

A VIRTUE INSIDE EBOOK

Who's in command?

Pride and selfishness in the cabin of your mind

Isabella Becker

About this book

This is a book for self-reflection. It does not diagnose, it does not replace treatment and it does not promise a cure. Read slowly, answer the questions by hand and come back to the pages that move you.

The characters in the command cabin come from **Virtue Inside**, the series in which real regions of the brain become crew members to explain how the mind works. Follow the series on Instagram: @alchemyofvirtues.

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Virtue Inside · created by Isabella Becker
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Contents

Before You Begin

PART I The Cabin and the Crew

1 Who's in Command?

2 The Crew

3 The Two on the Bench

PART II Pride

4 Before Thought

5 What Pride Is

6 The Pride Neurofunctional System

7 Pride in the Cabin, Crew Member by Crew Member

8 Where Pride Comes From

9 One Pride, Six Outfits

10 First Family · Displaying Worth

11 Second Family · Comparison and Competitiveness

12 Third Family · Reactivity to Criticism and Defense of the Ego

13 Fourth Family · Dominance, Contempt and Manipulation

14 Fifth Family · Control and Resistance to Change

15 Sixth Family · Moral Arrogance

16 How the Families Pull on Each Other

17 The Disguise: Overt Pride and Concealed Pride

18 Pride in Real Life

19 Wounded Pride or Wounded Feelings?

20 Why Pride Defends Itself So Much

PART III Selfishness

21 Is It Mine or Is It Yours?

22 What Selfishness Is

23 The Selfishness Neurofunctional System

24 Selfishness in the Cabin, Crew Member by Crew Member

25 Five Forms, One Selfishness

26 Pride and Selfishness Together

PART IV THE WAY OUT

27 The Way Out of Pride: Humility

28 The Way Out of Selfishness: Selflessness

29 A Fourteen-Day Practice

30 Toolbox

31 The Path Afterward

32 To Take With You

33 Handle with Care

PART V AFTER THIS BOOK

34 What the Virtues Are

35 What I Offer

36 About the Author

37 Going Deeper

Appendix 1 · The Twenty Behaviors of Pride, by Family

Appendix 2 · The Five Forms of Selfishness

Appendix 3 · Brain Glossary

Before You Begin

This book is about pride and selfishness. Not other people's pride and selfishness. Yours.

That is uncomfortable, and it is good that it is. The discomfort itself is already pride at work. Watch that discomfort as you read.

There is a curious detail about these two. They are, at the same time, the flaw and the blindfold that keeps you from seeing the flaw. People with a lot of pride rarely see themselves as proud. They see themselves as confident, competent, fair in their demands, and a little misunderstood by others. People with a lot of selfishness rarely see themselves as selfish. They see themselves as practical, realistic, someone who is "just looking after what's theirs." That is why this book will ask you to read slowly and to be suspicious of the pages that seem not to be about you.

To help you see what happens inside, the book uses an image. Inside your head there is a command cabin. A crew works there. Each crew member is a real region of your brain, with its name and the job it does. In the high chair sits the Captain. And, on a bench in the corner, two passengers who are always trying to take command: Pride and Selfishness.

Part I introduces the cabin and the crew. Part II deals with pride. Part III, with selfishness. Part IV shows the way out. Part V tells

what comes after the book.

Three agreements for the reading:

This is not a diagnosis. You will recognize yourself on many pages. Every human being does. Recognizing a behavior does not settle anything. A single trait does not say who you are. What counts is your whole story.

You see less than you think. Looking at yourself has a blind spot: what is out of place is often exactly what we consider normal. When a page seems to have nothing to do with you, write down the doubt and come back to it in a few days. Or ask someone close to you, someone you trust, whether they recognize that in you.

Write by hand. Throughout the book there are questions. Do not skip them. Answer them in a notebook, calmly. They are worth more than the reading.

One last warning, so you are not caught off guard. Seeing your own pride and your own selfishness usually hurts. Sometimes a strong shame comes, the feeling that "I am worse than I thought." That is part of the path, and the book will talk about it at the right moment. Shame is a stage. It is not a home.

PART I

The Cabin and the Crew

CHAPTER 1

Who's in Command?



The cabin at peace. Up on the left, the Captain in his chair. Below, the crew at work. On the right, the two windows, which are your eyes.

Imagine that inside your head there is a command cabin.

It has two oval windows, side by side. They are your eyes. Through them appears what you are seeing right now: the street, your desk at work, the face of the person talking to you.

Below the windows, a crew is at work. There are thirteen crew members, each with a different body, a color and a function. None of them is made up. **Each crew member is a real region of your brain.** The nickname helps you remember. The real name of the region always comes with it, along with what it does.

At the back of the cabin, on a mezzanine, is the **Captain**'s chair. He does not press any buttons. He directs. He looks down at the crew, receives what each one shows him, and decides.

And, on a bench in the corner, sit two passengers who should not be there: **Pride** and **Selfishness**. They are not brain regions. They are two systems that connect to the crew through cables and hoses and try, all day long, to push the Captain out of his chair.

The title of this book is a question. It applies to every moment of your day. When someone criticizes you, when a coworker gets praised, when the last slice is left on the table, who decides what you do? The Captain, or one of the two on the bench?

Most of the time, you cannot even tell. Pride and Selfishness do not arrive shouting "I have taken command." They arrive with your voice. That is why the first task is to get to know the cabin. Whoever knows the crew begins to notice when an instrument is showing something that is not true.

CHAPTER 2

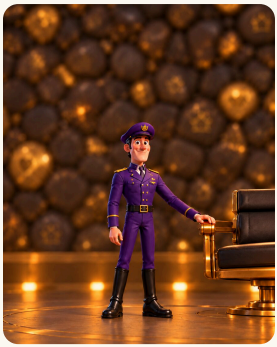
The Crew

The crew is the cabin's equipment. It does not choose anything on its own. Each crew member does part of the work and hands the result to the Captain.

The crew members work on three levels. **Downstairs**, those who take care of survival: Autopilot and the Gatekeeper. **In the middle**, those who bring the load of emotions: the Alarm, the Sensor Panel, the Fault Light and the Fuel Gauge. **Upstairs**, those who interpret and carry out: the Black Box, the Altimeter, the Radar, the Double Mirror, the Rein, the Navigator and the Radio. **On the mezzanine**, the Captain.

You do not need to memorize anything. Come back to these pages whenever a name shows up later on.

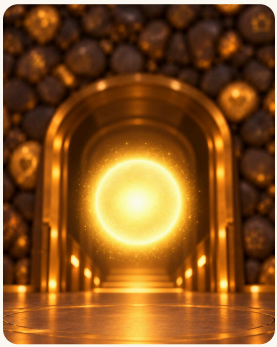
The Captain and the Self



The Captain

The ego · the manager of the cabin

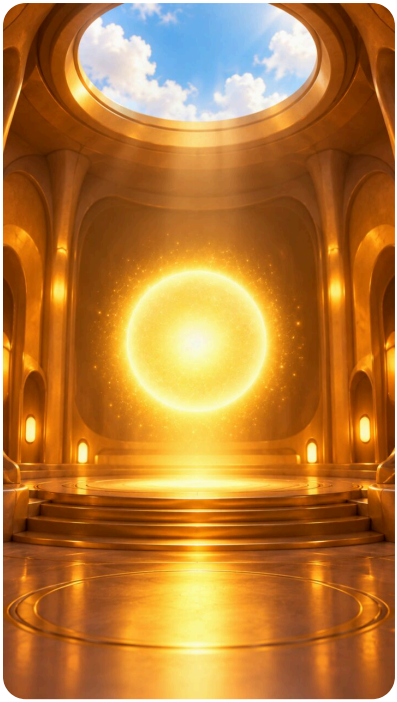
He is the only one with a human body. He sits in the chair on the mezzanine and directs the crew. He is not a brain region: he is the "I" who decides. When the Captain is firm in his chair, the crew works together and the choices are his. When he is weak, tired or distracted, someone else takes his place. With each virtue that takes hold, he earns an insignia on his uniform. A strong ego is not a big ego. It is an ego with virtue.



The Self

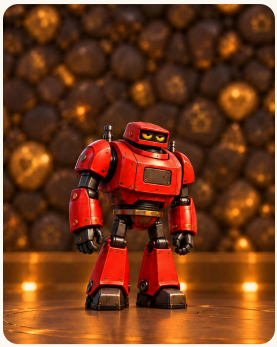
The essence · a sphere of golden light

The Self is not in the cabin. It is not brain. It lives in a deeper place, at the center of the person, which this book calls the **Sanctuary**. Its light reaches the cabin from below, through the door behind the Captain's chair. When the Captain is weak, that door stays closed: the Self keeps shining, but the light does not rise. When the Captain is firm, he turns his chair, opens the door, and the light fills the whole cabin.



The Sanctuary. That is where the Self shines, outside the command cabin.

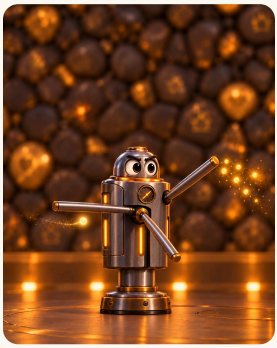
The Crew Members Downstairs



Autopilot

Brainstem · red

The biggest of the crew, heavy and tireless. It is the oldest part of the brain. It takes care of what keeps you alive without you thinking about it: breathing, the heart, alertness in the face of danger. It also stores the routes already recorded, the habits that repeat on their own. Its message is only one: survive. Pride and selfishness are born from it, as you will see.



The Gatekeeper

Ascending reticular activating system (ARAS), in the brainstem · brass

A living turnstile at the entrance of the cabin. Of everything that comes in through the windows, only a small part gets through. The Gatekeeper decides which. And it is tuned by repetition: whoever repeats “nothing ever works out for me” ends up setting the turnstile to let through only what confirms the sentence. That is why you do not convince the Gatekeeper with an argument. It changes with training.

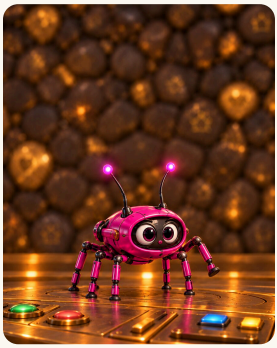
The Crew Members in the Middle



The Alarm

Amygdala · orange

The smallest of all, a round siren on little spring legs. It detects threat and goes off before any thought. It is the one that makes your heart race when your boss calls you into his office. The Alarm is fast and necessary. The problem is when it goes off for what is not danger.



Sensor Panel

Insula · pink

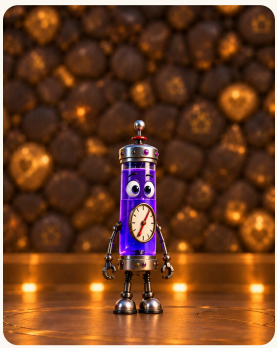
A small spider robot, with antennas that light up. It turns emotion into sensation in the body: heat in the face, tightness in the chest, butterflies in the stomach. It is also what lets you feel a little of what the other person is feeling.



Fault Light

Anterior cingulate (ACC) · white with a red stripe

A lamp that floats and blinks. It lights up when something has gone wrong: a mistake, a pain, a conflict between what you want and what you should do. It is what makes criticism really hurt.



Fuel Gauge

Ventral striatum (where the nucleus accumbens is) · purple

A tall glass tube, with a purple liquid that rises and falls. It is the reward center. It runs on dopamine, the substance of "I want more." When something gives pleasure, the liquid rises, and the brain saves the path to go after it again.

The Crew Members Upstairs



Black Box

Orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), just above the eyes · brown

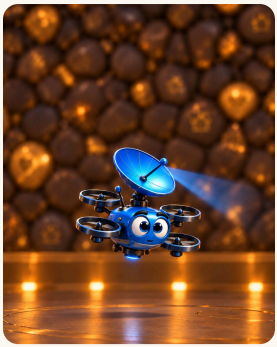
A sturdy cube with a tape spinning in its belly. It records how much each experience was worth: what went well, what went badly. When something in the present reminds it of the past, a smell, a tone of voice, its little head pops up and shows the old recording. It is also the one that complains when reality does not turn out as expected.



The Altimeter

Ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC), on the inner face of the front part of the brain · gold

A round brass dial that spins in the air. It measures the value of things and links that value to the "I." It is what calculates how much a choice is worth to you and how much it is worth to the other person. In pride, it becomes the altitude gauge: am I above or below?



The Radar

Temporoparietal junction (TPJ), where the temporal lobe meets the parietal · blue

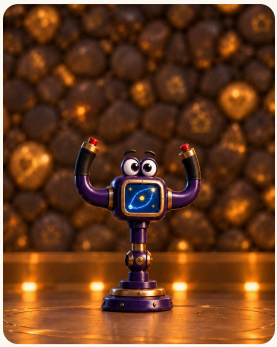
A drone with a spinning radar dish. It imagines what the other person is thinking and feeling. It puts you in their place. When the Radar works well, the other person counts. When it works badly, the other person disappears.



Double Mirror

Dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (dmPFC) · silver and lilac

Two oval screens on a hinge, on a single wheel. Your face appears on the left screen. On the right, the other person's face. It is what separates what **I** want from what **the other person** wants. It seems like little. Without it, you think the other person wants the same thing you do.



The Rein

Dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC), behind the forehead, at the top and sides · dark purple

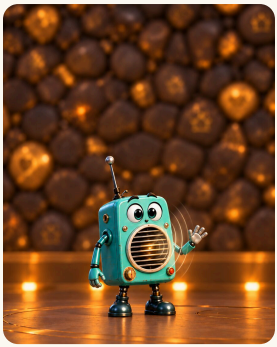
The control stick standing on a swivel base. It is the chosen pause before acting. It holds the impulse until the Captain decides, plans and chooses the shape of what comes out. An important rule: the Rein obeys whoever is in the chair. With the Captain, they work for you. With Pride or Selfishness in the chair, they work for them.



The Navigator

Posterior parietal cortex (PPC) · lime green

A brass globe on a tripod, with a crosshair where the eye would be. It tells you where you are and where to look. It holds your attention on the task. It works alongside the Rein: the Rein brakes and plans, it points and keeps the focus.



Radio

Posterior cingulate (PCC), the center of the Default Mode Network (DMN) · teal

An old radio, a bit crooked, that never stops talking. It is the mind that talks to itself when you are not doing anything: in the shower, in traffic, before falling asleep. It tells the story of who you are. When Pride tampers with it, it becomes the Danger Radio and spends the day chewing over what other people think of you.

What Else Is in the Cabin

The Rulebook. A big book of rules, made of pages glued together from different origins: family, religion, school, culture. It lives on a shelf, next to the door of the Sanctuary. When the Captain is strong, the book stays quiet and closed, and it is the Captain who decides to open it and read the rule. When the Captain is weak, the book leaves the shelf, walks around the cabin and gives orders out loud, in the voice of outside authorities.

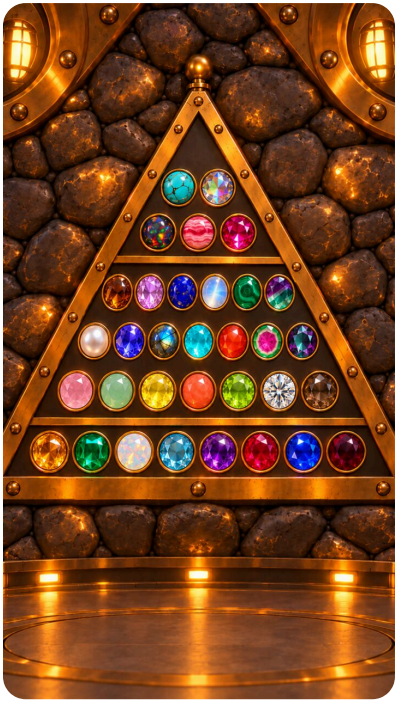


The walls of the cabin. Each stone holds a theme of your life.

The stones in the wall. The walls of the cabin are lined with magnet stones. Each stone is a cluster of memories and ideas around a theme: money, marriage, father, body. The dark stones are the wounds. The golden ones are those that have already been healed. When a theme shows up in your life, the stone for that theme lights up, and the crew's needles bend toward it. With the right work, the dark stones gradually turn golden.

The Pyramid Panel. Built into the wall, in full view of the Captain, there is a pyramid-shaped panel with thirty-three slots. Each slot is the place of one virtue. When a virtue takes hold, a

cut jewel goes into its slot and lights up. The first jewel, at the bottom left, is Humility's. It is the only golden one. You will understand why as the book goes on.



The Pyramid Panel with the jewels installed.

The spotlight. A lens of light above the two eyes. It has two measures. The size of the beam is everything you have already lived and know: it only grows, never shrinks. What is outside the beam does not even exist for you, and that is why you do not desire what you do not know exists. The direction of the beam is where you are looking now. The one with a hand on the switch is

the Captain. When Pride takes over, the beam lights up only what confirms its defense.

CHAPTER 3

The Two on the Bench

Pride and Selfishness were not born evil. Both are born from the same place: Autopilot, the part of the brain that only wants you to survive. That is why their bench is on the left side of the cabin, the side of the instincts.

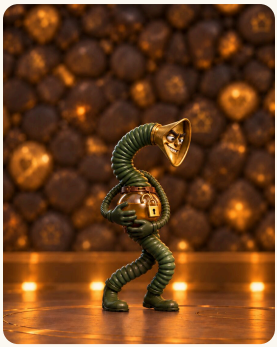
For almost the entire history of our species, survival depended on two things. Having a place in the group, because no one survived alone. And securing your share of the food, because food was scarce. From the first, pride was born. From the second, selfishness.



Pride

Pride Neurofunctional System (SNO) · red, dark red cape

Short and puffed up like a balloon. It asks all the time: **am I more or am I less?** It wants importance, position, approval. When it takes command, it swells up, with a crooked crown. When it is held back, it shrinks and sits on the bench with its seatbelt on.



Selfishness

Selfishness Neurofunctional System (SNE) · moss green

A living fuel hose, curved like a question mark, with a funnel head and a padlocked pocket on its belly. It asks all the time: **is it mine or is it yours?** And it always answers the same way: it's mine, the rest later. When it takes command, it hugs a fuel can and locks the padlock. When it is held back, the pocket is empty and the padlock open.

Notice that both are called a **system**. They are not a loose flaw. They are an entire team of the brain organized around a question. That is why behaviors that seem so different, vanity, envy, revenge, addiction, indifference, come from the same two roots.

How They Take Over the Cabin

They do not tie up the Captain. **They falsify his instruments.**

Pride attaches **red cables** to several crew members. Selfishness attaches **black, oily hoses**. Each connected crew member starts showing a lie. The Alarm shouts danger where there is none. The Radar shows enemies and an audience. The Altimeter shows a fall. The Double Mirror shows your face on both screens, and the other person disappears.

The Captain decides based on what the instruments show. So he chooses wrong thinking he is choosing right. That is how an

intelligent, well-meaning person repeats, for years, what makes them suffer.

Three figures never get a cable: the Captain, the Rein and the Navigator. The Captain is not a brain region, so the villains do not connect him. They push him out of the chair. The Rein and the Navigator do not need a cable: they obey whoever is sitting there.

Pride Puts On the Uniform



The Captain wakes up and takes the cap off whoever was in the chair. Underneath, Pride's crown appears.

There is a reason pride is so hard to see. It does not appear as an intruder. It appears as “I.”

When Pride takes command, it does not sit in the chair with its crown showing. It takes the Captain's cap and purple coat, puts them both on and sits there. The crew obeys the uniform. The Rein carries out the orders. And the real Captain lies asleep on the floor, behind the chair. No one notices him.

The clues are there, for those who look carefully. The tip of the red cape showing under the chair. A short, round silhouette that does not fill the uniform. The discreet red cables across the floor.

That is why, when pride speaks, it uses your voice: “I can't let this slide,” “I'm right,” “I deserve more.” It sounds like you. It is Pride in uniform.

The way out is also in this image. **Humility is the Captain waking up.** He gets up, walks over to the chair and takes the cap off whoever is sitting there. The crooked crown appears. There is no fight. Pride, exposed, climbs down deflated to the bench.

The Captain's Three States

The Captain is not always in the same place. Three scenes show the possible states.



Weak Captain. Pride in the chair, red cables everywhere, an audience judging at the windows.

Out of the chair. The Captain has been pushed to the back. The ones flying are Autopilot and the Alarm, with the villains in command and cables on almost everyone. The door to the Sanctuary is closed. The person reacts, does not choose.



Captain halfway there. He is back in the chair, but a villain is holding its arm.

In the chair, but pulled. The Captain is back in his place, but one of the villains is clinging to the arm of the chair, pulling. Half the cables are still connected. The door to the Sanctuary is ajar, with a sliver of light. The person already notices what is happening, and still sometimes loses.



Firm Captain. The villains belted in on the bench, the cables on the floor, the light of the Sanctuary rising.

Firm in the chair. The two villains are belted in on the bench at the back. The cables and hoses have fallen to the floor, and each crew member has gone back to its own color. The door to the Sanctuary is open. The person chooses.

What changes the Captain's state are the jewels on the Pyramid Panel. Each virtue installed releases, for good, the cables of some crew members. This book will show which.

