

The Deadly Sins

Gluttony/Drunkennes, Greed, Lust, Sloth, and Vanity

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The Deadly Sins present one of the best paradigms for organizing and assessing the collective teaching on sin and virtue contained in the bible, history, classical literature, and modern literature. This paradigm addresses not only principles, commandments, and sins, but also the interior attitudes that produce them, and the means and virtues to redress them. It not only contains the wisdom of the Old Testament – the Ten Commandments and the proclamations of the prophets – but also the New Testament – particularly the Sermon on the Mount. It has also been used by the world’s greatest literary authors – Virgil, Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Fitzgerald – as the central theme of tragic dramas and narratives, and may be seen in the annals of great historians to explain the origins of war, crime, and corruption. It stands at the heart of Christian spiritual classics – from the earliest fathers of the Church to contemporary spiritual autobiographies, and if psychologists are willing to admit it, at the origin of many psychic disorders. Whenever we see restless hearts, human discontent, bias, disrespect, marginalization, oppression, and every form of injustice and hatred, there we may also see the seeds of the 7 Deadly Sins – the interior attitudes that form the heart of darkness and the antithesis to generosity, compassion, and self-sacrificial love.

Though the Old Testament as well as many classical philosophers, historians, and poets had great insights into the 7 Deadly Sins, Jesus provided the deepest and most comprehensive understanding of them (though He did not use this phrase to describe them). There are several lists of “sins” in the Old and New Testament that might be thought to be a precursor to the deadly sins – such as Prov. 6: 16-19; Gal. 5: 19-21; and Rev. 21:8 – but these contain lists of prohibited *actions* – whereas the 7 Deadly Sins concern *interior attitudes* that dispose a person to evil actions. The 7 Deadly Sins “lie at the heart” of *all* sinful actions. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is in good part concerned with them, and provides the basis for Christianity’s foundational moral catechism.

After Jesus, subsequent generations of Christian thinkers developed and extended His insights, and eventually consolidated them into a paradigm called “Deadly” or “Capital” or “Cardinal” Sins or vices. One of the first paradigmatic presentations was developed by the fourth century ascetic monk, Evagrius Ponticus (345 – 399 AD). He greatly influenced St. John Cassian (360-435 AD) who used the paradigm as the basis of his *Institutes* (particularly Books 5-12) which addressed eight capital vices and how to redress them through virtue and prayer. Pope Gregory I revised the list of John Cassian, and gave it his Papal approval in 590 AD. Gregory’s revised list made its way into the western church and became the foundation for catechetical preparation, confessional preparation, monastic manuals, and moral tractates. It became a centerpiece of Christian art which was used to teach basic moral catechesis. In the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas defended and commented extensively on Gregory’s list of sins enshrining it within the foundation of Christian moral teaching. He shows in the *Summa Theologica* that the 7 Deadly Sins (what he terms “the 7 capital vices”) lie at the heart of all sins, because they are corrupt interior attitudes that orient human beings to false ends (non-loving objectives of life).

When we pursue these false ends, thinking that they will make us happy, we are led into a myriad of other sins (violations of Commandments) in our pursuit of these false ends. He notes in this regard:

The capital vices are those which give rise to others, especially by way of final cause. Now this kind of origin may take place in two ways. First, on account of the condition of the sinner, who is disposed so as to have a strong inclination for one particular end, the result being that he frequently goes forward to other sins. But this kind of origin does not come under the consideration of art, because man's particular dispositions are infinite in number. Secondly, on account of a natural relationship of the ends to one another: and it is in this way that most frequently one vice arises from another, so that this kind of origin can come under the consideration of art.¹

St. Thomas gives a detailed consideration of all the deadly sins in the First Part of the Second Part of the *Summa Theologica* (Q. 84).

The paradigm made its way into early European Christian literature – particularly Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*² and Chaucer's "The Parson's Tale"³. Since that time, parts of the paradigm -- either individual capital sins or combinations of them – have been integrated into every dimension of western literature. We will consider but a few eras and authors below – English Renaissance literature (e.g., several tragedies of William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*), Victorian literature (e.g., Charles Dickens), 19th century Russian literature (e.g., Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy), and 20th century American literature (e.g., F. Scott Fitzgerald).

Between the time of Evagrius Ponticus and St. Thomas Aquinas, the list varied between 8 and 7 cardinal sins. We will use the list of 8 because vanity (the disputed 8th sin) deserves treatment in its own right apart from pride. Thus, we will treat the following 8 sins in our exposition below – gluttony/drunkenness, greed, lust, sloth, anger, vanity, envy, and pride. Why this order of treatment? It corresponds best with our treatment of the Four Levels of Happiness (given on the Happiness and Suffering landing page). How so? The first three capital sins (gluttony/drunkenness, greed, and lust) pertain in good part to Level 1 (though greed and lust can also pertain to Level 2). Sloth (which concerns apathy about life's meaning and purpose) results in its victim staying on Level 1, because of sheer disinterest in making the most of life. Anger

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas 1947 *Summa Theologica* (I, II, Q. 84, art. 4), trans. by: Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc.) p. 965.

² The *Purgatorio* is in great part organized around the 7 Deadly Sins, and uses one of the most imaginative symbolic explications of them, the harm they do, and the remedies for them. Interested readers may want to use an annotated version and a commentary to profit from it suitably.

³ "The Parson's Tale," the last tale in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, is not a fable, but a sermon devoted to penitence – to which Chaucer himself subscribes. The first part is about the three stages of repentance, and the second part is about the 7 Deadly Sins and the virtues needed to remediate them. The Seven Deadly Sins are pride, envy, wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust, and they are remedied by the virtues of humility, contentment, patience, fortitude, mercy, moderation, and chastity. Readers interested in this insightful sermon will want to use an annotated version of the text to help them through Chaucer's Middle English and rhetorical style.

(which is concerned as much with unforgiveness and vengeance as with impatience or outbursts) is connected with ego concerns and ego offenses – and so is definitely associated with Level 2. Vanity (concerned with seeking the admiration and praise of others) is ego-comparative, and again connected with Level 2. Envy (which not only resents a person for having more goods, talent, status, and beauty, but also covets these things and wishes ill on those who have them) is near the height of ego-comparative vice (Level 2) because it is so destructive to others and self. Finally, pride (which is a conviction of being intrinsically superior to others, leading to a belief that one is more worthy and deserves more power and dominion than others) is viewed as the height of Level 2 vice, because it leads to all the other deadly sins and is most antithetical to love, and therefore, salvation. Let us now consider each of the deadly sins in turn, examining its destructiveness to self and others as well as its biblical precedents and some examples from the best of western literature.

I. Drunkness/Gluttony/Drugs

Gluttony is included in virtually all lists of the 7 Deadly Sins. It refers to the desire for excess of sensorial fulfillment which can include an excess of food, drink, alcohol, and other euphoric stimulants.

Why is gluttony destructive? It holds its victims in the spell of sensorial pleasure, preventing them from reaching higher levels of meaning and purpose in life, giving rise to the phenomenon of living to eat instead of eating to live. When gluttony casts its spell, it seeks out as much as it can get to the point where luxuriating in sensorial pleasures is almost insatiable. One seeks out the very best cuisine, wine, after dinner drinks in the best restaurants with the best views, etc. These luxuriating events are not necessarily gluttony if they are special occasions or occasional treats. Gluttony is not an occasion or event – it is the negative interior disposition of a person that captures his imagination and will to the detriment of all other pursuits which may have greater meaning and fulfillment. Enjoying gourmet cuisine turns into gluttony when one puts it at the center of life – reminiscing about it, anticipating its next occurrence, and orienting one's time and energy around it.

Satiation of sensorial desires – food, alcohol, and euphoric stimulants -- can become addictive, and when they do, they can lead to extreme declines in health, family life, work performance, and social efficacy. In the case of alcohol and euphoric stimulants, it can lead to impoverishment, criminal behavior, and death. Thus, gluttony (food, alcohol, and drugs) can be destructive of self and others. The stronger the addiction and habit, the more difficult it is to break, and the more destructive it will be for oneself and others. When one becomes fixated and concerned only with the next luxurious sensorial event, it will consume one's imagination, creativity, and social respectability. Though gluttony does not have the extreme antisocial potential of anger, envy, and pride, its addictions can lead to neglect of family members, squandering of resources, arrested maturity, superficiality, and continual distraction. In the case of alcohol and drug addiction, the negative consequences can be far worse, leading to destruction of the family, undermining of job performance, and even criminal behavior.

Gluttony is viewed as a dangerous vice in both the Old and New Testaments. The Book of Proverbs advises strongly:

When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony. Do not crave his delicacies, for that food is deceptive. Do not wear yourself out to get rich (Prov. 23:1-4).

The author recognizes how luxurious food can become a preoccupation, leading to superficiality and a subordination of ourselves (and life's purpose) to mere food and the wealthy individuals who can provide it for us. St. Paul sees gluttony as undermining the self-mastery for which Christ has destined us as children of God:

“I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both” (1 Cor. 6:12-13).

In the Letter to the Philippians, Paul goes further in counterpoising gluttony to his relationship with Christ:

For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our commonwealth is in heaven... (Phil. 3: 18-20).

Paul sees gluttony as one of the ways (along with lust) in which excess sensorial fulfillment can orient us toward the domain of the flesh, causing us to take our eyes off of our true dignity, nature, fulfillment, and destiny – the glorious body given to us through Jesus Christ.

