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HOW TO HAVE WILLPOWER

Περὶ Δυσωπίας

Πλουτάρχου

[1] Ἐνια τῶν ἐκ τῆς γῆς φυομένων αὐτὰ μὲν ἐστὶν ἄγρια καὶ ἄκαρπα καὶ βλαβερὰν τοῖς ἡμέροις σπέρμασι καὶ φυτοῖς τὴν αὕξησιν ἔχοντα, σημεῖα δ' αὐτὰ ποιοῦνται χώρας οἱ γεωργοῦντες οὐ πονηρᾶς ἀλλὰ γενναίας καὶ πίονος· οὕτω δὲ καὶ πάθη ψυχῆς ἐστὶν οὐ χρηστά, χρηστῆς δὲ φύσεως οἷον ἐξανθήματα καὶ λόγῳ παρασχεῖν ἐργάσιμον ἑαυτὴν ἐπεικῶς δυναμένης. ἐν τούτοις τίθεται καὶ τὴν λεγομένην δυσωπίαν, σημεῖον μὲν οὐ φαῦλον, αἰτίαν δὲ μοχθηρίας οὔσαν.

τὰ γὰρ αὐτὰ τοῖς ἀναισχύντοις οἱ αἰσχυρόμενοι πολλάκις ἀμαρτάνουσι, πλὴν ὅτι τὸ λυπεῖσθαι καὶ ἀλγεῖν ἐφ' οἷς διαμαρτάνουσι τούτοις πρόσσεστιν, οὐχ ὥς ἐκείνοις τὸ ἡδεσθαι. ἀναλγῆς μὲν γὰρ ὁ ἀναιδὴς πρὸς τὸ αἰσχρον, εὐπαθὴς δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὸ φαινόμενον

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Dysopia (On Caving)

PLUTARCH

You Are Too Sensitive

Dysopia Is an Excess of Shame

[1] Some things that grow from the earth are just wild and bear no fruit, and their spread harms cultivated plants and crops. Farmers take them as signs, though, that the soil is healthy and productive rather than poor.

Well, negative emotions are like that. They aren't good, but they're "outgrowths" of a good nature, a nature that can make itself relatively open to reason. Among them I put what's called "dysopia." It's not a bad sign, but it leads to terrible behavior.

You see, people with a healthy sense of shame often make the same mistakes that shameless people do, except they get upset and distressed at their lapses, while the latter enjoy theirs. That's because the shameless person is untroubled by a shameful action, whereas the pushover is highly sensitive to even the appearance of a shameful action.

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αἰσχρὸν ὁ εὐδυσώπητος· ὑπερβολὴ γὰρ τοῦ αἰσχύνεσθαι τὸ δυσωπεῖσθαι. διὸ καὶ οὕτως κέκληται, τρόπον τινὰ τοῦ προσώπου τῇ ψυχῇ συνδιατρεπομένου καὶ συνεξατονοῦντος. ὥς γὰρ τὴν κατήφειαν ὀρίζονται λύπην κάτω βλέπειν ποιοῦσαν, οὕτω τὴν αἰσχυνηλίαν μέχρι τοῦ μηδὲ ἀντιβλέπειν τοῖς δεομένοις ὑπέκουσαν δυσωπίαν ὠνόμασαν.

ὅθεν ὁ μὲν ῥήτωρ τὸν ἀναίσχυτον οὐκ ἔφη κόρας ἐν τοῖς ὅμμασιν ἔχειν ἀλλὰ πόρνας· ὁ δ' εὐδυσώπητος αὖτε πάλιν ἄγαν τὸ θῆλυ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τρυφερὸν ἐμφαίνει διὰ τῆς ὀψεως, τὴν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀναισχύτων ἦτταν αἰσχύνην ὑποκοριζόμενος. ὁ μὲν οὖν Κάτων ἔλεγεν τῶν νέων μᾶλλον ἀγαπᾶν τοὺς ἐρυθριῶντας ἢ τοὺς ὠχριῶντας, ὀρθῶς ἐθίζων καὶ διδάσκων τὸν ψόγον μᾶλλον ἢ τὸν πόνον δεδιέναι καὶ τὴν ὑποψίαν μᾶλλον ἢ τὸν κίνδυνον· οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ πρὸς τὸν ψόγον ὑπόπτου καὶ ψοφοδεοῦς τὸ ἄγαν ἀφαιρετέον, ὥς οὐχ ἦττον ἔνιοι πολλάκις ἀκοῦσαι κακῶς ἢ παθεῖν δέισαντες ἀπεδειλίασαν καὶ προήκαντο τὸ καλὸν οὐ δυνηθέντες ὑπομεῖναι τὸ ἄδοξον.

[2] Οὐτε δὲ τούτους περιοπτέον οὕτως ἀσθενῶς ἔχοντας οὐτ' αὖτε πάλιν ἐκείνην ἐπαινετέον τὴν ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀτενῇ διάθεσιν, ἀλλ' ἐμμελῆ τινα μηχανητέον σύ-

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I say all this because *dysopia is an undue sensitivity to shame*. In fact, that's why it's called dys"op"ia, since our face or countenance (*op*) somehow cringes and falls along with our feelings.

You see, just as feeling downcast is defined as unhappiness that causes us to look downward, so dysopia is the name for a sense of insecurity that's so powerful that it stops us from looking our petitioner in the eye. And that explains why one wit quipped that shameless people "have hussies, not pupils, in their eyes."¹⁴ Whereas, again, the face of the pushover shows all too clearly the cowardice and effeminacy in his heart, though he euphemizes his capitulation to shameless requests as "being flexible."