PART II

Pride

CHAPTER 4

Before Thought

Someone points out a mistake of yours. Before you think of anything, the excuse is already out of your mouth: “that's not quite how it was,” “I was in a hurry,” “nobody told me.” You did not decide to defend yourself. The defense came on its own, along with heat in your face and tightness in your chest.

In another person, the same correction goes differently. They listen, say “that's true” and get on with their day.

One more situation. You send a message and it shows as read, with no reply. An hour later, still nothing. Your mind starts putting together explanations: she got upset, she didn't care, she thought the message was silly. No one said anything. Even so, something in there felt diminished.

And one more. A coworker is praised in front of you for work similar to yours. You smile and say he deserved it. Inside, the math has already started: and what about me?

None of these situations threatens anyone's life. Even so, the body reacts as if it did, and it reacts before thought.

Behind all three situations there is a single rule, recorded in the oldest part of the brain: **being rejected is the same as dying.** And falling behind is the first step toward being rejected.

That rule has a name. It is pride.

CHAPTER 5

What Pride Is



Almost everyone thinks of pride as a character flaw. Stuck-up people, people who think they are better. That is not what this book is about.

Pride is **the primitive need to have importance, in order to be accepted and approved, and so have the feeling of surviving.**

Every word in that sentence carries weight.

Need. It is not a choice or idle vanity. It is a need, like hunger.

Primitive. It comes from far back in evolution. It existed before language, before culture, before any idea of right and wrong.

Primitive, here, means two things: old in the brain and little worked on in virtue.

To have importance. Being in the group is not enough. You have to count within it.

To survive. For almost the entire history of our species, being left out of the pack meant dying. Alone, a human being could not find food, could not defend themselves, could not raise children. Animals that live in packs know this in their bodies. So do we.

The oldest part of the brain, the **brainstem**, takes care of what keeps us alive: breathing, the heart, the alarm in the face of danger. That is where the message **"in a pack, we survive"** lives. The newer parts of the brain take that message and turn it into a more demanding order: **"I need to matter within the pack."**

For the brainstem, being rejected and coming face to face with a lion are the same threat. That is why an insult gets recorded in memory so fast. And that is why a simple drop in position, a joke at your expense, a "no" in front of others, can make an adult react like a cornered animal.

That is also why pride has the force of an impulse, and not the lightness of a preference. It operates with the urgency of someone fighting for their life. And it does not yield to argument. You cannot convince someone to stop seeking importance, just as you cannot convince someone to stop feeling hungry.

> *"It's not an opinion. It's an alarm."*

It Is Not Too Much Self-Love

There is a common confusion: thinking that the proud person loves themselves too much. It is the opposite.

Whoever always needs to be on top, always right, always admired, usually carries inside a feeling of little worth. The grandiosity is the facade. Behind it, very often, lives someone who feels like the least lovable person in the room and spends their life trying to prove the opposite.

> *"All grandiosity is propaganda."*

Where the love that gives worth without asking anything in return was missing, the person builds a worth on their own. A worth that no one needs to grant, because they seize it themselves: through winning, through control, through image. Pride grows like a prosthesis in the place of a lack.

The Root of Almost Everything

Pride is not one problem among others. Together with selfishness, it is one of the two roots of primitive human functioning. Look calmly at almost any human suffering and you will usually find one of the two underneath: the need for importance, which is

pride, or the absolute priority of one's own self, which is selfishness.

Both are born from the same survival, but they ask different questions.

> *"If pride asks 'am I more or am I less?', selfishness asks 'is it mine or is it yours?'"*

Part II of this book deals with the first question. Part III, with the second.

The Irony of Pride

The brain seeks importance so as not to lose the group. And it is precisely by seeking importance that we push people away. No one wants to be near someone who always needs to be on top, always right, always admired. Pride produces the very loneliness it is trying to avoid.

CHAPTER 6

The Pride Neurofunctional System



Pride works like a calculation the brain runs all the time, without asking permission:

How much am I worth, compared to the other person?

The word that carries weight is “compared.” Pride does not ask “how much am I worth?” It asks “how much am I worth compared to him?” The pleasure does not come from the gain itself, it comes from the place in line. Moving up in position gives pleasure. Moving down hurts.

That calculation does not happen in a single spot in the brain. It passes through several regions that work together, like a team.

That team has a name: the **Pride Neurofunctional System**, or **SNO**. A system, and not a list of flaws. That is why behaviors as different as vanity, envy, the need for control and revenge come out of the same calculation.

IN ONE SENTENCE

PRIDE IS BORN IN SURVIVAL, GAINS STRENGTH IN THE EMOTIONS AND IS CALCULATED IN THE PART OF THE BRAIN THAT THINKS. HUMILITY REORGANIZES THAT CALCULATION, AND YOUR POSITION STOPS DECIDING HOW MUCH YOU ARE WORTH.

The Whole Path, in Four Steps

1. **The base, in the brainstem.** The oldest part of the brain holds the message: in a group, we survive. That is why losing your place in the group is felt as danger.
2. **The charge, in the limbic system,** the set of structures where emotions are felt. Being rejected, criticized or diminished hurts. The pain shows up as shame, fear, anger, envy, jealousy.
3. **The calculation, in the cortex,** the part of the brain that thinks. It turns the pain into questions: how much am I worth? How am I being seen? What is my place? How do I recover my image?
4. **What shows on the outside.** Out of the calculation come the behaviors: comparison, control, arrogance, vanity, shyness, strong reaction to criticism.

That is why pride is not a single emotion. It is the whole brain organized around one question: what is my position in relation to others? The steps below show each part up close.

You already know the members of this team: they are crew members of the command cabin. From here on, each region appears by its brain name and, in parentheses, by its crew nickname.

First: The Names of the Brain

Studies on the brain are written almost entirely in English, and they call the regions by English acronyms. In this book, the regions appear by their plain name and by what they do, always with an everyday scene. You do not need to memorize anything. The acronyms are in the glossary, at the end of the book, for when you come across them somewhere else.

Step 1 · The Urgency Rises from the Bottom Up

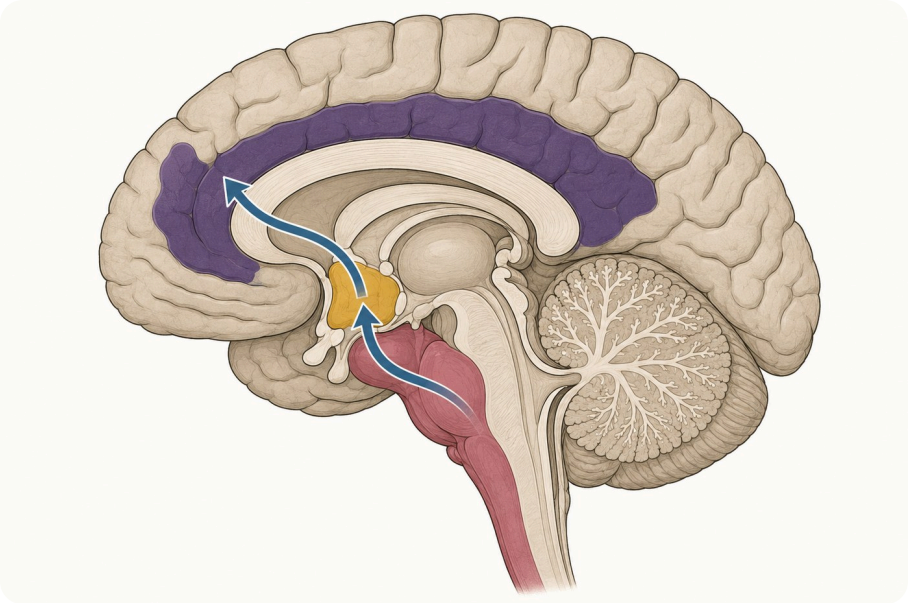


Figure 1 · The chain that rises. The brain seen from the inside, cut down the middle. In red, the **brainstem**: that is where the urgency to belong comes from. In yellow, the deep region where that urgency becomes **position value**. In purple, the inner face of the front part of the brain, where position becomes **"I."** The arrow shows the direction: from the bottom up.

The calculation begins on the oldest level of the brain, the **brainstem** (Autopilot). It takes care of what keeps us alive: breathing, the heart, the alarm in the face of danger. That is where the message "in a pack, we survive" lives. The brainstem does not calculate position. It only supplies the urgency: "without a place in the group, I am at risk."

That urgency rises. On the middle level, it becomes a calculation of value: how much this position is worth to me. On the upper level, it becomes identity: "I am this, I am worth this."

Three steps, one direction. That is why pride has the force of an impulse. It begins in a place that reasoning cannot reach.

Step 2 · Four Teams Do the Calculation

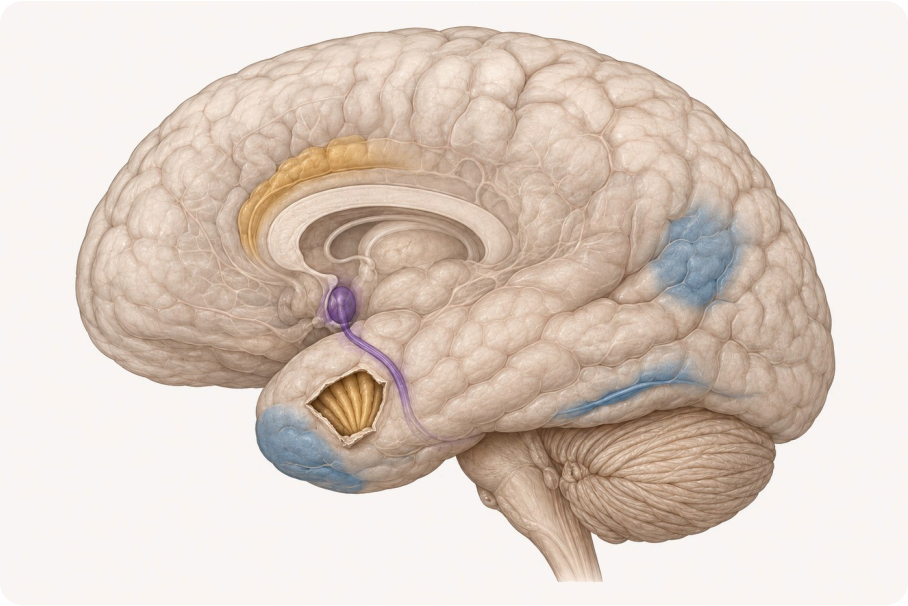


Figure 2 · Three of the four teams. In **purple**, reward: the pathway that rises from the middle of the brain to the **ventral striatum**, where moving up in position becomes pleasure. In **gold**, the alarm in the body: the **insula**, which appears through the open window on the side of the brain, and the **anterior cingulate**. In **blue**, the gaze of others: the regions on the side of the brain through which the audience enters the calculation. The fourth team, the **"I"** team, is on the inner face of the front part of the brain and appears in purple in Figure 1. The colors apply to each figure separately.

At the center of the SNO, four teams are at work. Brain studies call each one an **axis**. A scene helps you see all four at once.

You present some work at a meeting. At the end, the boss says, in front of everyone: "That's the best in the team."

In less than a second, four things happen.

1. Pleasure. A deep region of the brain, the **ventral striatum** (the Fuel Gauge), lights up. It is the reward center, the same region that lights up with good food or with money earned. It runs on **dopamine**, the substance of "I want more." The praise becomes pleasure, and the brain saves the path to go after it again.

2. The "I." The front part of the brain, on its inner face (the Altimeter), links that pleasure to you. The thought stops being "the work turned out well" and becomes "I am worth more." A region a little further back (the Radio) stitches this into your story: "after everything, I got further than they did."

3. The body. Two regions, the **insula** (the Sensor Panel) and the **anterior cingulate** (ACC) (the Fault Light), mark the moment as important and send the message to the body. That is why praise warms your chest. And that is why, if the sentence had been "that's the worst in the team," your face would burn.

4. The audience. Regions on the side of the brain, where the Radar works, imagine what others are thinking of you. That is what makes you look around to see who heard. Said in private, the same praise would be worth less.

Pleasure, "I," body and audience. The four teams work together on the same question: how much am I worth compared to others? That is the SNO at work.

You do not need to memorize the name of any region. Each one is explained in the glossary, at the end of the book, with the acronym that usually appears in studies.

How the brain “gives value” to a person

One word helps you understand pride: **valuation**. To value is to give weight. The brain does not record everything with the same weight. It marks some things as valuable, and that is where attention and desire run.

The same happens with people. In a well-known study, volunteers did a game task and saw on the screen the faces of other players, with a ranking: some above them, others below. When the face of someone ranked above appeared, the reward center lit up more. The brain gave more weight to that person. It paid more attention to them and cared more about them.

In everyday life it works like this: at a party, you notice the people with more prestige more. You remember what the boss said more than what a coworker said. A “good morning” from someone on top is worth more than the same “good morning” from someone below. No one decides to do this. The brain already delivers each person with the weight marked.

That is where pride's measuring stick comes from. If whoever is above is worth more, moving up becomes pleasure and moving down becomes loss.

Step 3 · Why Criticism Really Hurts



Figure 3 · The pain of criticism. On the left, the brain seen from the inside. On the right, seen from above, like a slice. The colored patches show the regions that light up with physical pain and with the pain of being criticized or excluded: the **anterior cingulate** and the **insula**. They overlap to a large extent. That is why the expression "that hurt" is not just a metaphor.

Criticism and exclusion light up, to a large extent, the same regions that light up when the body gets hurt: the anterior cingulate (ACC) and the insula. It is not exactly the same circuit, but the two overlap. For the brain, being disapproved of is registered as a real threat.

Two observations help you understand pride.

The pain can be hidden. Researchers measured the brains of people with a lot of pride, with narcissistic traits, while they were left out of a game. The pain alarm went off strongly. But when they were asked how they felt, the answer was that everything was

fine. On the outside, “it was nothing.” On the inside, it hurt. It is the case of someone who says the criticism did not affect them and spends the night chewing over every word.

Whoever feels they are worth little feels criticism more. Whoever is secure in their own worth receives criticism as information: “I did this badly.” Whoever feels they are worth little receives the same criticism as a sentence: “I am bad.” In that person, the alarm goes off louder. And the louder the alarm, the stronger the defense: the sharp reply, the excuse, the counterattack.

That is why an exaggerated reaction to criticism is not a sign of strength. It is a sign of fragility. Whoever needs to defend themselves against any criticism is someone whose sense of worth hangs by a thread.

Step 4 · The Brake That Hides or Shows Pride

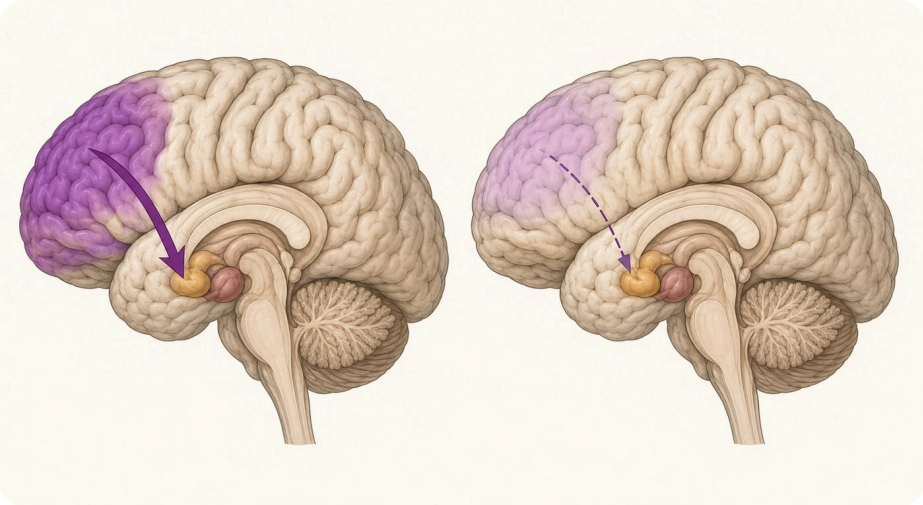


Figure 4 · The same pride, with a brake and without a brake. The two brains are the same inside: the deep regions, in yellow and red, have the same color in both. What changes is the front part, in purple, the **dorsolateral prefrontal cortex**. On the left, it is strong and sends a thick pathway downward: pride stays **concealed**, polite, disguised as modesty. On the right, it is weak, the pathway is dashed: pride comes out **overt**. The root is the same. Only the form changes.

Dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (in studies, **dlPFC**) · located in the front part of the brain, behind the forehead, at the top and sides. It is the region that plans, holds back impulses and chooses behavior according to the situation. In the command cabin, it is the Rein.

Think of this region as someone standing between what you feel and what you do. It has two tasks.

To brake. The urge to give a sharp reply rises, and it holds it back: "not now."

To choose what shows. It looks at the situation, who is listening, what looks good and what looks bad, and decides the shape of

what comes out. It works like someone who revises a text before publishing it: cuts one sentence, softens another, swaps a word. That is why, besides a brake, it is called an editor.

This region does not create pride. The urge to matter comes from below, from the teams you saw in the previous steps. It only decides how that urge will appear. It decides the outfit.

When it works hard, pride comes out edited. The person does not brag out loud. They say "oh, it was nothing" and wait for someone to insist on the praise. They help a coworker when the boss is watching. They seem modest, and they are admired precisely for seeming modest. That is **concealed pride**.

When it works little, from tiredness, anger, alcohol or lack of training, pride comes out unedited. The person brags, humiliates, retaliates. That is **overt pride**.

Both people run the same calculation inside: how much am I worth compared to the other person. The difference is only in what they let show. That is why it makes no sense to divide pride into "good" and "bad." The person who is modest on the outside does not have a better pride than the arrogant person. They have a better-edited pride. The useful question is not "do I show off or not?" It is "do I still run the calculation?"

This same region has another use. Trained by Humility, it stops editing pride to hide it and starts holding back the reaction so that you can choose a different one. You will see this in chapter 27.

Six Outfits, One Team

Each outfit of pride uses the same four teams, the same position calculation. What changes from one outfit to another is which team works hardest and which circuit joins them. In the chapters on the six families, a box called **“In the Brain”** shows this in a few lines.

When Approval Becomes an Addiction

The ventral striatum learns. If approval is a person's main source of pleasure, the brain comes to depend on it, in a way very similar to other dependencies. It takes one dose, then another, then a bigger one. And when the dose is missing, emptiness comes.

This way of functioning takes a toll on the body. Living all the time measuring your own position keeps the body on alert. Chronic pride usually comes with tiredness, irritability, poor sleep and high blood pressure. That does not mean all insomnia is pride. It means pride also lives in the body.

An Honest Caveat

All of this is a model to help you understand how pride works. It is not a picture of your brain. Brain regions do many things at once, and none of them is “the pride region.” What we see is a team that works together. The figures are illustrations to help you understand, not scans. Brains are not read from a book.

CHAPTER 7

Pride in the Cabin, Crew Member by Crew Member

You have just seen the pride system from the side of science: the urgency rising from the brainstem, the four teams, the pain of criticism, the brake that hides or shows. Now the same thing from the side of the command cabin.

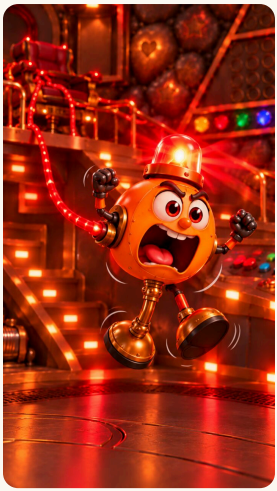
When Pride takes over, it attaches a red cable to nine crew members. Their eyes turn reddish. Each one keeps doing its job, but in the service of a single question: **am I more or am I less?**



Autopilot · brainstem

Without the cable: takes care of survival and repeats the recorded routes.

With the red cable: starts treating loss of position as mortal danger. A joke at your expense weighs like a lion at the door. And it repeats, on its own, the usual route: the ready excuse, the counterattack, the three-day silence.



The Alarm · amygdala

Without the cable: goes off in the face of real threat.

With the red cable: goes off at any sign of a fall. A correction in the meeting, a message with no reply, praise that went to someone else. It is also what notices who is above and who is below, and gets you ready to assert yourself.



Sensor Panel · insula

Without the cable: translates emotion into sensation in the body.

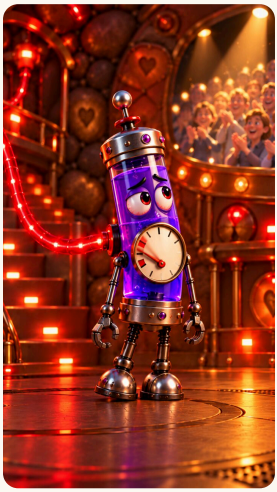
With the red cable: makes your face burn at criticism and your chest swell at praise. These are the three signs of pride in the body: humiliation, exclusion and superiority. The last one is deceptive, because it feels good.



Fault Light · anterior cingulate (ACC)

Without the cable: lights up in the face of a mistake or a pain.

With the red cable: lights up at any criticism, as if the body had been hurt. For it, being disapproved of and getting injured become very similar. That is why criticism really hurts.



