justice, courage, temperance), three specifically Christian (faith, hope, love).

In the Christian paradigm, life in all its aspects is to be seen as providential, as divinely given. Early Christianity described Christian character by lists of virtues-values so conceived. In Galatians 5:22, the virtues are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” In Ephesians 5:9, the values are “all that is good and right and true.” In Philippians 4:8, Christians are to “think about these things”: “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable...any excellence...anything worthy of praise.”

Back to GREED.

1.....Greed is CENTRIPETAL, sucking everything into itself. Its energies are consumed in “seeking its own” (First Corinthians 13:5), conceiving as its own whatever it desires regardless of any other considerations: its responsibility is only to itself. The sun is so greedy that were it not for rotation, everything else in the solar system would collapse into it.

The greedy soul (or family or society, institution or partnership, corporation or nation) exercises a gravitational pull on all it desires—beyond its needs and without consideration of others’ needs. It is its own sun, its own god. While it is possible to subsume six of the deadly sins under any one of them, I think greed wins this contest.

2.....The best antonym of greed is whatever word best suggests the virtue of sucking everything out of itself in the interest of others—the word with the greatest CENTRIFUGAL force. In early Christian Greek (the language of the New Testament), that word is “agathosune,” which is translated above (in the first list of the Christian character) as “GENEROSITY.” Some other words bespeak goodness; but this word (an intensive of “agathos,” good) signals a *goodness eager and energetic to meet human needs* no matter the cost to the doer of the good. In Christianity, Jesus is more than the model for such goodness; in paying the cost of the Cross, he opened for all the gates of new life beyond sin.

I’ll close with the story of someone who right now, in this world of appalling greed-caused misery, exhibits the eager and energetic generosity my title refers to, a generosity which shames greed. I think of some living Christian examples, but I have decided on a Muslim. (In teaching such generosity, Jesus a Jew told the parable not of a good Jew but of “The Good Samaritan.”)

Muhammad Yunus, an economist with a Vanderbilt University PhD, deserved the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for founding the Grameen Bank for “micro-credit” to the poor as a tool in poverty reduction, and for the development of “social business,” a form of capitalism attentive equally to profit and to social-change benefits. Here is even more than intelligent compassion. Here is competent generosity in action toward a better world. Such generosity shames greed.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | JANUARY 19, 2008; 5:52 PM ET

Comments

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Err, What, Bgone? (on second thought, never mind, why bother.)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 22, 2008 4:59 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Begone,

lol...

DEFEATED BY LOVE

The sky was lit
by the splendor of the moon
So powerful
I fell to the ground
Your love
has made me sure
I am ready to forsake
this worldly life
and surrender to the magnificence
of your Being
- Rumi

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 22, 2008 3:58 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Terra Gazelle:

"By the light---of the silvery moon---with my money I'll spoon---
((((((NOT MONEY YOU IDIOT---HONEY))))))

"Honey moon---keep a shinin' in June---we'll be playin' love's tune---swoon swoon---forgot the words---hum
hum---hum hum

"Don't let the stars get in your eyes---don't let the moon break your heart---love blooms at night---in daylight it
dies---

POSTED BY: BGONE | JANUARY 22, 2008 1:31 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Terra: that was lovely ;-)

Paganplace: I once ran for a law school office with the slogan "The less seriously I take myself, the more
seriously I can take the job." I won. ;-)

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 22, 2008 1:19 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Joet,

I have just come in from my Full Moon rite, so I am filled with a happiness about the universe. lol.

Tonight reminds me of something I wrote...

Wisteria Spirit

I weave my life through spirit, as the Wisteria weaves through the trees...

Climbing the heights to the sun, to blossom in the breeze.

