

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

August 2, 2020

Spiritual Ponderings

Ego Free

I had originally written this set of Spiritual Ponderings for May. I decided to instead write about the Corona Virus during May and to move these reflections to the month of August. Every year in May colleges invite people to come and speak to their graduating class. These commencement speakers try to inspire those graduating to live better lives by offering them wisdom and advice. I think Brandon Black and Shayne Hughes's book *Ego Free leadership: Ending the Unconscious Habits that Hijack Your Business* would make a great commencement address. Brandon and Shayne speak about how a person ego can sabotage a person in many unconscious ways.

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Dysfunctions is so entrenched because it occurs automatically, whenever a person experiences stress or fear. Although unproductive reactions seem like personality traits, they are, in fact, learned, very predictable-and completely changeable. In understanding how anxiety about your value, competence, and well-being can hijack your behavior, you will discover the time-tested strategies that Encore employed to forge healthy, creative, and high-performing organization.

The word "hijack" caught my attention in the above quote because I do feel like sometimes my bad behaviors hijack my good intentions. Once my emotions and thought processes are "hijacked" I am in trouble and will most likely say or do the wrong thing in an effort to appease my ego. Self-improvement comes about when I learn how to prevent the hijacking.

Let's think of the ego as a constant preoccupation with our self-worth. While it can feel incomprehensible, it is actually a predictable system of triggers and reactions that can be mapped out. This is our "ego-system." Each one of us has beliefs and fears about our value, and they cause defensive and/or self-promotional behaviors when under stress. Whether in a meeting, a presentation, or a relationship, part of our attention—sometimes all of it—is preoccupied by our view of our self. Are we competent? Respected? Intelligent? Liked? Attractive? Included? Each of us have a set of criteria we unconsciously judge ourselves against. When we measure up, we feel pride, even superiority. When we don't, we feel uncomfortable, stressed, often afraid.

These feelings of inadequacy or imperfection automatically trigger knee-jerk reactions, usually in the form of fight-flight behaviors. Although they often feel "right" in the moment, these reactions have wide-ranging negative consequences.

Being proud of one's accomplishments is not a bad thing. In fact, the problem comes when all we do is think about ourselves either out of pride or worry. Bishop Barron in his writings talks about moving from the "small" soul just focused on oneself to the "great" soul – a soul that is open to God's larger creation. Becoming less selfish over time and more altruistic (concern for others) is a sign of maturity in the Catholic Church.

The Ego System: Our preoccupation with self-worth triggers reactive behaviors with the following characteristics.

AUTOMATIC – They happen without our conscious awareness.

DECEPTIVELY DESTRUCTIVE – Our ego hijacks our talents and strengths to protect our worth at the expense of others and our best intentions.

VERY PREDICTABLE- Each one of us has three or four primary ways in which we perceive a threat to our value and react to protect it.

WHEN TRIGGERED OUR EGO DRIVES US TO:

Avoid conflict, blame others, be a perfectionist, get angry/defensive, omit/hide issues, shut down, be indecisive, jump to conclusions, judge ourselves/others, procrastinate, not ask for help, or delete/prove others wrong.

Perhaps the reason why Jesus had to be tempted in the desert before He began His public ministry was because He had to learn to master the threats to His identity as the Son of God and the God made Man so that he could remain confident in the Father's love for Him and not have a knee jerk reaction to what people would say about Him or because

of the lack of gratitude He would receive. In my own life, I know that I am better at preventing sins when I am aware of what triggers my bad behavior. For example when I know that I am going to deal with a difficult person who likes to point out my faults (and I have a lot of them), I pray for patience and to be rooted in my identity as a child of God.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

August 9, 2020

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Most of our egosystem's reactions have similarly negative ripple effects on our goals and relationships. If we micromanage others, they often don't feel trusted. If we get defensive or angry, they feel attacked. IF we shut down to avoid conflict, they might feel judged, abandoned, and/or unsure of where they stand. Brandon's first blind spot lay in underestimating how his own dysfunctions derailed him and his team from achieving their goals.