I know Cato [the Elder] used to say he preferred young men who blushed to those who blanched, and he was right to teach us to fear criticism more than hard work, and suspicion more than danger. Still, we really must stop being overly worried about criticism and panicking. People too often wimp out because they're more afraid of mean words than physical harm, and, because they can't stomach getting called names, they sacrifice a noble cause.

[2] Well, we shouldn't condone such weakness from these people, but, by the same token, we also shouldn't endorse the other extreme of complete inflexibility. Instead, we ought to formulate a

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γκρασιν ἀμφοῖν, τοῦ μὲν ἀτενοῦς ἄγαν τὴν ἀναίδειαν, τοῦ δὲ ἐπεικοῦς σφόδρα τὴν ἀσθένειαν ἀφαιροῦσαν. ἧ καὶ τὸ θεράπευμα δυσχερὲς καὶ οὐκ ἀκίνδυνος ἢ τῶν τοιούτων πλεονασμῶν κόλουσις [Becchi: κόλασις “chastisement” vulgate].

- ὥς γὰρ ὁ γεωργὸς ἄγριον μὲν ἐκκόπτων βλάστημα καὶ ἀγεννὲς αὐτόθεν ἀφειδῶς ἐμβαλὼν τὸ σκαφεῖον ἀνέτρεψε τὴν ρίζαν ἢ πῦρ προσάγαγὼν ἐπέκαυσεν, ἀμπέλῳ δὲ προσιῶν τομῆς δεομένη καὶ μηλέας ἢ τιнос ἐλαίας ἀπτόμενος εὐλαβῶς ἐπιφέρει τὴν χεῖρα, δεδιὼς μὴ τι τοῦ ὑγιαίνοντος ἀποτυφλώσῃ,
- οὕτως ὁ φιλόσοφος φθόνον μὲν ἐξαιρῶν νέου ψυχῆς, ἀγεννὲς βλάστημα καὶ δυστιθάσειτον, ἢ φιλαργυρίαν ἄωρον ἢ φιληδονίαν ἐπικόπτων ἀκόλαστον αἰμάσσει καὶ πιέζει καὶ τομὴν ποιεῖ καὶ οὐλὴν βαθεῖαν· ὅταν δὲ τρυφερῷ μέρει ψυχῆς καὶ ἀπαλῷ κολούοντα προσάγῃ λόγον, οἷόν ἐστι τὸ δυσσωπούμενον καὶ διατρεπόμενον, εὐλαβεῖται μὴ λάθῃ τούτοις συναποκόψας τὸ αἰδούμενον.

καὶ γὰρ αἱ τίτθαι τῶν βρεφῶν ἐκτρίβουσαι πολλάκις τὸν ῥύπον ἐλκοῦσιν ἐνίστε τὴν σάρκα καὶ βασανίζουσιν. ὅθεν οὐ δεῖ τῶν νέων παντάπασιν ἐν χρῶ τὴν δυσωπίαν ἐκτρίβοντας ὀλιγώρους ποιεῖν καὶ λίαν ἀτρέπτους·

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well-balanced blend of both—a blend that removes the callous indifference of excessive rigidity *and* the weakness of extreme “flexibility.”

So the cure is difficult, and the pruning of such excesses involves some risk, too. You see, when

- a gardener is clearing overgrown and unwanted weeds, he’ll simply stick his shovel in the ground and rip the roots right up, or apply a flame and torch them. When he comes to resect a grapevine, though, or an apple or olive tree, he handles it carefully, in fear of cutting a bud out from the healthy part. In the same way, when
- a therapist is ridding a teenage soul of malice—a stubborn and unwanted growth—or clearing signs of hedonism or greed, he’ll slash, bear down, resect the skin, and leave a deep scar. When he applies a pointed remark to a delicate and tender part of the soul, though—such as the part that causes feelings of awkwardness and turns us into pushovers—he’s careful not to accidentally cut all sense of shame out along with it.

Likewise, when nannies scrub babies too often, they sometimes tear their skin and hurt them. This suggests that there’s no need to scrub teenagers of dysopia down to the quick and leave them too rigid and unfeeling. No, we have to get rid of it in the

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ἀλλ' ὥσπερ οἱ καταλύοντες οἰκίας ἱεροῖς γειτνιώσας
τά γε συνεχῇ καὶ πλησίον ἐῷσι καὶ διερείδουσιν, οὕτω
δεῖ τὴν δυσωπίαν κινεῖν, δεδιότας συνεφελκύσασθαι
τὰ ὁμοροῦντα τῆς αἰδοῦς καὶ τῆς ἐπεικειάς καὶ τῆς
ἡμερότητος, οἷς ὑποδέδυκε καὶ προσπέπλεκται, κολα-
κεύουσα τὸν εὐδυσώπητον ὡς φιλάνθρωπον καὶ πο-
λιτικὸν καὶ κοινὸν ἔχοντα νοῦν καὶ οὐκ ἄτεγκτον οὐδὲ
αὐθέκαστον. ὅθεν εὐθὺς οἱ Στωϊκοὶ καὶ τῷ ῥήματι τὸ
αἰσχύνεσθαι καὶ δυσωπεῖσθαι τοῦ αἰδεῖσθαι διέστη-
σαν ἵνα μὴδὲ τὴν ὁμωνυμίαν τῷ πάθει πρόφασιν τοῦ
βλάπτειν ἀπολίπωσιν.