There is very little good literature devoted to the sin of gluttony-drunkenness-drugs, though drunkenness and drugs can play prominently at the periphery of many novels. For example, drunkenness undermines the lives of Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* Part I, The Whiskey Priest in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, and Dick Diver in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*. Drugs lie at the heart of many real-life celebrity tragedies, such as Janis Joplin, Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Heath Ledger, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Winehouse, and so many more. Considerable medical and psychological research studies are devoted to the addiction process, physical debilitation, destructive personality changes, and resultant life tragedies that arise out of drugs and alcohol. One does not have to turn to fiction to probe the destructiveness of these addictive euphoric substances, because there are so many real-life tragedies that not only appear in popular magazines and television, but touch the lives of the people around us. Though contemporary culture assigns a considerable stigma to being overweight, gluttony pales in comparison to drunkenness and drugs in its debilitating and destructive effects. So it is difficult to find literature that probes the mind and heart of someone adversely affected by gluttony. Jami Attenberg's 2012 novel, *The Middlesteins*, is an exception to this norm. The central figure, Edie Middlestein, is a former successful attorney and a loving mother and friend. Yet her obsession with eating causes a radical decline in her life – the loss of

her job, then the loss of her husband, and now the loss of her health – to the point of killing her. Her children and in-laws who care about her rally to her support, but she cannot seem to help herself – she cannot resist finding another delicious morsel to feed her habit and bring her “peace of mind.”

Though Attenberg reveals the destructiveness of Edie’s gluttony to her job, marriage, family, and health, she does not make this the central focus of the novel, but rather probes into the reasons for Edie’s self-destructive obsession, and the ways it affects her family members. As with many cases of gluttony, the obsessed victim is not a hedonist (like a Roman epicurean at the vomitorium who focuses solely on euphoric self-indulgence), but rather a complex individual who uses food – like alcohol and drugs – to manage the stresses and challenges of inner turmoil produced by a difficult life. To be sure, there are many hedonistic individuals focused on the euphoria of sensorial self-indulgence, but Edie is not one of them. Though the destructive effects of her gluttony are the same as the hedonist, she has almost unconsciously slipped into it while hedonists *chooses* to forsake any higher level meaning in life (e.g. achievement, contribution, family, and faith) for the sake of the next party and its continuous euphoria.

Edie grew up with parents who virtually set her up for obsessive euphoric self-medication. Her mother could not resist feeding her out of mistaken sense of love – “Here dear, have another matzo ball.” Her father also contributed to the mix because of his background – a Jewish immigrant from the Ukraine who nearly starved on his journey to Chicago, inducing an ongoing anxiety about getting enough to eat. The stage was set – Edie would use food as a way of overcoming anxiety and lifting her spirits. As the challenges of her life increased, she gained so much weight that her law firm discharged her with an excellent pension (to prevent her from filing suit) and her husband, who could no longer watch her destroy herself, abandons her. The one bright note is that Edie’s family cared enough about her to help her in her time of need – even to the point of procuring remediate surgery and staying in the kitchen throughout the night before the surgery to prevent her from eating yet another snack that would adversely affect the surgery.

Clearly, gluttony – obsessive overeating for the purpose of euphoria – is *tragic* – whether it be caused by the free choice of a hedonist who has abandoned higher meaning in life for the sake of pleasure – or a person like Edie who has unconsciously appropriated the habit of excessive euphoric overeating to medicate herself and lift her spirits. Gluttony’s effects are destructive to self and others, and can lead to an acute underliving of life. Though the reasons for their gluttony are quite different, both Edie and the hedonist are faced with a similar moral challenge – they must desire – nay, will – to make a change in their lives in order to prevent further waste of life, self-destructiveness, and destructiveness of others who care. This act of the will – that stands at the foundation of curbing an insatiable desire for sensorial overindulgence, and to replace it with higher level desires for achievement, contribution, love, and faith, will be very difficult indeed. Yet without this act of the will, there can be no relief from gluttony’s course of self-destruction. Though difficult, this act of the will is not impossible, and it can be strengthened and efficacious with the help of reinforcement, collective wisdom, and prayer.

Twelve-step programs – such as overeater’s anonymous, alcoholics anonymous, and narcotics anonymous – are devoted to helping the addict make this act of will efficacious and successful.

Of course these programs cannot make the decision to change (the act of the will) for the addict, but they can help the addict to do the following:

- Recognize (instead of denying) his problem.
- Refute his rationalizations.
- Gain insight into the causes of his problem.
- Encourage his acts of self-control through wise fellowship.
- Avail himself of supernatural grace through prayer.

There are literally millions of success stories that have been aided by these programs, but at the heart of all of them is the decision of the addict himself – not only a decision to refrain from denial and rationalization (i.e. to seek authenticity and truth) but also the decision to pursue what we called the virtues of temperance and fortitude – to control one’s sensorial appetite and to commit oneself to a better future. When this decision toward truth and virtue is made, the Lord can help tremendously through prayer and grace.

Recall from above, that the effectiveness of grace is in good part dependent on our desiring and choosing it. Furthermore, grace builds on nature. Thus, as we grow stronger in the virtues of temperance and fortitude by practicing them and making them a habit, we make them part of our nature -- our “second nature.” Philosophers since the time of Aristotle have associated virtue with habit, and habit with “second nature.” The genius of 12-step programs is the recognition of the power of “truth to self,” free choice, and virtue such as self-control and fortitude – and to build faith and prayer onto this strong natural foundation. As the millions of success stories testify, this formula is incredibly successful so long as individuals can hold out for enough time to break the spell of the addiction. It is sometimes best to stay in a treatment center that curbs the possibility of obtaining the addictive substance during the initial period of withdrawal, and then to remain vigilant in meetings (accountability sessions) and support groups to help bolster the act of the will and the development of temperance and fortitude. As time passes, the spell of addiction will wane – and then wane considerably, though it will never go away.⁴ An addict must continue to be vigilant even when the compulsion to satisfy the addiction has almost disappeared.

It is essential to educate and continuously reinforce young people about the negative consequences of drunkenness and drugs, because easy availability and popular culture make them so alluring. In the case of drugs, one or two slip-ups can lead to a lifetime addiction, and in the case of alcohol, ongoing overconsumption can do the same. Though the culture does not make gluttony alluring, the availability of delicious fast foods, sugars, and carbohydrates can initiate a habit like Edie’s where food is used to self-medicate and lift the spirits. When peer pressure to stay thin lessens, a developing routine of seeking pleasure to alleviate stress can turn into a full time habit. What does this mean? Young people who will be best prepared to move beyond the spell of Level 1 euphoria and the destructiveness of euphoric addiction are those who are educated and trained in the virtues of prudence, temperance (self-control), and fortitude.

⁴ According to the Journal *Psychology Today*, those who have achieved sobriety for three months still have a 66% chance of relapse. Those who have achieved one year of sobriety have a 50% chance of relapse, and those with five years of sobriety, have only a 15% chance of relapse. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/craving/201402/how-often-do-long-term-sober-alcoholics-and-addicts-relapse>.

When these virtues are combined with faith, they will have a remarkably effective shield to avoid the pitfalls of the first Deadly Sin, and move to higher levels of meaning and purpose in life.

II. Greed (Avarice)

Like gluttony, greed is grounded in an excessive worldly desire. Where gluttony is the excessive desire for sensorial euphoria, greed is the excessive desire for material possessions and wealth. Though greed does not cause physical addiction, it does cause psychological obsession to the point of being insatiable – so insatiable that one is willing to cheat, steal, defraud, and exploit the vulnerable in order to obtain more material goods than one actually needs. Though greed is focused on material goods (Level 1), it is connected with the ego-centric desire to have more (in order to be more) than others (Level 2).

Though one can unconsciously slip into gluttony, one generally does not slip into greed. The perpetrator is at least tacitly aware that he covets more than he needs, that his excessive possessions will grant him comparative advantage, esteem and status, and that he might have to take ethical shortcuts in order to satiate his desire. Nevertheless, he seems to ignore or suppress these innate murmurings of conscience in order to experience the elation and ego satisfaction coming from material goods. The elation seems to come from a sense of being enhanced – of becoming more – through possessions and wealth. He does not seem to recognize that material goods do not add to his creative, loving, contributive, moral, and transcendent self, but only to things possessed outside the self.

The elation coming from additional material goods with which to enhance the outer self leads to a forgetfulness of the inner self – the qualities that ultimately define the goodness, generativity and love of a human being enabling him to be contributive and imitate the heart of God. The more one pursues the adornments of the outer self, the more one forgets the inner self which opens the door to heartlessness (particularly toward the marginalized and poor), exploitation of others, “legal cheating” and “legal stealing.” These practices that violate the Ten Commandments and scriptural writ enhance egocentricity and delimit compassion – inhibiting the path to salvation. For this reason, St. Thomas Aquinas noted that “Greed is a sin against God... inasmuch as man forsakes things eternal for the sake of temporal things.”⁵ Aquinas considers a sin against God to be most serious, because it inhibits the path to salvation in its quest for the things of the world. How does this occur with greed? If one gives in to the lure of greed, it takes over more and more of the human psyche, and can become the dominant perspective from which one views self, the world, and others. As it continues to seduce the individual, it blocks out empathy, respect, and compassion -- and as it grows, even conscience and the desire for relationship with God. The insatiability of greed makes it expansive. The more one gets, the more one wants. As long as the individual gives in to its allurements, it grows in intensity – one can never be satisfied with the previous level of satisfaction. One “needs” a bigger house, a fancier car, more property, better clothes, more jewelry, etc.

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II-II., Q 118, Art. 1, Ad 2.
<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3118.htm>.