When people become aware of their "derailers," they typically justify these behaviors as an inflexible part of their personality. "I'm just that way"; "Take the good with bad"; "Can't reach an old dog new tricks." But these behaviors are not genetic. They are learned, and even though we developed them over decades, it is never too late to unlearn them.

When I read the previous quote, I immediately thought of Adam and Eve and Original Sin. Their one ego-based choice not to trust God and to "eat the apple" has affected all of our relationships. It affected their relationship with God (they now hid from Him), their relationship with each other (they had to find clothing), and then with creation itself.

With the grace of Christ, we are able to overcome our egos. Saint Augustine is a great example of this. He began his life as a wild sinful man but when he finally got serious about converting to Christianity, he jumped in with all his efforts. Like in alcoholics anonymous we must first admit that we have a problem before we can address it.

Meanwhile, our egosystem constantly monitoring our value and status. People can say, "I don't care what others think," but that is almost universally untrue. Our brains are wired to care, and trying not to is another form of ego-protection. This fear of others judgements creates an emotional tension or mind chatter in each of us, and we expend significant time and energy trying to manage it. At LaL (Learning as Leadership), we call this monitoring "desired and dreaded images." Desired images described how we wish to appear or what we want others to think of us. Dreaded images are how we do not want to appear or how we fear being judged.

The problem is not that we care what other people think about us. The problem is when we allow what other people think of us prevent us from doing what is right or from being authentic. I also like the term "mind chatter" because I do have a lot of negative sounding voices telling me that I am "no good" and that I am "worthless" that I have to overcome every day. This is one of the reasons why I thank God for three things that makes me special each day. I am pretty certain that their other people out there who go around with tapes in their head telling them that they are "awesome" and "great" and yet they are only mediocre at best.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to appear confident or appreciated it. We just need to make sure that this is not our primary goal.

Common Desired and Dreaded Images Duos

Competent: (smart/stupid, capable/incapable experienced/ignorant)

Likable: (kind/mean, reasonable/unreasonable, humble/arrogant)

Ethical: (Generous/selfishness, honest/dishonest, a good/bad person)

Strong: (Self-Sufficient/needy, powerful/powerless, in control/helpless)

We can choose to be smart, capable, and experienced but we must follow up our choice with actions. I can be an honest person but I must choose to never tell a lie even if telling the truth will make me unpopular. I can choose to be a generous person but I need to share what I have with those in need.

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August 16, 2020

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There are moments in life when we feel that external circumstances or people are dictating our experience. The emotions we feel in these instances are typically negative: resentful, frustrating, powerless, agitated, afraid, stressed, angry, and trapped. At LaL (Learning as Leaders) we describe this experience as feeling "at the mercy" of these unwanted people or circumstances—feeling bad because they are doing this or that circumstance is to blame.

I think it is important to point out two things. First it is not bad to feel the negative feelings listed above. Feelings are ALWAYS neutral. It is what we do with them that matters. If I allow my negative feelings (aware of them or not) to allow myself to become short temper and I throw a fit or yell at someone then I have committed a sin. If I take my negative emotions, acknowledge them, and then use them to help me be more patient then I have can claim victory. I have firmly come to believe that the only person I can control in a situation is myself but I always have a choice. I can let situations that seem unfair me to tear me down or I can approach the situation again from different perspective. I may have damaged a relationship by losing my temper but I have the choice to offer forgiveness. I may not be able to forgive a person immediately but I can go take a walk, pray, etc. and then come back.

It is neither good nor bad to be at the mercy---it is just a term to describe an experience we all have. Learning to recognize when we are in this state is very useful, however because it is an indication that we are reacting to our environment, not proactively influencing it.

I like the phrase "proactively influencing". It reminds me of the quote "it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness." I can get mad and frustrated when I see an injustice or I can thank God for the opportunity to correct the injustice.