ἀλλ' ἡμῖν χρῆσθαι τοῖς ὀνόμασιν ἀσυκοφαντήτως
δότωσαν, μᾶλλον δὲ Ὀμηρικῶς· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν

αἰδῶς, ἥ τ' ἄνδρας μέγα σίνεται ἡδ' ὀνίνησι.

καὶ οὐ κακῶς τὸ βλάπτειν αὐτῆς πρότερον εἶπεν·
γίνεται γὰρ ὠφέλιμος ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τὸ πλεονάζον
ἀφελόντος καὶ τὸ μέτριον ἀπολιπόντος.

[3] Πρῶτον οὖν τοῦτο δεῖ πείθεσθαι τὸν ὑπὸ πολλῆς
δυσωπίας βιαζόμενον, ὅτι πάθει βλαβερῶ συνέχεται,

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same way that builders do when they're demolishing a house which abuts a temple: they leave alone the parts that are touching or practically touching the temple, and reinforce them. We don't want to remove along with dysopia adjacent concepts which underlie and entwine it, such as a healthy sense of shame, and reasonableness, and niceness—concepts that flatter the pushover as “understanding” and “politic” and “empathetic” and not “stubborn” or “blunt.” (That's why the Stoics distinguished the word *dysopia* from *shame* and *a healthy sense of shame*; their goal was to deprive the emotion of even the same name as a pretext for doing harm.)

Still, if they'll allow it, let's not get pedantic about nomenclature. Let's simply follow Homer, since he said [in fact Hesiod, *Works and Days* 318 ~ Homer, *Iliad* 24.44–45]:

Shame, which does men both great harm and great help.

He wasn't wrong to mention the harm first, incidentally, since shame only becomes healthy once reason has removed the excess and leaves us with the right amount.

[3] Therefore, when someone is acting under the influence of dysopia, the first thing to do is make them understand that they're suffering from

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καλὸν δὲ τῶν βλαβερῶν οὐδέν, οὐδὲ δεῖ τοῖς ἐπαίνοις
κηλούμενον ἥδεσθαι κομπὸν καὶ ἰλαρὸν ἀντὶ σεμνοῦ
καὶ μεγάλου καὶ δικαίου προσαγορευόμενον, μηδ’
ὥσπερ ὁ Εὐριπίδου Πήγασος

ἔπτησ’ ὑπείκων μᾶλλον ἢ μᾶλλον θέλοι

τῷ Βελλεροφόντῃ, τοῖς δεομένοις ἑαυτὸν ἐκδιδόναι
καὶ συνεκταπεινοῦν φοβούμενον ἀκοῦσαι τὸ “σκλη-
ρός γε καὶ ἀπηνής.”

τῷ μὲν γὰρ Αἰγυπτίῳ Βοκχόριδι φύσει χαλεπῷ
[vulgate: perhaps γαληνῷ “gentle” Pelittari per lit-
teras] γενομένῳ τὴν ἀσπίδα λέγουσιν ὑπὸ τῆς Ἰσιδος
ἐπιπεμφθεῖσαν καὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ περιελιχθεῖσαν ἄνω-
θεν ἐπισκιάζειν ἵνα κρίνη δικαίως· ἡ δέ τοι δυσωπία
τοῖς ἀτόνοις καὶ ἀνάνδροις ἐπικειμένη καὶ πρὸς μηδὲν
ἀνανεῦσαι μηδὲ ἀντειπεῖν ἰσχύουσα καὶ δικάζοντας
ἀποτρέπει τοῦ δικαίου καὶ συμβουλευόντας ἐπιστο-
μίζει καὶ λέγειν πολλὰ καὶ πράττειν ἀναγκάζει τῶν
ἀβουλήτων· ὁ δὲ ἀγνωμονέστατος αἰεὶ τοῦ τοιοῦτου
δεσπότης ἐστὶ καὶ κρατεῖ τῷ μὴ αἰδεῖσθαι τὸ αἰδού-
μενον ἐκβιαζόμενος.

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a pathological emotion, and that nothing pathological is good. They can't let themselves get seduced by praises; they shouldn't want to be called "nice" and "good" rather than "important" and "impressive" and "fair-minded." They shouldn't be like Pegasus in Euripides's play, who, for Bellerophon [fr. 309 Nauck]

bowed and yielded at his rider's will.

They can't surrender to bullies and stoop to their level because they're afraid of getting called (predictably) "callous and cruel."

Because King Bakenranef of Egypt was a naturally harsh man, legend has it that Isis sent a cobra down to curl around his head and loom out over it and make sure the king judged disputes fairly.¹⁵

Dysopia terrorizes weaklings and wimps in a similar way. Because it lacks the strength to deny or refuse anything, it stops them from settling disputes fairly, from speaking up in meetings, and it forces them to say and do many things they disagree with. The most unreasonable person is always the master of such a man; his shamelessness tyrannizes the first man's sense of shame and overpowers it.

