

Pride;

On Misconceptions and Prejudice.

An essay by

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Pride is absurd. White Pride, Gay Pride, Latino Pride and Nationalist Pride are only a few examples of the type of vacuous, intellectually distorted, emotional nonsense that people employ all the time. So many people say they have “pride” as if they've only just discovered a new word for which they're looking for even the weakest excuse to use it. The problem I have with this is when people say they're "proud" of something, of which they ought not to be "proud". I know that may sound a bit extreme, a bit harsh. But, if I didn't grab your attention I might not save you from a life of misery. Well, okay, it's not likely actually misery, it's more likely just occasional inaccuracies and misunderstandings. But, the point remains about pride. Pride is a word that is very often used wrongly.

Just to be clear on a few things, before I continue on about pride. When people say “gay pride” perhaps what they mean, what they ought to be saying is, “not ashamed to be gay”. And why not? There is nothing about being gay, which one should be ashamed of, at all. The term, though not synonymous, is understood to mean “unashamed”. Unlike, with racial or ethnic or religious “pride”, which is synonymous, in these cases, with “supremacy”. La Raza, the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Panthers are racial supremacy groups that advocate racism against people who are not “superior”, in other words members of their own race or ethnicity, in their views. Their use of the word “pride” is meant to be a dodge, or a cover, or code word, for racial identity and their supposed supremacy.

The fact about pride is that it requires an accomplishment of some sort. All too often one hears – what at least to me sounds something like the dragging of fingernails on chalkboard people throwing the word “pride” around, needlessly or carelessly. In some ways it may cheapen that to which it is being applied, and sometimes it's used entirely inappropriately. One must wonder what does a person mean when they say they are “proud” of this thing or that. There are times, of-course, when it's use is completely appropriate. But, that's not the point. The correct use of a term does not arouse a need to improve clarity. Correct use of terms simply does not arouse the ire of those of us who do care about the art and science of communication.

The sloppy use of language makes me cringe, as it would anyone who wishes to be clear. Everyone has their own perceptions, but to be understood correctly, we must first get past our own perceptions. There must be uniformity in our understanding of what the terms we use mean. We need

standards, or else our words become meaningless. Our efforts at communication become useless when we are not clear. We need to read dictionaries, reliable ones, multiple ones. We need to settle on the definition that most of the dictionaries are in consensus on, for each term. We need the simplest and yet most accurate definition. After-all, definitions must be agreed upon if we are to convey our concepts accurately. If you use unclear terms, words that can be understood differently by others, poor context or grammar, you may not be saying what you intend. Others will likely not be receiving your message as you want them to understand it.

I do, in fact, see a commonplace misunderstanding of the term "pride". Certainly a review of some various dictionaries reveals that there are multiple ways that the term is commonly used. But, still many people use the word all too loosely. It's not that people are saying something like "I'm too proud to be seen with you", in which case they would mean proud in the sense of self-esteem, or even arrogance. Nor, is the use of proud as in "the head stands proud of the shoulders" being discussed, in that case it would be using the term to mean standing above, or out from, something. It should go without saying that we're not discussing a group of lions, a "pride" being similar to a "herd" or a "flock". Rather, the meaning of "proud", implicit in the topic, is that of accomplishment.

Some people talk about their racial or gender pride, or ethnic pride, but that's a misunderstanding about pride. In some cases, like the use of the term in Gay Pride Parade, what is really meant is "not ashamed". Clearly, it is fair to be unashamed of one's sexual orientation, though the word is still being misused. "Gay Pride" raises a whole other set of issues, like that of choice. If you can be "proud" of being gay, then why, for fairness sake, can't I be proud of being straight? I'll assume that what is meant, and clumsily conveyed, by "gay pride" is rather "not ashamed to be gay". That would be fair then. Obviously, one doesn't choose their skin color or arrangement of genitals, or in which culture they're raised. In this way one cannot honestly be "proud" of one's religion, after all one who merely maintains the beliefs they're taught to believe in hasn't accomplished any feat, in that regard.

Religious people may often say that they are "proud" of being a Christian, or a Muslim, for example. The problem is that in most cases, unlike with atheism, one really did not accomplish

anything to become a Christian or a Muslim, etcetera. Most religious people are simply being as they were programmed by other people: their parents or other family members, religious leaders, friends and society. They are acting in accordance to the external programming which was implanted in their youth, such that they've essentially not accomplished on their own being as they are. This is akin, in a way, to being “proud” to be black or to be white, or “proud” to be a male or to be a female, for example. This sort of so-called pride is an absurdity. Each of us was born male or female. Every person was born into a group of skin-color. It's an accident of birth, and so not an accomplishment because it is a state of being which was permanently imposed from the outset. Though, obviously, religion is different in that it's not unchangeable. The point is that virtually all religious people were taught in their youth, when they were most impressionable, to be religious. It comes, almost, as natural to them. In fact, usually little thought is given to one's religious beliefs.

But, to think critically, to apply logic and to be rational is an accomplishment, that is worthy of the term. It's a feat that one accomplishes every time one thinks about their beliefs, analyzes the evidence and consciously decides to either accept or reject a proposition because of its merits. In this way, since religion is the norm, being an atheist is something of which one can rightfully be proud. The reason being is, as bluntly as it is, that so many people simply accept primitive and unfounded fantasies as if they were reality. There is no accomplishment in merely acquiescing to popular pressure, to obediently accept conformity for the sake of comfort rather than honesty. I'm proud to say that I'm an atheist. And since one can only have pride in an accomplishment, and since realizing that faith is not a virtue, coming to grips with reality rather than denying it, is an accomplishment, the term fits.

An "atheist" is a person who has no beliefs in a deity. That's all it means. What we can be "proud" of is how we become an atheist, or the reasons we are an atheist. Since to be "proud" requires an accomplishment to be "proud" of, one cannot be proud merely of being an atheist. This is because being an "atheist" is a state of being, not an accomplishment. But, one can be proud of thinking critically, because that is an action and so can be an accomplishment. Thus, one has pride in being an atheist only to the extent that to become an atheist one accomplished the act of thinking critically. In other words, when one says “I'm proud to be an atheist” one means the connoted critical thinking that lead to being an atheist is what one is actually proud of. One is proud of his or her correct use of logic

and one's critical thinking skills. One is, therefore, also proud of the act of rejecting claims that are lacking the requisite evidence.

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