I will twine my soul within the white fingers of the roots

And I will live in the knowledge that I am one within the spring shoots.

~~~~~

That is being Pagan.

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 22, 2008 1:39 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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" JoeT:

"paganplace: I feel so much better now ;-)."

I'm glad. :) Things are liable to get too busy to be dealing with miscommunications and mischaracterizations and misunderstandings. :)

" and for the record, I agree that humility is absolutely a positive virtue having virtually nothing to do with the absence of pride. It is the root of our ability to love, and to accept the love of others."

'Honor and humility' Both involve graciously-accepting gifts and wielding them with all due, umm, power and compassion. :)

(Speaking of Catholic upbringing, pardon if I over-exegize Aunty Doreen's poetry: (Well done, though) ...this is by choice in terms of keeping such endeavors as simple as possible: then again, half the sentence the Wiccan Rede is found in is a comment on how brief the rest is:

"Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill: An' it harm none, do what ye will." :) )

Humility can also mean accepting and \*taking real responsibility for\* your personal power, and where you work with something bigger: it can be false pride to figure your ego or mind is even an \*issue\* in a given situation. Frankly, when a lot of Christians speak of 'Pride' as a 'sinful force,' ...while of course saying, 'Only those like me have access to charity and humility... Therefore we should rule...' Well, we Pagans tend to figure, 'Get over yourself.'

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 21, 2008 5:44 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Anyway, Reverend, a few points, here.

"I hope you notice that my counter was to say that Christian ethics features VIRTUES—as it were, standing around the warming & illumining fire of God's love, while goblins of vice stand in an outer ring in the dark & the cold—ready to pounce."

Actually, that sounds like the very perspective on the world I would most criticize political Christians insisting upon: the metaphor there is, "There is only this one fire, stay penned up around it... everything outside this glow is 'vice and goblins and dark and cold. Fear others, fear yourself, fear the dark.'"

Sometimes where you see darkness, I see starlight. But even the shadows are of the Goddess.

" Better still, Christian ethics is fundamentally relational, not prescriptive; & specifying good/bad behavior corrupts the Faith (1) by reducing it from loving relationships (as Jesus says, with God/others/self) to mere rules to follow;"

It's funny, cause it seems to me that you've called yourself morally-superior all this time \*for\* relying on a proscriptive/prescriptive morality... as opposed to Pagan relational ethics, usually denounced as 'moral relativism.'

Am I to expect you'll help out when people are trying to reduce my loving same-sex relationship to a mere 'violation of rules to follow?':)

" & (2) by deluding believers into thinking they are capable of becoming good in God's sight (notice the good guy's list of good deeds in Jesus' ironic parable of "The Pharisee and the publican" [Luke 18:9-14]). / Amen to what you say of "lust"—which in German ("Lust") means pleasure, joy, delight (as "lust" means in its earliest English usage, 1607)"; & is only secondarily negative."

This derivation doesn't seem to be the connotation with which the word is used in English: surely Pagans see pleasure, joy and delight as good things from the Gods... \*sacred\* in a loving context, and not to be defiled with negative connotations.

" While the Bible is big on joy, its wary of physical-sensuous pleasure, in reaction against the hedonism of the cultures of its birth"

The... \*accused\* hedonism: actually Victorian Christian use of the 'Fall of Rome' for a morality play has really given the ancient civilizations a bad rap on this count: you'd think everyone was a Nero or Caligula, which just wasn't the case... some of the more lurid travelogues and political/religious propaganda of the time had a way of sensationalizing and misconstruing a lot of stuff... if not passing off wild rumor as firsthand accounts. (not to paint too rosy a picture of things, either, but that's rarely a concern in places like this.)

If the cultures involved were so 'hedonistic,' then accusing them of excessive 'hedonism' wouldn't have gotten much play among the would-be converts, would it?

" This wariness became excessive as a generalized suspicion of sex, resulting in the warped notion that anti-sex (anti-masturbation, celibacy) is more "spiritual." "

Well, celibacy as a spiritual practice has some precedent... definitely it wasn't meant to make everyone in the world 'sinners' in those contexts: it was a focus of energy on spiritual practices. Definitely it became twisted into sexual self-loathing on a massive scale.

"You seem capable of spinning out pathologies from this warpage."

Oh, Gods, don't get me started. I've seen more than I care to remember of the pathologies that spin out of Christian sexual repression. A few really do say, 'So Long, And Thanks For All The Fetishes,' (more often without the 'So Long,' come to think of it,) ..but a lot of the shame-and-sin-and-spank is just considered \*normal\* that, well, forget about it.

"Sorry your Christian education did not correct for it. / If it had, you might still be a Christian."

Speaking of hubris: you really think the likes of you have that much power, that if only someone like you says the right things, the universe is how you say?

No, my Christian education taught me what to respect about the Christian religions, and, exhaustively, where they go wrong, even in terms of their nobler ambitions, but there'd be no reconciling being born with memories of other lives and my own experience of the Gods, even under ideal conditions. I even gave it a fair shake, but, no, it just wouldn't have been enough, whatever someone did.

Personally, I think that's a recurring Christian hubris... that faith can be destroyed or enforced through control of words. Even your idea that you can suppress Paganism or destroy our connection to the Gods. You can hurt people, you can burn books, you can try and beat into people whatever you darn well please.. You can even make people afraid to look for themselves at the world and our consciousness...