Fuel Gauge · ventral striatum

Without the cable: registers the pleasure of what is truly good: food, a get-together, a job well done.

With the red cable: only rises when you rise in position. Praise becomes mandatory fuel. Without applause, the liquid drops, and emptiness comes. This is also where the pleasure of imagining payback lives.



The Altimeter · ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC)

Without the cable: measures the value of things.

With the red cable: becomes an altitude gauge. It links every event to the "I": "I am worth more," "I am worth less." It compares your height with everyone else's all the time. In the face of a friend's success, it shows a fall.



Black Box · orbitofrontal cortex (OFC)

Without the cable: records how much each experience was worth.

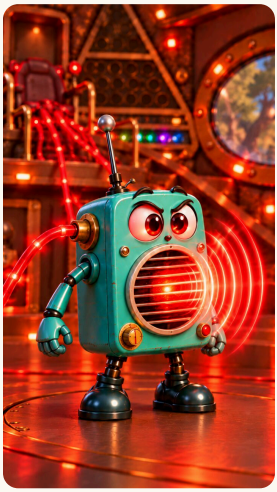
With the red cable: holds on hard to every humiliation. When something similar comes up, its little head pops up and shows the old recording: the teacher, the father, the classmate who laughed. You react to the past, and not to what is happening. It also produces strong discomfort in the face of anything that escapes control.



The Radar · temporoparietal junction (TPJ)

Without the cable: imagines what the other person thinks, so you can understand them.

With the red cable: imagines what the other person thinks **of you**. It fills the windows with an audience judging and whispering. It makes you look around to see who heard the praise. Said in private, the same praise would be worth less.



Radio · posterior cingulate (PCC)

Without the cable: tells the story of who you are.

With the red cable: becomes the Danger Radio. It links today's position to your whole story and spends the night chewing it over: what did he mean, why didn't she reply, what will they think. It is the radio that won't let you sleep after a criticism.

The Ones That Obey the Chair



The Rein worksing for whoever is in the chair.

The **Rein** (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, dlPFC) does not get a cable. They obey whoever is sitting there. With Pride in uniform in the chair, they become the editor you saw in the previous chapter: they choose pride's outfit. If they are strong, pride comes out concealed, polite, looking like modesty. If they are weak, from tiredness, anger or alcohol, pride comes out overt.

The **Navigator** (posterior parietal cortex, PPC) does not get a cable either. It holds attention wherever command sends it. With

Pride in command, it keeps the focus stuck on whatever confirms importance, or on the threat to it.

And the **Double Mirror** (dorsomedial prefrontal cortex, dmPFC) shows up here in another way. It compares what you think of yourself with what you imagine others think of you. In pride, the two images turn into a contest.

When the Cables Fall

In the chapters on the six families, each "In the Brain" box includes an **In the Cabin** line, with the crew members that particular outfit of pride uses most.

And when the Captain wakes up and takes the cap off whoever was in the chair, the cables fall to the floor. Each crew member goes back to its own color. The Alarm sounds for what is danger. The Radar goes back to looking at the other person, and not at the audience. The Altimeter measures the value of things, and not altitude. That is the work of Humility, and that is what Part IV is about.

CHAPTER 8

Where Pride Comes From



No one chose to be proud. Pride forms where two things meet: what you brought with you at birth and what life did with it.

What You Brought

Everyone is born with a level of need for importance. Some with more, others with less. It is part of the inheritance, like eye color. Experience is written on top of that level. That is why two children raised in the same house can turn out so differently: one arms herself, the other lets things go.

This lifts an important weight. There is no perfect childhood that would have prevented pride.

> *"Show me a person who won the approval of their father and mother and became, because of it, full and complete. There is no such person."*

How Childhood Shapes It

On top of that base level, some experiences tend to reinforce pride.

Comparison handled badly. Between roughly the ages of 6 and 9, children begin to measure themselves against their peers. They discover they are not the best at everything. This can teach humility or install a feeling of inferiority. It depends a great deal on how the adults react. A classmate says she is "bad at soccer." The parents can say "never mind, you're the best." Or they can say "yes, you're not good at that, and that's okay." The second sentence teaches that no one is good at everything, and that worth does not depend on it.

The praise that never comes. "You only did what you were supposed to." The child learns that effort does not count, that only the extraordinary result matters. And spends their life trying to be extraordinary.

The work that was humiliated. The child shows a drawing and hears “this is garbage.” The brain learns that exposing yourself hurts. The adult who grows out of this does not show what they do, or shows only what they are sure will please.

Humiliation in public. The child who was humiliated when speaking in front of the class may grow up and feel their chest close up in front of any audience. It is not the audience that threatens. It is the whole memory of the humiliation that lights up at the first similar sign.

Criticism of the way you are. Almost all of us were criticized for a natural trait: “talks too much,” “is slow,” “is soft,” “is hot-tempered.” The brain installs an order there: hide this. The cruelty is often ordinary: whoever criticized did not have the same trait and did not understand.

Parents who compete with their child. The child says they got a perfect score in math and hears that, back in his day, the father was the one who was good at math. That child grows up without ever having heard a clean “congratulations.” And, very often, becomes the adult who cannot say “congratulations” to their own child.

The example that contradicts the words. The father tells his son to say on the phone that he “isn't here,” and on the same day teaches that lying is wrong. The child needs the parents' approval to

survive in the pack. That is why they tend to imitate what the parents do more than obey what they say.

An important note. None of this is meant to blame mother and father. Parents are one of the expressions of the need for acceptance, not the only one. The same mechanism will repeat with a spouse, a boss, a friend, a group, a stranger. The work, therefore, is not to settle accounts with the past. It is to develop the capacity that was missing, today.

Temperament Supplies the Outfit

Temperament is not pride. Being dominant, being shy, being intense, being reserved: none of this is a flaw. The problem begins when pride takes over the trait.

- A **dominant** temperament, without pride, becomes leadership. With pride, it becomes the controller who cannot let go of anything.
- An **extroverted** temperament captured by pride becomes a need for attention and dependence on the gaze of others.
- An **introverted** temperament captured by pride becomes avoidance of contact, silent pride, difficulty exposing yourself and asking for help.
- An **intense, achieving** temperament captured by pride becomes the "doer" who does, does, does so as not to feel and to feel important.

An example. A person with a direct manner, who says what they think without beating around the bush, can use that manner to warn a friend of a danger no one else had the courage to point out. They can use the same manner to expose someone's mistake in front of everyone. The trait is the same. In the first case, it protects. In the second, it humiliates. What decides between the two is not temperament. It is pride, when it is in command.

So it is not your way of being that needs to change. It is pride that needs to get off of it. The trait stays. What changes is whom it serves.

To Observe Yourself

1. In your childhood, what happened when you made a mistake in front of others?
2. Which trait of yours was criticized early on? How do you deal with it today?
3. What sentence from the adults of your childhood still echoes when you compare yourself with someone?

CHAPTER 9

One Pride, Six Outfits



Pride has one root and many outfits.

The person who cannot stand criticism. The one who needs to be praised. The one who turns everything into a competition. The one who looks down on other people's opinions. The one who needs to control everything. The one who feels morally above everyone. They look like six different people, with six different problems.

They are the same calculation, dressed six ways.

There are twenty behaviors of pride, organized into **six families**. Each family is the same core, the position calculation, connected

to a different circuit of the brain. It is the circuit that gives each family its face.

1. **Displaying worth:** recognition, self-aggrandizement and vanity.
2. **Comparison and competitiveness:** the position calculation in action.
3. **Reactivity to criticism and defense of the ego:** the pain of having your position threatened.
4. **Dominance, contempt and manipulation:** superiority imposed on the other person. Revenge lives here.
5. **Control and resistance to change:** the order that protects the self-image.
6. **Moral arrogance:** superiority on the plane of right and wrong.

No one has just one family. Pride usually picks one or two as its favorite outfit, depending on each person's temperament and history. But the root is always the same. When you work on the root, all the outfits loosen together.

In the next chapters, one family at a time. Each chapter has the same structure: what it is, how it shows up in everyday life, what goes through your head, what happens in the brain, what it costs, questions to observe yourself and the virtues that work on that family.

The Virtues and the Pyramid

Each family chapter ends with the virtues that work on that outfit of pride. Before getting there, it helps to know how the virtues are organized.

There are thirty-three virtues. They do not form a loose list. They form a structure, and that is why they are drawn as a **three-level pyramid**. Think of a house: no one starts with the roof. You start with the foundation.

The Treatment Foundation. Eight virtues: Humility, Selflessness, Acceptance, Forgiveness, Individuation, Responsibility, State of Certainty and Perseverance. They are the ground. It is with them that a person leaves survival mode, in which pride and selfishness are in command, and enters life.

The middle. Twenty virtues, in three groups. Those that regulate emotions: Gentleness, Patience, Good Humor, Gratitude and Optimism. Those that align what you are with what you show: Truth, Honesty, Purity of Heart, Nonjudgment, Flexibility, Pursuit of Improvement and Care for the Body. And those that carry virtue into relationships and into time: Reconciliation, Repaying Evil with Good, Honoring Family, Positive Example, Usefulness, Eternity, Love for Nature and Animals and Nonattachment.

The top. Five virtues, all turned toward the other person: Oneness, Fraternity, Love of Neighbor, Helping Others and

Equality.

The rule of the Pyramid is simple: each virtue depends on others that come before it. Whoever skips the Treatment Foundation builds a facade, and facades fall. **Humility** is the first of all. It needs no virtue before it, and all the others need it. It opens the Pyramid together with **Selflessness**, which deals with selfishness, the other root. In the command cabin, this pyramid is the Pyramid Panel, on the wall, with a slot for each virtue.

That is why, throughout this book, the virtues appear in this order: first Humility, then those of the Treatment Foundation, then those of the middle and, last, those of the top. And each one comes with what it requires first.

CHAPTER 10

First Family · Displaying Worth



Recognition, self-aggrandizement and vanity

What It Is

It is the most direct form of pride. The person seeks, outside themselves, proof that they are worth something. Praise, attention, likes, admiration.

Here live the **constant need for recognition**, **self-aggrandizement** (inflating what you did), **vanity** in its three versions (of the body, of knowledge and of spirituality), the **need to impress** and **lust as a search for validation**.

Lust enters this family through a specific door. It is not sexual desire itself. It is when conquest becomes proof: “if I am desired, I am worth something.” The pleasure sought is less that of the encounter and more that of confirming yourself as desirable in the other person's eyes. Outside that door, desire has nothing to do with pride.

How It Shows Up in Everyday Life

- Telling the same achievement to several people, waiting for their reaction.
- Posting and going back to your phone every minute to see who reacted.
- Rounding up: your salary, your job title, the number of people at the event.
- Dropping the names of important people you know.
- Choosing your clothes, your car, the restaurant thinking about what others will think.
- Asking “what do you think of my hair?” and feeling bad if the answer is lukewarm.
- Working out less for health and more to be desired.
- Feeling a strange emptiness when a job well done goes by without anyone commenting.

The three vanities have their own scenes.

Vanity of knowledge. Correcting others in public. Using big words for no reason. Needing to show you have read more. Turning any conversation into a lecture. There is also a silent version: explaining everything and feeling nothing. Very intelligent people often use reasoning to avoid admitting an emotion, because feeling would mean losing control.

Vanity of the body. Investing time, money and pain in your appearance in order to be admired. Living your body as a shop window.

Spiritual vanity. Needing people to know how much you meditate, pray, fast or have "already evolved." Wanting to be seen as enlightened. At the extreme, the person sets themselves up as someone special, chosen, above ordinary people. It looks like spirituality. It is the inflated self dressed in holiness.

The Shop Window

Imagine a person's life as a shop window: the car, the house, the diploma, the trips, the body, the important friendships. A window set up to be seen is a window set up by pride.

There is an irony in this. The fuller the window, the less each item is worth. Because each object is there as proof, and proof needs to be renewed. The new car loses its charm in weeks. Another one is needed.

> *"We do not become attached to objects, but to what they represent."*

There is a clear sign that things have gone too far. It is when the person stops **having** the expensive pen and starts **being** the expensive pen. An object can say where you are. It cannot say who you are.

What Goes Through Your Head

> *"I need them to recognize what I am."*
> *"If no one sees, it's as if I'm not worth anything."*
> *"I'm going to show I'm more than they think."*

What Happens in the Brain

In the Brain · the shop window

- **Pleasure:** praise lights up the reward center, like money earned.
- **"I":** the front of the brain turns that pleasure into "I am worth more."
- **Audience:** everything is oriented toward whoever is watching.

In the Cabin: Fuel Gauge, Altimeter and Radar.

Here pride's calculation appears almost without disguise. Praise and attention light up the reward center through the same pathways as a gain in money. The front part of the brain links that gain to the "I" and inflates self-esteem. And the system that

imagines the gaze of others orients everything toward the audience.

The emptiness that appears when recognition is missing has an explanation. Without applause, the reward signal drops. And the "I," which learned to measure its own worth by that signal, feels the drop as a lack of worth. The person did not just get sad. The currency they used to measure themselves disappeared.

What It Costs

Whoever lives on recognition lives on loan. Their worth is always in someone else's hands, someone who can give it or take it away whenever they want.

And the account never balances. You win the award, the position, the followers. You feel a peak of pleasure for a while. Then you go back to the same emptiness as before. Another award is needed.

> *"The hunger comes back after every round of applause."*

There is a quieter cost. Whoever needs to impress never rests in anyone's company. They are always on stage. And whoever is always on stage is never truly seen, because what others see is the character. The greater the shine, the greater the shadow the person pays not to see.

IN ONE SENTENCE

It is pride seeking, outside you, proof that you are worth something.

To Observe Yourself

1. Who do you dress for?
2. If no one praised anything of yours for a month, would you keep doing things the same way?
3. What would you do with your life if no one were watching?
4. Think of an object you want very much. What would it say about you, that you fear you are not without it?
5. On appearance: are you doing this to express yourself or to be accepted?

The Virtues That Work on It

Everything begins with **Humility**. It is the first virtue of the Pyramid: it needs no other before it, and all the others need it. As long as worth depends on the audience, any other virtue becomes one more way of being admired.

With Humility underway, these come in, in this order:

- **Individuation**, from the Pyramid's Treatment Foundation. It builds an identity that holds itself up from the inside, and not through the mirror of others. A sign that it is arriving: the

imaginary audience stops being consulted. It requires Humility first.

- **Truth**, from the middle of the Pyramid. It makes self-aggrandizement unnecessary: whoever does not need to inflate does not need to lie. It requires Humility and Responsibility first, Responsibility being owning what is yours.
- **Nonattachment**, also from the middle, further along the path. It releases the status of objects. It requires Individuation and Acceptance first.

The order matters. Individuation without Humility first becomes one more shop window: "look how authentic I am." Truth without Humility first becomes a display of sincerity. And Nonattachment is not asked of someone who still needs objects in order to exist.

CHAPTER 11

Second Family · Comparison and Competitiveness



The position calculation in action

What It Is

Here the engine of pride comes to the foreground. The person measures themselves all the time. And lives life as a contest in which losing is intolerable.

Here live **comparison with others** and **extreme competitiveness**.

How It Shows Up in Everyday Life

- Walking into a room and, in seconds, knowing who is better-looking, richer, more successful. And where you stand in that line.
- Hearing a friend's good news and feeling, before the joy, a pang.
- Scrolling Instagram or LinkedIn and coming away with a tightness in your chest.
- Turning the family board game into a war.
- Not being able to lose in traffic.
- Using other people's children as a yardstick for your own.
- Reading about someone your age who “made it” and feeling bad for the rest of the day.
- Not being able to admire someone without, right after, looking for a flaw in the person you admired.
- At work, seeing your coworker as a competitor and the promotion as a war trophy.
- Rooting for a team as if competing personally: “we won!” is borrowed importance.

What Goes Through Your Head

> *"I need to be better than him."*
>
> *"If the other person goes up, I look smaller."*
>
> *"I can't stand it when someone at my level does better than me."*

What Happens in the Brain

In the Brain · the yardstick

- **Pleasure:** the reward center gives more weight to whoever is above. It is the valuation from chapter 6.
- **Body:** the alarm strongly marks every victory that moves you up.
- **Audience:** the other person enters the calculation. Without them, there would be no yardstick.

In the Cabin: Fuel Gauge, Sensor Panel and Radar, with the Altimeter measuring altitude.

You saw in chapter 6 that the reward center gives more weight to whoever is above. In this family, that yardstick commands everything. Every encounter becomes a measurement: who is above, who is below, where do I stand. And the body's alarm strongly marks every victory that moves you up.

Position only exists in relation to the other person. If worth is relative, **the other person's success is registered as your loss**. Not as neutral information. As a threat. That is why the pang comes before the joy.

> *"It is death anxiety dressed up as meritocracy."*

Envy

Comparison has a well-known daughter: envy. Envy is pride projected onto the other person. It desires what it does not have and resents what the other person has.

It works like a hidden calculation. Deep down, without the person knowing, the brain figures that if the other person falls, they rise. That is why envy rarely shows up under its own name. It shows up as criticism:

- "He only got there because he was corrupt."
- "She has everything, but she's empty inside."
- "That's just luck."

All criticism driven by envy is a form of destruction. And almost always, what the person envies is not even the object. If someone is drinking coffee from a beautiful cup and looks happy, the envious person thinks they want the cup. They don't want the cup. They want the state of happiness.

Two Wrong Ways Out

Comparison has two poles, and both are pride.

Competing with everything. Everything becomes a test, a ranking, a scoreboard. Winning becomes addictive and losing becomes chronic humiliation.

Running from any contest. The person avoids challenges, sabotages their own potential and runs from any place where they could be compared. It looks like nonattachment. It is fear of losing position. Over time, this often turns into silent envy, conformism or passive-aggressive outbursts.

There is a similar version in personal growth. Stagnation says “I'm already good enough.” Restlessness says “I'm never good enough.” They look like opposites. They are the same calculation with the sign flipped.

What It Costs

Comparison has no finish line. There is always someone above. Whoever lives by comparison loses even when they win, because the next yardstick is already waiting.

It steals the joy from good things. The pleasure of a job well done disappears when you find out someone did it better. The pleasure of a trip disappears when you see someone else's trip. Life becomes a league table, and no one rests in a league table.

And there is the bigger loss. Whoever competes with everyone has no one to count on. The friend becomes a rival. The brother becomes a rival. The partner, sometimes, too.

Competing Is Not the Problem

Humility does not forbid competing. You can keep playing to win in sports, compete for a position, want to be excellent at what you do. What changes is where competition belongs. It leaves the conversation, the relationship, the family. And it stops being the measure of your worth.

A simple way to notice the difference: use the competitive drive for your own excellence, and not to humiliate the other person.

IN ONE SENTENCE

It is the position calculation becoming a way of life: life becomes a contest, and losing is intolerable.

To Observe Yourself

1. What do you feel when someone close to you does better than you? And what do you do with that?
2. Whom do you envy today? What does that person have that you think you lack?
3. What criticism did you make of someone this week that, looking closely, was envy?
4. In what ordinary situation did you turn something simple into a contest?
5. Do you run from any place where you could be compared? Which one?

The Virtues That Work on It

First **Humility**, which takes personal worth out of the calculation. It does not forbid noticing that someone did better. It takes the weight off the noticing.

> *"There will always be someone better than you - and what's the problem?"*

Then, in this order:

- **Selflessness**, from the Treatment Foundation. It deals with selfishness and returns the other person to the place of partner, and not rival. It requires Humility first.
- **Responsibility**, from the Treatment Foundation. It takes the focus off what the other person has and puts it on what is within your reach to do. It requires Humility first and goes hand in hand with Acceptance and Forgiveness.
- **State of Certainty**, from the Treatment Foundation. It sustains the effort whose result cannot yet be seen, and so envy does not take root. It requires Humility first and goes hand in hand with Acceptance.
- **Gratitude**, from the middle. It turns your gaze back to what you already have. A practical rule: when you compare yourself with someone who has what you lack, you stop seeing what you have. If you are going to compare, compare with someone

who does not have it. It requires Acceptance and Responsibility first.

- **Fraternity**, from the top. The stranger comes to be treated as family. It requires Individuation, Acceptance and Forgiveness first.
- **Equality**, the last of the top. It is Humility extended to all relationships: the position calculation switched off with anyone, upward and downward.

Equality is the last virtue, and not the first. It requires Humility and the whole path of the Treatment Foundation and the middle. Attempting Equality without that path becomes talk: the person speaks of equality and keeps counting who is above.

CHAPTER 12

Third Family · Reactivity to Criticism and Defense of the Ego



The pain of having your position threatened

What It Is

Perhaps the most characteristic mark of pride. Criticism, mistakes and fragility are experienced as an attack. And the system responds by defending the self-image at any cost.

Here live **resistance to criticism**, **difficulty admitting mistakes**, **difficulty asking for help** and **rejection of vulnerability**.

How It Shows Up in Everyday Life

- Getting a simple remark and answering with three excuses.
- Apologizing with a “but” in the middle: “sorry, but you also...”.
- Driving around lost for half an hour before asking for directions.
- Not telling anyone you are having money problems, health problems, problems in your marriage.
- Chewing over at night a criticism you heard in the morning.
- Thinking that crying in front of others is weakness.
- Shifting the blame: it was the traffic, it was the boss, it was the other person who didn't explain it properly.
- Suffering out of all proportion over small things: a delay, a “no,” a mild disagreement, an invitation that never came.
- No longer trying new things so as not to risk making a mistake in front of others.