Consequences in Sexual Relations

Plutarch now comes to the delicate topic of consent in sexual relations. Because many Greek men were bisexual, he first addresses "pederasty"—that is, the

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ὅθεν ὥσπερ χωρίον ὕπτιον καὶ μαλακὸν ἢ δυσωπία
μηδεμίαν ἔντευξιν ἐξῶσαι μηδὲ ἀποστρέψαι δυναμένη
τοῖς αἰσχίστοις βásiμός ἐστι πάθεσι καὶ πράγμασι· κακὴ
μὲν γὰρ αὕτη παιδικῆς φρουρὸς ἡλικίας, ὥς ἔλεγε
Βροῦτος οὐ δοκεῖν αὐτῷ καλῶς τὴν ὥραν διατεθεῖ-
σθαι τὸν πρὸς μηδὲν ἀρνούμενον· κακὴ δὲ θαλάμου
καὶ γυναικωνίτιδος ἐπίτροπος, ὥς φησιν ἡ παρὰ τῷ
Σοφοκλεῖ μετανοοῦσα πρὸς τὸν μοιχόν

ἔπεισας ἐξέθωψας.

ὥσθ' ἡ δυσωπία προσφέρουσα [Becchi 1996: προσδι-
αφθείρασα “further corrupts” vulgate] τὸ ἀκόλαστον,
ἀνώχουρα πάντα καὶ ἄκλειστα καὶ κατάντη προδίδωσι
τοῖς ἐπιτιθεμένοις. καὶ διδόντες μὲν αἰροῦσι τὰς βδε-
λυρωτάτας, τῷ δὲ πείθειν καὶ δυσωπεῖν πολλάκις κατ-
εργάζονται καὶ τὰς ἐπιεικεῖς.

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*normalized sexual abuse of boys by grown men within stable romantic relationships. In such relationships men typically courted boys, offering them gifts or opportunities in exchange for their favors. Plutarch then addresses heterosexual relations, and here readers should be aware that in classical Greece, as in some Middle Eastern countries today, respectable women were routinely secluded within the house, allowed outdoors only with a male relative chaperone, and they typically veiled themselves when they did go out.*¹⁶

And so, being unable to reject or refuse any request, dysopia, like flat and soft terrain, risks being walked all over and victimized in the most shameful ways. You see, dysopia is a poor protector of one's boyhood, which is why Brutus used to say he didn't think a man who denied nothing had managed that period well [*Life of Brutus* 6.9 (986E)].

It's also a poor guardian of the bedroom and harem, as the regretful woman in Sophocles's play says to her seducer [fr. 857 Radt],

You sweet-talked me, you *tricked* me . . . !

As a result, by inducing a compromise of principles, dysopia delivers everything up to its attackers—unsecured, unlocked, a downhill slide. And while gifts win over loose women, persuasion and pressure work all too often even on women of virtue.¹⁷

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(ἐὼ δὲ τὰς εἰς τὰ χρήματα βλάβας ὑπὸ τοῦ δυσωπεῖσθαι, δανειζόντων οἷς ἀπιστοῦσιν, ἐγγυωμένων οὓς οὐ θέλουσιν, ἐπαινούντων μὲν τὸ “ἐγγύα πάρα δ’ ἄτα,” χρῆσθαι δ’ αὐτῷ περὶ τὰ πράγματα μὴ δυναμένων.)

[4] “Ὅσους δ’ ἀνήρηκε τοῦτο τὸ πάθος οὐκ ἂν τις ἐξαριθμήσαιτο ῥαδίως. καὶ γὰρ ὁ Κρέων πρὸς τὴν Μήδειαν εἰπών,

κρεῖσσον δέ μοι νῦν πρὸς σ’ ἀπεχθέσθαι, γύναι,
ἢ μαλθακισθένθ’ ὕστερον μέγα στένειν,

ἄλλοις ἐγνωμολόγησεν, αὐτὸς δὲ τῆς δυσωπίας ἥττων γενόμενος καὶ μίαν ἡμέραν αἰτουμένη δούς ἀπώλεσε τὸν οἶκον.

ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ σφαγὰς ὑφορώμενοι καὶ φαρμακείας διετράπησαν.

- οὕτω παραπώλετο Δίων, οὐκ ἀγνοήσας ἐπιβουλεύοντα Κάλλιππον ἀλλ’ αἰσχυνηθεὶς φυλάττεσθαι φίλον ὄντα καὶ ξένον·
- οὕτως Ἀντίπατρος ὁ Κασάνδρου Δημήτριον καλέσας ἐπὶ δεῖπνον, εἶτα κληθεὶς τῇ ὕστεραίᾳ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡδέσθη πεπιστευμένος ἀπιστεῖν, καὶ πορευθεὶς ἐσφάγη μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνον.

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(I'll pass over the monetary losses caused by caving to pressure—the lending money to people you don't trust, the cosigning loans you don't want to, and endorsing the saying "Give a guarantee, go broke," but being unable to heed it in practice.)

[4] It would be difficult to count all the lives this emotion has ruined. You see, when Creon told Medea [Euripides *Medea* 290–291]—

Better for me to have your hate right now,
woman, than to go soft and groan regret

—he gave sage advice to others but succumbed to pressure himself, and by granting her request for a day's reprieve he destroyed his world.

Even some who suspected assassination or a poisoning attempt have refused to face it. For example:

- Dion perished—not out of ignorance at Callippus's plot, but because he felt ashamed to take protective measures against a close friend.
- Antipater, the son of Cassander, invited Demetrius to dinner, and was invited in return the following day. He was ashamed not to trust a man who'd trusted him, so he went—and was murdered after the meal.