Is there any way out of the seduction of greed? There is – a crisis of meaning, emotional crisis, existential crisis, economic crisis, relationship crisis, family crisis, and community crisis. As many saints have noted, crisis can be the best thing that ever happened to a person because it causes a rethinking of life's meaning, fulfillment, and destiny which in turn can lead to the discovery – or in many cases the rediscovery – of the goodness of love, family, integrity, and God. Without such crises, greed's spell can be so powerful that it prevents the discovery of all higher purpose, dignity, fulfillment, and destiny. This point is illustrated well in both the scriptures and literature – particularly Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carole*.

We will begin with scripture which addresses greed at great length – far more than gluttony/drunkenness because it is more detrimental to the soul. We will begin with the Old Testament that probes the heart and futility of greed in depth – particularly in the Psalms, Proverbs, and other wisdom literature.

In Psalm 49, the psalmist asserts the futility of greed, indicating that the greedy man's heart takes so much satisfaction in his wealth that he trusts in it instead of the Lord. Yet his wealth cannot ransom him from Sheol (the domain of death), but only the Lord. In allowing his wealth to occupy his complete attention, and ignoring the Lord who can ransom him from death, he risks an eternity in the domain of the dead – which is, as the Psalmist notes, incredibly foolish:

Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me, men who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? Truly no man can ransom himself, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of his life is costly, and can never suffice, that he should continue to live on for ever, and never see the Pit... Their graves are their homes for ever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they named lands their own. Man cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who have foolish confidence, the end of those who are pleased with their portion. Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol [the underworld realm of the dead]; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home (Ps.49:5-14).

The Book of Proverbs and other wisdom literature (e.g. Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and Wisdom) do not accentuate the eternal significance of allowing one's heart to be completely consumed by greed, rather they focus on how obsession with wealth is a waste of life and human creativity – lowering one's meaning in life to mere accumulation of property – which is foolishness (the opposite of wisdom):

Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf (Prov. 11:28).

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold (Prov. 22:1).

Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless (vanity).
(Eccl 5:10).

The New Testament reflects Jesus' extreme concern for those who give themselves over to greed. Not only is greed the antithesis of love; it has a consumptive property that beckons its victim to itself to the point of indentured servitude. Those who give themselves over to the accumulation of wealth will very likely serve it, and in so doing will block out love and faith as higher meanings and fulfillment in life. By doing this, a man trades his soul for mere accumulation of material goods which is pitiable. Jesus makes this clear in two passages:

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24).

"Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Lk. 12:15-21).

One is reminded of Saint Thomas More's use of scripture (in Robert Bolt's *Man for All Season's*) when he confronts Richard Rich who has falsely accused him (consigning him to death) in order to obtain Lordship over Wales. More asks him:

It profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world... but for Wales, Richard?

Jesus' teaching is clear – one risks freely rejecting God and heaven by allowing oneself to be consumed with the goods of this world. One must break the spell of greed to find life's higher purpose and to open oneself to the Lord who can save us.

The bible's clear pronouncement on the dangers of covetousness and greed is supported and complemented by classical and contemporary literature. It focuses on the negativity and destructiveness of greed to self, others, and the culture. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a prime example of the destructiveness of unmitigated greed and lust for power that destroys him and his wife – and nearly destroys his friends and country (examined in detail below Section VIII -- Pride). In *Les Miserables*, Victor Hugo counterpoises the generosity of Jean Valjean to a greedy couple – Thénardiens – who know no limit to exploitation of the poor to satisfy their greed. They take the daughter of a poor woman and reduce her to indentured servitude, ultimately ransoming

her to Valjean for a ridiculous price. As the novel ends, they reach their “true fulfillment” by becoming slave traders in the new world. Their greed makes their lives into a force of darkness, pain, and destructiveness with no end in sight as they proceed into eternity.

A contemporary film depicting the seductive and addictive dimensions of greed—as well as its power to destroy the self and others—is Oliver Stone’s and Stanley Weiser’s 1987 film *Wall Street*. The film’s two central characters are Bud Fox (an up and coming stock broker whose greed moves him to near catastrophe) and Gordon Gekko (a diabolical super-trader who is the master of greed, a destroyer of companies and lives, and the “mentor” of Bud). Gekko is so imbued in greed that he has forsaken his conscience and has given himself over to it declaring in a famous speech “greed, for lack of a better word, is good!”

Bud so desperately wants to become a protégé of Gekko (to procure the luxurious Manhattan lifestyle he seems to offer) that he begins gradually compromising his ethical standards to please and be rewarded by him. First he divulges insider information to Gekko on a company—Bluestar Airlines where his father works as head of the union. He involves himself in corporate spying to give Gekko additional information to enhance his wealth. He then learns the art of straw trading to further enrich Gekko and himself. Finally he involves himself in an insider trading and straw trade scheme with Bluestar Airlines to reach a new height of wealth. At this point, he learns that Gekko is about to betray him, his father, and all the workers on the airline by selling off the assets of the company, firing its employees, and taking advantage of the company’s over-funded pension fund.

Unlike Gekko, Bud has a qualm of conscience. He cannot betray and destroy his family and friends to satisfy his greed and relationship with Gekko. The gravity of harm that was to occur because of him breaks the spell of greed, and he decides to suffer the consequences of going against Gekko by under-cutting Gekko’s shares in Bluestar, and secretly advising his British rival-- Sir Larry Wildman- to buy them. When Gekko discovers Bud’s betrayal of him, he turns him over to the Securities and Exchange Commission for prosecution by providing information on Bud’s straw trades. In the process of being prosecuted by the SEC, Bud decides to turn State’s Evidence against Gekko, and at the end of the film both appear to be headed for long prison terms.

The moral of *Wall Street* goes far beyond the adage that there is no honor among thieves. It exposes the fallacy of Gekko’s initial conviction that “greed, for lack of a better word, is good,” showing that greed’s cravings compels its victims to ignore their conscience, to undermine their ethical principles, to abuse family and friends, and to give away their souls for mere material wealth and self-aggrandizement. If allowed to follow its depraved logic to its natural end, greed will lead to heartlessness (like that of Gordon Gekko) opening upon complete betrayal of family, friends, colleagues and economic welfare. Even if greed’s victim can resist this final seduction and destruction, it still leaves in its wake tremendous harm and destruction which may, in due time come back to haunt its protagonist. Indeed, financial journals are filled with the names of those who have paid the price for undermining trust, betraying fiduciary responsibility, and breaking the law—from Ivan Boesky, Michael Milken, Kenneth Lay, “Bernie” Madoff-- and so many more.

Charles Dickens provides one of the very best literary studies of the heart and mind of greed in virtually all of his novels concerned with England during the Industrial Revolution. Perhaps the two most notable characters consumed by greed in the annals of western literature are Uriah Heep (in *David Copperfield*) and Scrooge (in *A Christmas Carol*). Uriah Heep is the soul of greed motivated by envy. His every move is designed to acquire more power and possessions by any possible means – lying, stealing, and creating a completely false self-caricature (calling attention to his humility and generosity which are virtually non-existent). His devious machinations enable him to take over the business and household of Mr. Wickfield (who was an aging alcoholic). Thanks to Heep’s secretary, Mr. Micawber, David discovers the fraud, which in turn interrupts Heep’s plans to marry Wickfield’s daughter Agnes. Ultimately, Heep’s greed and envy are his undoing, and he winds up in prison for attempting to defraud the Bank of England.

The epitome of greed is best illustrated by Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. He describes him as follows:

The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue, and he spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice.⁶

As the novella begins, Scrooge who hates Christmas celebrations, turns down two petitioners asking for funds to help the poor on Christmas Eve, and refuses an invitation to Christmas dinner from his nephew Fred, using the derogatory expression, “Bah humbug.” His clerk, Bob Cratchit, asks him for the day off, which annoys Scrooge, but because of social custom, finally agrees to it. Though Scrooge appears to be almost irredeemable, he is given a remarkable chance to turn his life around by transforming his greed into generosity and genuine concern for humanity. As he sleeps, he is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who is wearing chains and dragging money boxes. Marley tells Scrooge that his fate will be worse if he does not reform his selfish attitudes that pave the way for Marley’s bleak destiny.

Scrooge is then visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past who brings him back to scenes of his past life where he relives the scene of his fiancée Belle who ends their relationship because of Scrooge’s inattentiveness out of hyperconcern for money. Scrooge is then shown a scene of her in a happy Christmas gathering with her new husband and family. Though perturbed by the visit, Scrooge remains resolute in his greed and hardness of heart.

He is then visited by the Ghost of Christmas Present, where Scrooge sees several scenes of Christmas joy as well as the difficulty of Bob Crachit (whose son, Tiny Tim, will die imminently if he is not able to obtain care). He then visits two exceedingly sad children – Ignorance and Want. Scrooge is even more perturbed by this visit which fills him with some regret about the departure of Belle and a slight sense of longing for joy and companionship on Christmas. Nevertheless, his heart remains unchanged.

Finally, he is visited by the last Ghost – The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come where he witnesses the aftermath of a man’s death. No one will show up to his funeral unless lunch is

⁶ Charles Dickens 2010 *A Christmas Carol* (New York: Simon & Brown) p. 7.

provided. He asks if anyone would feel any loss at the man's death, and the Ghost tells him only people who are rejoicing that they will have more time to repay their debt. The Ghost then shows him his own grave, at which point Scrooge awakens, having a remarkable change of heart. He sees the emptiness, loneliness, and meaninglessness of a life that forsakes goodness, compassion, and contribution for the sake of an insatiable desire for more money. This moves him to action. He accepts Fred's invitation and spends Christmas with him and his family, buys a turkey for Bob Cratchit's Christmas dinner, and gives him a raise in the hopes of helping his son, Tiny Tim.