Although it can seem like it, we don't always feel at the mercy. We all experience moments of calm and focus; that is, when our full attention is devoted to the task at hand and we are tapping in to our full potential. Our energy and attention flow from us toward the world, regardless of external circumstance or stimuli. We call this state of mind "at the source".

When we realize that we have power (through the grace of God) we can change the world. Mother Teresa never let what she could not do stop her from doing what she could. He helped each individual she came encounter with one at a time and thus change the world for the better by inspiring millions.

This is part of the reason why I believe we go to Mass on Sunday. One of the titles we bestow upon the Eucharist is "source and summit". When we remind ourselves at Mass that God is on our side and with God all things are possible. He is the conqueror of sin and death.

At The Mercy	At the Source
1. My attention is on myself.	1. My attention is on what I want to create. 2. It starts with me

<p>2. My experience is dependent on external people or circumstances.</p> <p>3. I have a win-lose mindset “it’s me against others.”</p>	<p>3. The outcome is sustainable for me and others.</p>
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One of the most important lessons that I had to learn in life is that I get to choose the way I face each situation. I can give up or I can keep on trusting on God.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
August 23, 2020
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As Catholics we are constantly called to improve ourselves. Recently I came across this book written by Bandon Black and Shayne Hughes’s book *Ego Free leadership: Ending the Unconscious Habits that Hijack Your Business*. I have found many of the concepts and suggestions very practical in helping me realize just how my ego can hijack my good intentions and lead me into sin.

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It may feel like it’s about the other person but the underneath, the root cause of these behaviors is ultimately about you and your self-worth. How would hurting their feeling be a threat to your ego?”

I think that it is safe to say that when I hurt someone intentionally or not, it has to do with my ego and how I wish people will view me. Maybe I want to be taken more seriously then I feel Like I have been taken or maybe I feel like I am being set up to look bad. These are when I need to take the time to be humble. I think the litany of humility lays out many ways I let my view of how others view my self-worth. The following is a part of the prayer that can act like an examination of conscious.

Parts from the LITANY OF HUMILITY

From the desire of being esteemed	From the desire of being loved	From the desire of being extolled.
From the desire of being honored	From the desire of being praised	From the desire of being preferred to others.
From the desire of being consulted.	From the desire of being approved.	From the fear of being humiliated
From the fear of being despised	From the fear of suffering rebukes	From the fear of being calumniated .
From the fear of being forgotten	From the fear of being ridiculed	From the fear of being wronged
From the fear of being suspected	That others may be loved more than I,	
That others may be esteemed more than I	That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease	
That others may be chosen and I set aside	That others may be praised and I unnoticed	
That others may be preferred to me in everything.	That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should R3.	

Any time, we know intellectually what to do, but our actual behavior is inconsistent or in contradiction, it is a sign we are being short-circuited by our egosystem.

I have to remind people often that there is no logic in evil. Evil the absence of good. This is why so many of our abortion’s laws are so screwed up. Instead of protecting life, we have created a system to protect people’s ego.

These behavior derailers come in many forms: conflict avoidance, procrastination, defensiveness, people pleasing, shutting down, being argumentative, just to name a few. Upon examination, these integrated knee-jerk reactions invariably prove to be predictable and recurrent.

I like the image and thoughts that come from the word “derailers.” These are the things that prevent me from reaching success and I need to overcome them. I can remember one time when I was a college seminarian, the whole college seminary waited to greet a high-ranking Church official. He was coming for dinner. This Church official drove down the

main driveway of the seminary and hit the speedbump that had been there for years going at least 30 miles an hour and this almost made him lose control of the car. To be fair there was no sign stating that there was a speedbump. I also remember that during summer break that speed bump was removed. I don't know if the church official asked for the speed bump to be removed but for this analogy let us say that he did. This is how we are to deal with our derailers. When we encounter them, we should do our best to make sure we don't make the same mistake a second time. If I find myself being a procrastinator then I should challenge myself to stop procrastinating for example.

