

[D is me (i.e., the narrator of the prior post). R is the opponent. Let's call him the "rebutter."]

R: You are aware of the primary sin of what you have just written?

D: What is that?

R: Pride. Rampant pride. Why else would you go out of your way to state the *Night with the Pembletons* screenplay was 55 pages long? What narrative purpose did this serve beyond calling attention to how smart you were as a child? Or how about the fact that your "independent mathematical investigations" started in 10th grade, or the generally exhausting nature of many of your sentences? Also, why all the obscure vocabulary and references?

D: God forbid I share some details about my life. It's exhausting having to pass everything through a "don't look like a braggart" filter. And as for the sentences, I don't know. That's just how I write. I like long sentences, in fact, as they get the reader through the paragraph faster and as they allow for more flexibility of expression.

R: Independent of the expositional style, why bother sharing all these details about your life? There's already enough junk on the internet. Do people really need to know that you made a 23-slide PowerPoint in 2009 detailing battle strategies for a fifth-grade snowball war?

D: Again, God forbid I share some details about my life. And it's not like I spoke at length about that PowerPoint. I was just like, "hey, this exists, so you have an idea of how comprehensive my record-keeping is."

R: Surely you must understand where I'm coming from.

D: I mean, yeah. I get it. There's something narcissistic not only in holding on to such trivial documents but in shouting to the world that that's what you're doing. But as I reckon I'm not the only one doing this sort of document hoarding, there's a potential for human connection here.

R: So your goal is to communicate?

D: I suppose. But the running joke on this blog is that we have no readers. So maybe this really is just an exercise in stringing words together – a glorified cognitive workout given three weeks of downtime before the fall college term.

R: So you agree there was a bit of egotism driving this piece?

D: Sure. But I pulled the trigger anyway. Too many interesting ideas and conversation starters to not get it out there. And come on, even you would admit describing an Apple ad as “aggressively diurnal” is pretty dope.

R: There it is. Pride.

D: A killjoy. That’s what you are. And what’s so bad about pride anyway? Like, isn’t it good when people “take pride in” the things they do?

R: It’s one of the Seven Deadly Sins. In fact, some would call it the deadliest. James spoke about it in “Dear Sirs, I Am.”

D: But can you explain from first principles what makes pride so bad?

R: It’s an unsightly thing in conversation. You just feel it in your bones, no?

D: I will admit there’s something cringy about boasting. But are you able to explain where that cringe comes from on a deeper level? I have my guesses.

R: Go on, as it sounds like you would like to educate me.

D: Well, I reckon it’s mainly got to do with insecurity. The boastful individual is overcompensating for a perceived deficit in abilities. He’s lashing out, doing something – anything – to get people to believe in an underlying competence he feels he lacks. To make a finance analogy, such an individual liquidates too much of his intellectual stock at once. It doesn’t bode well for his long-term flourishing.

R: So you believe the sinfulness of pride derives from this observation and no more?

D: Yup. Ethical emotivism is what they call it (shoutout to Alex O’Connor). The cringe is primal and the ultimate source of the taboo, though with a little digging the cringe itself can also be found to have a quasi-evolutionary, pragmatic explanation.

R: So in your mind, the downside to pride is that prideful individuals are less competent than more reserved individuals, and you believe that this underlying competence is really the only thing that matters here?

D: Well, I suppose you could also whip up a utilitarian rebuttal to boasting involving collective self-esteem. The idea here is that even if the prideful individual’s boasting has no impact on their accomplishments, the mere act of boasting can have a negative impact on those around them.

R: Ah, so you believe prideful individuals get in the way of social harmony? Surely this is more in line with the rejection of pride in the Christian tradition than what you argued before.

D: But who is to blame for the compromised social harmony? If a successful, boastful individual makes a bunch of people feel envious and therefore bad about themselves, then do we blame him or the envious people? Recall that envy itself is also a Deadly Sin.

R: The general consensus seems to be not to be a braggart.

D: Have you seen the modern internet? There is no such consensus. It's prideful influencers everywhere you look.

R: And do you think this is a good thing?

D: Honestly, a lot of them just seem interested in communicating how they go about their lives. This is in the hopes that others can improve their own lives through imitation. Often this ends up looking like a narcissistic recording of day-to-day minutia, but that's the sort of thing they have to get on the record to fully present how they go about life.

R: Alright, so you're fine with fitness and productivity influencers. Now, would you situate your last post in the context of those people?

D: What, like with the "Note on Influences" at the end?

R: Precisely.

D: I'm just curious as to what prepwork needs to be done to set off a good batch of writing. As transparently as possible, I wanted to track what was going on in my life in the vicinity of my writing that piece. It was for my own recordkeeping.

R: But why include it in what was posted? Why not just keep those records private?