Though one might view Scrooge's change of heart as a bit artificial, because he is able to benefit from a privilege that most greedy people will not have – the visits by the four Ghosts – Dickens' conversion story (perhaps a Christian allegory) has an undercurrent of realism. Those consumed by greed to the point of heartlessness and exploitation are frequently visited by crises sometimes brought on by a curious turn of events, rejection by families, economic downturns, depression and psychological problems, and even trouble with the law. These crises act very much like the four Ghosts appearing to Scrooge in that they cause disruption of life, turbulence of soul, and a reexamination of what makes life worth living. As with the Ghosts, crises do not force anyone to take action; they only challenge the greedy individual to action. They, like Scrooge's Ghosts, can lead either to despair or to genuine change of heart -- to contribute rather than to exploit, to bring joy rather than despair, to foster human relationships rather than destroying them. It then remains for the individual to make a decision and act on it.

Some might think that Scrooge's Ghosts did not challenge him to genuine change of heart, because they appeal to his vanity to have someone care about the value of his life and to mourn his passing. Yet this is not unrealistic. Most people consumed by greed who confront crisis, and its call to a change of heart, are initially moved by these more selfish feelings in their attempt to extricate themselves from loss, anxiety, and depression. As they work through their challenges and feelings, they discover the superficiality and negativity of their lives. This in turn calls them, as it did Scrooge, to change their view of happiness, purpose, dignity, fulfillment, and ultimate destiny. If they do change, they will not be disappointed. After this metanoia, only one thing remains – to develop goals, virtues, and prayer to solidify that change so that regression will be difficult, if not quasi-impossible.

III. Lust

Lust (*luxuria*) generally refers to an intense desire, and therefore can refer to “lust for power” as much as “intense desire for sexual gratification.” However, its use within the seven deadly sins is focused specifically for the habit of giving in to one's intense longings for sexual gratification. It is seen as the root cause of infidelity, promiscuity, licentiousness, and in the contemporary world, sexual addiction (whether that be manifest in unrestrained use of pornography or unrestrained pursuit of sexual gratification). As such, lust frequently is the cause of broken relationships, broken marriages, unsuccessful marriages, unsuccessful family life, and their deep and oftentimes devastating negative emotional consequences.

Lust is perhaps the most prevalent deadly sin in contemporary Western Culture. The almost unrestricted availability of internet pornography, the cultural belief in the harmlessness of

casual sex, the continuous references and suggestions of sexuality in every form of media and the culture's frequent promotion of sexual gratification as a healthy and fulfilling end in itself, leads to a barrage of suggestion and stimulation that is hard for anyone to resist, let alone those who are young and inexperienced in building friendships and generative relationships. It has gotten to the point where many young people find themselves helpless to resist even when they want to! It is hard to know what a pervasive cultural solution might be, and perhaps there really isn't one. However, there is a solution in every individual's life who truly wants to follow the teaching of Christ (see below), develop genuinely generative marital relationships, avoid the devastation of broken commitments, and build a healthy family and enduring friendships – the commitment to chasteness through the grace and imitation of Jesus.

Before looking more deeply at the destructiveness to self and other caused by lust, we will want to examine the ideal of romantic love--eros. Sometimes this ancient term refers only to romantic or sexual *passion*, but that is not its full meaning in any major classical work of philosophy. The full meaning extends to the friendship and commitment underlying romantic love which takes on a very special significance in Christianity -- the exclusive highest priority, indissoluble commitment and fidelity needed for strong faith-filled families.

Eros, in its concern for romance and romantic feelings is a complex phenomenon much broader than sexual feelings and satisfaction. It involves many dimensions of the psyche – including intimacy, generativity, the reception of generativity, anticipation of deep friendship and commitment, the perception of beauty, complementarity of function, anticipation of family, and a sense of adventure. Hence, *eros* has a very wide range of feelings and psychological engagement coming from both personal maturity and decisions about life's meaning.

Recall from the discussion of happiness, that a Level One or Two view of happiness/purpose tends to emphasize *personal* gratification and satisfaction of *self* while Levels Three and Four tend to emphasize empathy, contribution, and transcendental purpose. Thus, a person who has a Level One or Level Two meaning in life, who is likely to be less personally mature, will have a very different, more superficial, view of *eros* than a person in Levels Three and Four who is more mature, and is open to an intimate, generative, and committed relationship.

Recall also the discussion of “freedom from” and “freedom for” in which it was shown that individuals on Levels One and Two are likely to have a view of “freedom from” which focuses on immediately attaining strong urges and desires, escaping constraint and commitment, “keeping their options open,” and resenting unreciprocated sacrifices. Conversely, individuals on Levels Three and Four are likely to view freedom as “freedom for” which focuses on the most pervasive, enduring, and deep purpose in life – one that goes *beyond* self and makes a genuine contribution to family, friends, community, organizations, church, the Kingdom of God, and even the culture. In this view, constraint and commitment for the sake of achieving life's higher purpose is seen as worthwhile. Likewise, foreclosing options to pursue some truly good directions is deemed essential, and unreciprocated sacrifices are accepted and expected. Once again, these different views of freedom radically affect individuals' views of a romantic relationship, as well as their feelings and expectations from it.

We may now give a general profile of the focus and expectations for a romantic relationship in the perspectives of Level One-Two and Level Three-Four. As might be expected, the Level One-Two perspective of *eros* emphasizes what is more apparent, immediately gratifying, intense and ego-fulfilling. Hence, its focus is predominantly on sexuality, beauty, gender complementarity, and romantic excitement and adventure. Furthermore its expectations are fairly short term and focused on immediate gratification, keeping options open, increased levels of romantic excitement, and avoiding commitments and unreciprocated sacrifices. As a consequence, it resists movement to Level Three-Four, and the intimacy and generativity intrinsic to them (discussed below).

In contrast to this, a Level Three-Four perspective of *eros* focuses on making a difference beyond the self – and in mature individuals on making the most pervasive, enduring, and deep contribution possible. It is also open to empathy and care for others (in its quest to make an optimal positive contribution to the world). Though it does not abandon the dimensions of *eros* emphasized in Levels One and Two (sexuality, beauty, gender complementarity, and romantic excitement), it contextualizes these desires within concomitant desires for intimacy, generativity, complementarity, collaboration, common cause, deep friendship, loyalty, commitment, and family. A Level Three-Four perspective is not enough to bring about these desires; there must also be psychological stability and personal development and maturation. When these factors are co-present, the expectations of romantic relationships broadens and deepens. As a consequence there is a willingness to foreclose options, to invest more fully in the romantic relationship (and ultimately to make this relationship exclusive). There is willingness to make the other a “first priority” in the expenditure of physical and emotional resources, which anticipates a life-long commitment as well as unreciprocated sacrifices. The following chart summarizes the outlooks of both perspectives.

LEVEL	FOCUS	EXPECTATIONS
<i>Eros (Romantic Love)</i> 3 & 4	Openness to the importance and inclusion of: Intimacy, generativity, complementarity, collaboration, common cause, deep mutual friendship, long-term commitment, and family (note: sexuality, beauty, and romantic excitement are still important, but contextualized by the above).	Pervasive, enduring, and deep meaning, foreclosing of options to secure “best option,” mutually supportive communion, constraints for the sake of intimacy, depth, and commitment, unreciprocated sacrifice
<i>Eros (Romantic Love)</i> 1 & 2	The emphasis is on sexual feelings and gratification, beauty of the other, romantic adventure, excitement of the relationship, and control within the relationship	Immediate and heightened gratification, fulfillment of the desire to be admired and loved, keeping options open, greater levels of excitement, and no unreciprocated sacrifices

When romantic relationships occur in Level Three-Four individuals who are stable and mature, the intimate friendship becomes deeper and deeper. Recall that when *Philia* is reciprocated it tends to deepen and become more committed. When we commit more of our time, future, and physical and psychic energy to a friend, and that friend reciprocates with a deeper commitment to us, the friendship becomes closer, more supportive, more fulfilling, and more emotionally satisfying. When it is appropriate, this deep friendship can incite intimacy, generativity, and romantic feelings, which in turn, can deepen the friendship even more – but now it is not just a deep friendship, it is an *intimate romantic* deep friendship. This distinctive kind of friendship can continue to deepen until both parties are not only ready for, but desirous of, making the other their *number one priority*. From a logical point of view there can only be one #1 priority – everything else is a contradiction. Hence the desire to make a deep intimate friend a #1 priority is tantamount to wanting an *exclusive* commitment – which cannot be given to anyone else.

Furthermore, this deep friendship anticipates a *life-long* commitment in which the couple enters into common cause – that is, to do some good through their mutual efforts for the world *beyond* themselves. The most significant dimension of common cause for a couple who are intimately related (anticipating sexuality) is the creation of a *family*. Recall from above that love moves *beyond* itself – we seek to do the good for *the other*, the community, the world, and the Kingdom of God. Just as loving individuals move beyond themselves, so also loving couples move beyond themselves. Though it is very important that the couple have their “alone time” to develop their closeness, affection, generativity, and mutual support, it is likewise important that they do not *stay* within the relationship *alone*. A couple staring into each others’ eyes can be as mutually self-obsessive as Narcissus looking at his image in the pool – they can drown in the waters below their beautiful self-images. This illustrates the need for intimate friendships to move from “*within* the relationship” to “*beyond* the relationship.” The deeply committed romantic relationship cultivates a complementary and collaborative strength – a synergy to move beyond itself to make a positive difference through common cause. Family is the most fundamental aim of such a relationship. But there can be many other objectives as well – for community, church, culture, Kingdom of God, etc. Though the most fundamental objective – family – must come first, it too must move beyond itself – to make a positive difference in ways that will not undermine its depth and cohesiveness.