But you can't take away our Gods, and it'd vanity to think anyone would or could take yours away.

You rely on a book, and books can be destroyed, or twisted in time. You fear your life hangs on it, and you cling inappropriately, until your fear drives you to aggression.

You needn't.

Pagans say that the world ain't like your book says, but neither do we say you're hosed forever if you believe the 'wrong' thing.

But you tend to get people hurt, and that may be spoken of.

" / Yes to your poem against despair. Shakespeare's Portia spoke of "the quality of mercy." "

I used to say that was my favorite part of the Bible: "The quality of Mercy is not strained: It droppeth as the gentle rain from Heaven." ...until I found out the Christian who claimed it was misattributing Shakespeare. :)

Not strained. Not conditional... Don't 'give till it hurts,' ...Give till it \*doesn't.\* :)

"The quality of despair is determined by what the despair is of. In Christian perspective, despair is healthy when it is of anything other than what America's founders like to call "Providence" (i.e., God's benevolent intention for humanity.)"

Despair has no 'quality' like that. If you preach despair about the goodness in humanity, you preach despair... even of 'Providence.' ...this Deist concept you try and appropriate to evangelical Christianity probably makes more sense to Pagans than it ever did to you, anyway.

Goes back to that idea anyone you meet might be Gods in disguise, or agents of the Gods, however unaware. Maybe you think it's 'healthy' to despair of the promise of America and freedom... to believe and teach that the world is full of 'goblins of sin' outside the circle of the ritual fire of your mental conception of your religion...

"All waste is kin to all despair."

There's a lot of 'world' ..and a lot of human grace and talent you take pains to suppress, ...just going to waste over fear of your 'goblins of sin' ... and you don't have to burn down the forest with the 'fire of God' to escape fear or validate your 'healthy despair,' Reverend.

" But any religion that holds out hope can't be all bad."

Hope, isn't a conditional virtue... Hope is in the thing which spurs the \*next breath,\* and smiles at the last. Even in shadows and sun.

Anyone being 'all bad' is off the table in y book, Reverend. I'd more worry about the despair in humanity shown by 'sin-mongers' who want to give up on America and freedom and the goodness in people, but rather defame and demonize others \*as\* all-bad.

Meanwhile 'spending the meeks' inheritance like the only 'hope' is the end of the world.

People are funny, that way.

Kind of like those 'ashamed' of their sexuality have a way of practicing unsafe things and destroying their own relationships cause they can't look at what they're doing.

Dig?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 21, 2008 5:02 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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terra: it's not silly at all. two souls have connected. the Godess would be happy ;-)  
There must be a pagan somewhere in me trying to get out. seriously, I have lost any faith in the christian god, yet I know that life has meaning outside of me that is bigger than me, that I should be humble in the contemplation of. sometimes I think

that I am with Einstein in thinking that the activist god of religions is an absurdity, but that nonetheless the universe itself has a religious majesty to it. the distance between that perspective and paganism is quite narrow indeed.

bye for now

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 21, 2008 4:47 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Joet...

lol..

big hugs! yep!!

I am grinning from ear to ear for some silly reason.

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 21, 2008 4:18 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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terra: just when I thought I was gaining ground ;-). I agree with your last post completely. despair comes from seeing only a part of you that you believe is a failure. the same perversity that leads one to believe that they are the only thing with meaning leads them to only see the part of themselves that has failed, and failed only because they have developed a warped sense of what success means. To get past despair requires, just as you put it, dealing with that side of yourself, and finding the other side of one's self, the side that is connected to the universe, and the rest of humanity.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 21, 2008 4:14 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dr. Elliot,

This is one column of your's I can agree on full heartedly.

So mark it on the calender. ; )

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 21, 2008 4:14 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Joet,

I appologize if I was the one that misunderstood you...

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 21, 2008 4:09 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Joet,

I think you missunderstand.

The dark night of the soul is not looking and seeing what you do not like as in sin or ...it's seeing yourself, your truth with no mask...it is what we call Your Shadow.

Wiccans believe you must know that part of you...that other part of your whole before you can go on. Despair is that feeling of being unworthy after seeing your totality. But then to get past that you must know that that other part that you want to hide is also part of who you are...and created by the Divine. That there is always that learning curve and a chance to be that person you need to be.

We believe until you see and accept all of who you are you can not be whole and you will always live half a life.

Christians say that they were born with sin, born to fail...it makes then hopeless to start with. Sad I think.

I was asked on another thread who is innocent? That the only innocent died 2000 years ago. He was talking about those who die in war and come home changed for ever. But in that Christian's book it doesn't matter because all people are born in sin. Now that is evil.

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 21, 2008 3:58 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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paganplace: I feel so much better now ;-). and for the record, I agree that humility is absolutely a positive virtue having virtually nothing to do with the absence of pride. It is the root of our ability to love, and to accept the love of others.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 21, 2008 3:50 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Oh, Joet:

