

Grandiosity and the Empowerment of the Spiritual and Artistic



R.S. Pearson

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Introduction

It is important to remember that I am not writing as a psychologist, nor claiming to solve serious mental health issues by this work. Those who have serious mental health problems related to grandiosity should see a trained professional psychotherapist.

Starting when I was just a teenager, grandiosity was displayed to me by the action of a few friends and acquaintances. It is possible to see amazing exhibitions of grandiosity in otherwise functional people and to describe them exactly would show how much grandiosity can be in the people around us. Because these experiences occurred with real people, I will not describe them exactly as experienced. I will disguise them as much as possible.

One can meet people for whom the only type of abnormality they exhibit is the grandiose trait. One person may believe they are going to do something like write a book that would have extreme importance in the world, perhaps on the level of the Bible. They might be quite sincere about this and not understand the impossible nature of the statement. Another person may talk defiantly about

how his painting style and technique was the best on Earth. He would spend his time belittling other living painters. Another one might talk about how he would give the world a new scientific worldview, one that would revolutionize everything, but have no hard science to back it up. Or, take for example, a person in a business that proposes ideas for marketing that only he himself could appreciate -- ideas that actually would guarantee absolutely no commercial success. He was molding the world around his concept, not using his perception of the rules of the world to influence his thinking.

Other behaviors of these people would be normal. Yet, when they talked about these specific aspects of their life, they had little grasp of reality as others perceived it. They had to make an adaptation that provided themselves with safety and a sense of self-esteem when the world was unwilling to grant them either.

One might argue it is a healthy aspiration for a person to work from the perspective that he or she will create a work that will usher in a new revolution in ideas. However, the rare people who created these kinds of revolutions probably did not herald their work in such terms. Such accolades are given by others, not by the persons themselves. Often, the greatest artists and thinkers have the most humility. Some great artists and thinkers do have grandiose traits, especially in the cases where addiction plays a role. But these did not have a pure dysfunctional grandiosity, since they were, indeed, creating works that had the objective value of being some of the most important work of their time. They already had enough functionality to create great work, and successfully market or distribute it enough so that it survived. To the extent that the artist cannot do these things, the greater or lesser most likely is their dysfunctional grandiosity. One might call the successful people who exhibit grandiosity, "functionally grandiose," in the same way we call alcoholics who can hold down a job while deep in their alcoholism, "functional alcoholics." The disempowered grandiose, those who cannot achieve professional or functional goals, could be called "dysfunctionally grandiose."

Those who are psychologically balanced but still have low self-esteem, may need to see grandiosity manifested in order for it to be an available inflation mechanism for their diminished self-esteem. This is similar to how alcoholics are often supported in their disease by alcoholic peers early in life. In this way, some types of grandiosity may be "contagious," in the way that those in destructive cults have similar distorted views of the world which they share with each other and which in turn bolsters their own problems. By becoming close to the

grandiose and being exposed to their views of the world, a person whose personality is often “submerged” or passive to others, is by nature of socialization accustomed to acquiescing to the grandiose or they may in fact lose the bond of friendship (Wolf and Kutash, 1991). Some views of the world that can be called grandiose are a constant critical view of the capacities of those that have normal empowerment, especially those in positions of power. It can be oriented towards those who judge what is valid in art, or what is spiritual, and so on. How skewed a person becomes is based on his or her overall level of reality testing. This subject gets complicated by going against religious statements that the world is a fallen place, or even truisms that great artists must work against the conformity of accepted styles.

When the artistically and spiritually grandiose are empowered they may become some of the most caring and socially aware. Maintaining one’s spiritual or artistic vision while creating a full and functional life is an excellent basis of one’s life philosophy. It can become a force for good in the society around one because of its completeness. Having functionality guide their value system, the grandiose will then become free of their negative way of over-mystifying their life. This new manifestation of empowered spiritual and artistic people may ripple around the world and help lessen others’ mental illness and other societal problems. Those who are being empowered are those who are most able to care because they are most able to understand other’s suffering as they themselves have similarly suffered.

As many others did, I saw that the way the world was operated by powerful people was less than an optimal arrangement. The word “ignorant” could be used in describing the guiding principle of many of our actions. I could see that many problems people suffered from were caused by poor nutrition, a lack of basic self-discipline, and a simple lack of love that surrounded them. I saw that pollution problems could be solved, and that science itself was the force that could solve issues with the environment. Since this was true, all society, and especially the empowered in society, were to blame for the majority of the ills of the planet. Staying in this understanding alone could set the stage for a type of grandiosity, because powerlessness increases the chance of grandiosity. How this exactly develops and is overcome will be discussed in this book.

