

PalaDiary Day 13: Vices- Pride

I personally hope, through paladinhood, to be a force for good in the world. But the archetype has its drawbacks, and certain flaws that I believe Paladin-type people are particularly susceptible to. One of these is pride.

The trouble of being a holy warrior is becoming holier-than-thou. The trouble with being a knight on a steed is sometimes one has to get off their high horse. I fully believe in acknowledging privilege and using it to uplift others. But responsibility can over-manifest as domination or control. Going from “I can help, so I should” to “Only I can fix this”. Dedicating oneself to a cause is well and good, but how does one decide what cause is virtuous, what action is righteous? If I’m seeing myself as the people’s champion, when do I start seeing others as NPCs, or helpless, lesser, un-empowered beings? When does it become condescension?

There is a rigidity to paladinhood as a personality, and one way that rigidity can manifest is “my way or the highway” or “everyone is doing it wrong” (whatever “it” might be). There’s a reason the stereotypical annoying D&D paladin is the player who is unwilling to bend or cooperate with their fellow party members. For me, it’s possibly a lingering effect of gifted kid bullshit, which, for all the harmful and traumatic effects it had, did leave an imprint in my ego. I sometimes catch myself thinking “But I *am* smarter/more diligent/better organized/more committed than people around me”. I have to monitor for that and swat it when I see it, lest it sneak into my actions.

Devotion is a paladin virtue, but its flipside is proud stubbornness. Captain America’s “stand tall and tell the world to move” is a very Paladin-esque approach. But it’s noble only if you’ve found the ‘right’ place to stand, and speaks to a frankly dangerous level of self-importance. Paladins are often already Knights Templar, and one must be careful not to fall into being the Tautological Templar. (Going from “I am a good person so I should do x, y, z” to “Whatever I do must be good because I am the one doing it”).

Archetypes- all archetypes- are exaggerations. They are platonic ideals, caricatures and silhouettes, stretched larger than life. No human being can ever fully meet an archetype, nor should they. In the complexity of real life, the stretched aspects of an archetype become dangerous flaws. I will never have the absolutism of a mythical paladin and that’s probably for the best. Because as-is, I already have to spend time and energy monitoring myself and my reactions to those around me so that I don’t declare myself The Good Person at the cost of pride and harm to others.