

Title:

Human Flaws and Absolute Power: A Combination For Disaster?

Word Count:

743

Summary:

People in positions of power and authority are often seen as being superior and incapable of making a mistake. However, as literature has so often shown, people who are in important positions tend to have the same flaws and weaknesses as normal people do. The difference, however, lies in how far-reaching the impact would be for someone with that much power.

Keywords:

mental health, status anxiety, social anxiety, performance anxiety

Article Body:

It has been said that giving a superhero the flaws of an ordinary person could only lead into inevitable disaster. The concept stems from the old adage "absolute power corrupts absolutely," as superheroes tend to be in positions of great power. Arguably, any protagonist that exhibits human flaws is going to find himself subject to great scrutiny. People will always see him as being someone who must never exhibit weaknesses and flaws. Flaws and traits like social anxiety, status anxiety, mental health disorders, and psychosis can all have immense impact on a hero's actions, which in turn can affect countless others. The "flawed" hero, while an interesting avenue to take in the realm of fiction, can also become a walking disaster, with the level of damage only varying on how badly things go.

Frodo Baggins, from Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" saga, can be taken as an interesting case of both status anxiety and performance anxiety. Presented with an all-powerful, all-corrupting object of pure evil, Frodo is made to embark on a journey to destroy the said object. It is made clear in several passages that Frodo does not want the ring and the inevitable burden of having to carry it and disposing of it. His status anxiety plays out in the subtle hints that he is willing to pass the burden on to just about anyone, if only it would let him get back to his normal "status" in his home.

However, he also exhibits mild hints of performance anxiety in that he is unwilling to undergo the long and dangerous journey to be rid of the ring in the first place. Even if he felt inadequate for the task, he slowly came to realize

that pawning the ring off to someone else is merely going to delay the inevitable. However, in the end, he comes to realize that the "One Ring" is a burden he has to bear, and faces up to the task. He is corrupted near the climax by the promise of power, but by that point, he has finally accepted his fate.

Another instance of a combination of problems similar to Frodo's comes in the form of Paul "Muad'dib" Atreides, from Frank Herbert's "Dune" saga. Atreides, like Baggins, has the deadly cocktail of status anxiety and performance anxiety. However, unlike the aforementioned literary character, Paul's actions could have had more long-lasting effects for all of humanity. Paul, gifted with the ability to see the future and thus enable plans to ensure his visions occur, foresees what he claims is "The Golden Path" of humanity. However, he also sees that while his vision assures the continued survival of humanity, it also means that he would have to sacrifice his humanity to achieve it.

His performance anxiety comes into play when he realizes that he does not want to make the sacrifices necessary to ensure that his vision becomes reality, as he is too attached to his humanity to abandon it. However, his position as ruler of a galaxy-spanning empire places pressure on him to rule. His unwillingness to let go of his position echoes of status anxiety, as he feels that he must remain Emperor. Yet, by remaining Emperor, he effectively is playing right into the hands of his fear of losing his humanity. In the end, however, he find a way out of his own conundrum by distorting the very faith that made him Emperor in the first place.

However, both Frodo Baggins and Paul Atreides were permanently scarred by their actions. Frodo's emotional healing never really purged the trauma he experienced during his time with the "One Ring." In the end, the stress and anxiety of the journey forced him to leave his home and his friends forever, as he felt he could no longer be part of "their" world. In the case of Paul Atreides, years of twisting and warping his own image such that he made himself a "god" had taken their toll on his mental health and how he viewed himself. He had become a hypocrite by enslaving the people he claimed he wanted to free, using religion rather than force to subdue them. His opportunity to make up for his mistakes and have some semblance of emotional healing came when everyone thought him to be dead. Changing from Emperor to a blind wanderer, he then began working on repairing the damage he had wrought by attempting to dismantle the religion he himself crafted.