In sum, the ideal of a Level Three-Four romantic relationship is to bring intimate friendship to its highest level – to make the intimate friend a #1 priority through an exclusive and life-long commitment to enter into mutually supportive and collaborative common cause toward family and other positive objectives that will serve not only friends, but community, culture, church, and the Kingdom of God.

We can now see an inherent conflict between Level One-Two *eros*, and Level Three-Four *eros*. The emphasis on beauty, adventure, and sexual feelings in Level One-Two *eros*, without the dimensions of generativity, friendship, and commitment, can incite individuals to be both sexually permissive and promiscuous. Sexual stimulation (from sexual activity to pornography)

is frequently addictive.⁷ Sexuality can become an end in itself, and when it does, romantic desires can only be accentuated by more sexual activity, more partners or more excitement (amplified by aggressiveness, risk, and alcohol/drugs, etc.).⁸ These activities can enhance sexual addiction⁹ and desensitize the individual to higher dimensions of relationship and psychic satisfaction (e.g. intimacy, generativity, collaboration, common cause, friendship, commitment, exclusivity, and family). As a result, the long term practice of Level One-Two *eros* can become addictive, callous, and aggressive¹⁰ – leading to objectification (“thingification”) of the other, “using” the other as an object of gratification, and dominating the other for ego satisfaction. This can lead to a state of mind in which intimacy, generativity, and mature friendships are hard to recapture. The addictive quality of lower brain activities can make it difficult to move from Level One-Two to Level Three-Four happiness and meaning. The longer individuals reinforce Level One-Two *eros*, the more difficult it will be for them to grow in levels of maturity and development, and to seek genuinely intimate, generative, and exclusive romantic relationships. It is difficult to maintain and deepen marital and family relationships with a narrow Level One-Two perspective and focus.

We may now return to the topic of lust which might be viewed as unrestrained Level One-Level Two *eros*. In this sense, lust is not only an underestimation and undermining of *eros*’ true potential and power, it is also an agent of the destruction of true *eros* (Level Three-Level Four). As noted above, this narrow lower kind of *eros* stunts personal maturity, creates sexual addictions, and moves toward narcissism, promiscuity, and infidelity, giving rise to broken relationships, commitments, marriages and families. Lust (*eros* 1 & 2) has three additional fatal flaws. First, it objectifies (“thingifies”) the other who loses his/her sense of dignity, belovedness, intrinsic respectability, mystery, and transcendental depth. Though every mature person wants to be viewed in terms of his/her unique mystery, goodness, lovability, and transcendental depth, lust reduces the “lover’s” gaze to seeing mere *objects* of gratification, physical beauty, and status. Thus lust prevents us from respecting as we ought, loving as we ought, and working for family and common cause as we ought. A relationship adversely affected by lust is likely to be short-lived and insufferably self-involved. It might be objected that some beloveds want to be viewed as mere objects of beauty and gratification. Yet, if this truly were the case, one can only feel pity for someone who wants to ignore and reject their depth, mystery, transcendental powers, and unique belovedness—to reduce themselves to the status of mere objects, playthings, and players. Our best course of action is not to leave them in their state of pitiable self-limitation and self-reduction, but to educate them about their true dignity, purpose, fulfillment, and destiny.

⁷ Activation of the reward pathways (dopamine system) in the lower brain by sexual activity, pornography, aggression, and drugs – all form memories and habits of pleasure that can become gradually addictive. See Hilton 2013 pp 1-18. See also Prayer 2009 pp 1-4.

⁸ Both sexual activity and aggression activate reward pathways in the hypothalamus. There is also evidence of interrelationship between sexual desires and aggression (even violence) through the hypothalamus (see Lin, et.al. 2011 pp 221-226 and Callaway 2011 pp 1-3). If sexuality is connected to generative (higher cerebral) functions, it will likely mitigate the aggressive components originating in the hypothalamus.

⁹ See Hilton 2013 pp 1-18 and Prayer 2009 pp 1-4.

¹⁰ See the previous note.

The second fatal flaw of lust (*eros* 1&2) is that it leads to narcissism, because it frequently puts the emphasis not on love, but on being loved, not on giving oneself, but on receiving from the other, not on satisfying the other, but on being satisfied by the other. Evidently, this narcissistic world-view cannot sustain a mature friendship—let alone a marriage – over the long term. Perhaps more seriously, it is likely to *undermine* “freedom for”, “commitment”, “mature friendships”, and marriages.

The third fatal flaw of lust (*eros* 1 & 2) is its tendency to move *away* from exclusive commitments and deep friendships to *multiple*, uncommitted, passionate relationships. Therefore, it prevents people from entering into marital commitments with the awareness and freedom to keep them, and when people do enter into marriage in this way, *eros* 1 & 2 (lust) continuously challenges it and frequently undermines it. It is hard enough to maintain a marital commitment in both mind and heart in today’s permissive culture with its continuous encouragement toward sexual gratification and ego-comparative fulfillment without fueling it with habits of unrestrained romantic passion. One will have to confront these bad habits (vices) with good ones (virtues) along with commitment to the Lord through Church and prayer. We will have to be realistic about the blindness to consequences that lust frequently causes (see *Anna Karenina* below) – and vigilant about confronting temptation at its very beginning in order to begin the long process of deepening chastity and charity in our lives.

Given the above darkness and negativity caused by lust, it should come as no surprise that the bible specifically prohibits it – particularly in the preaching of Jesus. Adultery – unlawful intercourse with a partner who is committed to another by marriage – is prohibited in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:13 and Deut. 5: 18, 21) and also in the Holiness Code (Lev. 20:10). Adultery was considered so serious that it was punishable by death – generally stoning (Ez. 16:40). There are multiple condemnations of adultery in wisdom literature (Prov. 2:16, 5:15, 7:1 ff, 23:27 f, and 30:20). Jesus repeats and reinforces the prohibition against adultery (Mt. 5:27; Mk. 10:19; Lk. 18:20), but adds considerably to it, indicating that the desire for adultery illicit fornication (lust) is evil as well:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell (Mt. 5: 27-30).

Jesus very clearly extends the prohibition of adultery to the desire for illicit sexual union (lust) because he is aware that if these passions are unrestrained, it will lead to all the above consequences – to actual adultery and the undermining of self, others, and the relationships between them. As we shall see in the case of *Anna Karenina* (and so many other well-known literary figures like *The Great Gatsby*¹¹), the entertainment of adulterous desires captivates the

¹¹ In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s classic work, *J. Gatsby*’s obsession with Daisy leads to an affair resulting in a landslide of terrible consequences – broken marriages, ruptured relationships among friends, and ultimately, to Gatsby’s murder by the husband of a woman who was the mistress of Daisy’s husband, Tom. The message is similar to *Anna*

imagination and causes a controlling self-blinding to adultery's devastating consequences. In the midst of this, lust powerfully fuels the passions to the point where acting upon them seems irresistible. At that point, the darkness takes over.

Leo Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* weaves together several deep and complex themes—including, love, forgiveness, Christian faith, sinfulness, and guilt. Yet, its focus seems to center on the deadly sin of lust and infidelity manifest in the lives of Princess Anna Karenina and her illicit lover, Count Alexei Vronsky. Tolstoy presents Anna as an almost perfect woman from the vantage point of external beauty, charm, vivaciousness, and personality. Men and women alike fall in love with Anna's external appearance almost irresistibly. Yet on the inside, Anna has a character flaw to which she allows virtually free reign—unrestrained romantic passion (lust). Though Anna believes that she is committed to "love," her view of it is quite narrow and immature. She believes that the strength of her feelings justifies ignoring and even rejecting other dimensions of love – her commitment to her husband (Count Alexei Karenin), her legitimate son (Sergei "Seryozha" Karenin), and her illegitimate daughter (with Vronsky) Annie. Her feelings and passions become so central that the deep hurt she will cause to her husband and children, the loss of their reputation within Russian society, the principles of her Orthodox Christian faith (which do not appear to have ever been strong), and the sensitivities of her family and friends pale in comparison. She gives way to these unrestrained romantic passions, catapulting headlong into an affair with Count Vronsky.

As the story develops, Anna's romantic passions first become an object of scandal. Her husband, Karenin, is a good man and generous provider who has done nothing to deserve Anna's growing disdain. He explains to her that their reputation is being seriously jeopardized, and that she should call the affair off. However, Anna's soul is so filled with the romantic love of Vronsky that she cannot imagine a life without him. She ignores Karenin's requests, trying to justify her infidelity and betrayal by blaming *him* for being boring, and for forsaking *his* passion for mere reputation and convention. Anna is so blinded by her passion she does not recognize either her inauthenticity or the devastation she is causing to family members and friends around her. She is so completely blinded, she doesn't even acknowledge the terrible social consequences that are about to befall her if she continues in her scandalous relationship. As with so many other tragic characters, her moral flaw begins to control the events around her, ultimately becoming fatal.

After Anna confesses her infidelity to Karenin, he asks her to stop the affair, but Anna cannot help herself. She pursues Vronsky with even greater passion which provokes Karenin to seek a divorce which would have ruined Anna's reputation. When Anna almost dies giving birth to her daughter Annie (with Vronsky), Karenin comes to visit her, and is genuinely moved with compassion. He forgives Anna for her infidelity, assures her that he will drop the divorce, and then forgives Vronsky for his part in the affair. This act of compassion, forgiveness, and magnanimity stand in such contrast to the infidelity and inauthenticity of Anna and Vronsky that Vronsky is moved to commit suicide—though he is unsuccessful in his attempt to do so. Anna, however, is not moved in the same way. Instead, she resolves that she cannot live with her husband (despite his compassion and generosity) and must follow her passion to live with

Karenina, except seen through the eyes of a male narrator, Nick Carraway. See F. Scott Fitzgerald 1925, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons).