What Goes Through Your Head

> *“Criticism is an attack on me.”*
>
> *“Admitting I was wrong is showing weakness.”*
>
> *“I can't let them see my vulnerability.”*

What Happens in the Brain

In the Brain · the shield (Figure 3)

- **Body:** criticism and exclusion light up the same alarm as physical pain.
- The less worth a person feels inside, the louder that alarm sounds.

In the Cabin: Fault Light and Sensor Panel, with the Radio chewing it over at night.

Criticism and exclusion are registered by regions that, in part, also register physical pain: the insula and part of the cingulate. They are not exactly the same circuit, but they overlap. For the brain, disapproval is registered as a threat to survival in the group.

That is why criticism really hurts. It is measured pain, not exaggeration.

You saw in chapter 6 two things about this pain. It can stay hidden: the person says it was nothing and spends the night chewing it over. And it is stronger in those who feel they are worth little: the criticism arrives as a sentence, and not as information. The louder the alarm, the stronger the defense. An intense reaction to criticism is not a sign of strength. It is a sign that worth is hanging by a thread.

Why It Is So Hard to Admit a Mistake

When you accept that the other person had a better idea, the primitive brain reads: “my importance has decreased.” That is why

so many people prefer to go on being wrong rather than admit the mistake. It is not stupidity. It is primitive defense.

The same happens with thinking. Whoever operates by comparison sees in every piece of data confirmation that they are right, because being wrong, for pride, amounts to losing position. The person is not lying. They are seeing through the filter of pride.

The Defenses: Pride in Action

So as not to feel the pain of seeing their own mistake, the mind sets up automatic defenses. Most of them serve pride. It is worth knowing the most common ones, because they disguise themselves as common sense.

Denial. What gets denied, by preference, is what lowers you. “The doctor is exaggerating, I'm fine.” “Our marriage is perfect.” The person sees the sign and says they didn't see it.

Rationalization. A well-built explanation so as not to feel what happened.

> *“Rationalizing is giving a good excuse for something that has no excuse.”*

It is the case of the person who has never made a mistake in their life, only “was misunderstood by circumstances.” One question

helps take it apart: **what would I feel if this explanation did not exist?**

Projection. The flaw you do not admit in yourself is seen in the other person. “Everyone at work is envious and competitive.” The greater the pride, the greater the tendency to see in others the failings you do not accept in yourself.

Procrastination. Putting off whatever can be evaluated. The logic is simple and cruel: whoever never finishes is never measured. Fear of failure is a wound of importance that hurts ahead of time. At the extreme, putting things off becomes giving up before starting: the person does not learn anything new, does not change careers, does not make new friends, because they do not want to show that they make mistakes. The brain found a way never to fail in public, which is not even to try. And life shrinks into a bubble.

Inhibition. Keeping quiet, not exposing yourself, “not wanting to bother anyone.” Not exposing myself means I cannot fail.

> *“What defends you destroys you.”*

The defense does not go off because the person does not know. It goes off because they cannot bear not knowing. Humility is precisely what makes not knowing bearable.

The Same Fact, Two Readings

A criticism arrives. A humbler brain processes it like this: “this hurts me, but I can learn.” A proud brain experiences the same criticism as destruction: “I'm worthless.”

The second sentence seems like the opposite of pride, it seems like self-devaluation. It is pride inside out: the criticism touched the position, and the position collapsed entirely. When a person says “I feel like garbage,” that inferiority is usually a symptom of pride, and not the cause of the problem.

What It Costs

Whoever does not admit mistakes does not learn. A mistake is the information the brain uses to correct course. When pride intercepts that information, hiding it, justifying it or pushing it onto the other person, the correction does not get in. The person repeats the same mistake for years, each time with a better excuse. The proud person learns less, and learns more slowly.

Whoever does not ask for help carries everything alone. And whoever hides their own fragility is never cared for, because no one takes care of what they do not see.

IN ONE SENTENCE

It is criticism felt as real pain, and the self-image defended at any cost against that pain.

To Observe Yourself

1. The last time you got worked up in a conversation, what were you really defending?
2. What help did you not ask for this week so as not to look like you needed it?
3. What was the last thing you stopped trying out of fear of making a mistake in front of others?
4. What explanation have you been repeating for a mistake of yours? What would you feel if it did not exist?
5. What are you putting off? What would happen if you did it and it didn't turn out well?

The Virtues That Work on It

First **Humility**, and here it has a visible marker: the pause between what happens and how you respond. Someone criticizes you. Before, the answer came out immediately, hot, ready-made. With Humility, a gap appears. You breathe. You listen to the end. Only then do you respond. The anger may still be there. The difference is that it is no longer giving the orders.

Three sentences help train that gap: “I was wrong,” “I hadn't thought of it that way,” “I need to rethink my position.” They seem simple. For a proud brain, each one is a small leap.

With Humility underway, these come in, in this order:

- **Acceptance**, from the Treatment Foundation. It lets you receive criticism without experiencing it as annihilation. It requires Humility first.
- **Truth**, from the middle. It lets you say “I made a mistake, and I'll fix it” without the excuse hanging off the end. It requires Humility and Responsibility first.
- **Good Humor**, from the middle. It lets you laugh at yourself. Laughing at yourself is Humility in action. It requires Humility, Acceptance and Forgiveness first.

Acceptance without Humility first becomes resignation: “fine, that's just how I am,” said with your chin up.

CHAPTER 13

Fourth Family · Dominance, Contempt and Manipulation



Superiority imposed on the other person

What It Is

In the previous families, the person tries to rise or avoids falling. Here they push the other person down. Lowering, looking down on, manipulating, imposing themselves.

Here live **contempt for other people's opinions**, **emotional manipulation**, the **need to always be right** and **lack of empathy in the service of superiority**.

How It Shows Up in Everyday Life

- Needing the last word in an argument, even if the argument is about nothing.
- Interrupting. Rolling your eyes. Laughing at the other person's opinion.
- “Explaining” to someone something they know as well as you do.
- Using guilt, silence or tears to get what you want.
- Making a joke at someone's expense in front of others.
- Gossiping: knowing about other people's lives so you can feel on top.
- Never asking “what do you think?” and, when you do ask, not listening to the answer.
- Treating well those above you and badly those below: the waiter, the employee, your child.
- Expecting others to guess what you want, and taking offense when they don't.

What Goes Through Your Head

> *“My opinion is the only one that counts.”*
> *“I always need to be right.”*
> *“Putting the other person down puts me above.”*

What Happens in the Brain

In the Brain · the step

- A threat sensor, the **amygdala** (the Alarm), perceives who is above and who is below.
- Very old circuits organize the behavior of asserting yourself, as in animals that compete for rank in the pack.
- Part of the reward center lights up just from imagining payback. It is the pleasure of revenge.
- The brake at the front of the brain, the Rein, can hold back the payback. When it doesn't, revenge moves forward.

In the Cabin: Alarm and Autopilot, with the Fuel Gauge on the pleasure of payback and the Rein holding back or letting go.

Dominance uses the network the brain has for organizing hierarchies. The **amygdala**, the threat sensor, perceives who is above and who is below. Older circuits organize the behavior of asserting yourself, similar to what you see in animals that compete for rank in the pack.

Those who attack the most are often not those who feel on top. They are those who feel their position is **threatened or insufficient**. And, for pride, any unfavorable comparison is a threat, even for someone already at the top. The boss who humiliates an employee is not secure. He is defending a position he feels is fragile.

Lack of empathy, here, has a function. Considering what the other person feels would weaken the superiority. So the brain simply does not consider it.

The Anger That Goes Down the Stairs

There is a very common movement in this family. Follow it step by step.

1. The boss humiliates an employee in front of the team. The alarm goes off: his position has dropped.
2. Anger rises. It wants to recover the rank: answer back, retaliate.
3. Only answering back to the boss is costly. It could cost the job, it could bring a bigger humiliation. The brake at the front of the brain, the Rein, holds back. The employee swallows it.
4. The anger does not go away. It stays stored, waiting for a safe place to come out.
5. At home, his son drops a glass. There is no risk there at all. The brake lets go, and the whole day's anger comes out on the son, at a size the glass does not justify.
6. The son, in turn, kicks the dog.

The anger went down the stairs. It landed on whoever was one step below, and then on whoever was even lower. This movement has a name: **displacement**. It is one of the defense mechanisms. You take it out on the wrong target because the right target was too costly.

Pride comes in here twice. It is what feels the humiliation as a drop in position and demands payback. And it is what chooses

the target: it attacks where it can come out on top without running any risk. That is why the same person is agreeable where they are afraid and explosive where they can be.

And there is a dangerous lesson in this. Every time unloading on someone weaker brings relief, the brain records the path. Little by little, it learns a rule: humiliating protects you from humiliation. Someone who has been humiliated many times can become someone who humiliates, without noticing they are repeating the same calculation.

Revenge

Revenge belongs to this family. The offense is felt as being lowered, and retaliating is the way to recover the rank.

> *"He humiliated me in front of everyone - I couldn't let it slide."*

The brain anticipates pleasure in punishing whoever hurt us. Part of the reward center lights up just from imagining payback. The more it lights up, the more the person is willing to pay to get revenge: losing money, time, friendships, their own peace. The front part of the brain can brake that impulse. When it doesn't, revenge moves forward.

It shows up in small forms: the sharp reply saved for the right moment, the "I'll pretend I didn't see" to get even, the three-day punishing silence, the old memory brought out in the next fight.

And it shows up in cold, more sophisticated forms: “I don't respond in the heat of the moment, I build the response to just the right measure.”

Hurt Feelings

Hurt feelings look like sadness. Often they are wounded pride.

> *“Hurt is wounded pride. No one is allowed to wrong me: that is Importance inflated to the point of demanding that the other person know how to treat me.”*

That is why forgiving is so hard for pride. A primitive voice says: “you were deceived and you're still going to forgive? You're going to look like a fool?” And that is why reconciliation gets stuck so often. Wounded pride waits for the other person to make the first move. “If they apologize, then I'll see.” Waiting for the other person to come is also a way of staying on top. In the body, this shows up as a familiar stiffness: the feeling of “I'm not going to humble myself.”

What It Costs

What you gain from dominance is obedience. It is never love. The people around you learn to agree, to keep quiet, to pull away. The dominant person ends up surrounded by people who are afraid of them or who have given up on them. A leader who humiliates

builds a team that hides information. A parent who humiliates raises a child who lies.

The need to always be right charges the highest price: the person would rather be right than have company.

Revenge costs double. Whoever takes revenge pays to punish, and stays stuck to the offense. The person who hurt you moves on with their life. You stay.

IN ONE SENTENCE

IT IS POSITION ASSERTED ON TOP OF THE OTHER PERSON: LOWERING THEM IS A WAY OF RAISING YOURSELF. AND REVENGE IS OFFENDED PRIDE TRYING TO RECOVER ITS RANK.

To Observe Yourself

1. When someone disagrees with you, do you listen to the argument or count who is on your side?
2. With whom are you harsher: with those above you or those below you?
3. Where does your anger "go down the stairs"? On whom do you unload what you could not say to someone else?
4. What old offense do you still hold on to? What did it take from you that you still want back?
5. With whom are you waiting for the first move?

The Virtues That Work on It

First **Humility**. Then, in this order:

- **Selflessness**, from the Treatment Foundation. It brings back empathy: what the other person feels stops being a threat to your superiority. It requires Humility first.
- **Forgiveness**, from the Treatment Foundation. It undoes revenge. Forgiving, here, is not saying the offense did not happen. It is to stop feeding the pleasure of payback. It requires Humility first and goes hand in hand with Acceptance.
- **Truth**, from the middle. It makes manipulation unnecessary. It requires Humility and Responsibility first.
- **Reconciliation**, from the middle. It takes the first step. Taking the first step is giving up being right. It requires Forgiveness first.

Forgiveness without Humility first becomes disguised superiority.

> *"Forgiveness is not that arrogant position of I forgive you. [...] You are not God."*

CHAPTER 14

Fifth Family · Control and Resistance to Change



The order that protects the self-image

What It Is

Pride also dresses up as organization. The person needs to control people and situations. And refuses to change.

Here live the **need for control** and **resistance to change**.

How It Shows Up in Everyday Life

- Redoing what someone else did, “because it turns out better my way.”
- Not being able to delegate. Not at work, not in the kitchen.
- Planning your vacation hour by hour and getting irritated at any unexpected event.
- Needing to know where everyone is, with whom, doing what.
- Feeling every wait as a personal offense: the line, the delay, the reply that takes a while.
- Defending the old way of doing things, even when it no longer works.
- Refusing a new tool, a new method, a new idea, “because it's always been this way.”
- Thinking, deep down, that life should make an exception for you.
- Feeling anger, and not just frustration, when plans change.

What Goes Through Your Head

> *“Everything has to be under my control.”*
>
> *“Changing means admitting I could have been wrong.”*
>
> *“I can't stand what doesn't meet my expectations.”*

Underneath these sentences there is usually a hidden rule: **if I'm not in control, I get humiliated.**

What Happens in the Brain

In the Brain · control

- A circuit that checks whether everything is in place stays switched on too much. It is the same one that is very active in people who go back several times to check whether they locked the door.
- Regions at the front of the brain, just above the eyes, produce strong discomfort in the face of any uncertainty.
- The Rein, the brake and editor you saw in chapter 6, becomes rigid: it struggles to switch rules when the situation changes.

In the Cabin: Black Box and Fault Light, with the Rein rigid.

Control uses circuits that check whether everything is in place. They are the same ones that are very active in people who need to check the door several times before leaving. Regions at the front of the brain react with intense discomfort to any uncertainty. And the front part that should help switch rules when the context changes becomes rigid.

Why is this pride, and not just anxiety? Because of the motive. Here, control serves to keep the self-image standing. The unpredictable could expose a failing. Change could reveal that the old way was wrong. What cannot be controlled could lower you.

The same circuit can be used for different motives. One person controls so as not to be punished for a mistake. Another controls

to impose their own order on others, and that is a form of selfishness, which you will see in Part III. Here, you control to protect your position. What changes from one picture to another is not the brain region. It is the why.

The Forms of Control

Perfectionism. It is the position calculation carried into the territory of order: a mistake threatens position, and control restores it. There is a well-known portrait: the person who admires the perfect piece of toast and throws it away because it does not meet the standard. Very often, those who control too much were heavily controlled.

Perfectionism turned inward. Pride does not always attack others. Sometimes it turns into cruel self-criticism: the demand to be perfect in your own eyes.

The "pride in toughing it out." Ignoring tiredness to keep up the image of being productive and indispensable. Sleeping five hours and telling people about it like someone showing off a medal. The result usually arrives through the body: burnout, illness, collapse.

The indispensable one. The mother who does not sleep because without her something will go wrong. The boss who does not delegate because delegating splits the credit. Both carry, without noticing, the same sentence: "I'm so essential that without me nothing works."

Jealousy and distrust. Controlling your partner, your children, your coworkers, to anticipate any threat to the self-image.

The demand for certainty. Wanting a guarantee before acting. Anxiety, very often, is exactly this: a threat over which you have no control, but want to.

What It Costs

Controlling the uncontrollable is an impossible task. And an impossible task is exhausting. Whoever needs to control everything lives on alert, with the body always a little tense, waiting for the next unexpected event.

The people around them feel this as a lack of trust. And they are right. Whoever does not delegate is saying, without words, "I don't trust you." Over time, others stop trying.

And whoever does not change falls behind. Life changes anyway. Whoever refuses to keep up is gradually left alone in a world that no longer exists. Every bad phase of life, every cycle that ends, comes to be experienced as personal humiliation.

IN ONE SENTENCE

It is order imposed on the world as a shield against the unpredictable that threatens the self-image.

To Observe Yourself

1. What task can you not hand over to someone else? What would happen if they did it their way?
2. What was the last unexpected event that made you lose your temper? What did it threaten in you?
3. What tiredness are you proud of?
4. What change are you putting off because it would force you to admit that the old way no longer works?
5. Where do you demand certainty before acting?

The Virtues That Work on It

Three virtues from the Treatment Foundation release control together.

- **Humility**, first, which takes you out of the control of other people's gaze.
- **Acceptance**, which ends the war with reality. Instead of spending energy denying what is, you start from what is.
- **State of Certainty**, which releases control over the course of life. Not as blind belief, but as the certainty that there are laws that govern life and that part of existence is, by definition, outside your command: the past, time, other people's choices. It goes hand in hand with Acceptance.

Then come two from the middle of the Pyramid:

- **Patience**, which takes the taste of offense out of waiting. It requires Humility and Selflessness first.
- **Flexibility**, which teaches you to bend without breaking. A sign that it has arrived: you change your mind in front of someone, and it costs you nothing. It requires Humility, Acceptance and Individuation first.

The order matters. Patience without Humility first becomes patience in the service of pride: “I'll wait, because I'm above this.” Flexibility without Humility first becomes strategic adaptation: the person gives in on the outside so as to keep controlling on the inside.

CHAPTER 15

Sixth Family · Moral Arrogance



Superiority on the plane of right and wrong

What It Is

The most sophisticated form of pride. And one of the most dangerous. The person judges themselves morally or spiritually superior and condemns those who think differently.

Here live **moral arrogance** and, linked to it, **spiritual vanity**.

How It Shows Up in Everyday Life

- Judging harshly those who do not follow your standards: about food, raising children, religion, politics.
- Feeling a discreet pleasure when you see someone who is "wrong" come to grief.
- Giving advice no one asked for, with the air of someone who has already gotten past that.
- Talking about "people who haven't awakened yet."
- Distancing yourself from people who "aren't on the same vibration."
- Defending a just cause in a way that humiliates those who do not agree yet.
- Announcing your own simplicity as if it were a medal.
- Treating someone with pity, as a poor thing.

What Goes Through Your Head

> *"My values are superior to other people's."*
>
> *"Whoever doesn't think like me is wrong."*
>
> *"I'm more correct and have more integrity than they do."*

What Happens in the Brain

In the Brain · the courtroom

- A region on the side of the brain holds the concepts of right, wrong, worthy and unworthy.
- **"I":** the front of the brain links those concepts to you: "I am the correct one."
- **Pleasure:** the reward center gives the pleasure of feeling better than others.
- **Audience:** the comparison with those who "don't follow the same standards."

In the Cabin: Altimeter, Fuel Gauge and Radar.

It is the same position calculation, now in the currency of morality. A region on the side of the brain, in the temporal lobe, holds the concepts of right, wrong, worthy, unworthy. The front part of the brain links those concepts to the "I" and produces the conviction of superiority. The reward center gives the pleasure of feeling better than others. And the system that imagines the other person sustains the comparison with "those who don't follow the same standards."

Being more virtuous. More correct. More elevated. The calculation is the same as in vanity and competition. Only the currency has changed.

> *"Judging is climbing. The verdict confers superiority."*

Why It Is So Dangerous

Because it disguises itself as virtue. The vain person, at some point, realizes they are vain. The person who is arrogant on the moral plane thinks they are being good. Pride operates under the appearance of goodness, and that is why it stays almost invisible to the person carrying it.

An example. A group says: "we here don't care about expensive cars, we're simple people." It looks like humility. But, within that group, the value lies in simplicity. Whoever needs to announce it is asking for approval, and still feels better than the other group. They have only swapped the object of comparison. Now think of someone who has an expensive car and does not think they are better because of it, helps everyone and does not need people to look at the car. That person is closer to Humility than the group that looks down on the car.

> *"Humility is not about what you have or don't have. It's about whether you need it to be worth something."*

Good Done to Be Seen

This family has a silent version, which fools even those who practice it.

- **Help from above.** Helping to be seen, helping like someone stepping down a rung, helping to be "the one who helps,"

helping only those who are worth it.

- **Charity with an audience.** Giving to be seen is not charity. It is importance in another outfit.
- **The shop-window good father.** The father who gives his child time to be seen as a good father.
- **Kindness that wounds.** Help that charges, the favor that becomes a debt, goodness spoken in the tone of someone above.
- **The loud defense of morality.** Whoever needs to condemn an impulse too loudly is often fighting that very impulse inside themselves.
- **Pity.** Treating someone as a poor thing looks like compassion. It is inequality: the person is being looked down on.

One question helps tell them apart: **do I follow this rule because I believe in it, or out of fear of being disapproved of?**

Prejudice

Moral arrogance has a consequence bigger than the person. Whoever defends their own bubble becomes a critic of everything outside it. Prejudice is born from the need for importance: for me to be above, someone has to be below.

What It Costs

Moral arrogance isolates. Whoever is always right, on the plane of value, has no one to talk with. They only have people to agree with or to condemn. Relationships become a courtroom.

And it blocks one's own growth. Whoever already thinks they are elevated has nowhere to climb. It is the hardest pride to treat, precisely because the person confuses it with their own virtue.

IN ONE SENTENCE

It is the position calculation in the currency of morality. The most dangerous form of pride, because it disguises itself as virtue.