"I just figured out how I confused you. I didn't mean that pagans thought they weren't part of something bigger, I meant that for pagans, sinful pride would consist of not believing you are part of something bigger. sorry."

Oh, OK. I wasn't \*confused,\* there, I \*took offense.\* :) What you said when you misspoke is a defamation we hear a lot of: people somehow insisting to our faces we're empty hedonists or lazy or prideful or whatever. I'm glad to hear you didn't mean that, and, well, apology accepted and perspective on your good self adjusted. It's the idea I may have been cranky at, not who you are, anyway. :)

Oh, and, hi, too, Terra. I haven't gone too far, just needed to take a few steps back, too much arguing makes me cranky indeed when the body's complaining and sleep's harder to come by. As much as the Net can be wonderful for debate, religious discussions can darken one's perspective on the real people in the world.

\*catching up a bit.\* Wasn't intending to post-lots-and-then-unplug. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 21, 2008 3:42 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

\*with a wave for Joet.\* Hi. :)

I think where you don't see the difference in how Terra (and I, for that matter,) characterize the issue has to do with, well, exactly that saying we attribute to the Goddess: "Let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you."

To us, 'humility' isn't 'absence of the 'sin' of pride,' it's a positive virtue.

Maybe the below will clarify a bit.

And Rev. Elliott. Good afternoon.

See, when you say this:

"My dignity as I human being was being honored when, as a young brat, somebody yelled at me "You should be ashamed of yourself!" Result: I was ashamed, & became a little less bratty."

Well, that's exactly what I'm talking about when the idea of 'sins of pride' (as the opposite of submission to authority) is abused... Externally-induced shame does not necessarily have any content in virtue or 'moral courage'... all it means is someone externally-induced shame.

People can beat their spouses and children for arbitrary reasons and condition them to feel ashamed when they haven't done anything wrong by anyone's standards, and this occurs in other cases when preachers and Bible-waving politicians try and trigger conditioned shame in people who might be inclined to dissent. That's not conscience, that's conditioning.

Another big problem with using induced shame as a moral enforcer is that it turns the process of learning into an overly- negative and painful experience, one which people will tend to \*avoid,\* even if this means defending and justifying and perpetuating injustices and wrong actions. ...in fact it's the people \*most\* ruled by ideas that shame and submission to authority who throw up the very most resistance to the idea that they're even hurting anybody with their oppressions, or that the victims don't 'deserve it,' or that 'This abuse is really 'God's Love:' submit to my vicarious authority or be accused of 'Pride.'"

People who are ashamed may be the ones most likely to behave shamefully, because they feel \*helpless,\* ...this helpless state is one that abusive authorities count on to one degree or another when they want to turn people into sheep.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 21, 2008 3:21 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

paganplace: I just figured out how I confused you. I didn't mean that pagans thought they weren't part of something bigger, I meant that for pagans, sinful pride would consist of not believing you are part of something bigger. sorry.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 21, 2008 3:01 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

terra: reading your post I wonder if I have been typing greek, as you are saying exactly what I am saying. despair is what happens when all you have is yourself, and you don't like what you see. it is the ironic result of

placing exclusive meaning in yourself, rather than the universe, the earth, etc. exactly as you put it, and much better than I did.

paganplace: I agree completely that pride is oftentimes used as you are using it, that is, it's sinful not to give yourself completely to whatever you are told God wants because you are too proud to do so. I was coming from terra's point of view, that despair is isolation from the meaning that exists outside oneself, which is the again ironic result of a perverted excess of egocenteredness, or the evil meaning of pride.

I have enjoyed trying to translate my academic perspective to yours, and it seems from your last post you are trying to understand mine. thanks so much.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 21, 2008 2:47 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Bless me Father Willis for I have sinned. I confess that I propagandized quotes from sacred scriptures.

Matthew 19:21

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor is incomplete. Let's look at the whole thing and maybe it will help us understand greed.

Matthew 19:21

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

Only if one wishes to be perfect does one give all. And, it's "quid pro quo." The treasure one "greedily" accumulates in heaven is directly equal that which one "painfully" gives up on earth.

Now, nuns operate off the "give all" principle -poverty, chastity and obedience. Rhetorical question: how close to being nuns are Pat Robertson and Robert Schuler, (covering faith coast to coast)? How much treasure here on earth and how much in heaven -given their public image?

We cannot blanket, "man preaching and teaching what sacred scriptures says is doing what they say" but we do. And therefore we ignore greed in the strangest places, at the feet of Jesus and the bosom of Abraham.

The Kudlow creed, "I believe free market capitalism is the best path to prosperity." Greed is the heart and soul of free market capitalism -not a put down of religion but simply being willing to recognize that religion is an "enterprise" where the big money definitely goes to those leading the multitudes. To where are they leading their followers, heaven or hell?