Grandiosity is a cloud that forms over a person's life and blinds them to their real possibilities. It makes the person unable to function in the role that would be right for him or her. It develops most likely because a normal role in life was cut off from the person by a parent, a teacher, or someone else, but to see

exactly how this happened takes some degree of psychological understanding. They may still be living in a circumstance where they are not able to get enough normal respect so they create a fantasy life in which they can get the respect they need. This fantasy life is not the usual idea of having a fantasy by creating a "visualization" of something in the mind. It is more complex, and in effect creates a worldview that has many unique properties.

Not being able to deal with having to achieve in the real world, one creates a world in which one already has achieved the important things in their life. Believing they are doing something much greater than what "average" people do, they supersede any lack in the normal achievements necessary in life or which would be helpful for them in their artistic or spiritual path.

Focusing on the spiritual and artistic types of grandiosity is important because this is where some of the greatest growth in society can occur. If grandiose artists and spiritual seekers became more empowered in what they could really do in the world, it would contribute much to society. If the grandiose can have their understanding grow, and develop more empowerment in their lives, they may find that the world needs them, as they believed it did, but in a direct way that has a very present application.

If more of the artistic and spiritual can achieve their true potential, we would live in a better world by the added creativity, acts of altruism and community involvement they would create. While we do live in a functional world, we cannot say that we live in a world that is optimal for most people. While each person is responsible for making his or her own life fulfilling and enjoyable, there is a common good that affects us all in some way, no matter how competent and empowered we are. Many of the most empowered and financially successful people become philanthropists because they understand the need to think of the common good. The artistic and spiritually minded often have the biggest burdens to carry, which can be seen from studying history. One thinks of artists or philosophers like Kierkegaard, Melville, and countless others who, if not isolated, at least were at odds with themselves or others. Therefore, when they are more empowered, there will be positive change in the world.

Like the word "codependency," grandiosity can be a hard concept to understand even though grandiosity has an important history in Western psychology. The word grandiose is in common everyday usage and exists in recovery literature. Grandiosity is one of the subjects most covered in doctoral level psychological works. Due to the possibly serious nature of grandiosity and

the fact that it is covered so often by psychologists, I wanted to limit my study. This book gives insights in how grandiosity hinders the spiritual and artistic from achieving their goals. There are other areas covered here, however, that are not only related to the spiritual and artistic but pertain to grandiosity in general.

This book identifies how grandiosity occurs in the lives of those who are artistic and/or following spiritual paths. The cognitive distortion of grandiosity is experienced by the person as having a constructive purpose. They cannot abandon their grandiose thinking because for them it may be seen as a way of being heroic. Our insight must be careful to not criticize the motivation to be heroic, to be a great artist or great scientist. It is also not wrong to want to be close to God and be spiritual. The problem comes in when one can only be judgmental against what others are in certain capacities in light of what exaggerated abilities one believes oneself has in these capacities. Therefore, one misunderstands the true nature of one's authentic self because it is being modified against false natures ascribed to others. One neither correctly perceives the positive in oneself or the positive in others. These misunderstandings further complicate one's place in the world.

The grandiosity that happens to artists and spiritual seekers can be distinct from the more pathological delusions of grandeur and the grandiosity that can happen to people who do not have spiritual or artistic ambitions. The latter may be more narcissistic because the spiritual and artistic believe they are dedicating themselves to something higher, that being God or art.

I use the term spiritual often in the book so I should define what I mean by it. The use of the term "spiritual" in this book is not a qualitative judgment on people's ethical life but merely signifies the interest in spirituality. Since, I am attempting a somewhat objective look at what happens in peoples' lives in the area of grandiosity, I am not going to put in my own subjective views on spirituality. That would skew the book towards the direction of an author's own spiritual beliefs. Many define spirituality by a person's altruistic qualities and instead of the word "spiritual" they could also say "altruistic." Problems in grandiosity also happen to people who focus on altruism alone -- not on religion -- and have the same challenges in psychological health and empowerment. Often there is a distinction made in people's minds between the terms "religious" and "spiritual." There are various areas of overlap and I am using the term "spiritual" because it covers all of these areas.

We have to use religious terminology when discussing the topic of how spirituality and psychology interact, and this should be understood and accepted. The effort to secularize all areas of academic thinking is purely partisan, and innumerable great thinkers, such as Jung, Eliade and Sorokin to name just a few, have wrote with academic legitimacy on the value of the spiritual life. One cannot discuss the life of those with spiritual aims except to use terms that they themselves use to define their worldview. I try to do it without the levels of abstraction that makes it impossible for the layman to understand. When speaking of God, I describe God as if God is an existing force that the spiritual animate in their private psychological universe.