To Observe Yourself

1. What kind of person do you judge most easily? What do you feel inside when you judge?
2. Do you announce your simplicity, your faith or your values? To whom?
3. When you help someone, do you need people to know?
4. What bubble are you in? Whom did you stop listening to in order to stay in it?
5. Do you use the same voice with the doorman, your coworker and your boss?

The Virtues That Work on It

First **Humility**, and here it needs more care, because moral arrogance can turn even Humility into a trophy: “I'm humbler than they are.”

Then, in this order, three virtues from the middle of the Pyramid:

- **Gentleness**, which takes the harshness out of the way you defend what you believe. It requires Humility, Acceptance and Perseverance first.
- **Purity of Heart**, which cleans the intention: doing good without an audience. It goes hand in hand with Truth.
- **Nonjudgment**, which suspends the inner courtroom. A simple exercise: describe instead of label. Instead of “this person is arrogant,” “this person is talking a lot about themselves, in a very assertive tone.” A description gives no verdict, and without a verdict there is no step to climb. It requires Humility first and goes hand in hand with Patience and Truth.

At the top of the Pyramid, once again, **Equality**: no one above, no one below, not even on the moral plane. The sign that it has arrived is concrete: the doorman and the president hear the same voice. It is the last, because it requires the whole path first.

Nonjudgment without Humility first becomes “I don't judge anyone,” said with pride in not judging.

CHAPTER 16

How the Families Pull on Each Other

The six families do not live in separate rooms. They talk to each other. And, in real life, they rarely show up alone.

From comparison to revenge. Comparison makes the other person's success look like your loss. When the loss hurts too much, the person tries to recover their rank by pushing the other person down: dominance comes in. If the other person reacts, or if they give offense, revenge comes in. It is the same calculation, rising in temperature.

From criticism to control. Whoever cannot stand making mistakes tries to organize the world so as not to make them. They control, plan, check, refuse the new. Control is often a defense against criticism, set up in advance.

From vanity to moral arrogance. Spiritual vanity is the bridge between the two. It begins with "I need people to see how evolved I am." It ends with "whoever isn't like me is behind."

The same person, several outfits. Pride changes outfits depending on the audience. A person can be all modesty at work and all dominance at home. They can be submissive with the boss and ruthless with their child. They can be shy in public and cruel in

their thoughts. That is why it does no good to ask “which is my family?” and stop there. The useful question is a different one: **where, and in front of whom, does my pride change outfits?**

A single pride contaminates your whole life. The same need for importance, out of balance, becomes jealousy in a relationship, competition at work and showing off with money. It looks like three problems in three areas. It is one root.

This explains why working on the root works better than fighting each behavior. Whoever only controls vanity usually sees competition grow. Whoever only holds their tongue in an argument usually sees control tighten. The calculation is still there, looking for another way out. When the calculation loses strength, all the outfits loosen together.

CHAPTER 17

The Disguise: Overt Pride and Concealed Pride



Up to here, many of the examples have been of visible pride. But there is a pride that does not show off. And it is often the hardest to recognize.

You saw in chapter 6 the brake and editor at the front of the brain (Figure 4), the Rein. It does not create pride. It only decides what shows. When it works hard, pride comes out **concealed**: polite, skillful, looking like modesty. When it works little, pride comes out **overt**: open boasting, dominance, revenge.

Inside, both people run the same calculation. The one who is modest on the outside does not have a healthier pride than the arrogant one. They have a better-disguised pride. That is why this chapter exists: concealed pride fools people precisely because it looks like the opposite of pride.



Pride in uniform in the Captain's chair. Notice the red cape and the silhouette that does not fill the coat.

In the command cabin, concealed pride is Pride in uniform. It sits in the chair wearing the Captain's cap, and the crew obeys. No one sees the crown. Not even the person themselves.

Some outfits of concealed pride fool almost everyone.

Shyness. The shy person seems nice, discreet. It is exactly the opposite. Inside, it is written: “if I expose myself and get criticized, it will be so unbearable that I'd rather keep quiet.” The

silence is not a lack of desire to speak. It is protection of the image. What gets avoided is the symptom. The cause is pride. A word of care: shy people usually already suffer from their own shyness. For that person, the risk is not too little shame, it is too much. Discovering the pride behind shyness is no reason for more shame. It is the beginning of the way out.

Shame. Shame and insecurity are the sign of a position calculation that does not add up: a self that has made a worth it cannot sustain on the inside depend on the outside.

Putting yourself down. “I'm nothing.” “Oh, I didn't do anything special.” “I'm the worst at this.” It looks like humility. It is pride inside out. Whoever puts themselves below is running the same calculation as whoever puts themselves above. They have just chosen another place in line.

Being useful, being nice, being the one who suffers most. These are three discreet ways of seeking importance. The useful one becomes indispensable. The nice one becomes impossible to criticize. The one who suffers most becomes the center of attention through pain.

Drama. Drama is importance charging for pain. “Look what I've been through” means “see me.”

Pride in the wound. The person clings to the image of someone who overcomes every adversity, and no longer knows how to live without an adversity to overcome. It is pride in its most concealed

form: being important through the scar. One question takes it apart: **who would you be if everything were fine?**

Pleasing too much. There are five signs that go together: difficulty saying no, a need to please, difficulty asking for help, difficulty accepting praise, difficulty accepting gifts. It looks like kindness. Often it is debt: importance sought through sacrifice.

Erasing your own will. The opinion exists, the will exists, and the person erases both so as not to lose their place.

Being ashamed of where you came from. Rejecting the small town, the simple family, the accent. Whoever is ashamed of where they came from carries the shame wherever they go.

Hiding your own virtue. Refusing to be an example, hiding the good you do, running from praise. This can also be pride: "better not to be seen than to be seen and judged." The question is: **why do I refuse to be a reference, shame or pride?**

Pride Dressed as Virtue

There is a stage on the path in which pride learns to speak the language of the virtues. The person already knows what humility, acceptance and forgiveness are. And starts to show them off. The showing off is the proof that they are not there yet.

Some sentences of this kind:

- "I make a point of leaving with my head held high."

- “One day they'll recognize I was right.”
- “I listen respectfully. Not everyone has the humility for that.”
- “I make a point of being the one who keeps their composure.”
- “I make a point of being the one who holds the family together.”
- “I like being the one people come to.”
- “I'm a decent person.”

They all look like virtue. They all have an “I” above someone.

> *“Acceptance that needs to be seen is resistance in another outfit.”*

There is also the false humility of exhaustion. Someone who is depressed can look humble: they accept everything, react to nothing. Often it is not Humility. It is a lack of energy for any reaction. That is not treated as pride. It is treated with care.

Recognizing these outfits in yourself takes time. It is not a conclusion to reach in an afternoon of reading. Come back to these pages more than once, and notice which one stops you.

CHAPTER 18

Pride in Real Life



In a Couple

Many conflicts between partners seem to be about dishes, money or the mother-in-law. Underneath, there is usually a single alarm: the fear of being abandoned, operating through the pride system.

> *"No one needs to prove what they have. What people prove, compulsively, is what they fear they don't have."*

Whoever is sure they are loved does not need their partner to prove it every hour. Whoever is sure of their own place in the

home does not need to show, in every argument, who is in charge. What a person tries to prove all the time, insistently, is usually exactly what they are afraid of not having. Whoever needs to win every fight is usually afraid of not counting. Whoever needs to hear every night that they are loved is usually afraid of not being loved.

The partner who controls everything seems strong. Very often they are terrified.

> *"Control is not an excess of power. It is panic about loss dressed up as power."*

Some familiar scenes:

- **Wanting to be right.** The argument stops being about the problem and becomes about who wins.
- **The partner who runs everything.** A person with a dominant temperament remains dominant with Humility. What changes is that they stop wanting to steer everything, everywhere, all the time.
- **The jealousy prophecy.** The insecure partner treats the other as unfaithful until the other gets tired and leaves. And then says: "I always knew it."
- **Living through the other.** "I wanted to be someone important, so I married someone important." The person feels like a

winner through their partner's success.

- **Raising and lowering the shop window.** Sometimes showing off for the partner, sometimes hiding from them, depending on that day's calculation.
- **Expecting the other to guess.** And taking offense when they don't.

A useful note: a diploma is not maturity. A person can have a doctorate and, in the skills of emotional life, such as humility, patience and acceptance, have the structure of a child. And pride is skillful at using good theory to justify bad functioning.

> *"You don't defeat a defense by proving it is wrong. You defeat it by making it unnecessary."*

A defense is a protection. Jealousy protects against the fear of being replaced. The need to be right protects against the feeling of being worth less. When someone attacks the defense, with a "you're jealous" or a "you always want to be right," the person feels more threatened and defends themselves more. That is why arguing about the defense almost never resolves anything. What resolves it is the person no longer needing it. When their worth stops depending on position, jealousy and the need to be right lose their function and loosen. That is the work of Humility.

In the Family and with Children

Pride passes from generation to generation through example. Some attitudes help break the chain:

- When a child discovers they are not the best at something, tell the truth lightly: “yes, you're not good at that, and that's okay.”
- Praise the effort, and not only the result.
- Receive the perfect score in math with a clean “congratulations,” without comparison.
- At home, teach them that at home they are loved, and that out in the world they will find comparison. And that it is possible to receive comparison without losing yourself.
- In sports, swap the question “did you win?” for “did you have fun? did you look out for someone?” The scoreboard is not born with the child. It is an adult who comes along and asks “what's the score?”
- Show your own mistakes. A parent who says “I was wrong, I'm sorry” teaches more Humility than a thousand pieces of advice.

At Work

Work is one of pride's favorite stages. The coworker becomes a competitor, the promotion becomes a trophy, the parking space becomes a battlefield. Instead of “I matter because I contribute,” what sets in is “I matter because I outdo.”

It shows up as intellectual vanity, a need to dominate, jealousy of other people's results, centralizing out of insecurity, disguised envy. And as the inability to say “I don't know.” Teams in which no one is allowed not to know learn little and hide a lot.

There is also the other side: putting up with abuse at work in the name of responsibility. Often it is not responsibility. It is fear, or a need for approval.

And there is the emptiness at the top. Many people discover, precisely when they get there, that the position did not fill what it promised to fill.

With Money

Money is not the enemy. The enemy is the pride that makes use of money. And also the pride that makes use of refusing money.

- **Spending to impress.** Whoever spends to impress is seeking importance. An honest question: why do we spend to impress people we don't even like?
- **Looking down on money.** Associating money with “bad people” to justify your own lack of it. No one prospers in what, deep down, they condemn.
- **Having a lot and staying poor.** Pride turns lack into an insatiable hunger to have. That is why so many, having a lot, remain poor inside.

In the Body, in Health and in Aging

Pride also lives in the body. It shows up as “pride in toughing it out,” as the tiredness that is not admitted, as the pain that is not mentioned. It shows up in illness, when the person says “the doctor is exaggerating.” It shows up in aging, as refusal of the body that changes and horror at depending on someone.

Accepting help, accepting the body's rhythm, accepting your age: all of this goes through Humility. Overcoming pride, in old age, is surrendering to love.

An important caveat. None of this means that an illness is caused by pride. Getting sick is no one's fault. What pride does is make care harder: asking for help, accepting treatment, respecting your own limits.

In Spirituality

Pride also enters the spiritual path. It shows up as the need to seem evolved, as judgment of those who “haven't awakened yet,” as the contest over who meditates more. In its most primitive forms, God becomes the leader of a bigger pack, and the person wants to be his favorite.

True spirituality has no audience.

CHAPTER 19

Wounded Pride or Wounded Feelings?



Two pains look very much alike on the outside and are very different on the inside. It is worth learning to tell them apart, because each one calls for a different kind of care.

Wounded feelings are the pain of the bond. “I'll die without you.” It is the fear of being abandoned, of losing love, of being left alone.

Wounded pride is the pain of position. “How dare they give that place to someone else?” It is not losing the bond. It is losing the throne.

A scene helps. A person does not get promoted. The position goes to a coworker. She suffers a great deal. If what hurts is “they're going to leave me out, I'm not wanted here,” the axis is the bond. If what hurts is “I wasn't the one chosen, they gave it to him,” the axis is position.

Many people prefer the first explanation, even when the second is the true one. It is much more bearable to say “I have abandonment wounds” than to admit “I blow up when I'm not the star of the party.”

That is why it is worth asking the question honestly: **what hurts me is being without the person, or being below them?** Often it is both things together. It is worth writing both answers in your notebook and seeing which one weighs more.

When the axis is position, the work is only one: teaching the self to survive on the day the world says “today it's not you.”

CHAPTER 20

Why Pride Defends Itself So Much

If pride does so much harm, why is it so hard to let go of?

Because, for the brain, letting go of pride feels like letting go of survival. Anything that touches the self-image is registered as a threat to position. And the system responds with defense: denying, justifying, counterattacking, pulling away. Even help can be felt as an attack. Pride usually attacks whoever points it out. Even this book can be attacked by it.

And there is the problem of the blindfold. The proud person does not suffer for being proud. They suffer because they think others do not recognize them. They do not see themselves as someone with a problem. They see themselves as someone misunderstood.

Importance Is Not the Same as Being Loved

Here is the deepest mechanism, and one of the most useful to understand.

Mattering and feeling loved seem like the same thing. They are not.

Importance is wanting to be admired, special, recognized.

Feeling loved is wanting to be embraced as you are: with flaws, with falls, with limits.

Underneath an inflated need for importance there usually live two unmet needs: **the need to trust** and **the need to feel loved**. And this forms a cycle:

- the person does not feel loved for who they are;
- they seek importance as a substitute;
- the search for importance pushes people away;
- without a true bond, they feel even less loved;
- and they seek even more importance.

No recognition satisfies this cycle, because what is missing is not recognition. It is a bond. And pride is precisely what prevents the bond.

> *"No applause replaces the simple experience of 'there are people who love me even when I don't perform well.'"*

Admiration is not love. No one truly loves someone who is always on a pedestal, because no one can get close to a pedestal.

There is a detail that protects against going too far. The need for importance does not have to disappear. In balance, it becomes dignity: a calm sense of your own worth and responsibility for the impact you have on the world. Whoever has too little importance

also suffers: they live on alarm, read neutrality as rejection, feel ashamed of existing. The goal is not to bring importance down to zero. It is for it to stop governing your life.

Pride Going Against Life

There are laws that govern life. Pride goes against several of them at once, and this helps explain why it makes people so sick.

- **Polarity.** Every human being carries both poles: capable of the best and the worst. Pride denies its own shadow and condemns in others what it refuses in itself.
- **Observer.** What you see depends on how you look. Whoever hungers for importance watches for slights, and finds them.
- **Mentalism.** The need for importance, when it is lacking, makes the person see rejection where there is neutrality.
- **Correspondence.** The person changes jobs and finds a fourth boss with the same complaint. They wage a war out there against an enemy that is inside.
- **Unity.** Life works as a network. Pride sees the other person as a rival to beat, never as part of the same whole.
- **Life works in cycles, and life is chaos.** Everything changes, and not everything can be predicted. Control and resistance to change fight this all day long.
- **Free will.** "You make me feel this way." Pride throws responsibility onto the other person and becomes a victim.

- **Truth.** Pride is the father of the inner lie. The person sustains an image of themselves that is not the true one, like someone working two jobs and living exhausted without knowing why.
- **Karma.** The leader who humiliates builds a team that hides information. What pride plants comes back.
- **Love.** Pride trades the bond for validation. And, when it ends up alone, concludes that "nobody is any good."

Whoever lives going against life gets tired. Not out of weakness, but because they are rowing against the current.

PART III

Selfishness

CHAPTER 21

Is It Mine or Is It Yours?



One slice is left. Before any thought, the hand has already gone for it.

One slice of pizza is left on the table. Four people. Before you think of anything, your hand has already gone to the box. Or it didn't, but your eye stayed on it, and you hoped no one would take it.

One more situation. The restaurant check arrives, and someone suggests splitting it evenly. You only ordered a salad. The others

ordered wine. The math starts on its own in your head.

And one more. Your mother calls in the middle of your favorite show. You answer already irritated, reply in monosyllables and hang up quickly. Afterward, you don't even really remember what she wanted.

None of these scenes is a crime. No one dies over a slice of pizza. Even so, in all of them, a calculation was made before thought: **is mine worth more, or the other person's?** And the answer came ready-made: mine.

That calculation has a name. It is selfishness.

> *"If pride asks 'am I more or am I less?', selfishness asks 'is it mine or is it yours?'"*

CHAPTER 22

What Selfishness Is

Selfishness is **the behavior in which a person puts their own needs and desires first, forgetting the needs of others.**

The summary fits in two words: **me first.**

Like pride, selfishness is not a character flaw that some people have and others do not. It is born from the same source: survival. For almost the entire history of our species, food was scarce. Whoever did not secure their share did not survive. The brain stored this rule in its oldest part, the brainstem: **first I secure myself.**

That is why selfishness has the force of an impulse, and not the lightness of an opinion. It does not appear as a choice. It appears as urgency. “It's my survival that's at stake.” “Without me, nothing matters.” The person feels their own need as a matter of life or death, even when it is just a slice of pizza.

Pride and Selfishness, Side by Side

Both are born from the same survival, but they solve different problems.

Pride takes care of **position** within the group. It needs you to matter, because being left out of the pack meant dying.

Selfishness takes care of the **sharing** of resources. It needs your share to come first, because running out of food also meant dying.

One asks "am I more or am I less?" The other asks "is it mine or is it yours?" Together, they are the two roots of primitive human functioning. Look calmly at almost any human suffering and you will usually find one of the two underneath. Often both.

It Is Not Excess. It Is Lack

Here is the most important discovery about selfishness, and it changes the way you look at it.

We usually think of the selfish person as someone who wants too much. But wanting your own good is normal. Every brain wants it. What science shows is something else: **the essence of selfishness is an absence.** It is the correction that should come in, the one that puts the other person into the calculation, and does not come in enough.

The brain, in its most primitive state, already comes with "me first" switched on. What needs to be built is the counterweight. In the selfish person, that counterweight is weak, arrives late or does not arrive at all.

This has a practical consequence. It does no good to ask selfishness to "want less." The work is different: to strengthen, through training, the part of the brain that puts the other person into the calculation. You will see how in the chapter on Selflessness.

A Single System

Aggressiveness, addiction, indifference, control, dishonesty. They look like five different problems. They are five forms of the same system.

Selfishness has a name: the **Selfishness Neurofunctional System**, or **SNE**. A system, and not a list of separate flaws. There are not many selfishnesses. There is only one, the survival of the self raised to a rule of life, which shows itself in many forms.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Selfishness is the "me first" that is born in survival and decides before you think. The failure is not in wanting your own good. It is in the other person not entering the calculation.

CHAPTER 23

The Selfishness Neurofunctional System

Selfishness is born below and decided above. It is worth walking the whole path, as you did with pride.

The Whole Path, in Three Steps

1. **The base, in the brainstem.** The oldest part of the brain holds the message: this body needs to stay alive. It is the first form of "me first." It supplies the urgency.
2. **The calculation, in the middle and front of the brain.** The urgency becomes a weight on a scale. How much is my gain worth? How much is the other person's gain worth? In each situation, the brain settles this small conflict, before you notice that it did.
3. **The correction, or the lack of it.** A region of the brain can rewrite this calculation in the other person's favor. When it works, the choice takes the other person into account. When it doesn't, the choice comes out centered on the self.

In the Cabin: Three Crew Members Do the Calculation

The core of selfishness lies in three crew members you already know. A scene helps you see all three.

You are at work, swamped with tasks. A new coworker asks if you can explain a program to him. It will take half an hour.

1. The Altimeter calculates. The **ventromedial prefrontal cortex** (vmPFC) is the scale. It combines, into a single number, your gain and the other person's gain: the half hour you lose against the help he gets. When the weight of the self dominates the scale, the answer is “not now.” This is where selfishness is, in fact, calculated.

2. The Double Mirror represents the other person. The **dorsomedial prefrontal cortex** (dmPFC) separates what you want from what your coworker wants. The better it separates the two, the more the person tends to consider the other. In selfishness, the Mirror works little or crookedly. The other person does not appear as someone with a will of their own. They appear stuck to you (“he'll figure it out, like I would”) or as an object (“it's just one more task in my day”).

3. The Radar corrects. The **temporoparietal junction** (TPJ) is the counterweight. When the temptation to be selfish grows, it is what steps in and rewrites the Altimeter's calculation in the other person's favor. In selfishness, this counterweight is weak, seldom

called on or arrives too late. The scale stays on the side of the self because no one corrected it.

What studies show about the Radar

The Radar's role is not just a hypothesis. Researchers tested it in both directions.

First, they switched the region off for a few minutes, with magnetic stimulation over the head. People became more selfish toward those who were distant from them. And, curiously, they also became more impatient with their own future: they preferred a smaller gain now to a bigger one later.

Then, another group stimulated the same region, instead of switching it off. The effect was the opposite: people began to make more choices that took future generations into account, even when paying for it.

A review of almost a hundred studies, with more than four thousand participants, reached the same conclusion: this region controls the behaviors that require separating my point of view from the other person's point of view.

Switch the Radar off, and selfishness grows. Switch it on, and consideration for the other person grows.