D: Why not include it? As discussed, there's already a robust online tradition of people being super explicit about how their habits impact the work they produce. My case is a little unconventional in that there's an undermining of some of the genre's tropes (e.g., going to bed at 4:00 AM, eating sugary snacks). But maybe those sorts of things actually improve writing? Frankly, I've long been of the opinion that there's a certain simplicity to early risers...

R: Alright. This is getting away from a debate and turning into an interview about your habits. But getting into something a little more contentious, I'm wondering what the whole *point* of such a thorough documentation of one's past is?

D: I explain it in the article. Do I not? It gives my children something fun to look through.

R: The same children you grant may or may not come to exist? Be honest. You're of an artistic bent and would like for a significantly larger group of people to appreciate the various things you've created over the years. I reckon you keep the documents because you believe there's genuine merit to them.

D: Well, if everything is nice and organized I can go in and nab what I need when I need it. Things from my past may very well trickle onto the blog every now and then.

R: Oh please. We're probably only a few days away from seeing the "Battle Strategies" PowerPoint from 2009.

D: Why not discuss that war now? Children have a culture too, you know.

R: Oh God.

D: It all started when a fort of giant snowballs – each about the height of a fifth-grader – materialized by the kickball field one day in winter. We don't know how they got there, R, but they induced mayhem. Absolute mayhem.

R: Why am I hearing this?

D: I wasn't a big commander by any means, but I had a loyal faction of about three or four kids. Call me a lieutenant. This faction wasn't allied with the Fort Kids, at least not initially. In fact, we participated in a great combined charge against the Fort one day. I remember the code word. "Huzzah." Yup. That was the signal for all the little, scattered groups to come out of the woodwork and converge onto the Fort. It was surreal, R. Like our own D-Day. Weeks of scheming and spying and drawing maps on dry-erase boards during indoor recess coming to fruition in one epic battle charge. It was the last time in my life I felt like I was truly a part of something bigger than myself, R. I felt "Huzzah" *in my bones*.

R: Do you even believe what you're saying right now?

D: Then, in a later battle that came after some more indoor-recess scheming, I ended up *inside* the fort. Poor, poor REDACTED 1. Everyone turned on him except for REDACTED 2, whom

we easily spooked away. But REDACTED 1 kept right on charging. The damn trooper got pelted over and over and over again, but he powered through and jumped clean over the wall and made it inside. That mad lad would end up on the football team in high school. But you know what happened to him once he was inside the fort, R?

R: What?

D: REDACTED 3 and REDACTED 4 captured him.

R: Oh no, not those guys.

D: Then they subjected him to the nutcracker. The *nutcracker*, R.

R: What's the nutcracker?

D: Exactly what you think it is. They held his arms in place, pulled his legs back, and slammed his crotch into the hardest and iciest of the big snowballs. At least, I think that's what they planned on doing before some of us rebelled.

R: Wait, what? Did the nutcracker actually happen?

D: It wasn't very clear. Anyhow, I was like "this isn't right," and then a few of us started pushing REDACTED 3 and REDACTED 4. REDACTED 1 got away, I think. I don't know. There was a scuffle of some variety. Snowballs flying everywhere. I think I got called a "gaylord." People ran away.

R: Why are you saying this?

D: It's a good story.

R: It's just children playing games, D. Also, I think this conversation has gotten away from us.

D: Do you even believe what you're saying? Games are what children live for. You know, R, I reckon there's a whole universe of "playground culture" the academics are barely aware of, because the kids don't have the brains to properly document the things they do. It spreads from playground to playground via cousins at family get-togethers, and somewhere, out there in the great void of information, there exists an accounting of every playground innovation ever made. Somewhere out there, for example, is the first kid to have ever drawn "the Cool S."

R: Or perhaps it was an adult.

D: I'd like to believe it was a kid. Surely it was a kid, at least, who instantiated it as "a thing that kids draw."

R: Or maybe it was the significantly older brother of this child who introduced it to them.

D: Anyhow, there's an answer out there, in theory, and it's kinda fascinating that we just don't know. There's an entire culture right under our noses, R, and we barely know anything about it. We partake in it yet we still don't know. We've got a better understanding of black holes than we do of the origin of the Cool S.

R: I don't know about *that*.

D: Well, regardless, I would say I have a general curiosity about my past comparable to my curiosity about mathematics, say. I look back in time and I see a bottomless abyss – this is the point where memory runs out, the completely unaccountable early years. But other memories may still be recoverable – deep, but recoverable. Something like a digitized VHS tape or a photograph or a Word Document acts like a submarine. It transports me to the depths and gives me a good starting point to look around.

R: Alright.

D: It's not revelling in past precociousness, R. It's genuine curiosity.