Vronsky, convincing him to elope with her in Europe – thus leaving behind Karenin, Seryozha, and the rest of her family.

At first, Anna's and Vronsky's romantic adventure seems like veritable bliss. Yet, it has no solid foundation beyond the strong feelings that they have for one another. They have abandoned the idea of love as commitment for good beyond themselves—not through their words, but through their actions—e.g. in Anna's abandonment of her husband, son and family and Vronsky's support of her in this destructive act. Furthermore, Anna does not see Karenin's forgiveness and generosity as a manifestation of love for her—true love that can span the chasm of hurt and betrayal that she has initiated. So when the intensity of passion begins to die down—as it almost always does—Vronsky begins to find himself bored by the object of his former passion. In an ironic turn, Anna now faces the same boredom and disinterest from Vronsky that she had formerly seen in her husband, and used as an excuse to leave him and elope with Vronsky. This causes Anna to desperately seek Vronsky's time and affections to the point where she is suffocating him, causing him to pull away from her even more. Additionally, they have no way of finding social relationships and amusement with their Russian peers in Europe because their elopement without divorce has caused scandal. Though Vronsky tries to amuse himself by taking up painting, it is clearly not the kind of pursuit around which his soldierly life can be centered.

Unable to bear the social snubbing of their peers in Europe, Anna and Vronsky return to St. Petersburg. They stay in a luxurious hotel, but in separate rooms. At this juncture, the veil of passion over Anna's rational faculties begins to lift. She begins to see that the social consequences of her unrestrained passion are quite real indeed. Though she tries to maintain her belief that these consequences are nothing compared to her passion for Vronsky, she begins to feel progressively more isolated. Vronsky, who enjoys considerably more freedom for social interaction, exacerbates Anna's feelings of isolation. In the blindness of passion, Anna abandoned her relationships to family, friends and society, but now feels quite alone. She does not appear to feel regret for her past actions, and certainly has no intention of asking for forgiveness or making amends, and so her social isolation continues to grow. Instead of reversing course, she turns to even greater passion—desperately pleading with Vronsky to refrain from even the smallest trips for business, for she has only Vronsky to alleviate her loneliness and she strongly suspects he has other lovers to whom he is giving his romantic affections. Anna's unrestrained romantic passion has now degenerated into jealousy, anger, and despair – three other deadly sins.

In an attempt to reclaim some of her former social status (to alleviate her loneliness), Anna decides to attend a gala event at a theatre in St. Petersburg where many of her former social peers will be present. Though Vronsky pleads with her not to go, Anna's blindness to the social consequences of her reckless actions causes her to believe that everything will turn out ok. The evening is a complete disaster, Anna is roundly snubbed by her former friends, and one of them storms out in protest. Devastated, Anna and Vronsky decide to leave St. Petersburg and move into Vronsky's country estate.

While at the estate, Anna's jealousy and bitterness grows and she and Vronsky begin to argue repeatedly. Anna starts taking morphine to help her sleep, but instead of helping her to sort

out the confusion caused by the surging of her passions, it enhances it. The two leave Vronsky's estate and go to Moscow where the loneliness, jealousy, anger, desperation, confusion, and despair intensify. After several weeks, Anna and Vronsky have a terrible argument leading her to believe that their relationship is finished. As her feelings of isolation, confusion, and despair increase, she begins to contemplate suicide. After sending a telegram to Vronsky asking him to return, and visiting her friends Dolly and Kitty, Anna is overcome by her jealousy, bitterness, and confusion—and so she decides on a course of suicide. As she looks around her she can only see the bad news – the bad news of her life, her friends, and even people simply walking down the street. In a final act of desperation, she throws herself in front of a train, ending her life in the same way as a railway worker who accidentally fell in front of a train on the occasion when she first met Vronsky.

Of course, lust does not always lead to complete destruction or suicide – or to murder and physical injury (as portrayed in countless volumes of popular magazines like *True Detective* or cable television stations like *Investigation Discovery*). Nevertheless, as explained above it stunts the growth of romantic love, preventing it from developing into genuine generativity, exclusive commitment, and self-sacrifice for family. Indeed, it almost always undermines and destroys these things. As such, it leaves in its wake profoundly immature individuals, broken relationships and families, dashed expectations, and emotional destructiveness of every kind. True—it does not necessarily lead to infidelity and broken families but it almost always undermines the capacity for fidelity, commitment, sacrificial generativity, and unselfish love. If allowed to grow, lust leads to the same kind of blindness experienced by Anna—blindness about hurt to others, separation from children and friends, and separation from church and society.

What can we learn from Anna's story? First, we will want to see through the so-called “beauty” of unrestrained romantic passion. Though lust causes blindness to its negative and evil consequences, removing the darkness from a seemingly beautiful future, the blindness will come to an end when the real future catches up with us. Secondly, it is always best to challenge the urges of lust at their beginning when they may be strong, but still manageable. Allowing those urges to grow will almost always, as in the case of Anna, become unmanageable—and when this happens, the blindness will set in, then inauthenticity to self, then the hypocrisy of blaming others for our misdeeds (e.g., I can no longer live with Karenin because he is boring and passionless). Thirdly, the mythical beautiful world painted by unrestrained romantic passion will almost certainly come to a hurtful end because of the narcissism of one or both parties, the jealousies and anger generated by inauthenticity and infidelity, and the confusion and destructiveness caused by the rupturing of commitments and families. As is shown in the article on moral conversion (on this landing page), we will be best prepared to contend with the passion of lust by reinforcing our higher self (through the techniques mentioned there), spiritual conversion and spontaneous prayers.

IV. Sloth (*Acedia*)

Sloth (*acedia*) has the general meaning of disinclination toward exertion, but in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it refers to spiritual apathy – a complete lack of concern for oneself, others, the community, the society, and the Kingdom of God. It is seen as one of the most serious

deadly sins, because it reflects a complete disinclination toward care, love, contribution, and faith – that open upon our true dignity, purpose, and eternal destiny. It stands at the root not only of underliving life, but of wasting it – along with our talents and the potential to develop them to make an optimal positive difference to the families, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, institutions, communities, and churches with which we associate. Unlike the other Deadly Sins that require tempering of our passions, sloth reflects that absence of passion – healthy passion coming from beliefs, convictions, ideals, principles, empathy, and conscience. Oftentimes, sloth can become so deep that one not only does not care, but does not care that he does not care. When this occurs, the individual relegates himself wastes his life, relegates himself to the status of a “ne’-er do well,” and jeopardizes his salvation. He will be like the individual in Jesus’ Parable of the Talents” who did nothing with the talent he was given and buried it in the ground for fear of his master. Jesus responds:

You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth’ (Mt. 25: 26-30).

The verdict rendered to the slothful servant stands in direct contrast to the two servants who made the best use out of the talents they had been given. They are given great abundance (with the implication of salvation) for using their gifts to make an optimal positive difference to others, to community, the culture, and the kingdom. But the slothful servant loses *everything* he had since he did not care about making a positive difference to anyone or anything beyond himself – not to others, community, the kingdom of God, or anything else. What’s worse is that he knows he is responsible to a master (God) who wants him to use his talents to make a positive difference, yet he ignores this implicit mandate and completely wastes the potential of the talent he has been given. The servant’s callous disregard of the master’s expectations earns the disdain of the master who simply cannot believe that the servant would let his time and his gifts come to nothing. Jesus’ message about the seriousness of the sin of sloth is clear – if we don’t care about completely wasting our lives and talents, then we should care about what the Lord who gave us our lives and talents expects of us – and if we do not even do that, then we rightfully earn the disdain of the Lord Himself. Stated differently, if we do not care that we do not care – and we do not care about what the Lord thinks about our apathy and laziness, then we may be given a future similar to the life we have created in our past – a wasteland, filled with emptiness and darkness. Though at first glance sloth appears to be a lesser sin than the more aggressive sins – lust, greed, anger, envy, and pride – the Lord teaches otherwise – for the sin of sloth can lead to the undermining of all virtue – particularly the virtue of love – charity, contribution, compassion, and self-sacrifice.

English literature is replete with examples of ne’er-do-wells who waste their lives, take advantage of others, and bring down unsuspecting good people who give them an unwise benefit

of the doubt. It is difficult for an author to place such characters at the center of a narrative, because protagonists and antagonists are supposed to *do* something, to which slothful characters cannot bring themselves. Thus they are frequently relegated to significant side characters who play into the narrative through the negativity they create in taking advantage of others.

In E.M. Forster's work *Room with a View*, one of the main side characters, Cecil Vyse, when asked by the vicar, Mr. Beebe about his profession responds as follows:

I have no profession. It is another example of my decadence. My attitude – quite an indefensible one - is that, so long as I am no trouble to any one I have a right to do as I like. I know I ought to be getting money out of people, or devoting myself to things I don't care a straw about, but somehow, I've not been able to begin.¹²

Cecil has both title and resources from his family, and has appropriated enough education to appear witty and sarcastic. Instead of orienting his life toward contribution or good for anyone or any cause, he has contented himself with the profession of leisure. Much like the servant who buried his talent in the ground, Cecil tries to excuse his admitted decadence by claiming that anything beyond leisure would be a vulgar pursuit of money or a worthless cause. This rationalization for wasting his life, title, and family resources, though wholly inadequate, is sufficient to give peace to the slothful Cecil.