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– Ἡρακλέα δὲ τὸν Ἀλεξάνδρῳ γενόμενον ἐκ Βαρσίνης ὠμολόγησε μὲν Κασάνδρῳ Πολυπέρχων ἀναιρήσειν ἐπὶ ταλάντοις ἑκατόν, εἴτα ἐπὶ δεῖπνον ἐκάλει· τοῦ δὲ μειρακίου τὴν κλῆσιν ὑφορωμένου καὶ δεδοικότος, ἄλλως δὲ προφασίζομένου μαλακώτερον ἔχειν, ἐλθὼν ὁ Πολυπέρχων, “πρῶτον,” εἶπεν, “ὦ παῖ, μιμοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς τὸ εὐκόλον καὶ φιλέταιρον, εἰ μὴ νῆ Δία δέδοικας ἡμᾶς ὥς ἐπιβουλεύοντας.” αἰδεσθεὶς ἠκολούθησεν ὁ νεανίσκος· οἱ δὲ δειπνίσαντες αὐτὸν ἐστραγγάλισαν.

οὐ γελοῖον οὖν, ὥς φασί, οὐδὲ ἀβέλτερον, ἀλλὰ σοφὸν τὸ τοῦ Ἡσιόδου·

τὸν φιλέοντ’ ἐπὶ δαῖτα καλεῖν, τὸν δ’ ἐχθρὸν ἐᾶσαι.

μὴ δυσωποῦ τὸν μισοῦντα μηδ’ ὑπαίκαλλε πιστεύειν δοκοῦντα· κληθήσῃ γὰρ καλέσας καὶ δειπνήσεις ἂν δειπνίσῃς, ὥσπερ βαφὴν τὴν φυλάττουσαν ἀπιστίαν μαλαχθεῖσαν αἰσχύνῃ προέμενος.

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– Polyperchon cut a deal with Cassander to get rid of Heracles of Macedon, Alexander’s son by Barsine, for a million dollars, so he began inviting him to dinner.¹⁸ But the young man was suspicious and afraid, and kept claiming he felt unwell. Polyperchon went to see him and said, “Now, my boy, you should emulate your father’s agreeableness and sociability— unless, of course, you’re worried that I’m plotting something!” The young man was shamed into going, and after serving him dinner, they strangled him.

It isn’t funny or ridiculous (as some claim), therefore, but wise, when Hesiod says [*Works and Days* 342]:

Invite your friend to a feast, but give your enemy a pass.

Don’t get pushed around by an adversary—but also, don’t kowtow if he seems to trust you. See, when you invite *him* over, he’ll invite *you*, and once he’s dined with *you*, then you’ll go dine with *him*—and all because you let your sense of shame blunt the protective edge of distrust.

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[5] Ὡς οὖν πολλῶν κακῶν αἴτιον τὸ νόσημα τοῦτο ὃν πειρατέον ἀποβιάζεσθαι τῇ ἀσκήσει, πρῶτον ἀρξαμένους, ὥσπερ οἱ τᾶλλα μελετῶντες, ἀπὸ τῶν μικρῶν καὶ μὴ σφόδρα δυσαντιβλέπτων. οἶον . . .

- ἐν δείπνῳ προπίνει τις ἄδην ἔχοντι· μὴ δυσωπηθῆς μηδὲ προσβιάσῃ σαυτόν, ἀλλὰ κατάθου τὸ ποτήριον.
- αὐθις ἕτερος παρακαλεῖ κυβεύειν παρὰ πότον· μὴ δυσωπηθῆς μηδὲ δείσης σκωπτόμενος· ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ Ξενοφάνης Λάσου τοῦ Ἑρμιονέως μὴ βουλόμενον αὐτῷ συγκυβεύειν δειλὸν ἀποκαλοῦντος ὁμολόγει καὶ πάνυ δειλὸς εἶναι πρὸς τὰ αἰσχρὰ καὶ ἄτολμος.
- πάλιν ἀδολέσχη συνήντηκας ἐπιλαμβανομένῳ καὶ περιπλεκομένῳ· μὴ δυσωπηθῆς ἀλλὰ διακόψας ἐπείγου καὶ πέραινε τὸ προκείμενον.

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Step-by-Step Tactics for Resisting Pressure

On Alcohol, Getting Called Chicken, and Breaking Away

[5] Since this illness is the cause of so many problems, therefore, we must try to get rid of it by exercises. We can start—as people practicing anything do—with little incidents that aren’t too hard to face. For example,

- At a dinner party, someone raises a toast to you when you’ve had enough? Don’t cave, and don’t force yourself. Just put the glass down.
- Someone else asks you to gamble while you’re drinking? Don’t cave, and don’t be afraid you’ll get made fun of. Just do what Xenophanes did when Lasus of Hermione kept calling him a coward for not wanting to play dice with him: agree that you absolutely are a coward, and you lack the guts to risk getting shamed!
- Some windbag has latched onto you and won’t let go? Don’t cave. Just break away and get on with your business.

HOW TO HAVE WILLPOWER

αἱ γὰρ τοιαῦται φυγαὶ καὶ διακρούσεις, ἐν ἐλαφραῖς μέμψεσι τὴν μελέτην ἔχουσαι τοῦ ἀδυσωπήτου, προεθίζουσιν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὰ μείζονα.