POSTED BY: BGONE | JANUARY 21, 2008 12:50 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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As with the Bible, a group of men under Papal edict put together the list of seven Deadly sins. Perhaps they were merely prioritizing as a way to determine which one to tackle first. But underlying all the 7 deadly sins, I believe, is fear. Fear drives it all -fear of the world, fear of each other, fear of self. So maybe the discussion should be more about how can we, as a community of people, combat fear? One of my favorite Psalms is 121: I lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord. . . that verse talks about fear and faith and how the strength of deep abiding faith combats fear. While a non-practicing and oft-times skeptical Christian, I still find great solace and encouragement in that Psalm. And rather than dwell on the affects of the 7 deadly sins, I prefer to work towards dealing with and healing the causes & outcomes of these so-called sins.

POSTED BY: CYMRIC | JANUARY 21, 2008 6:56 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN Willis E. Elliott 1.20.08

After church this morning, a regular reader of my "On Faith" entries & their trails of comments commented that few commenters respond to a whole entry: most appear to have read only far enough to light upon something to complaint about, & they're off. Being in religion is tough; being in politics—running for office—must be even worse. Not to worry....

JOET

Well put: you can make almost as good a case for pride as I made for greed. One reason I chose greed was because it is egocentricity in the ACTIVE mode, whereas pride is only egocentricity's ATTITUDINAL mode.

DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN

Hate to think I give anybody a headache, & proud of you for reading me anyway. / You & I both: growing up in Sunday school & church, never heard of the Seven Deadly Sins. A 6th-century Roman Catholic vice-list,

somewhat influential in the development of Western religio-ethics. Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time, but it's influence has been ambiguous.

PAGANPLACE

Splendid post, my applause with nine fingers. / Being told 7 or 17 ways to be naughty ain't apt to help anybody be nice. I hope you notice that my counter was to say that Christian ethics features VIRTUES—as it were, standing around the warming & illumining fire of God's love, while goblins of vice stand in an outer ring in the dark & the cold—ready to pounce. Better still, Christian ethics is fundamentally relational, not prescriptive; & specifying good/bad behavior corrupts the Faith (1) by reducing it from loving relationships (as Jesus says, with God/others/self) to mere rules to follow; & (2) by deluding believers into thinking they are capable of becoming good in God's sight (notice the good guy's list of good deeds in Jesus' ironic parable of "The Pharisee and the publican" [Luke 18:9-14]). / Amen to what you say of "lust"—which in German ("Lust") means pleasure, joy, delight (as "lust" means in its earliest English usage, 1607); & is only secondarily negative. While the Bible is big on joy, its wary of physical-sensuous pleasure, in reaction against the hedonism of the cultures of its birth (the "developed" cultures of the great river-valleys (Nile/Tigris/Euphrates), of Canaan, of Greece, & of Rome. This wariness became excessive as a generalized suspicion of sex, resulting in the warped notion that anti-sex (anti-masturbation, celibacy) is more "spiritual." You seem capable of spinning out pathologies from this warpage. Sorry your Christian education did not correct for it. / If it had, you might still be a Christian. / Yes to your poem against despair. Shakespeare's Portia spoke of "the quality of mercy." The quality of despair is determined by what the despair is of. In Christian perspective, despair is healthy when it is of anything other than what America's founders like to call "Providence" (i.e., God's benevolent intention for humanity.) But any religion that holds out hope can't be all bad.

GARYD

Yes to your criticism of the Deadly Sins as only "a list of symptoms that makes no attempt to get at the root cause," selfishness acting out as envy and greed.

JOET

Yes. Again, self-centeredness. The self is a chaos of disorder & cannot serve for the creative ruling of life. The human options (according to Christian philosophical theologian Paul Tillich) are autonomy (trying to rule yourself, a doomed project, ending [as you agree] in despair), heteronomy (letting somebody or something else rule you, including obsessions), & theonomy (letting God, who orders all things aright, rule you.

PAGANPLACE

Yes to your being "proud in healthy ways." My primary reason for putting greed first is that its sememe is univocal: nobody can say anything good for it (except in the ironic capitalist strut "Greed is good"). Not so, pride. One contribution of second-wave feminism was to point out the captivity of "pride" to macho: I wouldn't want to live with a woman who wasn't proud of being a woman, "made in God's image" as much as any man. But since you do speak of hubris, false-excessive pride, please don't badmouth the Bible for saying "Pride goes before a fall." One translation: Humble yourself, or you'll be humiliated.

You do well to introduce arrogance & shame into the conversation. Arrogance is univocally bad news; but please see both sides of shame. A person who fails to take healthy pride in herself should be ashamed of herself! Long time since I heard of "shameless women," but there was truth in it. And we all are horrified at multiple-murdering shameless sociopaths. My dignity as I human being was being honored when, as a young brat, somebody yelled at me "You should be ashamed of yourself!" Result: I was ashamed, & became a little less bratty. (NOTE: A "brat" has false dignity that needs removal, so that true dignity can develop without competition from false.)

PAGANPLACE & JOET

"Where I'm Coming From" is a Stevie Wonder album & the title of a number of books. How important! Where you two are coming from is the experience of Christianity as OPPRESSIVE: in my case, LIBERATIVE. A favorite Bible verse of mine is "Stand fast in the liberty in which Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage!" (Galatians 5:1; read the whole short letter to catch its liberative spirit). Jesus delivered me from (among other things) the upper-middle-class rat race I was expected to run.

BGONE

Thanks for your POV, especially the Jesus-quotes (from the Gospels): radical!

The Bible's only Jesus-quote outside the Gospels is the one your close your post with (though you don't identify it as a Jesus-quote): "Giving is more blessed than getting" (my translation of Acts of the Apostles 20:35). You do well to ask us to think about whether giving is "better" than receiving, & I do well (no?) in asking you to think about the possible differences between "better" (which Jesus didn't say) & "more blessed."



POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | JANUARY 20, 2008 8:47 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Absolutely Rev. Generosity is the key to not just shaming but outright killing greed.  
Tell'um to give 'till it hurts. Here some readings that are guaranteed to "make them generous."

Matthew 19:24

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Matthew 19:21

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor  
Go light on that second one else they'll want you to go first.

Would you believe:

\*All generous gifts are received by a greedy someone.

\*All money lost by banks doing sub prime lending has been found by the greedy.

Are you sure it's better to give than receive, I mean other than hard knocks, that sort of giving of course.

POSTED BY: BGONE | JANUARY 20, 2008 3:12 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Joet;

Excellent posts...I learn new ways of looking at things from your comments,  
which I find are deeper and more  
interesting than most general comments here.

I'm still playing around with some of your ideas,

For instance...

" For an atheist or pagan, or deist, Bhuddist, or whatever, it is the egocentric thought process that I am not part of anything more important than me, whether it be the universe, society, nature, mother earth, whatever, so that whatever suits me defines truth, and that how I affect others has no meaning that I need care about".

Mmmmm gotta mull this over.Very interesting.

Write more..Thanks,Nicko

POSTED BY: NICKO | JANUARY 20, 2008 12:37 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Paganplace, I missed reading your words...

Joet,

Pride... I am filled with it. I am a creation of the same entity that is and of the universe...and I have that little speck of divine within me! wow! and so do you...I stand tall in pride, I hold myself as worthy to be prideful, I am the daughter of the Gods. And they do not make unworthy.

These attributes are called the Virtues of the Goddess:

Beauty and strength

Power and compassion

Honor and humility

Mirth and Reverence

You can see that they are opposites. Working together they create balance and wholeness.

We do not have bad attributes listed that we are not to do...to disrespect life is wrong, period. Anything can do that...Greed, Lust, sloth, or to care only about Beauty, or your Honor or Power...they all create imbalance and are harmful. Is one kind of harm worse then another? No..

Dispair is thinking you are alone. That there is no one there you can turn to. It's when doubt sets in that you are worthy. There is a writing called The Dark Night of the Soul by St. John of the Cross.

[http://www.ccel.org/ccel/john\\_cross/dark\\_night.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/john_cross/dark_night.html)

It tells of the desolation and despair he felt. It has happened throughout history, that feeling of aloneness, specially in people who are spiritually growing.

Despair is not an attitude of sin...it is a fight with self, it is doubt.

And-"For an atheist or pagan, or deist, Bhuddist, or whatever, it is the egocentric thought process that I am not part of anything more important than me, whether it be the universe, society, nature, mother earth, whatever, so that whatever suits me defines truth, and that how I affect others has no meaning that I need care about."

Maybe you need to know really what Pagans think. I am a part of the Universe, nature, Mother Earth, Society, and all the whatever's. We have laws that we have to follow...The Rede-An do what ye will, but harm none. The Law of Return- What you send out to others returns back to you. We have Ordains, Principles...Ethics and Laws. And all the laws, are about how to treat others in respect. How to make better this place we call home...Egocentric? So what was that statement except made through your Pride and Ego? You're Christian so you must be more caring than any Pagan or Atheist or Buddhist? Blah!

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 20, 2008 3:17 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"I see despair as being rooted in total isolation from one's surroundings, one's friends, everything that could have meaning."

Well, in the sense it was brought up, I think that's exactly \*how\* pride could be seen as an expression of... despair, for what the poetic point is worth. Maybe something, after all.

And, actually, GaryD, the way some 'sin-based' folks throw around accusations of the sin of 'pride,' usually 'the sin of pride' in their minds is no more and no less than... not submitting to their kind of Christian authority as if it were 'God.'

I figure that if there's any useful meaning to the idea, though, it \*would\* have to do with something more like 'hubris.'

But it's not hubris to buck a preacher or a church or a religion or a prejudice.

Hubris is thinking someone bucking your idea of religion is the same as bucking a wrathful, jealous God, I say. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 20, 2008 1:44 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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In the sense the Bible uses Pride, Hubris and pride are essentially interchangeable.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JANUARY 19, 2008 1:03 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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In the since the Bible uses Pride, Hubris and pride are essentially interchangeable.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JANUARY 19, 2008 1:02 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Paganplace: I really do see what you are saying, and I am not, really, disagreeing with you. I am somewhere between agnostic and atheist myself, just a lapsed Catholic for background. Of course we define meaning for ourselves, and legitimately so. That is not pride, nor is subjecting ourselves to others necessarily noble. I see despair as being rooted in total isolation from one's surroundings, one's friends, everything that could have meaning. Of course we rely on ourselves, but if we look to nothing else but ourselves, we can be overwhelmed.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 18, 2008 10:51 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I'll tell you what... I light this single candle in the name of hope.