The Weight of the Other Person and the Weight of Your Tomorrow

The finding above brings something few people imagine. The weight you give to the other person and the weight you give to yourself, a year from now, depend on the same operation: breaking out of the prison of the present self.

That is why selfishness and lack of self-control go together so often. Whoever cannot leave the last slice for a coworker also has

trouble leaving the dessert for tomorrow. Tomorrow's self, for the brain, is almost “another person.”

For the Selfish Person, Considering Others Takes Work

Another finding helps you understand selfishness without judgment.

In people who tend to be generous, the decision to help comes out almost on its own, like an automatic response. In people who tend to be selfish, the same decision happens, but with effort: the brain works harder, takes longer and only considers the other person when it has to. Under pressure of time or scarcity, the person goes back to “me first.”

This confirms what you read in the previous chapter. The priority of the self is the brain's factory setting. Considering the other person is an achievement. It has to be called on on purpose, and it can be trained until it becomes automatic.

From the Brainstem to the Cortex

Put the steps together and you have the whole chain.

In **Autopilot**, the brainstem shouts “survive.” In the **Altimeter**, that shout becomes “mine first.” In the **Radar** and the **Double Mirror**, that calculation could be corrected. In selfishness, it is not.

The way out is not to silence Autopilot. The urgency to survive does not disappear, and it should not. The way out is to strengthen the upper layer, the one that puts the other person into the calculation. You do not erase the brainstem. You build, on top of it, the layer that decides.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Selfishness is born in the brainstem as an impulse and is decided in the cortex as a weight: the Altimeter weighs the self above the other person, the Double Mirror represents the other person poorly, and the Radar does not correct the calculation.

An Honest Caveat

As with pride, this is a model to help you understand how selfishness works. It is not a picture of your brain. No region is "the selfishness region." These regions take part in almost every value decision. What characterizes selfishness is the way they work together: the scale tipping toward the self, without the correction that would come from the Radar.

CHAPTER 24

Selfishness in the Cabin, Crew Member by Crew Member



Selfishness in command, hugging the fuel can, with the black hoses coming out of him.

Pride uses red cables. Selfishness uses **black, oily hoses** that come out of his body and stick to the crew members. The eyes of anyone hooked up turn murky, the color of oil.

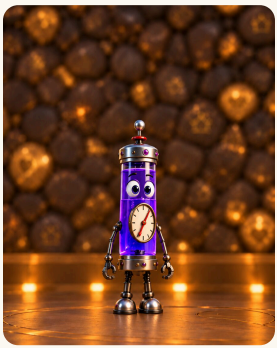
Selfishness hooks into fewer crew members than Pride does. But he picks exactly the ones who do the math.



The Altimeter · ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC)

Without a hose: weighs your gain and the other person's gain on the same scale.

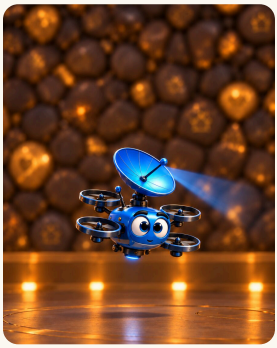
With the black hose: the scale is rigged. Your gain weighs a lot. The other person's, almost nothing. "Mine first, then theirs, if there's anything left."



Fuel Gauge · ventral striatum

Without a hose: registers pleasure in many things, including giving.

With the black hose: pleasure now comes only from what is yours and what is now. Immediate relief is worth more than any commitment. This is the way selfishness turns into addiction.



The Radar · temporoparietal junction (TPJ)

Without a hose: turns the dish outward and picks up the other person.

With the black hose: the dish turns inward and picks up only you. The other person drops off the screen. "I don't even think about how he'll feel."



Double Mirror · dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (dmPFC)

Without a hose: shows your face on one screen and the other person's face on the other.

With the black hose: both screens show the same face, yours. "What he wants is what I want him to want." "If I don't need it, he doesn't need it either."

Underneath it all, **Autopilot** supplies the urgency. He doesn't need a hose. The message "first I take care of myself" is already his.

And, once again, **the Rein** obeys whoever is in the chair. With Selfishness in command, they carefully plan how to get what he wants.

How the hoses spread

The four hoses form the core. But depending on the form selfishness takes, other crew members join the math. In aggressiveness, the Alarm. In addiction, the Fuel Gauge, the Black Box and the Fault Light. In indifference, the Sensor Panel. In control, the Black Box and the Rein. That is what the next chapter shows.

CHAPTER 25

Five Forms, One Selfishness

There are five main forms in which selfishness shows up. All of them share the same core: the Altimeter's scale tipping toward the self, without the Radar's correction. What changes from one form to another is the crew member who joins the core and gives each form its face.

Just as with pride, nobody has only one form. Selfishness tends to pick one or two as favorites.

1. Aggressiveness · Defending the Self Through Threat



The argument heats up. In the cabin, the Alarm has already gone off.

What it is. The impulse to attack or defend yourself without considering the other person's well-being. Self-protection comes before everything.

How it shows up day to day.

- Blowing up at a frustration or a setback.
- Responding with disproportionate hostility to a threat that wasn't even that big.

- Defending yourself without noticing, or without caring about, the damage you did to the other person.
- Slamming the door, honking, cursing in traffic.

What goes through your head.

> *"If they threaten me, I hit back, no matter who gets hurt."*
> *"Nobody walks all over me."*
> *"That's their problem, not mine."*

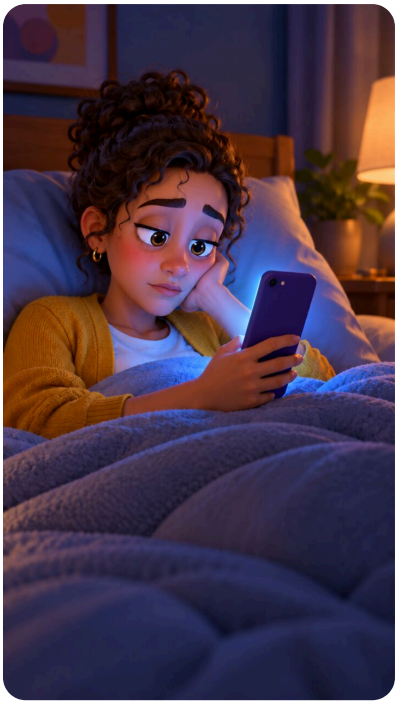
In the cabin · the siren with no brake

- **The Alarm** (amygdala) detects the threat and turns up its volume.
- Very old circuits, linked to **Autopilot**, organize attack and defense, as in animals.
- **The Black Box** (orbitofrontal cortex, OFC) records the frustration: "it wasn't supposed to be like this." It is a frequent trigger.
- **The Rein** (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, dlPFC) should hold back. In aggressiveness, they go weak and the Alarm goes off with no brake.

In aggressiveness, attacking is protecting the self without the other person, their pain, their point of view, entering the math. Anger itself is not the problem. The problem is anger deciding on its own.

What it costs. People who attack to protect themselves end up alone, surrounded by people who are afraid or by people who have left. And they learn little, because every conflict becomes a war, and war teaches nothing.

2. Addiction and escapism · the pleasure that hijacks



One more video. Then one more.

What it is. Putting immediate desires above responsibilities and above the needs of others. The best-known form is chemical dependency. But the same mechanism shows up with the phone, food, shopping, gambling, compulsive work.

How it shows up day to day.

- Seeking immediate relief even while knowing the damage to yourself and to others.

- Putting off obligations and relationships for the sake of what feels good now.
- Slowly losing control over consumption. What was a choice becomes a habit.
- "Just one more," said for the tenth time.

What goes through your head.

> *"Just me and what relieves me right now."*
> *"I'll deal with the rest later."*
> *"I need this, everything else can wait."*

In the cabin · the tank that gives the orders

- **The Fuel Gauge** (ventral striatum) is captured. Whatever gives immediate pleasure makes the liquid rise far above what the thing is worth.
- With repetition, command shifts from will to automatic habit. **Autopilot** repeats the route on its own.
- **The Black Box** (orbitofrontal cortex, OFC) and **the Fault Light** (anterior cingulate, ACC), which weigh consequences and hold back impulses, go weak.

This is the purest form of what could be called **the selfishness of time**. The self of right now dominates. The other person and the future, including your own future, vanish from the math.

One detail helps explain why addiction grows. The pleasure of fulfilling a desire is a peak. It passes in moments or in days. Then you need more, or you need to switch desires. This is the basis of

every compulsion. The tank never fills up, because what is missing is not that.

What it costs. What gets lost in addiction is rarely just money or health. It is people. Someone who lives for the relief of right now stops being present for whoever is beside them.

A word of caution. Chemical dependency is an illness, and it calls for specialized treatment. This book does not replace that treatment. It shows the root that addiction shares with selfishness, so that the work with the virtues can go hand in hand with treatment.

3. Emotional indifference · the other person who doesn't show up

What it is. A lack of warmth and affection. Difficulty recognizing the other person's needs and acting on them. It is the clearest mark of selfishness.

How it shows up day to day.

- Not offering support when the other person's need is obvious.
- Staying unmoved in the face of someone's suffering.
- Not noticing the impact of your own actions on what the other person feels.
- Telling about your own day without asking about theirs.

- Getting home and only noticing your partner was sad when they are already crying.

What goes through your head.

> *"I don't feel what the other person feels, and I don't try to."*
> *"Other people's problems don't touch me."*
> *"Everyone takes care of their own."*

In the cabin · the sensors that don't light up

- **The Sensor Panel** (insula) and **the Fault Light** (anterior cingulate, ACC) light up both when you feel pain and when you see someone else feeling it. This is the basis of empathy. In indifference, they barely light up for the other person.
- **The Radar** (temporoparietal junction, TPJ) and **the Double Mirror** (dorsomedial prefrontal cortex, dmPFC), which would help you understand what the other person thinks and needs, are left out of the math.

An important observation here. In indifference, the selfish person is almost never cruel on purpose. Consideration for the other person simply doesn't happen, because the system that would make it possible was never called in. That is why the person is so surprised when someone points out the damage: they didn't see it.

One clarification. In its most extreme and structural form, this lack of empathy resembles what is described in psychopathy. But the two are not the same thing. Selfishness is a common position, one everyone has to some degree and one that can be worked on.

Psychopathy is a clinical condition. Treating one as the other would be a mistake.

What it costs. Someone who doesn't feel the other person is not felt by the other person. People get tired of giving without receiving and drift away, in silence. The indifferent person tends to discover loneliness late.

4. Inflexibility and control · the order of the self



The Black Box, which complains when reality doesn't turn out as expected.

What it is. A lack of patience, difficulty accepting the other person as they are, intolerance of what is different. And obsessive control of the environment, in which the person ignores the preferences and needs of others to keep their own order.

How it shows up day to day.

- Imposing your own rules and rejecting any adjustment.
- Overdoing the cleaning and organizing of the house, without considering whoever lives there too.
- Not tolerating difference, disagreement, the unexpected.
- Reorganizing the drawer the other person just tidied.

What goes through your head.

> *"It has to be my way."*
> *"I can't stand what is out of my control."*
> *"My opinion is the right one, period."*

In the cabin · the order that won't bend

- **The Black Box** (orbitofrontal cortex, OFC) and **the Fault Light** (anterior cingulate, ACC) produce strong discomfort with anything outside the pattern.
- A circuit that checks whether everything is in its place stays switched on too much.
- **The Rein** (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, dlPFC), which should help switch rules when the situation changes, go rigid.

You have already seen control in pride, in the fifth family. The difference is in the motive. In pride, control protects the self-image: the unexpected might expose a flaw. In selfishness, control imposes the order of the self on the other person: the inner peace of the one in control is worth more than the freedom of the people who live with them. The other person stops being a person with needs and becomes a variable to be controlled.

What it costs. Someone who controls everything lives surrounded by people walking on eggshells. And the house, the job, the family end up just right for one person only.

5. Transgression and corruption · advantage against the rule



The bill. Someone is doing a different calculation.

What it is. Seeking personal advantage while disregarding the impact of your own actions on the collective well-being. Breaking the rule because, for this person, the rule barely carries any weight.

How it shows up day to day.

- Cutting in line. Parking in the reserved spot "just for a minute."

- Taking supplies home from work.
- Declaring less, charging more, padding the reimbursement.
- Calling dishonesty being smart.
- Feeling nothing in the face of the collective harm caused.

What goes through your head.

> *"Rules are for other people, not for me."*
> *"If I can get an edge, I take it."*
> *"Nobody will notice, and I come out ahead."*

In the cabin · the scale against the rule

- **The Altimeter** (ventromedial prefrontal cortex, vmPFC) and **the Black Box** (orbitofrontal cortex, OFC) calculate the value of the advantage, weighed against the chance of getting caught.
- **The Radar** (temporoparietal junction, TPJ) predicts how others will react. Here, it works for selfishness.
- **The Rein** (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, dlPFC) and **the Fault Light** (anterior cingulate, ACC), which enforce the rule and signal the conflict between what you want and what you should do, lose the contest.
- In the most extreme cases, **the Alarm** and **the Sensor Panel** barely react to the harm. Breaking the rule doesn't even bother.

What it costs. Trust. Someone who takes a small advantage every day slowly loses the hardest thing to get back: their word. And teaches the people around them that this is how you live.

To observe yourself

1. From zero to ten, how much of your life is devoted to your own wants? And how much is devoted to someone besides you?
2. Today, did someone around you need something? Did you notice right away, later, or only now?
3. Which of the five forms did you recognize yourself in most? In what situation does it show up?
4. What immediate relief do you seek when you are tired or frustrated? Who goes without you in the meantime?
5. What small rule do you break and call being smart?
6. When you tell about your day, do other people appear with wants of their own, or only as scenery?

CHAPTER 26

Pride and Selfishness Together

You have seen the two separately. In real life, they almost always go hand in hand.

	Pride (SNO)	Selfishness (SNE)
The question	Am I more or am I less?	Is it mine or is it yours?
What it protects	Position in the group	My share of the resources
In the cabin	Red cables on nine crew members	Black hoses on the core of the math
The other person becomes	Audience or rival	Scenery or obstacle
The way out	Humility	Selflessness

The two share the reward center (the Fuel Gauge) and the region that links things to the "self" (the Altimeter). And both have the same counterweight: the regions that put the other person into the math, like the Radar, and the pause of the Rein. That is why, when one grows, the other usually grows with it.

How one pulls the other

Envy. Pride feels the other person's success as a loss of position. Selfishness adds an old calculation, one of scarcity: if that thing is unique, if there won't be any left, then it has to be mine. Envy is the place where the two meet.

Control. Pride controls so as not to be exposed. Selfishness controls so that everything goes its way. In the same person, the two motives add up.

Materialism. Pride uses objects as a shop window. Selfishness hoards objects for itself. Someone who has a lot and stays poor inside is usually caught by both.

Lack of empathy. In pride, considering what the other person feels would weaken the superiority. In selfishness, the other person never even enters the math. The result looks the same. The way out also runs through both.

The couple. Pride needs to win the argument. Selfishness needs the house, the money and the time to revolve around its own needs. Many fights have a bit of each: "I'm right" and "what I need comes first."

Why treating only one doesn't work

Someone who works only on pride can become a humble person who stays closed in on themselves. Someone who works only on selfishness can become a generous person who needs to be seen being generous. The first is leftover pride. So is the second.

That is why, in the Pyramid of Virtues, the first two jewels are **Humility** and **Selflessness**. One takes Pride out of the chair. The other takes out Selfishness. And the order matters: first Humility,

so that renunciation doesn't become a show for an audience. Then Selflessness, so that the other person enters the math.

PART IV

The Way Out

CHAPTER 27

The Way Out of Pride: Humility



The way out of pride has a name: **Humility**.

But the name needs cleaning up first. Humility is not making yourself smaller. It is not walking with your head down. It is not saying you are nothing. As you have seen, that is pride turned inside out.

> *"Humility is stepping out of the math."*

Humility is the ability to recognize yourself as capable of the best and capable of the worst. And to not need anyone to confirm

either one. It is recognizing your own limits and flaws, learning from others and accepting that your worth does not depend on a position of prominence. It is seeing yourself at the right scale, neither bigger nor smaller than you are.

Liking what you did is not the problem. Being happy about a compliment is not the problem. The problem starts when you **need** it in order to be worth something.

Humility is also asking for help. Many people do everything they can not to depend on anyone, and call it strength. It is pride. We depend on one another, and that is human.

And Humility is taking the focus off yourself. Notice the way you talk. A lot of conversation is an attempt to convince the other person that you are nice, that you deserve to be loved, that you have worth. Meanwhile, the other person is left with no room. Humility reverses the direction: your interest turns to the other person.

> *"Evolution doesn't come to convince the other person to love you. It comes so that you love the other person."*

Three false humilities

Humility has imitations. They are worth recognizing, because they fool even the people who practice them.

The humility that makes itself smaller. "I'm nothing." "Oh please, it was nothing special." It looks like modesty. It is the same position math, only with the person choosing the back of the line.

The humility that announces itself. "I'm a simple person." "I don't care about those things." Someone who needs to announce their own simplicity is asking for approval for it, and feeling better than people who aren't simple.

The humility of exhaustion. Someone who is worn out or depressed may accept everything and react to nothing. It looks like Humility. It is lack of energy. That is not treated as pride. It is treated with care, and sometimes with professional help.

True Humility doesn't make itself smaller, doesn't announce itself and isn't tired. It has the energy to react and chooses not to react from pride.

What Humility unlocks

There are fifty-one human needs. Every person has all of them, in different degrees. Pride meddles with several of them at once. It inflates some and blocks others.

What pride inflates:

- **Having importance.** This is the need that pride is. Everyone needs a minimum of it so as not to be left out. In pride, it becomes the center of life.

- **Competing.** Useful when resources are scarce or in sports. In pride, every relationship becomes a contest.
- **Being seen by your social circle.** Colleagues, acquaintances, followers: that is where the audience is. In pride, the person multiplies relationships that serve as mirrors.

What pride blocks:

- **Having a deep bond.** Being fully known by at least one person. Pride won't allow it, because it can't stand being seen at its worst.
- **Being who you are.** The more importance the person seeks, the more they live a character made to please.
- **Growing.** Someone who already thinks they are the best has nowhere to go. Someone who is afraid of looking worse runs away from exactly the difficulty in which people grow.
- **Learning.** Learning requires admitting you don't know.
- **Giving without an audience.** Pride either doesn't give, because giving is losing, or gives in order to be seen giving.

And there is one that pride distorts from both sides: **trusting and being trustworthy.** Either the person needs to look trustworthy at any cost, and tends to the image instead of the conduct. Or they trust no one, because they see in the other person the same competition they carry inside.

Humility doesn't do all this on its own. It does one thing only: it takes pride out of command. With that, what was inflated goes back to the right size, and what was blocked comes loose. That is why it is the root. Not because it solves everything, but because it unlocks everything.

Why it comes first

Humility is the first virtue of the Pyramid, which you met in chapter 9. It doesn't need any other virtue before it, and all the other thirty-two need it, directly or indirectly.

As long as pride is in command, everything you train will serve it. Without Humility, Acceptance becomes resignation, Forgiveness becomes a performance, Individuation becomes a shop window, Patience becomes superiority, Gentleness becomes a defensive calm. Generosity becomes a shop window. First you take pride out of command. Then you build the rest.

There is another reason. Pride closes the door through which error comes in. And without receiving the error signal, the brain learns nothing: not how to accept a loss, not how to be patient, not how to forgive. Humility reopens that door. That is why it appears in almost every virtue combination, for almost every kind of suffering.

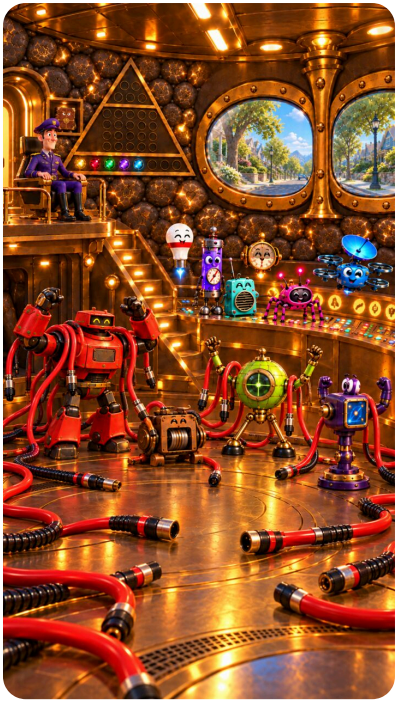
It's not a decision. It's training

Nobody becomes humble by deciding to be humble. Pride lives in old circuits that don't obey good intentions. What changes those circuits is repetition.

The brain changes with use. Each time you do something new, a connection between neurons forms. Each time you repeat it, it gets stronger. Humility is built this way: by replacing, little by little, the information that says "my worth depends on what the other person sees in me" and "rejection is being abandoned by the pack."

In the brain, this has a shape. Humility doesn't switch off the teams from chapter 6. It changes what feeds each one. The reward center stops lighting up only when you move up in position and starts lighting up also with cooperation, with the help nobody saw, with the honest conversation. The body's alarm stops treating criticism as a death threat. The brake and editor at the front of the brain stops working for the disguise and starts holding back the reaction so you can choose a different one. And the mind spends less time chewing over its own importance.