καὶ τὸ τοῦ Δημοσθένους ἐνταῦθα καλῶς ἔχει διαμνημονεύειν· τῶν γὰρ Ἀθηναίων ὠρμημένων Ἀρπάλῳ βοηθεῖν καὶ κορυσσομένων ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον ἐξαίφνης ἐπεφάνη Φιλόξενος ὁ τῶν ἐπὶ θαλάττῃ πραγμάτων Ἀλεξάνδρου στρατηγός. ἐκπλαγέντος δὲ τοῦ δήμου καὶ σιωπῶντος διὰ τὸν φόβον ὁ Δημοσθένης,

“τί ποιήσουσιν (ἔφη) τὸν ἥλιον ἰδόντες οἱ μὴ
δυνάμενοι πρὸς λύχνον ἀντιβλέπειν;”

τί γὰρ ποιήσεις ἐν πράγμασι μεγάλοις, βασιλέως ἐντυγχάνοντος ἢ δήμου δυσωποῦντος, εἰ ποτήριον ἀπώσασθαι μὴ δύνασαι προτείνοντος συνήθους μηδὲ ἀδολέσχου λαβὴν διαφυγεῖν, ἀλλὰ παρέχεις ἐμπεριπατεῖν φλυάρῳ σαυτόν, οὐκ εὐτονῶν εἰπεῖν, “ὄψομαί σε αὖθις, νῦν δὲ οὐ σχολάζω”;

[6] Καὶ μὴν οὐδ’ ἢ πρὸς τοὺς ἐπαίνους τοῦ ἀδυσωπήτου μελέτη καὶ ἄσκησις ἐν μικροῖς καὶ ἐλαφροῖς ἄχρηστός ἐστιν. οἷον ἐν συμποσίῳ φίλου κιθαρωδὸς ἄδει κακῶς ἢ πολλοῦ κωμωδὸς ἐωνημένος ἐπιτρίβει

RESISTING PRESSURE

You see, escapes and refusals like these give us practice in resisting pressure at the cost of only slight offense, and they condition us for tougher cases.

On that note, it's good to recall a remark of Demosthenes. The Athenians were eager to aid Harpalus and were arming themselves against Alexander, when Philoxenus, Alexander's admiral, suddenly appeared. When the assembly was shocked and speechless in fear, Demosthenes quipped,

“If they can't face a lamp, what'll they do when they see the sun?”

I mean, what will you do in great affairs—if a king comes asking, say, or an assembly's pressuring you—if you're unable to decline a glass offered by a friend or escape a windbag's clutches? If you'll instead let some blowhard walk all over you because you lack the nerve to say, “I'll catch you another time; I'm not free right now”?

Don't Join the Amen Corner

[6] And indeed, practice and training in resisting feelings of pressure in minor and trivial matters is of no small advantage when it comes to the pressure to join in praise. Say, for example, a performer sings badly at your friend's party, or some expensive actor

HOW TO HAVE WILLPOWER

Μένανδρον, οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ κροτοῦσι καὶ θαυμάζουσιν· οὐδὲν οἶμαι χαλεπὸν οὐδὲ δύσκολον ἀκούειν σιωπῇ καὶ μὴ παρὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀνελευθέρως ἐπαινεῖν.

ἐὰν γὰρ ἐν τούτοις μὴ κρατῇς σαυτοῦ, τί ποιήσεις φίλου ποίημα φαῦλον ἀναγινώσκοντος ἢ λόγον ἐπιδεικνυμένου γεγραμμένον ἀβελτέρως καὶ γελοίως; ἐπαινέσεις δηλονότι καὶ συνεπιθορυβήσεις τοῖς κολακεύουσι. πῶς οὖν ἐν πράγμασιν ἀμαρτάνοντος ἐπιλήψη; πῶς δὲ περὶ ἀρχὴν ἢ γάμον ἢ πολιτείαν ἀγνωμονοῦντα νουθετήσεις;

ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲ τὸ τοῦ Περικλέους ἀποδέχομαι πρὸς τὸν ἀξιοῦντα μαρτυρίαν ψευδῇ μαρτυρῆσαι φίλον, ἢ προσῆν καὶ ὅρκος, εἰπόντος,

“μέχρι τοῦ βωμοῦ φίλος εἰμί”.

λίαν γὰρ ἐγγὺς ἦλθεν. ὁ δὲ πόρρωθεν ἑαυτὸν ἐθίσας μήτε λέγοντος ἐπαινεῖν παρὰ γνώμην μήτε ἄδοντος κροτεῖν μήτε σκώπτοντος ἀφυῶς ἐπιγελᾶν οὐκ ἔασει μέχρι τούτου προελθεῖν οὐδ’ εἰπεῖν πρὸς τὸν ἐν ἐκείνοις ἀδυσώπητον “ὅμοσον ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ καὶ τὰ ψευδῇ μαρτύρησον” καὶ “ἀπόφηναι παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον.”

RESISTING PRESSURE

he's hired flubs Menander . . . and the crowd claps and cheers. I don't think it's obnoxious or difficult to just listen in silence and not slavishly applaud in spite of the evidence.

I mean, if you don't control yourself in these matters, what will you do when a friend is reading you a bad poem or has you listen to him practicing some silly and absurd speech he's written? You'll presumably praise him and join his flatterers in hearty applause. Okay; but how will you correct him when he's making mistakes in real life? How will you talk sense to him when he's being unrealistic about running for office or getting married or making a policy decision?