My premise with this book is that the grandiose have been disempowered to the point that they were forced to create a fantasy structure by which they get what they need for emotional survival. This allowance of a sometimes subtle fantasy is an unconscious mechanism that allows their Ego to function as well as it does. I use the Freudian sense of Ego, that is, the part in us that when healthy solves problems and controls the relationship between our Superego and our Id. Their delusion or fantasy serves to float them over the jagged edges of reality so they do not get emotionally or psychologically hurt. If they were consistently hurt without getting help from this grandiose defense, they would not have the energy to go on living.

A painter, who says he to himself that he is the best, most likely if he put his energy into realistic career advancement, would sell much less than many other local painters, and probably not have the great posthumous fanfare that awaits him. Perhaps at an unconscious level, the painter knows very well that if he tried to market his work, he would only have limited success, and not sell as many copies as he assumes. If an author, who only had the skills to write in an unpolished, stream-of-consciousness style, could competently market his work, his audience would probably be less than those who write in clear, eloquent styles. By creating a fantasy structure and splitting the world strongly into good (their style) and bad (the world's acceptance of style), they are safe from any failure or threat to their self-esteem. Inactivity then becomes a safety mechanism for deep psychological protection.

Some have used the term grandiosity to refer to the powerful that rule nations and have such hubris that they are willing to create negative conditions rather than to live humbly. Instead of seeing grandiosity as only happening to those who are powerful, we should especially see it as happening to those who are disempowered. For the disempowered, delusional grandiosity is a defense

mechanism to allow them to avoid aspects of their life they cannot emotionally deal with.

The grandiosity that happens to the artistic and spiritual can be understood outside of the deep crevices of doctoral-level psychological understanding because it is an insight we all have a stake in. Grandiosity happens in various ways to many people, not just a few. Understanding grandiosity in religious life can in fact be an instrument in examining how most of us can be more spiritual. The problem is that most people do not understand what grandiosity is. Grandiosity is seen as a type of pride, but pride has a conscious manifestation whereas grandiosity is more unconscious.

A form of grandiosity is at the heart of sectarian religious or political divisions that lead to violence. There is usually not a blind pride that leads people to violence, but instead a violation of various aspects of their worldview in which they feel they must defend themselves or even attack others. They become blinded to the outcome of their violent stances, and blinded to the historical results of intolerant stances. If people intimately knew that simply believing in war as a solution might lead to the death of themselves or loved ones, that their sons and daughters will die in war, their cities will be burned, they might have the conscious insight to avoid war. Likewise, if the grandiose knew what they lost by being grandiose, they could find the help they need to overcome their grandiosity.

People do not often examine the idea of pride or vanity in an analytical way. Psychologists do examine grandiosity in a logical -- some would even say scientific -- way. Vanity should be separated from self-esteem. One person may take ten minutes a day for grooming while another a half-hour a day, but the latter is not necessarily vain. They may attach their career position to being attractive so good grooming becomes a type of economic necessity. Some of the grandiose may take a certain degree of pride in the fact that they only spend limited time grooming themselves. They will have grandiose delusions about their worth over others because they can only ascribe useless vanity to what others are doing. They do not allow themselves the good habits that others do. Hence, the understanding of what grandiosity is must be built up in such person to avoid such delusions.

There are many different backgrounds and intelligences among people, thus there are different degrees of empowerment they can achieve. Over time, a functional person understands what are the most empowering conditions for

their psyche and tries to stay within those limits. Prosperity of various kinds can develop when one is "right sized" -- when one is willing to fit in a place that is proper and best for one. Such a person does the work that he or she is most capable of. They endorse themselves internally so they are emotionally capable of doing work that requires the highest competence that they can comfortably achieve. The opposite is someone who is unwilling to work where work needs to be done. They may be an intelligent person but only be willing to do a very simple job, because of an emotional and not intellectual problem.

"Grandiosity and the Empowerment of the Spiritual and Artistic" will be published on April 26, 2010. All pre-orders will get a signed copy of the work, and a PDF version which will be available in March 2010. Pre-orders are only \$15, saving \$4.95 off the website price of \$19.95. The price includes free shipping for a limited time. You can pre-order a copy at www.telicalbooks.com or sending \$15 to Telical Books, P.O. Box 27401, Seattle, WA 98165