When that information changes, criticism stops hurting like a death threat. The other person's success stops being your loss. A correction goes back to being just a correction, and an unanswered message goes back to being just an unanswered message.



The cables fall to the floor, and each crew member goes back to their own color.

In the command cabin, this is the Captain waking up. He takes the cap off whoever was in the chair, the red cables fall, and each crew member goes back to their own color. With each practice cycle, the golden jewel of Humility sits more firmly in the first slot of the Pyramid Panel.

The scolding ladder

One scene shows clearly how Humility comes in. Your boss scolds you in a voice message, and your friends heard it. Here are five ways to react, from the most primitive to the most mature:

1. "I feel like punching him."
2. "I'm furious. I curse him out with my friends."
3. "I tell everyone it didn't shake me. I make a point of showing I kept my composure."
4. "I feel exposed and explain to my friends what happened."
5. "I make a joke at my own expense."

The third rung looks the most controlled, and it is the most deceptive. Notice the "I tell everyone" and the "I make a point of showing." The person knows what humility is and puts it on display. They need others to see their calm. It is not the calm that gives the pride away. It is the need to display it. Someone who really wasn't shaken doesn't need to announce it. On the fourth rung, the pause already appears, but the math is still being done: the person recognizes the pride and still reacts to it. On the fifth, worth no longer depends on position. The scolding is just a scolding.

The sign that it has come in

The clearest sign is **the pause**.

Picture a concrete scene. Your boss corrects you in front of the team. Before, the response came out instantly: the justification, the raised voice, the counterattack. With Humility, something different happens. You feel the heat in your face. And instead of

obeying it, you take one breath. You listen to the end. You say, "That's true." Or you ask, "What do you suggest?"

The anger may still be there. The difference is that it no longer gives the order. That gap between what happens and what you do is where Humility works. When it appears where it didn't exist before, Humility has come in, even if you still can't explain what changed.

Another sign: **the first mistake you manage to admit without defending yourself.**

And another, lighter one: being able to talk about your own difficulty with good humor.

The three signals in the body

Pride almost always gives warning in the body before it acts. It is worth learning to recognize three families of signals:

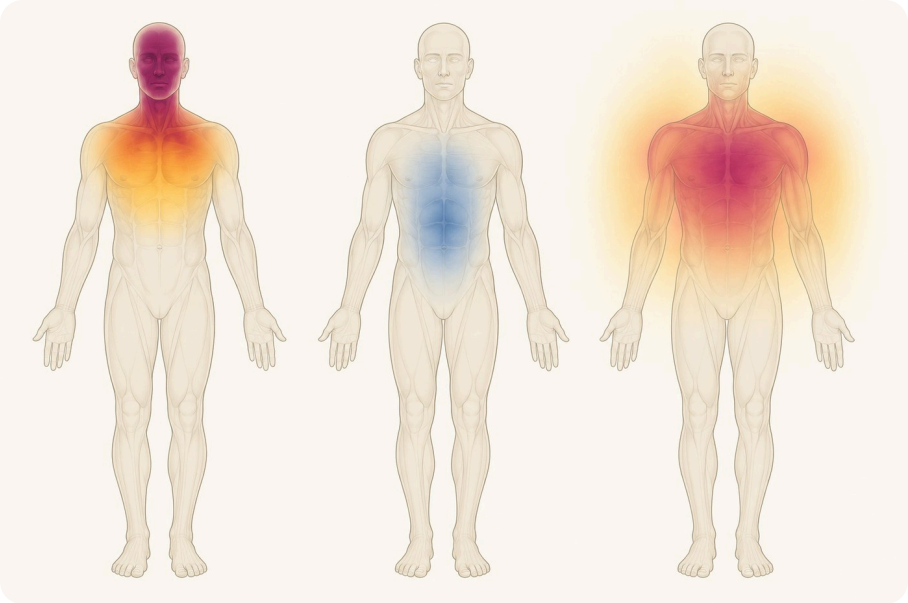


Figure 5 · The three signals in the body. On the left, **humiliation**: heat in the face and throat. In the middle, **exclusion**: emptiness in the chest and stomach, with a drop in energy. On the right, **superiority**: the chest expanding beyond its outline. This last one is the least recognized, because it feels good.

- **Humiliation:** heat in the face, tightness in the chest in the face of criticism. It tends to be stronger in people who went through painful exposure at school, in the family or at work.
- **Exclusion:** withdrawal, coldness, a sense of being left out. It tends to be stronger in people who experienced rejection early.
- **Superiority:** puffed-up chest, raised chin, a slight contempt. This one is deceptive, because it feels like well-being. It is not a sign that things are going well. It is pride in action.

The work is not to make these signals disappear. It is to **feel the signal and not obey it.** The signal stops being an order and

becomes information.

The four stages of the crossing

Knowing you are proud doesn't solve anything. "I've become aware of my pride," the person says, as if naming it were already a cure. It isn't. Between seeing the flaw and living the virtue there is a crossing, and it usually has four stages.

1. The confrontation: starting to see. Pride is, at the same time, the flaw and the blindfold. The first stage is the blindfold falling. A clear sign: the person stops saying "people think I'm proud" and starts saying "I just saw my pride."

2. Shame: seeing yourself as you are. When the blindfold falls, it hurts. The whole architecture of superiority that held the person up falls with it. The feeling of being worthless may come. This stage has no deadline.

> *"When I came face to face with my pride, I stayed in a state of shame for almost a year - I took an entire sabbatical to get through it."*

There is an important difference here. One kind of shame moves you: "I did this, and I don't want to do it anymore." Another kind makes you sick: "I'm no good." The first is a path. The second is pride again, turned inside out. Seeing your own pride is different from condemning yourself for it. If the shame turns into "I'm no

good" and doesn't pass, talk to someone you trust or seek help from a professional.

> *"Shame is a stage, not a dwelling."*

3. The decision: interrupting the automatic mark. The decision doesn't happen at a retreat. It happens at the trigger, at the instant pride would rise. The person recognizes it and doesn't carry it out.

4. The new way of functioning. With repetition, the new way becomes the natural way. That doesn't mean pride never shows up again.

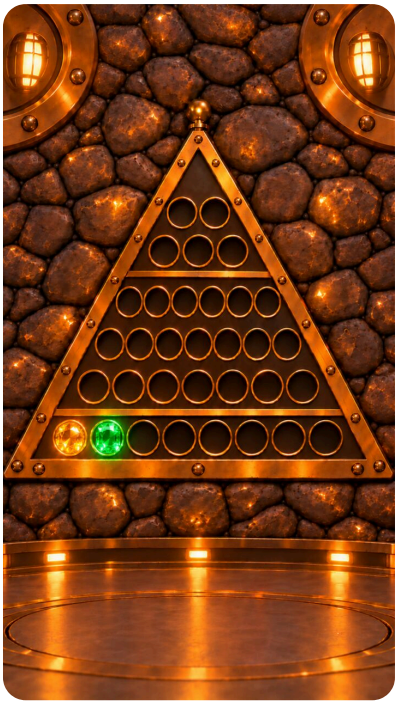
> *"A consolidated virtue is not the impossibility of the flaw - it is its stable improbability."*

And the crossing is not a straight staircase. It is a spiral. You will pass through the same places again, each time at a higher point. A relapse is not a sentence. Be careful with the phrase "see, I never change." It is also pride: the demand to be finished already.

When the crossing moves forward, a simple phrase tends to appear, said with relief: "now I'm myself."

CHAPTER 28

The Way Out of Selfishness: Selflessness



The jewel of Selflessness, emerald green, goes into the second slot of the Pyramid.

The way out of selfishness also has a name: **Selflessness**.

The summary fits in two questions. What is selfishness? **Me first.** What is Selflessness? **The other person first.**

And then comes the hard part. For the other person to come first, you have to overcome your own instinct. Autopilot keeps saying

"first I take care of myself." Selflessness doesn't silence that voice. It builds a different response on top of it.

What it is, and what it isn't

Selflessness means **renunciation**. Renouncing your own wants and desires, setting them aside for later so that the other person comes first.

But the word needs cleaning up, just as Humility did.

Selflessness is not erasing yourself. It is not disappearing, having no wants, living for others without existing. Selflessness doesn't erase the person. It reorganizes the math.

Selflessness is not giving in with anger. Imagine you wanted to go to the beach and your child gets sick. Of course you stay and take care of them. But if you give up the beach and stay angry, the anger will come out somewhere: in drinking, in traffic, at your partner. And nobody will know where it came from. Renouncing without Selflessness is postponing the bill, not paying it.

Selflessness is not sacrifice in order to be seen. Someone who sacrifices so that others see the sacrifice is using Selflessness as a outfit for pride. That is why it comes after Humility, and never without it.

From renunciation comes fullness

Here is what selfishness doesn't believe.

Desire is born from a lack. When you fulfill a desire, a peak of pleasure comes. But the lack isn't resolved. The peak passes in moments or in days, and you need more, or you need to switch desires. You saw this in addiction.

When you do something real for another person, something else happens. It is not a peak. It is a state of **fullness**, of being complete, that no fulfilled desire gives.

The primitive brain doesn't know this. To it, fulfilling desire is natural, and renouncing seems like it will be unpleasant. That is why Selflessness has to be trained: the brain only believes after it experiences. Until the person feels, in their own body, that giving to the other person also brings pleasure, that letting the other person eat first doesn't threaten their survival, they will stay in "me first." It is a process.

What happens in the brain

In the cabin · the hoses come loose

- **The Radar** (temporoparietal junction, TPJ) and **the Sensor Panel** (insula) start being called in on purpose. They rewrite the **Altimeter**'s math in the other person's favor.
- **The Double Mirror** goes back to showing two faces: yours and the other person's, with different wants.
- **The Fuel Gauge** learns a new source of pleasure: giving.

Selflessness doesn't suppress Autopilot. The urgency to survive is still there. What changes is the layer on top.

In a selfish person, considering the other person takes effort: the brain has to call in the Radar on purpose. Selflessness is the daily exercise of doing exactly that. It is not erasing the old path. It is building a new road beside it, a more efficient one. With repetition, consideration for the other person becomes automatic, the same way the priority of the self is automatic today.

And there is a beautiful detail. The reward center that, when hijacked, produces addiction is the same one Selflessness uses. When giving to the other person starts to have value of its own, the Fuel Gauge rises with helping, and not only with gaining. It is the exact reversal of the chain of selfishness. The fullness you read about above has this shape.

Studies on compassion training point in the same direction: with practice, the regions of empathy change, and behavior changes with them.

Why it comes with Humility

Humility and Selflessness open the Pyramid together. They are the first two jewels. One works on pride. The other, on selfishness.

The order is: **Humility first.** Selflessness without Humility becomes showing off. The person helps in order to be seen helping, renounces in order to be admired for the renunciation. It is Pride wearing the outfit of Selflessness.

Humility, so that renunciation isn't a show for an audience. Selflessness, so that the other person enters the math.

And Selflessness is the base of other virtues. Someone who can't put the other person first can't wait for them, so **Patience** calls for Selflessness first. **Helping Others** also calls for it, because it is Selflessness reaching the hands. And it is part of the base of **Gentleness**.

The sign that it has come in

In Humility, the sign is the pause. In Selflessness, the sign is different, and it can also be seen from the outside:

The other person starts to have wants of their own in the way you talk.

Notice when you tell someone about your day. Before, other people showed up as scenery: the boss who got in the way, the child who asked for something, the line that took forever. When Selflessness comes in, they show up with their own wants. "My son needed attention today." "I think my colleague was afraid of making a mistake."

And another sign: **renunciation stops hurting.** You leave the last slice, and you don't keep a tally of it in your head.

The three signals in the body

Selfishness also gives warning in the body before it acts. There are three families of signals:

- **The urgency of your own pleasure:** a heat rising in the chest, the impulse to go get the thing.
- **Subtle contempt for the other person:** a slight tightening of aversion, short breath, the feeling of "that's none of my business."
- **The expansion of entitlement:** the puffed-up chest, the feeling, deep inside, that you deserve it.

The work is the same as with Humility: **feel the signal and not obey it.**

What Selflessness unlocks

Just as Humility unlocks what pride locked up, Selflessness unlocks what selfishness locked up.

- **The bond.** Someone who only looks at themselves is not truly looked at. With the other person in the math, relationships stop being an exchange and become an encounter.
- **Self-control.** The weight of the other person and the weight of your tomorrow depend on the same operation. Someone who learns to wait for the other person learns to wait for themselves.

- **The way out of addiction.** To overcome addiction to anything, the most effective path is to develop Selflessness, always with Humility first and, when needed, together with treatment.
- **Fullness.** The pleasure of giving doesn't pass in moments. It stays.

The hero

Think of the story of any hero, in a movie, in a book, in a tradition. The hero is only a hero because he set aside his own wants, his own comfort, sometimes his own life, for another person.

Each of us can be that hero in our own life, for the people close by. And who is our neighbor? Not only family, not only the group you chose to help. It is everyone.

A question to take with you: **from zero to ten, how much do I live for my own wants? And how much do I shift my actions toward someone besides me?** Ask yourself this every day. Did the person who lives with me need something? Did a colleague need a phone call to be heard?

CHAPTER 29

A Fourteen-Day Practice



Humility is recorded in the brain through practice. Here is the complete path to do at home, alone or with someone. Everything you need is in this book and in a notebook.

One virtue at a time. Fourteen days. About twenty-five minutes a day: fifteen to twenty in the morning, five at night. Same place, same time. Plus two practices a week.

Every morning

Prepare. Same place, same time, notifications silenced (WhatsApp, social media), only the notebook and this book open.

One breath. Notice which of the three signals is present today.

Study. For the first three days, calmly reread chapter 27 of this book, all of it. From the fourth day on, it is enough to reread the definition of Humility and the sentence below, in one minute.

Each of the thirty-three virtues has a short sentence like this one, made to be remembered throughout the day, at the moment pride rises. This is the sentence for Humility:

> *"I am virtue embodied as Humility. I see myself as I am, without needing to make myself seem more or less than I am. I acknowledge my limitations without belittling myself, and I acknowledge my gifts without puffing myself up. I do not need to defeat others to exist."*

Read the Humility affirmation out loud, once, feeling your voice in your chest. Then **write it by hand, once,** in your Humility notebook. It is not for memorizing. The affirmation is longer than the sentence. It goes through pride's outfits, one by one:

I am virtue embodied as Humility.
I no longer seek importance. I do not want to be more important than others. I master my pride.
Vanity no longer rules me. Arrogance is not part of me. For I master my pride.
I no longer want to control things and people. I embrace others with their flaws and imperfections. I accept the setbacks of life. I master my pride.
I do not seek recognition. I do not seek applause. I master my pride.
I do not engage in violent communication. I speak and make my decisions with gentleness. I master my pride.
I don't need to be the first. It doesn't matter if I'm not the best. For I master my pride.
I face my life's tragedies with Good Humor. Bad moods and irritability are no longer part of my life. I master my pride.
Voracity and gluttony are not part of my life. Wrath and revenge are not part of my life. I master my pride.
Shame and shyness are not part of me. Laziness and procrastination are not part of me. I master my pride.
I love and help my neighbor. I do not judge people who are different or who have made mistakes. For I master my pride.
I treat everyone with equality and brotherhood. I never feel humiliated or exposed. I master my pride.
I am grateful for life. I master my pride.

Meditate for ten minutes. Quiet your body. Then, three moves.

Choose the scene. Think of the situation most likely to set off your pride today. Someone will correct you. Someone will disagree with you. Someone will get the compliment you were expecting. Someone will do it better.

See the scene in detail. Who is there, where, what is said. Feel which of the three signals rises in your body.

Rehearse the response. The pause, the breath, and the sentence that comes after. It might be "tell me more." It might be "that's true, I was wrong." It might be a silence that isn't contempt.

Imagining the scene in detail activates some of the same circuits as acting. It is the closest you can get to practicing before the moment comes. Without the concrete scene, it is relaxation. With it, it is training.

Recall, without looking at anything. Close the notebook. Where have I applied Humility since yesterday? Where did I fail? What does it ask of me today? Don't try to remember the sentence. Remember what you did.

Build your trigger statement. In the format "if this happens, I will do that." Redo it every two or three days. Some examples:

> *If my boss corrects me in front of the team, I will take a breath, say "that's true," and ask what they suggest.*
>
> *If someone disagrees with me, I will listen until they finish before responding. And I will say what they are right about before saying what I disagree with.*
>
> *If I feel the heat in my face, I will silently name it "pride" and wait ten seconds.*
>
> *If I need help and my pride says no, I will ask anyway.*

During the day

One real situation a day. Choose one:

- accept a criticism without defending yourself;
- ask for help you could do without;
- admit a mistake out loud.

If the situation doesn't come, go looking for one.

Every night

Five lines in the notebook:

1. Where did pride go off today, and which signal in my body gave the warning?
2. What did I do?
3. If I failed: what set it off, and what was pride protecting?

4. What will I do next time?
5. If I got it right: what did I feel?

No punishing yourself. No praising yourself.

The day you failed is not a lost day. It is the most valuable day of the cycle, as long as the mistake is looked at and not hidden. Someone who only writes down the successes is, once again, tending to the image.

Then sleep. Dark room, phone away from the bed, regular schedule. It is during sleep that the day gets recorded.

Twice a week

A situation created on purpose. Once a week, ask someone you trust for direct criticism about yourself. And listen to the end, without answering.

The Ten-Question Reflection Circle. Once a week, answer these questions out loud, with another person or in a group. Nobody corrects anybody.

1. What irritates me more: what people say, or who was listening?
2. The last time I lost my temper, what was I really defending?
3. Where do I belittle myself, thinking I am being polite — and whose interests does that serve?
4. What was the last thing I did not try for fear of making a mistake in front of others?

5. When someone disagrees with me, do I listen to their argument — or count how many people are on my side?
6. What help did I avoid asking for this week so I would not seem to need it?
7. Do I advertise my simplicity? Do I advertise what I have? To whom?
8. What do I feel when someone does better than I do — and what do I do with that feeling?
9. If no one praised anything I did for a month, would I keep doing things the same way?
10. What bubble am I in — and whom have I stopped listening to in order to stay in it?

If there is no one, answer in writing and read each answer out loud to yourself. At the first opportunity, go back to doing the circle with someone.

Afterward

Four reviews. The fourteen-day cycle is over. Now come four short reviews, on set dates: 7 days, 30 days, 90 days and 180 days after the last day of the cycle. Put all four dates in your calendar on the day you finish.

Reviewing is not doing the cycle again. It is a four-minute conversation with yourself, with the notebook closed and without rereading anything. You answer three questions from memory:

- Where have I applied Humility since the last review?
- Where did pride win?
- What will I do from here on?

Only after answering, open the notebook and write down the answers. If your life has changed and the trigger statement, the one with "if this happens, I will do that," no longer fits, write a new one.

Why review? Because the brain forgets what it doesn't use. Recalling without looking, at longer and longer intervals, is what tells the brain that this is still important. It is what keeps the Humility trained in the cycle recorded months later.

If Humility calls for another cycle, take a break of two to four days before starting again. Don't run one cycle straight into the next.

One day you will be able to explain Humility to someone, in your own words, without looking at this book. It is not a step of the practice. It is the sign that it has been inscribed.

Fourteen days open the door. They don't finish the work. Humility is the virtue that calls for the most cycles, because it is the ground of all the others. It usually takes three to six cycles over six months to a year to settle in, and a few years of practice to consolidate. That is no reason to lose heart. It is the real size of the work.

The second cycle: Selflessness

Once the Humility cycle is over and the two-to-four-day break is done, Selflessness comes next. The format is the same: fourteen days, about twenty-five minutes a day, same place, same time, plus two practices a week. The content changes. And Humility doesn't leave the stage: it continues in the scheduled reviews, because Selflessness only settles in with it.

Prepare. Same place, same time, notifications silenced. One breath. Notice which of the three signals of selfishness is present today: the urgency for personal pleasure, subtle contempt for the other person, or the expansion of entitlement.

Study. For the first three days, calmly reread the chapter on Selflessness, all of it. From the fourth day on, it is enough to reread the sentence below, in one minute. This is the sentence for Selflessness, to remember throughout the day, at the moment "me first" rises:

> *"I am virtue embodied as selflessness. I forgo excessive personal pleasure to serve the other person's true needs. I master the impulse for immediate pleasure and give, without expecting anything in return, what is within my power to give."*

Read the Selflessness affirmation out loud, once, and **write it by hand, once,** in your Selflessness notebook:

> *I am virtue embodied as selflessness.*
> *I raise my consciousness and understand that my evolution comes from love and charity. I master my selfishness.*
> *My needs are not the priority. The priority is my neighbor. I master my selfishness.*
> *I do not let my daily commitments blind me to my neighbor's suffering. I master my selfishness.*
> *I do not put my desires and pleasures before my neighbor's needs. I put myself in the other person's shoes and feel their pain. I put myself in the other person's shoes and understand their view of the world. I master my selfishness.*
> *I master my primitive instincts and do not see the other as a threat. I master my selfishness.*

Meditate for ten minutes, with the same three moves. **Choose the scene** where selfishness is likely to show up today: splitting the bill, the colleague's request at the wrong time, the call that interrupts your rest. **See the scene in detail** and feel which signal rises in your body. **Rehearse the response:** the pause, and the other person first.