You can abstract my 'sins' as you wish.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 18, 2008 12:59 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Oh, but on this:

"I can't see how despair can be the root of pride."

I can.

What if you don't \*trust\* anything but what you yourself can define or control?

I see it every day. People 'despair' of the goodness in the world and humanity, and thus \*pridefully\* try and speak for 'God.'

Talking about 'sin' and 'war' and all.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 18, 2008 12:51 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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And maybe, Joet, though you casually dismiss my people and your own ancestors as 'egocentric,' really, I say nay. Life and our \*brilliant humanity\* are just not that powerful: Christians claim we can't break the world through obvious pollution and exploitation, ...but that we can 'break' 'The Love of God' by breaking some book's taboos. Say we must live on the slim notion that our excess won't hurt us, yet others must live on the slim notion that what someone else \*thinks\* or \*does in bed\* \*will.\*

Seriously. That's silly. Backwards.

We can, in fact, screw up our ecosystem.

We \*can't\* actually hurt the Gods, or God, as some arrogantly claim when they push their words and vanity and control.

Not like the fearful and prideful say when they try and control others. Or define them.

If I can handle that plank for ya. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 18, 2008 12:47 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Oh, and Joet, just to deal with some Christian chauvanism I get a little sick of hearing when Christians insist humanity and the world are 'irredeemable' except by some vain apocalyptic idea that the world must end...

"I believe I am using pride in a more pristine definition, from which I can argue that despair is the prideful rejection that things outside ourselves matter to the point that we are being arrogant to give up (or for the believer, to reject grace or hope, or whatever)."

Is this your experience of despair? Honestly.

"And just as a theoretical matter, I can't see how despair can be the root of pride. For an atheist or pagan, or deist, Bhuddist, or whatever, it is the egocentric thought process that I am not part of anything more important than me,"

Do you really think you get to be the one that defines Paganism, or Buddhism, or Deism, for that matter, in such terms?

Do you really think that if you prayed to your One God to dial you up someone who believes they are not part of something bigger than themselves, that you'd get a Pagan on the other end?

Hel, they call us idolaters for \*not\* believing we're apart from the rest of the world, most days. (Remember, we're 'tree-hugging dirt-worshippers' who think a statue is God, most days?)

Make up your mind.

Or hear.

Actually, we consider it hubris for some to strut around claiming their mental conceptions of certain translations of certain books are 'The Word of The One God.'

We also consider it unwise to base our lives on 'being saved' from what some words call 'the sins of Satan' and thinking we can r\*teach the knowledge of good and evil,' ...especially when in chapter one of the book it's all based on, 'Knowing good and evil' is exactly the thing that supposedly 'creates sin and screws up the world' in the first place.

Worshipping at the altar of 'sins' to be 'saved' from isn't actually something with a track record of ennobling humans or even reducing related crimes and abuses.

In fact, it seems to blind people to the very things they seek to avoid.

"The biggest lie the Devil ever told was saying he existed."

Seriously. Unnecessary. Get over it. Or at least let those of us who have live in peace with our real human frailties and real human blessings.

I tend to figure yer man Jesus there didn't mean, "Let he who says someone else's sin is worse in the abstract than the balance sheet of those who say that this sin isn't as bad as some other.... Aww, screw it, throw some rocks at someone..."

I mean, I know Christians are fond of claiming everyone else is 'egocentric' for thinking the \*world\* is sacred and stuff, but... seriously, you got priests so afraid to masturbate, they rape minors...

I happen to be an actual Pagan, gimme some credit for knowing the difference between 'Admirable pluck,' 'Commendable tenacity,' and 'Child, WTF you think you're doing?' :)

If I speak boldly, it's cause I'm secure in the knowledge that \*everything\* is bigger than me. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 18, 2008 12:17 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"Try substituting Hubris for pride."

But, GaryD, they are \*not\* the same thing.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 17, 2008 11:54 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Try substituting Hubris for pride.

And remember without Selfishness there is no hubris.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JANUARY 17, 2008 10:27 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Paganplace: I follow your points, and don't disagree one little bit, using pride the way it's used by those you are responding to. I believe I am using pride in a more pristine definition, from which I can argue that despair is the prideful rejection that things outside ourselves matter to the point that we are being arrogant to give up (or for the believer, to reject grace or hope, or whatever). And just as a theoretical matter, I can't see how despair can be the root of pride. For an atheist or pagan, or deist, Bhuddist, or whatever, it is the egocentric thought process that I am not part of anything more important than me, whether it be the universe, society, nature, mother earth, whatever, so that whatever suits me defines truth, and that how I affect others has no meaning that I need care about.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 17, 2008 8:35 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Or, in other words, people who tout 'pride' as a 'sin' are usually trying to get you to submit to \*shame.\* In the name of their own prideful mightiness.

Real pride does not depend upon denigrating others.

People say, 'Not submitting to abuse makes you 'proud' and 'sinful,' so ...be ashamed and submit, or ally yourself with shame-mongers and be 'proud' of your 'Christian Nation' identity... And thus behave shamefully and call it 'piety.'

Call any objection the 'sin of pride' against the authority you so-humbly claim to speak for as the ultimate will of the universe....