Cecil believes that his title, wit, and resources will be sufficient to solidify an engagement with Lucy Honeychurch, a beautiful upper-class lady who is touring Florence with her chaperone cousin, Charlotte Bartlett. Unbeknownst to Cecil, a rather awkward, but loveable commoner – George Emerson also encounters Lucy (along with his father) in Florence. Though George has none of the exterior appeal of Cecil (title, monetary resources, status, and high level education), he is sincere, loving, and passionate – and is genuinely concerned for Lucy and her happiness. As the fates would have it, Lucy and George encounter one another coincidentally – twice in Florence and once in England – where George expresses his sincere love for Lucy. When Lucy returns to England from Florence, she finds herself engaged to Cecil who has perfected the vice of sloth as well as “putting on airs.” Lucy again encounters George by coincidence in Windy Corner in the English countryside. Once again they kiss, and Lucy is moved by George's sincere love for her. She reveals to him her engagement to Cecil to which George responds that Cecil only views her as “an object for the shelf,” and that he is incapable of loving her enough to respect her and allow her independence. Though Lucy initially tells George that he must leave – a request with which he complies – she has one more chance encounter with George's father after seeing Cecil for who he really is. She breaks off her engagement with Cecil, and returns to George, ultimately marrying him. Though Cecil possesses all the good fortune an English lady could ever want, his decadence, slothfulness, insincerity, vanity, and arrogance make him rather dark and ugly on the inside. Despite the exterior glitter and gold, his soul's emptiness, coldness, and lovelessness bursts through – alarming not only Lucy, but anyone else who could possibly care for him. Though he will probably never find love, he will always be able to content himself with his cynical arrogance – “I have no profession. It is another example of my decadence.”

¹² E.M. Forster 1908, *A Room with a View* (London: Edward Arnold) pp. 109-110.

Forster critiques the sin of sloth by revealing the decadence, heartlessness, and loneliness it cultivates. Though its victims are convinced of their remarkably good fortune to be born into a perpetually easy life, they suffer from insipient meaninglessness, loneliness, and alienation, because they do very little for the world and the people around them and even less for the culture and the kingdom of God. They know in their inmost being that their lives mean next to nothing both objectively and in the hearts of people around them. They are like unnoticeable transparent beings who consume more than they contribute and lower others to their level instead of raising them to a higher dignity and destiny. As a result, despite their feigned happiness, they are quite empty, lonely, and alienated – the unfortunate fruits of the nothingness to which they have devoted themselves.

V. Vanity

Though vanity (*vanagloria*) has been included in the sin of pride (*superbia*), since the time of Pope Gregory I (AD590) many lists of the deadly sins—including those of the originator Evagrius Ponticus, and John Cassian (who transmitted the list to the West)—kept it separate because of its difference from another, more sinister, dimension of pride – lust for power and dominion. I belong to this camp, for the same reason – the substantial differences between the two sins. Though the cause of *vanagloria* and *superbia* is the same (ego-centricity) their effects and manifestations are different.

In general, “vanity” refers to an excessive self-love and/or an excessive desire to be loved, admired, or recognized by others. This excessive love of self, as well as the desire for adulation and recognition, frequently aims at becoming a central focus of attention within the lives of an increasingly large sphere of people. If it is allowed to grow uninhibitedly, one will seek to become *the central* focus of attention in people’s lives – and if allowed to reach its “fulfillment,” it will lead to self-idolatry where one will seek to replace God and family at that center. As vanity begins to grow within the soul, its victim can hear the refrain of the evil queen in the Disney fairy-tale *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*—“mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” As it reaches out to its fulfillment, it longs to be like John Lennon exclaiming “we [the Beatles] are more popular than Jesus!”¹³ Through it all, there is an undercurrent of darkness, emptiness, self-delusion, and impending demise—much like the Greek mythical figure Narcissus who fell so deeply in love with the image of his face reflected in a pool that he lost interest in all other dimensions of life, until he died from starvation.

In the Bible the English word “vanity” frequently means “futility” (“transitoriness” – “passing away” – or “fading away”). This is not what is intended by Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian in their original lists of the Deadly Sins. They meant “vainglory” – a belief that one deserves to be admired because of one’s perceived superior beauty, status, or talent. This is translated in New Testament Greek as “kenodoxia” – literally, “empty glory.” If “glory” is the object of admiration and awe, then vainglory is the belief that one be admired for a false reason – that is, admiring an empty object of glory. Wisdom literature and the New Testament teach that worldly beauty, worldly success, worldly talent, and worldly status are all passing away – and therefore are false objects of admiration or esteem. As theologians have stated for centuries, “*Sic*

¹³ Maureen Cleave, 1966, “An interview with John Lennon”, *The London Evening Standard*, March 1966

transit Gloria mundi” – the glory of this world is passing away – therefore, it is unworthy of our profound admiration, and completely unworthy of our worship.¹⁴ Though Jesus does not speak specifically of “kenodoxia,” He speaks about the same idea when using the phrase “exalts himself” – “for those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Mt. 23:12). Though Jesus does not explicitly prohibit the self-exaltation, He extols the opposite virtue – humble-heartedness (“being poor in spirit”) as the first Beatitude. If humble-heartedness is foundational for all the beatitudes – and therefore, for charity (*agapē*) itself, then we can infer that self-exaltation (the opposite of humble-heartedness) is one of the worst vices.

Jesus also teaches resistance to self-exaltation by using wisdom instruction – showing through parable and example that it is foolish, and will lead to shame before others. In Luke 14:8-11, Jesus says:

When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus’ teaching is clear – vanity (self-exaltation) is foolish and will likely result in shame. Furthermore, it undermines humbleheartedness, and so undermines charity, the will of God, and a disposition of soul needed for the kingdom of God – needed so that the kingdom of heaven will be ours (Mt. 5:3).

As with other deadly sins, particularly greed, lust, and pride, vanity has an addictive quality that impels its victims to seek greater and more rapid fulfillment until it strains the limits of even the most beautiful and popular individuals. It is an unquenchable fire that probes every possible avenue to gain the admiration and love it seeks, yet as it does so, it undermines its willing adherents in three major ways. First, it replaces the true identity of its victim with a façade—a false identity that is admirable or beautiful to the external observer, but lacking in interior significance and substance. In order to become more externally appealing, one has to appropriate a chameleon nature – capable of changing not only one’s appearance, but also one’s core identity – intrinsic lovability, spiritual powers, principles, ideals, religious beliefs, dignity, meaning in life, and fulfillment—in order to become an ever more significant center in the lives of an ever increasing number of people. Eventually the exterior image completely replaces the core identity of its beautiful and popular victim. As this occurs, victims ironically feel an increasing sense of emptiness, loss, and loneliness amidst an increasing sense of popularity and

¹⁴ Thomas a Kempis seems to have been the first to state this truth with the precise Latin phrase, but it was certainly recognized in 1418, but the truth behind the phrase was recognized by Evagrius Ponticus and his successors who reflected on the 7 Deadly Sins. Later, the phrase was integrated into the papal induction ceremony three times – a custom that was not carried forward after 1963. See Thomas à Kempis *The Imitation of Christ* Book 1, Chapter 3.

adulation – as the façade grows, the substance diminishes nearly to the point of nothingness—and the victims feel it.

Unfortunately, by this time, they are almost powerless to extricate themselves from the emptiness and loss of meaning and substance. Only one thing can save them – and it is not themselves (the first savior they are inclined to turn to)—but only the Lord of unconditional love who would reach into the depths of complete emptiness to help refashion an identity completely given over to mere appearances. Without a radical act of faith, those who give themselves over to vanity are likely to be perpetually lost in the emptiness and meaninglessness of their own making. They must be able to muster the humility of Peter, who after walking toward Jesus on the water, finds himself drowning, reaches up and cries “Lord, help me!”

A second major way in which vanity undermines its willing adherents is to make them believe that the appearance (the façade) is the “identity” in which people are interested—the only one that can be shown to others in the external world. Not only do the victims of vanity devalue and abandon their true substantive identity in their own minds (their intrinsic lovability, spiritual powers, principles, ideals, religious beliefs, dignity, meaning in life, and hope for transcendent fulfillment), they convince themselves that no one else cares about these qualities either. As the power of vanity overshadows the psyche, it reinforces the fiction that all people – particularly family and friends—are just like them. They are interested much more in their popularity than in their goodness and unique lovability, much more in their talents than in their spiritual nature and religious beliefs, much more in their outward beauty than in their principles, ideals, and desire to serve and love others—much more interested in the victim as a “thing” rather than a person. Once the conviction sets in, and the victim believes that family, friends and everyone else is interested much more in associating with their elevated fame, talent, and beauty than in their friendship, goodness, and transcendent soul, they abandon the latter to the former in their own hearts, and will only show the former to others and the world. Indeed, they hide their inner selves from others so that others may admire the external façade in its place.

Obviously, this has major negative consequences. First, one cannot afford to ever decrease in external beauty, talent, and popularity—for this would constitute a complete loss of the adulation one so desperately needs for meaning and identity – and therefore, a complete loss of identity and the self. Aging becomes a gradual suicide. As one ages, one’s true family and friends are the only ones left to support and sustain the goodness, lovability, and transcendent identity of the beloved. Regrettably the victim of vanity frequently rejects this real love, because it makes the lover an equal—or fleetingly superior – to him as beloved, which is too hard to take. Reversing this belief would take a radical act of humility which is exceedingly difficult for the victim to initiate from within himself alone. Such humility frequently requires the help of an unconditionally loving God, which in turn, requires faith.