Speaking for myself, I don't even accept the reply Pericles gave a friend who asked him to lie in court under oath—

“Up to the witness stand, I'm a friend.”¹⁹

—because he got much too close. Whereas if you condition yourself not to praise a public speaker or clap for a performer or laugh at an unfunny joke despite yourself, you won't let things get to that point. If you're immune to pressure in those matters, you won't let anyone say to you, “swear and lie under oath for me” or “deliver a wrong verdict.”

HOW TO HAVE WILLPOWER

[7] Οὕτω δὲ δεῖ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς αἰτοῦντας ἀργύριον ἀνταίρειν, προεπιζόμενον ἐν τοῖς μήτε μεγάλοις μήτε δυσπαραιτήτοις. Ἀρχέλαος μὲν γὰρ ὁ τῶν Μακεδόνων βασιλεὺς παρὰ δεῖπνον αἰτηθεὶς ἔκπωμα χρυσοῦν ὑπ’ ἀνθρώπου μηδὲν ἡγουμένου καλὸν ἢ τὸ λαμβάνειν ἐκέλευσεν Εὐριπίδῃ τὸν παῖδα δοῦναι, καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐκεῖνον ἀποβλέψας,

“σὺ μὲν (εἶπεν) αἰτεῖν ἐπιτήδειος εἶ καὶ μὴ λαμβάνειν,
οὗτος δὲ λαμβάνειν καὶ μὴ αἰτῶν,”

ἄριστα τοῦ διδόναι καὶ χαρίζεσθαι κύριον ποιῶν τὸ κρῖνον ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸ δυσωπούμενον· ἡμεῖς δὲ πολλάκις ἀνθρώπους ἐπιεικεῖς καὶ οἰκείους καὶ δεομένους περιορῶντες ἑτέροις αἰτοῦσιν ἐνδελεχῶς καὶ ἰταμῶς ἐδώκαμεν, οὐ δοῦναι θελήσαντες ἀλλ’ ἀρνήσασθαι μὴ δυνηθέντες. ὥσπερ Ἀντίγονος ὁ γέρων ὑπὸ Βία-ντος ἐνοχληθεὶς πολλάκις,

“δότε (εἶπεν) “βία . . . τάλαντον καὶ ἀνάγκη.”

RESISTING PRESSURE

The Dire Consequences of Caving

For Money

[7] This is also the way to oppose requests for money—that is, by developing the habit in cases which are unimportant and easy to refuse. For example, at a banquet, Archelaus, the king of Macedonia, was asked for a golden goblet by a man whose top priority in life was getting things. Archelaus, though, told his slave to give it to Euripides, and looking at the man, said:

“You’re the one to ask and not receive; he’s the one to receive even without asking.”

He made his own judgment, not pressure, the deciding factor for his gifts and favors. It was very impressive.

You and I aren’t like that, though; we often pass over worthy friends and relatives in distress and give money to others who nag and pester us—and not because we *want* to, but because we lack the strength to say no. A good example is what Antigonus, in his old age, said when Bias kept pestering him:

“Oh, pay the man . . . this is a ‘buy us’ incident.”²⁰

HOW TO HAVE WILLPOWER

καίτοι μάλιστα τῶν βασιλέων ἐμμελὴς ἦν καὶ πιθανὸς ἀποτρίβεσθαι τὰ τοιαῦτα. κυνικοῦ γάρ ποτε δραχμὴν αἰτήσαντος αὐτόν, “ἀλλ’ οὐ βασιλικόν,” ἔφη, “τὸ δόμα”· τοῦ δὲ ὑποτυχόντος, “δὸς μοι τάλαντον,” ἀπήντησεν,

“ἀλλ’ οὐ κυνικὸν τὸ λῆμμα.”

Διογένης μὲν οὖν τοὺς ἀνδριάντας ἤτει περιῶν ἐν Κεραμεικῷ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς θαυμάζοντας ἔλεγεν ἀποτυχάνειν μελετᾶν· ἡμῖν δὲ πρῶτον ἐμμελετητέον ἐστὶ τοῖς φαύλοις καὶ γυμναστέον περὶ τὰ μικρὰ πρὸς τὸ ἀρνεῖσθαι τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν οὐ προσηκόντως, ἵνα τοῖς προσηκόντως ληψομένοις ἐπικουρεῖν ἔχωμεν· οὐδεὶς γάρ, ὥς ὁ Δημοσθένης φησὶν, εἰς ἃ μὴ δεῖ καταναλώσας τὰ παρόντα τῶν μὴ παρόντων εὐπορήσει πρὸς ἃ δεῖ. γίνεται δὲ ἡμῖν πολλαπλάσιον τὸ αἰσχρὸν ὅταν ἐλλίπωμεν εἰς τὰ καλὰ πλεονάσαντες τοῖς περιττοῖς.

[8] Ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐ χρημάτων μόνον ἡ δυσωπία κακὴ καὶ ἀγνώμων οἰκονόμος ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τὰ μείζονα παραιρεῖται τὸ συμφέρον τοῦ λογισμοῦ

– (καὶ γὰρ ἰατρὸν νοσοῦντες οὐ παρακαλοῦμεν τὸν ἔμπειρον αἰσχυρόμενοι τὸν συνήθη, καὶ

RESISTING PRESSURE

And yet Antigonus had been the smoothest and most impressive of all the Hellenistic kings at deflecting such requests. When a Cynic wise man once asked him for fifty dollars, he replied, “That’s not a gift that kings grant.” When the man then rejoined, “Give me \$250,000,” he came back with, “That’s not a gift that Cynics receive.”²¹

Diogenes used to panhandle from statues in his neighborhood; he’d tell anyone who gawked that he was practicing getting turned down. Not us, though. We should practice on *irrelevant* people, and condition ourselves to refuse their trivial requests, if inappropriate. That way, we’ll be able to meet appropriate requests—because (as Demosthenes says) if you spend all your money on what you don’t need, then you’ll never be able to spend money you *don’t* have on what you *do* need. Besides, shame increases when we come up short for necessities because we’ve overspent on stupid stuff.