First, Brandon had to acknowledge his dysfunction without hedging: He avoided difficult discussions. Then he recognized the emotional blocks that prevented him from behaving the way he wanted to. Tying these fears back to childhood, allowed him to understand why they were so potent to him.

Next, instead of telling himself he "should" do the opposite, Brandon clarified his goal. He connected with the deeper intentions motivating him to have these uncomfortable conversations. What was at stake? Why did he care? What were his intentions for Dave? His goals gave him emotional clarity—a profound sense that he wanted to take the risk to shape his perspective to support Dave and see him grow.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

August 30, 2020

Spiritual Ponderings

Ego Free

We are now on the last day of August and so we get a little extra time to reflect on how our egos can hijack us. As Catholics we are constantly called to improve ourselves. Recently I came across this book written by Brandon Black and Shayne Hughes's book *Ego Free leadership: Ending the Unconscious Habits that Hijack Your Business*. I have found many of the concepts and suggestions very practical in helping me realize just how my ego can hijack my good intentions and lead me into sin.

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Our strengths and skills can be either a lethal weapon for our egosystem or a productive tool for our goals.

Pride is considered the worst of the seven deadly sins because it distorts our reality more than any other sins. Instead of thinking of God as the creator and center of the universe. When we begin making our pride the foundation of our world view and ethics we are building on shaky ground. It would be like building a mathematical system based on you assuming $2+2$ equals 5 . The more we build the more the chance things will come tumbling down and the more we risk hurting ourselves and others.

Our reactions are completely within our power to influence and change. Learning to notice when our egosystem is triggered, accepting these feelings with empathy, and then reconnecting to our deepest goals and intentions brings us back to a more centered state of being... With patience, we can become aware enough of our underlying ego threats to consistently preempt our reactions before they happen.

When going through Good Leaders Good Shepherds (a management program for priests), I took the DISC profile test. It is kind of like Myers-Briggs or a Strength-Finder tool. I learned that when I get put under pressure, I switch from being a "Accepting Introvert" to becoming a "Demanding Extrovert". I also learned that this can be very confusing to people who are expecting me to act one way when they experience me acting the other way. I have learned for the most part to use each of these "profiles" at the right time for the maximum benefit for everyone. I have also learned that before I switch "profiles" I should explain to people my change in leadership styles so I do not catch them off guard and I do not allow them to think that I am mad at them.

Identifying and challenging these ego threats matters because we are at our least effective, and most destructive, when our egosystem is triggered.

At a listening session I had earlier this year, I did not handle some people’s comments too well because I took them too personal. I saw their criticizing the situation as them criticizing me. I felt like I had done everything I could to make a bad situation good and these people were blaming me for not doing more, for not predicting the future, for not being smarter, etc. Thank God, Jim (our business manager) was there to step in and not only redirect the conversation but also challenge my behavior after the listening session was over. At prayer that night, I saw how I was in some ways connecting my experience that night with my childhood experience of never being able to please my dad. No matter, what I did, I was never good enough. At the end of prayer, I ask God for some spiritual healing of the situation and to help me control my ego – a wounded ego can sometimes be more dangerous than a healthy or over inflated one). The next few listening sessions, I was able to handle the criticism better.

Reactive Path (A subordinate changed a slide at sales presentation)	
Default Reaction	Intentional Response
<p>MINDCHATTER {Paul changed the document to make himself look good}</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>IDENTIFY MY EGO TREAT Appearing unprepared Unprofessional and incompetent</p> <p>↓</p>
<p>NEGATIVE FEELING *Frustrated *Distracted</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>CONNECT WITH MY GOAL *Interest the buyer in Encore *Learn to leverage my team.</p> <p>↓</p>
<p>KNEE-JERK REACTION I gloss over the new slide and cut Paul off when he tries to speak.</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>REFRAM MY PERSPECTIVE *My team is driving things forward on their own. I can count on them.</p> <p>↓</p>
<p>COSTS Paul disengages the buyer leaves unimpressed.</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>RESPOND CONSTRUCTIVELY I encourage Paul to take the lead.</p> <p>↓</p>