Maybe...

That's neither pride nor humility: maybe that's arrogance and shame.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 17, 2008 7:57 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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" JoeT:

"Paganplace: even despair reduces to pride. despair comes from believing that no one else cares about you, and that if you have failed, there is nothing to live for - in other words, it's all about you."

Maybe that's why 'despair' is 'the only sin.'

Gods know I've felt all those things you say, in my times... Fairly sure, in fact, I've \*said\* to the Gods, 'I feel all these things. Ow.'

(Prolly when I say 'Gods know' I'm not just being as trivial as some use the Christian equivalent for, actually.) But I've been proud in healthy ways, too.

Pride, to me, has nothing to do with claiming to be 'greater than the Gods,' never mind 'failing to be humble in the face of Christians.'

'Pride,' to me, isn't some \*hubris\* that 'comes before a fall,' ...it's what comes from the Gods when you're (literally) outnumbered and getting stomped in the corner of some place beyond help, in a place where Christian religion will call you a victim for your own rape, and 'Not. Like. This.' comes around. When 'Get. Up.' comes around when 'humility' says, 'You're sinful and screwed and you deserve this,'

Pride may say, 'You aren't bigger than this, but anyway, you fight.'  
HOka hey.  
Pride may abuse power, but pride also can say, 'It's a good day to die.'  
When 'sin' may say, 'Shut up and take it.'  
And I'm here to tell you about it right now.  
Even if sin-mongers took their piece to punish me for my 'pride' in resisting.

Ever see the first movie 'Rocky?'

What's \*real pride,\* and what is 'hubris?'

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 17, 2008 7:47 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Paganplace: even despair reduces to pride. despair comes from believing that no one else cares about you, and that if you have failed, there is nothing to live for - in other words, it's all about you.

same with believers - all sin is prideful action based on the rejection of whatever god you are supposed to place your faith in in favor of placing your "faith" in yourself as the center of meaning.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 17, 2008 6:20 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Why is not greed to sum extent powered by envy and motivated by selfishness. That's my problem with this whole list. It's a list of symptoms that makes no attempt to get at the root cause.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JANUARY 17, 2008 6:18 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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A little Pagan poetry I like:

"The Only Sin

Despair, a teacher once told to me,  
Is the only truly mortal sin.  
Since then, I've found another galls:  
Waste, that surely has to be  
Where all evils end, if not begin.  
In wasted time, each wasted breath,  
Another gift of the Mother falls  
In every waste, we give to death,  
Consign our trust to disrepair.  
All waste is kin to all despair."

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 17, 2008 3:54 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"Which is worse, Ignorance or Apathy?"

"I don't know, and I don't care."

:)

There's a little wisdom to that old joke, I think:

In that this little list \*probably wasn't intended to be prioritized.\*

They're all supposed to be 'deadly,' ...after all. Dead's pretty much 'dead.' ...Of course, I question the wisdom of turning these abstract concepts into 'threatening \*things\*' Things to claim have devilish power and to accuse others of.

I think 'Lust' is the 'worst' of these, because it's the least-defined and most-abused, ....the most-accused, and the most deleteriously-demonized of the frightening 'things' called 'sins' that people live in fear of, promote fear of... and induce strife with.

I think 'Lust' is the most dangerous conception of a 'sin' because the corresponding implied 'virtue' is likewise ill-defined and often oppressive and life-denying. Frankly, what's seen as the 'opposite' of 'lust' seems to lead to greed, envy, wrath, pride, gluttony and sloth...

le, the conception of 'Lust' simply doesn't have a positive connotation of sexual energy to oppose it, only a notion that 'You can't enlighten this, you must repress it till it squeezes out sideways.'

In claiming there is a 'Lust,' it always seemed to me that Christians only teach that full and loving and complete sexuality is \*impossible.\*

I think Greed is a \*great\* conception of a 'sin,' if you have to live in fear of these things. Greed is easy to spot, easy to deny, easy to counteract. It's even hit the level of \*cliche\* in popular culture.

This doesn't seem to stop the wealthy (or vicariously-wealthy) from claiming 'sharing' is 'Godless Communism,' ...but at least it makes \*sense.\* If you are greedy, things own you. If you share, things serve the good. Baddabing.

But I think naming them as 'forces of sin' only gives them undue power. Frames it all as a zero-sum-game where people are spending energy 'fighting sin' instead of putting it toward \*expressing virtue.\*

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 17, 2008 3:40 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Dr. Elliott

I am still reading you, but I have to admit, I usually end up with an ice-cream headache.

These seven deadly sins are not part of the Christian tradition in which I was raised, and in fact were never mentioned in Sunday School or church, even once.

It looks to me like a random list of human qualities, each one of which would make a good topic of discussion. I am sure someone (probably you) could write a very thick book, on each one of them.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | JANUARY 17, 2008 2:52 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Can't argue with your critique of greed, but for me, pride is the root of greed, and the other 5 as well. All are rooted in the perversion of self importance. Greed is simply the natural manifestation of feeling entitled to everything because you feel you deserve it on your own comparative merit, the feeling that your desires deserve to be fulfilled.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 17, 2008 12:15 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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