*For Health, Education, Lawsuits,
and Personal Beliefs*

[8] But dysopia isn’t just a foolish and bad steward of money. It impacts our ability to weigh costs and benefits in more serious matters, too. For example:

- We’re sick, but we don’t call a specialist because we’re ashamed not to go with our usual doctor.

HOW TO HAVE WILLPOWER

- παισὶ διδασκάλους ἀντὶ τῶν χρηστῶν τοὺς παρακαλοῦντας αἰρούμεθα,
- δίκην ἔχοντες πολλάκις οὐκ ἔωμεν εἰπεῖν τὸν ὠφέλιμον καὶ ἀγοραῖον, ἀλλ' οἰκείου τινὸς ἢ συγγενοῦς υἱῷ χαριζόμενοι παρεδώκαμεν ἐμπανηγυρίσαι, καὶ
- τέλος δὲ πολλοὺς ἐστὶν ἰδεῖν καὶ τῶν φιλοσοφεῖν λεγομένων Ἐπικουρείους καὶ Στωϊκοὺς ὄντας, οὐχ ἑλομένους οὐδὲ κρίναντας ἀλλὰ προσθεμένους δυσωποῦσιν οἰκείοις καὶ φίλοις)

φέρει δὴ καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα πόρρωθεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτυχοῦσι καὶ μικροῖς γυμνάζωμεν ἑαυτοὺς, ἐθίζοντες μήτε κουρεῖ μήτε γναφεῖ κατὰ δυσωπίαν χρῆσθαι μηδὲ καταλύειν ἐν φαύλῳ πανδοκεῖῳ βελτίονος παρόντος ὅτι πολλάκις ὁ πανδοκεὺς ἡσπάσατο ἡμᾶς,

ἀλλ' ἔθους ἔνεκα, κἂν ἢ παρὰ μικρόν, αἰρεῖσθαι τὸ βέλτιον, ὥσπερ οἱ Πυθαγορικοὶ παρεφύλαττον αἰεὶ μηδέποτε τῷ δεξιῷ μηρῷ τὸν εὐώνυμον ἐπιτιθέναι μηδὲ τὸν ἄρτιον ἀντὶ τοῦ περιττοῦ λαβεῖν τῶν ἄλλων ἐπ' ἴσης ἐχόντων.

RESISTING PRESSURE

- Instead of choosing the best teachers for our children, we choose those who ask for the job.
- We often won't let the best and most skilled lawyer represent us in a lawsuit. Instead, we'll hand our case off to the son of some friend or relative to help his career.
- Worst of all is seeing all the "philosophers" who are Epicureans and Stoics not by choice or conviction, but because they've caved to pressure from friends and relatives!

Please. Long before we reach that point, let's train for those situations in small, everyday encounters. Let's make a habit of not patronizing a barber or cleaners as dysopia dictates, and of not staying in a crummy hotel when there is a better one available simply because the owner says hello to us.

The General Rule: Always Choose the Better Option

Instead, for the practice, let's make a habit of *choosing the better option even when the difference is negligible*, much as Pythagoreans made a point of never resting their left leg on their right, and of picking, when all else was equal, an even number rather than an odd.

HOW TO HAVE WILLPOWER

ἐθιστέον δὲ καὶ θυσίαν ποιούμενον ἢ γάμον ἢ τινα ἄλλην τοιαύτην ὑποδοχὴν μὴ τὸν ἀσπασάμενον καλεῖν ἢ προσδραμόντα μᾶλλον ἢ τὸν εὖνουν καὶ χρηστόν·
ὁ γὰρ οὕτως ἐθισθεὶς καὶ ἀσκήσας δυσάλωτος ἔσται, μᾶλλον δὲ ὅλως ἀνεπιχειρήτος, ἐν τοῖς μείζουσι.

[9] Περὶ μὲν οὖν ἀσκήσεως ἱκανὰ καὶ ταῦτα· τῶν δὲ χρησίμων ἐπιλογισμῶν . . .

. . . πρῶτός ἐστιν ὁ διδάσκων καὶ ὑπομνήσκων ὅτι πᾶσι μὲν τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀκολουθεῖ καὶ τοῖς νοσήμασιν ἃ φεύγειν δι' αὐτῶν δοκοῦμεν· ἀδοξίαι φιλοδοξίαις καὶ λῦπαι φίληδονίαις καὶ πόνοι μαλακίαις καὶ φιλονικίαις ἥτται καὶ καταδίκαι·

τῇ δὲ δυσωπία συμβέβηκεν ἀτεχνῶς φευγούσῃ καπνὸν ἀδοξίας εἰς πῦρ ἐμβάλλειν ἑαυτήν. αἰσχυρόμενοι γὰρ ἀντιλέγειν τοῖς ἀγνωμόνως δυσωποῦσιν ὕστερον δυσωποῦνται τοὺς δικαίως ἐγκαλοῦντας, καὶ

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