Pride Comes Before the Fall

Over 40 years ago, President Nixon became the first person to resign the most powerful position on the planet. After two years of bitter public dispute, however, it came as no terrible surprise. American politics shows us that the most powerful men make the biggest mistakes because they feel invincible, that is, until their hubris destroys them. Greek tragedian Sophocles once wrote, “Think: all men make mistakes, / But a good man yields when he / Knows his course is wrong, / And repairs the evil: The only / Crime is pride,” and his words relate directly to Nixon’s situation. Sophocles’ definition of crime, however, is far from ours. While crime and evil are almost synonymous to us, he makes an important distinction between them—that all men are capable of evil, but evil is not a crime; the only crime is pride. He holds that evil is forgivable, but pride is not. Sophocles is unaware, however, of a recent discovery that pride actually comes in two forms: “authentic” and “hubristic.” This discovery shows that authentic pride may not be as bad as Sophocles makes hubristic pride out to be. Sophocles also suggests that pride is the only reason one wouldn’t attempt to repair their evil, and in Nixon’s case, this holds perfectly true. Scientists, however, argue that there are many other reasons one might not make amends. **History, literature, current events, and psychology show us that Sophocles’ words remain valid for much of what goes on in our lives, but as is for everything, there are certain instances in which they become objectionable.**

1. The only crime is pride
   1. History
      1. Nixon
         1. Autonomy
         2. Illegal Operations
      2. Titanic
         1. Not enough life boats
         2. Speed not decreased after warnings
   2. Literature
      1. Julius Caesar
         1. Many warnings
         2. Wife begs
         3. Caesar is more dangerous than danger
      2. Billy Budd
         1. Billy is executed because of Claggart
         2. Vere regrets his decision.
   3. Current Events
      1. Donald Trump
         1. Racist/Sexist comments
         2. Protests from outside and within party
         3. Push to abolish electoral college
      2. Personal Interview
         1. Background
         2. How my pride stopped me.
2. Evil isn’t a crime if repaired
   1. Leader Apologies
      1. What is an “apology”
      2. What effect does apologizing have
   2. Montreal Protocol
      1. What was the crime
      2. How was it repaired
3. Confidence is not bad
   1. Authentic vs Hubristic Pride
      1. Difference between two prides
      2. Evolutionary advantage
   2. Steve Jobs
      1. How he portrayed himself
      2. How his portrayal affected his business.
4. Pride isn’t the only reason evil isn’t repaired.
   1. Addiction
      1. Different arguments about addiction.
      2. How addiction is a brain disease, not pride.
   2. Insanity Defense
      1. What is insanity defense
      2. When is it used today

Sophocles’ words remain mostly valid today, and have remained so through the centuries, but there are a few caveats. Standing with Sophocles, history and literature show us that the root cause of most evil is pride, and that pride is really the only crime. Psychologists agree that evil is forgivable, and that a simple apology and attempt to repair it can go a long way towards staying a “good man.” However, we can’t simply label all pride as immoral, because authentic pride is actually a very important emotion that has evolutionary implications, such as helping us boost our social standing. We must also be careful about assuming that not repairing one’s evil is due to their excessive pride. Science and law show us that there are many cases where one wishes to do so, but is mentally unable. Nixon’s resignation opened the eyes of many and made us aware of the danger of hubris, and while it will undoubtedly continue to exist, we can only hope that Sophocles’ message is heard.