Build your trigger statement. Some examples:

> *If someone asks me for help when I'm busy, I will stop, look at the person and ask what they need before saying whether I can.*
> *If I feel the urge to take the last piece, I will offer it first.*
> *If I'm about to tell about my day, I will first ask about the other person's day, and listen to the end.*

During the day, one real situation. Choose one:

- give up a choice that was yours (the movie, the restaurant, the seat);
- do something for someone that no one will see;
- notice someone's need before they ask.

Every night, five lines in the notebook:

1. Where did "me first" go off today, and which signal in my body gave the warning?
2. What did I do?
3. If I failed: what set it off, and what was selfishness protecting?
4. Who needed something today, and I didn't see it?
5. If I got it right: what did I feel? Was it a peak, or did it stay?

No punishing yourself. No praising yourself. And no announcing to anyone what you did for others. Selflessness that gets told becomes a shop window.

Afterward, the same four reviews, at 7, 30, 90 and 180 days.

CHAPTER 30

Toolbox

Some questions and exercises to use when pride shows up. You don't need to use all of them. Choose the ones that work for you.

Questions for the notebook

- What bothers me more: what they say, or who was listening?
- The last time I lost my temper, what was I really defending?
- Where do I make myself smaller thinking I'm being polite, and who does that serve?
- When someone disagrees with me, do I listen to the argument or count who is on my side?
- Do I announce my simplicity? Do I announce what I have? To whom?
- What do I feel when someone does better than me, and what do I do with it?
- What bubble am I in, and whom did I stop listening to in order to stay in it?
- When I do this, what do I feel: pleasure or relief?
- And when nobody comments, what happens to me?
- What part of this conflict is mine?

Exercises

The same voice. For one week, notice how you talk to three people: the doorman, your colleague and your boss. Does your tone change? Does your attention span get shorter? Does your posture adjust? The exercise is to use the same voice with all three.

Celebrate the person you envy. Choose someone you feel envy toward and acknowledge, out loud or in writing, a real merit of that person.

Describe instead of labeling. When you are about to judge someone, swap the label for a description. Instead of "he's arrogant," "he talked about himself many times, in a very assertive tone." The verdict loses force.

The cost of the defense. Think of one of your defenses, like the need to be right or to control. Calculate how much energy you spend, twenty-four hours a day, all year long, keeping up that defense. Compare it with the cost of facing, once, what it avoids.

The three sentences. Practice saying, in real situations: "I was wrong," "I hadn't thought of it that way," "I need to revisit my position."

The refrain question. When you read the Humility sentence, ask: what does this sentence ask of me now? Where, today, will it cost me? Who will receive its effect?

Laugh at yourself. Tell someone, lightheartedly, about a mistake you made this week.

For selfishness

Questions for the notebook

- From zero to ten, how much do I live for my own wants? And how much do I shift my actions toward someone besides me?
- Who needed something today, and I didn't see it?
- When I tell about my day, do others appear with wants of their own, or only as scenery?
- What renunciation did I make this week and stay angry about? Where did that anger come out?
- What immediate relief do I seek when I'm tired? Who goes without me in the meantime?

Exercises

The other person first, once a day. In a small situation, let the other person choose first: the seat, the piece, the movie. Notice the signal that rises in your body, and don't obey it.

The help nobody sees. Do something for someone without that person knowing it was you. Don't tell anyone.

Ask before telling. Before talking about your day, ask about the other person's day. And listen to the end.

Switch sides. In a conflict, write out the situation from the other person's point of view, in the first person, as if you were them. Then read it out loud.

CHAPTER 31

The Path Afterward

Humility doesn't work alone. Each family of pride calls for other virtues, and they come in **after** it, never before. The table follows the three levels of the Pyramid, which you saw in chapter 9: first the Treatment Foundation, then the middle, last the top.

Family	In the Treatment Foundation, after Humility	In the middle	At the top
Display of worth	Individuation	Truth; further on, Nonattachment	—
Comparison and competitiveness	Selflessness, Responsibility, State of Certainty	Gratitude	Fraternity, Equality
Reactivity to criticism	Acceptance	Truth, Good Humor	—
Dominance and revenge	Selflessness, Forgiveness	Truth, Reconciliation	—
Control and resistance to change	Acceptance, State of Certainty	Patience, Flexibility	—
Moral arrogance	—	Gentleness, Purity of Heart, Nonjudgment	Equality

What each one calls for first

No virtue comes alone. Each one needs others already underway. This is the list of the ones that appear in this book:

- **Selflessness, Acceptance and Individuation:** call for Humility.

- **Forgiveness:** calls for Humility and goes together with Acceptance.
- **Responsibility:** calls for Humility and goes together with Acceptance and Forgiveness.
- **State of Certainty:** calls for Humility and goes together with Acceptance.
- **Gentleness:** calls for Humility, Acceptance and Perseverance.
- **Patience:** calls for Humility and Selflessness.
- **Good Humor:** calls for Humility, Acceptance and Forgiveness.
- **Gratitude:** calls for Acceptance and Responsibility.
- **Truth:** calls for Humility and Responsibility.
- **Purity of Heart:** goes together with Truth.
- **Nonjudgment:** calls for Humility and goes together with Patience and Truth.
- **Flexibility:** calls for Humility, Acceptance and Individuation.
- **Reconciliation:** calls for Forgiveness.
- **Nonattachment:** calls for Individuation and Acceptance.
- **Fraternity:** calls for Individuation, Acceptance and Forgiveness.
- **Equality:** calls for Humility and the whole path of the Treatment Foundation and the middle.

The order is not a detail. A virtue worked on out of order becomes one more outfit for pride. You saw this in every chapter:

Truth that becomes a display of sincerity, Forgiveness that becomes superiority, Patience that becomes "I'm above this," Nonjudgment that becomes pride in not judging.

> *"Individuation without Humility becomes egomania."*

Where to go after Humility depends on the outfit your pride wears most. Go back to the chapter on the family you recognized yourself in most and start with the first virtue on the list, one per fourteen-day cycle.

The path after Selflessness

Selfishness, isolation and cold affection call for their own virtue combination. It starts with the two from the Treatment Foundation you met in Part IV and climbs to the top of the Pyramid:

Humility → Selflessness → Love of Neighbor · Helping Others · Fraternity · Equality

- **Humility:** always comes first, so that renunciation doesn't become a show for an audience.
- **Selflessness:** calls for Humility.
- **Love of Neighbor:** from the top. Calls for Acceptance and Forgiveness, and goes together with Helping Others. Without Acceptance, you love what the other person should be, not

what they are. Without Forgiveness, love stops at whoever hurt you.

- **Helping Others:** from the top. Calls for Selflessness and Usefulness, and goes together with Love of Neighbor. Love is the feeling. Helping is the action.
- **Fraternity:** from the top. Calls for Individuation, Acceptance and Forgiveness.
- **Equality:** the last one. Calls for the whole path of the Treatment Foundation and the middle.

When selfishness shows up as addiction, compulsion or impulsiveness, the combination is different: **Humility, Selflessness, Truth, Gentleness, Patience, Responsibility and Acceptance.** And always alongside treatment, when it is needed.

The sign that Love of Neighbor has come in is concrete: someone steps on your foot, and the first thing that comes up is whether they got hurt. The sign for Helping Others is concrete too: you help when it wasn't a good time.

CHAPTER 32

To Take With You

- Pride is the primitive need to have importance in order to be accepted, and so to feel safe. It is not a character flaw. It is a survival alarm.
- It is not an excess of self-love. It is usually a lack of it.
- It works like a calculation: how much am I worth compared with the other person?
- That calculation wears six outfits: display of worth, comparison, reactivity to criticism, dominance, control and moral arrogance.
- There is overt pride and concealed pride. Shyness, shame, making yourself smaller and even virtue on display are also its outfits.
- Underneath inflated importance, what is usually missing is trust and feeling loved. Importance is not love.
- The way out is Humility: stepping out of the math. It is not making yourself smaller.
- It is built through training, and the sign that it has come in is the pause between what happens and what you do.
- Seeing your pride hurts. Shame is a stage, not a dwelling.
- The other virtues come after Humility, never before.

On selfishness

- Selfishness is "me first": putting your own needs ahead and forgetting the other person's. It is also born from survival.
- Pride asks "am I more or am I less?" Selfishness asks "is it mine or is it yours?"
- The essence of selfishness is not excess. It is the lack of the correction that would put the other person into the math.
- It shows up in five forms: aggressiveness, addiction, indifference, control and transgression. It is a single system.
- The way out of selfishness is Selflessness: the other person first. It is not erasing yourself, nor giving in with anger, nor sacrificing yourself in order to be seen.
- Selflessness comes after Humility, never before. The sign that it has come in is the other person starting to have wants of their own in the way you talk.
- The two on the bench don't leave through a fight. They leave when the Captain wakes up, and that can be trained.

CHAPTER 33

Handle with Care

This is a self-reflection book. It does not diagnose, it does not replace treatment and it does not promise a cure.

Pride and selfishness explain a lot, but they don't explain everything. An injury, a neurological illness, a psychiatric condition, chronic pain are not "a lack of humility" or "selfishness." If you live with a diagnosis, follow your treatment. This book walks beside it, never in its place.

If while reading you felt anger, shame or the urge to close the book, that is information, not failure. Write down in your notebook the passage and what you felt. That is almost always where the real work begins.

And if any chapter brought you more pain than you can carry right now, stop. Talk to someone you trust and, if you need to, seek help from a professional before going on.

PART V

After This Book

CHAPTER 34

What the Virtues Are

Throughout the book, the word **virtue** has appeared many times. It is worth saying clearly what it means here.

Virtue is not a moral quality of people who were born good. It is not a sermon, nor a rule of behavior. **Virtue is a competence.** It is a way of perceiving and reacting that is learned, trained and installed in the brain, the same way you learn to play an instrument or speak another language.

In the command cabin, each virtue is a jewel. When it settles in, it fits into the Pyramid Panel and lights up. And then three things happen. The cables and hoses on some crew members fall off for good. The Captain gets an insignia on his uniform. And the dark stones in the wall linked to that theme start turning golden.

There are thirty-three virtues, organized in a three-level pyramid. The Treatment Foundation has eight: Humility, Selflessness, Acceptance, Forgiveness, Individuation, Responsibility, State of Certainty and Perseverance. The middle has twenty. The top has five, all turned toward the other person.

Three rules apply to all of them:

One at a time. One virtue per fourteen-day cycle. Switching virtues too soon keeps the brain from recording.

Never alone. Each virtue calls for others before it. Whoever skips the Treatment Foundation builds a facade, and facades fall.

Training, not decision. Nobody becomes humble because they decided to. What changes the brain is repetition, in the right place, for the right amount of time.

The sign that a virtue has settled in usually shows up backward. One day you notice, after the fact: "I didn't even get upset." You didn't control the reaction. It simply didn't come.

CHAPTER 35

What I Offer

I am Isabella Becker. **I train your brain.**

The work I do is called **PRM, Personality Reconstruction Matrix**. It is one-on-one guidance for people who already understand a lot about themselves and want to turn that understanding into a response that also holds up under pressure.

You read, in this book, that pride and selfishness don't yield to argument. That they live in old circuits, and that the way out is training. PRM is that training, done as a pair.

It has three moves:

Map. Discover, precisely, who is in command of your cabin. Which outfits your pride wears most, where your selfishness shows up, which needs are out of place, what your temperament is, which dark stones light up most easily.

Understand. Before any exercise, you learn how your brain works and why that virtue, and not another, is the next one. The work only moves forward when you can explain this in your own words.

Train. The fourteen-day practice for each virtue, built for your life, with your scenes, in the right order of the Pyramid.

It is the same logic as this book, only tailor-made. And with someone beside you to notice what you, alone, can't see, because everyone has a blind spot.

The first step is an initial conversation, free of charge, to see whether there is a fit between you, your moment and the method.

Due to high demand, I work with a small number of clients at a time.

I want to talk about PRM

Message me on WhatsApp

CHAPTER 36

About the Author



Isabella Becker is a Human Development Advisor, virtologist, International Director of Instituto Virtudes and founder of PRM, Personality Reconstruction Matrix.

She lives in Grainau, in the Bavarian Alps, in Germany, and works online with people from all over the world.

She is the creator of **Virtue Inside**, the series in which the crew of this book teaches, in images, how the mind works and how the virtues settle in.

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- Instagram: @alchemyofvirtues, where the Virtue Inside series runs daily
- Website: alchemyofvirtues.com
- Blog, with free articles: alchemyofvirtues.com/blog

- All books and courses: produtos.alquimiadasvirtudes.com/en
- WhatsApp: +49 163 9643336



CHAPTER 37

Going Deeper

If this book stirred something in you, these are the next steps.



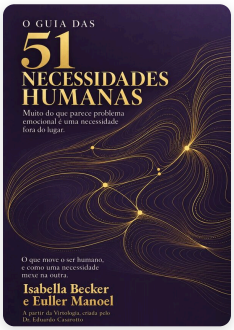
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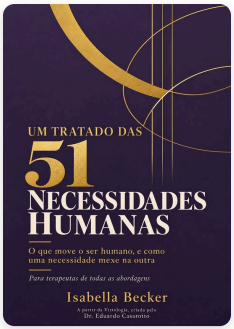


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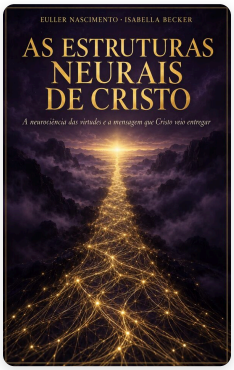


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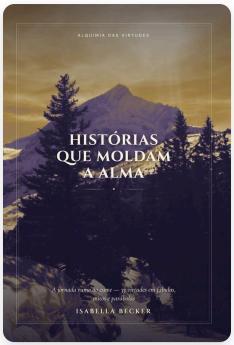


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Join the waitlist

Appendix 1 · The Twenty Behaviors of Pride, by Family

This list is a mirror, not a test. Use it to observe yourself, not to give yourself a label.

Display of worth

- **Constant need for recognition:** needing someone to see and comment on what you did in order to feel it was worth it.
- **Self-aggrandizement:** inflating what you did, what you have or what you know in order to seem more important.
- **Intellectual vanity:** needing to show you know more, correcting people in public, turning the conversation into a lecture.
- **Bodily vanity:** caring for your body less for health and more to be admired and desired.
- **Spiritual vanity:** needing others to know how much you pray, meditate or "have already evolved." It also belongs to moral arrogance.
- **Need to impress:** choosing your clothes, car, restaurant and words for the effect they will have.
- **Lust as a search for validation:** using conquest as proof of worth: "if I'm desired, I'm worth something."

Comparison and competitiveness

- **Comparing yourself with others:** measuring yourself all the time against whoever is next to you and feeling the other person's success as your loss.
- **Extreme competitiveness:** turning any situation into a contest, and not being able to stand losing even at a board game.

Reactivity to criticism and defense of the ego

- **Resistance to criticism:** experiencing any remark as an attack and responding with justification or a counterattack.
- **Difficulty admitting mistakes:** preferring to stay wrong rather than admit the mistake, or apologizing with a "but" in the middle.
- **Difficulty asking for help:** carrying everything alone so as not to look like you need anyone.
- **Rejection of vulnerability:** hiding pain, fear and fragility, and believing that crying in front of others is weakness.

Dominance, contempt and manipulation

- **Contempt for other people's opinions:** interrupting, rolling your eyes, treating the other person's opinion as lesser.
- **Emotional manipulation:** using guilt, silence or tears to get what you want.

- **Need to always be right:** needing the last word, even in an argument about nothing.
- **Lack of empathy:** not considering what the other person feels, because considering it would weaken the superiority.
- **In the same orbit, revenge:** striking back at an offense to regain your post, even at a high price.

Control and resistance to change

- **Need for control:** needing people and situations to go your way, and feeling the unexpected as an offense.
- **Resistance to change:** defending the old way even when it doesn't work, because changing would mean admitting you were wrong.

Moral arrogance

- **Moral arrogance:** feeling morally above others and judging harshly those who don't follow your standards.

Concealed pride

These outfits look like the opposite of pride. On the inside, they do the same position math (see The disguise).

- **Shyness and fear of exposure:** staying quiet so as not to risk being criticized. Silence protects the image.
- **Shame:** feeling that your own worth depends on outside approval and doesn't hold up from within.

- **Making yourself smaller:** "I'm nothing," "it was nothing special." It is the same math as someone who puts themselves above, only turned inside out.
- **Hiding your own virtue:** running from praise and refusing to be an example so as not to stand out and be judged.
- **Being ashamed of where you came from:** rejecting your hometown, your family or your native accent.

Appendix 2 · The Five Forms of Selfishness

Like the list for pride, this one is a mirror, not a test.

The core, present in all of them: the Altimeter's scale weighs my gain above the other person's gain, the Double Mirror represents the other person poorly, and the Radar doesn't correct the math.

- **Aggressiveness:** attacking or defending yourself without considering the other person's well-being. In the cabin: the Alarm goes off and the Rein doesn't hold back.
- **Addiction and escapism:** putting immediate relief above responsibilities and people. In the cabin: the Fuel Gauge is captured, and the Black Box and the Fault Light go weak.
- **Emotional indifference:** not recognizing the other person's needs or acting on them. In the cabin: the Sensor Panel and the Fault Light barely light up for the other person.
- **Inflexibility and control:** imposing your own order and not accepting the other person as they are. In the cabin: the Black Box and the Fault Light complain about everything outside the pattern, and the Rein goes rigid.
- **Transgression and corruption:** seeking personal advantage while ignoring the effect on the collective. In the cabin: the

Altimeter and the Black Box calculate the advantage, and the rule loses the contest.

Appendix 3 · Brain Glossary

The abbreviations come from English, the language in which most studies are written. A quick reminder: **m** = medial, the inner surface; **d** = dorsal, the upper part; **dl** = dorsolateral, on top and toward the side; **vm** = ventromedial, underneath and on the inner surface; **PFC** = prefrontal cortex, the front part of the brain.

Region (abbreviation)	In the crew	What it does in pride and in selfishness
SNO · Pride Neurofunctional System	Pride	The whole team that does the math "how much am I worth compared with the other person?"
SNE · Selfishness Neurofunctional System	Selfishness	The whole team that does the math "is it mine or is it yours?"
Brainstem	Autopilot	The urgency to survive: belonging to the group (pride) and securing your own share (selfishness)
Ascending reticular activating system (ARAS)	the Gatekeeper	Lets through only part of what arrives; is adjusted by repetition
PAG · periaqueductal gray	Autopilot	In the brainstem, organizes the attack and defense reaction
Hypothalamus	Autopilot	Together with the brainstem, organizes dominant and attacking behavior (studied mainly in animals)
Amygdala	the Alarm	Threat sensor; perceives who is above and who is below; sets off aggressiveness
Anterior insula	Sensor Panel	Turns emotion into sensation in the body; basis of empathy
dACC · anterior cingulate	Fault Light	Error and pain alarm; makes criticism hurt; signals the conflict between what you want and what you should do
Salience Network	Sensor Panel + Fault Light	Marks "this is important" and sends the warning to the body

Region (abbreviation)	In the crew	What it does in pride and in selfishness
Ventral striatum and **nucleus accumbens**	Fuel Gauge	Reward center: in pride, moving up in position becomes pleasure; in selfishness, immediate relief hijacks command
VTA · ventral tegmental area	fuels the Gauge	Produces dopamine, the "I want more" substance
Caudate	next to the Gauge	Anticipates the pleasure of punishing whoever hurt us; revenge circuit
OFC · orbitofrontal cortex	Black Box	Records how much each thing was worth; reacts to frustration and uncertainty
vmPFC · ventromedial prefrontal cortex	the Altimeter	Measures value and links it to the "self"; in selfishness, it is the scale between my gain and the other person's
dmPFC · dorsomedial prefrontal cortex	Double Mirror	Separates what I want from what the other person wants; compares what I think of myself with what others think
TPJ · temporoparietal junction	the Radar	Imagines what the other person thinks; in pride, puts the audience into the math; in selfishness, it is the counterweight that corrects the scale in the other person's favor
dlPFC · dorsolateral prefrontal cortex	the Rein	The brake and the editor: holds back impulses, chooses the form of what comes out; obeys whoever is in command
Posterior parietal cortex	the Navigator	Says where I am and where to look; holds focus
PCC · posterior cingulate	Radio	Hub of the Default Mode Network; links today's position to your history
DMN · Default Mode Network	the Radio's circuit	The mind that "talks to itself" about its own life; in pride, it chews over its own position
pSTS · posterior superior temporal sulcus	near the Radar	Reads gazes, expressions and intentions
Temporal pole	—	Stores the social value of things and the concepts of right and wrong; basis of moral arrogance
Cortico-striato-thalamic loop	—	Circuit that checks whether everything is in its place; very active in the need for control



The scientific content of this book comes from Virtology, by Dr. Eduardo Casarotto (Fundamentos da Virtologia and lectures); the highlighted quotes are his.

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