Another consequence of hiding one’s substance and core identity from others and the world is the shame that comes when one is confronted by misfortune, sickness or aging. Of course, we can do everything possible to hide these “problems” – from plastic surgery to the best coiffeurs and clothing-- but ultimately, little manifestations of weakness, unattractiveness, and frailty begin to emerge which gives rise to shame—a painful shame. Individuals who have a strong core identity – sense of intrinsic lovability, spiritual awareness, principles, etc—do not

feel this shame nearly as acutely, however, vanity's victims do—and the more radically they have abandoned their core identity the more acutely they feel the pain of shame—to the point of self-torment and hiding from others. One is reminded from a scene from C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* in which people in Hell are offered a bus ride into the outskirts of Heaven where they are greeted by spirits of friends, family members, or agents of God. The passengers are wispy ghost-figures when they arrive at the outskirts of Heaven, while their deceased friends or family members are solid spiritual beings completely transparent, bright, and beautiful *in themselves*. One of the passengers is a lady who has clearly given herself over to vanity much of her life. Though she was exceedingly well-dressed in Hell, her fine attire there was completely inferior to the presence of the solid transparent spiritual beings¹⁵. One of the beings approaches her to help her make the journey from the outskirts of Heaven (similar to Purgatory) to the mountains beyond which Heaven lay. The following dialogue ensues—described by a narrator within the story:

A moment later I heard the sound of feet, and one of the Bright People came in sight: one always noticed that sound there, for we Ghosts made no noise when we walked. "Go away!" squealed the Ghost. "Go away! Can't you see I want to be alone?" "But you need help," said the Solid One. "If you have the least trace of decent feeling left," said the Ghost, "you'll keep away. I don't want help. I want to be left alone. Do go away..." Said the Spirit "It's back there-to the mountains- you need to go. You can lean on me all the way. I can't absolutely carry you, but you need have almost no weight on your own feet: and it will hurt less at every step." "How can I go out like this among a lot of people with real solid bodies? It's far worse than going out with nothing on would have been on earth. Have everyone staring through me." "Oh, I see. But we were all a bit ghostly when we first arrived, you know. That'll wear off. Just come out and try." "But they'll see me." "What does it matter if they do?" "I'd rather die." "But you've died already. There's no good trying to go back to that." "I wish I'd never been born," it said. "What are we born for?" "For infinite happiness," said the Spirit. "You can step out into it at any moment..." "But, I tell you, they'll see me." "An hour hence and you will not care. A day hence and you will laugh at it. Don't you remember on earth-there were things too hot to touch with your finger but you could drink them all right? Shame is like that. If you will accept it-if you will drink the cup to the bottom-you will find it very nourishing: but try to do anything else with it and it scalds." "You really mean? . . ." said the Ghost, and then paused "Yes," said the Spirit. "Come and try." Almost, I thought the Ghost had obeyed. Certainly it had moved: but suddenly it cried out: "No, I can't. I tell you I can't. For a moment, while you were talking, I almost thought . . . but when it comes to the point. . . . You've no right to ask me to do a thing like that. It's disgusting. I should never forgive myself if I did. Never, never. And it's not fair. They ought to have warned us. I'd never have come. And now-please, please go away!" "Friend," said the Spirit. "Could you, only for a moment, fix your mind on something not yourself?" "I've already given you my answer," said the Ghost, coldly but still tearful.¹⁵

¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, 1946. *The Great Divorce*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc)
<https://barnardsvilleumc.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/ebook-lewis-c-s-the-great-divorce.pdf>

Lewis here shows the power that vanity can exert over the soul—so powerful that the ghost victim prefers to spend an eternity back in Hell (which she has already experienced) than endure a few days of comparative disadvantage and shame when she has to expose herself as less significant and beautiful than the solid spiritually transformed people around her. For a moment she hesitates and almost accepts the solid spirit's offer, but then falls back into the power of vanity to which she has succumbed for years. She blames her unhappiness on the generosity of God for allowing her to take the bus trip to Heaven, and claims that He did so under false pretenses. Particularly revealing is her exclamation that she wishes she had never been born, rising out of a seemingly simple dilemma between revealing one's true self to others for a short while or returning to eternal misery. Vanity's hold over her is so great that she declares her non-existence and eternal misery to be better than a few days of public self-disclosure.

The third major way in which vanity undermines its willing adherents is to immerse them in the negative emotions of what I call "the comparison game." In the article on Happiness (on the previous landing page), I gave a detailed description of these emotions --jealousy, fear of failure, fear of loss of esteem, inferiority, depression, ego-sensitivities, self-pity, resentment toward others for withholding adulation, ego-rage, ego-blame, and pervasive emptiness due to a lack of contributive and transcendent meaning and fulfillment. Rather than repeat the explanation, suffice to say that these negative emotional conditions—whether they be felt by losers, winners or something in between—is not only psychologically painful to vanity's victims, but to all the people they touch. The bouts of anger, depression, self-pity, blame, contempt, resentment, and jealousy cast darkness over the whole interpersonal network of vanity's victims, creating an ethos of misery, fighting and despair—an ethos into which the evil spirit can embed itself and bring still further misery. The solution to this miserable condition is to move one's identity fulcrum away from dominant ego-comparative identity (which opens the door to vanity's power) to a dominant contributive identity and/or transcendent identity. If one is already powerfully under the sway of vanity, it will probably be essential to make a radical act of faith in God through prayer and grace to make the transition.

Given the power of vanity to undermine our identity, our relationships with others, our emotional state, and even our ability to accept salvation when it is offered to us on a veritable silver platter, we will want to make every effort to move away from it with every human and providential power. If possible, we will want to nip it in the bud near its inception—or even at the inception of a dominant ego-comparative identity. Certainly, it is nothing to be trifled with, for the longer we entertain it, the more we allow it to take hold of our soul even to the point of destroying our core identity, our families and friends, and even our relationship with God.

Before leaving this topic we will want to consider one final dimension of vanity's power—the power of delusion. We have already addressed the capacity of lust to blind Jay Gatsby and Anna Karenina and the power of greed to blind Ebenezer Scrooge, Bud Fox (*Wall street*), and Uriah Heep. The blinding power of vanity can certainly match these deadly sins—and surpass them.

One of the most pure examples of this power is found in the 1950 film noir classic *Sunset Boulevard* (which is periodically revitalized in London and Broadway theaters—and has been re-released in 2017 with Glenn Close). At the center of the film is a former famous silent-film star-

Norma Desmond-- who is so completely seduced by her past beauty, popularity, and fame, that she could never get beyond it. She believes that she still retains that same beauty and popularity and sits in her mansion awaiting an invitation to return to the silver screen. Her former husband, Max von Mayerling, who after being divorced by her became her butler, writes fan letters to her to help her keep the myth alive lest she fall into another depression and succeed in a suicide attempt.

As fate would have it, a second rate screen writer, Joe Gillis, who is trying to evade creditors trying to repossess his car, turns into what he thinks is the driveway of a deserted mansion and disguises his car. Norma calls him because she's mistaken him for someone else. When they meet inside, Joe tells her that he is a script writer, at which point she discloses that she has written a screen play called *Salome* for her come-back. Joe reviews the poorly written script and indicates that he could improve it significantly as a "script doctor." Norma hires him and insists that he stay at the mansion to work and live with her.

As the weeks pass, Norma convinces herself that Joe sees her as having the same beauty, charm, and energy she possessed thirty years before. She begins to fall gradually in love with him, and at a New Year's Eve party, at which he is the only guest, she professes her love. Joe tries to extricate himself kindly from this misapprehension but infuriates Norma who slaps him and storms to her room. At this juncture Joe decides to leave the mansion, but when he phones Max to tell him to pack his clothes, Max informs him that Norma has tried to commit suicide with Joe's razor blades. Feeling compassion toward her, he returns.

Norma, believing that the screenplay for *Salome* has been perfected, and that her comeback is to be imminently revealed, sends the script to her former director, Cecil B. DeMille. Again, as the fates would have it, another employee of Paramount Studios-- Gordon Cole—starts calling Norma and she mistaken thinks he is calling her on behalf of Mr. DeMille to stage her comeback as *Salome*. However, he is only interested in using her very unusual car for an upcoming film at Paramount. Since she won't speak directly with Gordon Cole, because she believes she should deal only with Mr. DeMille personally, she does not realize the mistake and has Max drive her to the Paramount Studio to see him. When she arrives, Mr. DeMille receives her with great respect but avoids mentioning his disinterest in the script and her as a future star. She leaves the studio believing that her comeback is imminent and undergoes several beauty treatments to prepare for it.

Norma discovers another manuscript of Joe's having a female co-author, Betty Schaefer, who she surmises may have more than a working interest with Joe. She calls Betty to tell her that Joe has been living with her and impugns his reputation. When Betty comes to the mansion to see for herself, Joe does not dissuade her by exposing Norma's delusions. After Betty leaves, Joe decides to go back to his old life at a newspaper, and packs to leave. Norma again threatens to commit suicide but Joe disregards it. She then threatens him with a gun but he ignores that as well, and then tries to tell her the truth about the vainglorious lie she has been living, including the mistake at Paramount and the fake fan letters written by Max. Norma is so convinced by her delusion that she cannot accept what Joe has said, and instead of returning to reality, decides to end passionately the threat to her fantasy. She shoots him three times, and he falls into her swimming pool.

In the final scene, the police and reporters arrive at the mansion to investigate Joe's death, but Norma feels no fear because the reality of her fantasy has reached new heights. With encouragement from Max, she is convinced that the newspapers and film crews are there to report on her new comeback at Paramount as Salome. Max stages her arrival into the living room by shouting "action!" after which Norma descends down her grand stairway and announces her comeback, concluding "All right, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up."

Though Norma is an extreme caricature of the blindness of vanity, she illustrates how powerful vainglorious self-delusion can be—not only with respect to self-impairment and self-destruction, but also the impairment, injury, and destruction of others. It is a hard lie to overcome and a hard spell to break, leaving in its wake the broken lives of people who truly care for the real person—not merely a popular façade.