the bibliographic databases. But type in self esteem and it is as well to warn the librarian first. "No matter what ails you, self esteem is the cure."⁶ Money cannot buy you love, but self esteem guarantees money, love, health, and fulfilment. In the film *Wall Street* the motto "greed is good" became the epitaph of the 1980s. A 1990s remake would have Michael Douglas as a psychologist telling us that "Pride is good." High self esteem is not only desirable, it is a marker of good psychological adjustment.⁷

In contrast, low self esteem is blamed for nearly everything. Delinquency, drug taking, alcoholism, jealousy, self harm, eating disorder, depression, racism—all are the products of low self esteem.

So much has the search for self esteem become the contemporary zeitgeist, a paper that argued the opposite, that high esteem was associated with violence—the bar room situation of "Are you looking at me, kid?"—came as something as a shot across the bows of conventional psychological wisdom. Some knowledge of history would have helped. Lord George Sackville refused to fight at the Battle of Minden because his pride had been injured, and nearly cost the battle, while the pride of the Prince of Orange, unable to admit that he had mistaken a French regiment for a British one, led to one of the most famous and tragic incidents of the battle of Waterloo—Colonel Von Omteda leading the King's German Legion to certain destruction.⁸

To be genuine pride must be earned. Telling people to think more of themselves, or that by right or membership of some social, sexual, or ethnic group, they are automatically entitled to pride, is meretricious. In his magnificent *Culture of Complaint* Robert Hughes expressed it thus: pride "comes from doing things well, from discovering how to tell truth from lies, and finding out what unites us as well as separates us."⁹ Edward Gibbon knew what he meant: "People elated by pride ... are seldom qualified to form a just estimate of their actual situation."¹⁰

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Gluttony

John Garrow

If I were permitted to abolish six of the deadly sins from our planet the one which I would retain is gluttony. People who are driven by pride, wrath, envy, lust, or avarice probably make life unpleasant for those around them, but the penalties associated with gluttony and sloth (which are often mentioned together) fall mainly on the sinners themselves. To choose between these two last intransigent sins, consider their opposites: asceticism and hyperactivity. I would not mind people around me being hyperactive, so long as their motives were purged

of the other deadly sins, but asceticism, restraint, or self denial are not characteristics that I would welcome in my associates and still less in myself.

Our moral mentors deplore gluttony because self indulgence deflects our thoughts from higher things, but the Bible has little direct criticism of gluttony per se. The Book of Proverbs has some aphorisms about the social¹ and economic² disadvantages of gluttony, and the apostle Paul throws in gluttony in a general disparagement of the character of Cretans,³ but sinners who show gratitude by overconsumption of good things offered do not attract their most severe rebukes.

The strongest case that can be made against gluttony concerns its effects on the body rather than the soul. In medical literature it is fashionable to use gluttony as a synonym for overeating, especially as in "there is increasing evidence that obesity is not merely due to gluttony."⁴ This is loose use of language: it is certainly possible to eat far more than energy requirements dictate without ever overriding the physiological signals of satiety.

Watch those TV dinners

A picture to illustrate the aetiology of obesity would not be of gargantuan feasting: rather it would be of someone settling down to an evening of televising with an array of telesnacks within reach. If, during a typical 30 minute period between commercial breaks, he or she consumed a small (50 g) packet of peanuts or potato crisps, washed down with a half pint of beer or lemonade, the energy intake over three hours would exceed energy expenditure by about 2000 kcal. This is substantial overeating, but you could hardly call it gluttony. Indeed, such a person would probably tell a dietitian the next day, in all sincerity, that he or she could not recall eating anything that evening. We know that obese people must overeat, because calorimetry shows that obese people have higher energy expenditures than lean ones, so thermodynamic principles require that they have correspondingly higher energy intakes.⁵ The health risks of obesity have been rehearsed elsewhere.⁶

The characteristic of gluttons is that they are insatiable. With respect to food intake this has rather modest medical disadvantages. For a given daily energy intake it is metabolically less favourable to eat few large meals (gorging) than many small meals (nibbling).⁷ The syndrome of bulimia nervosa may drive young women to gorge, purge, and vomit in an effort to achieve a low body weight, but the medical problems of this syndrome

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arise as much from their "dyslipophobia" as from the disturbed eating pattern.¹¹ But gluttony need not apply only to food, there are also gluttons for work. Satiation also can be overdone. We should all be capable of satiation, but not too easily and not all the time.

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- 2 *Holy Bible* (New International Version). Proverbs xxviii,7.
- 3 *Holy Bible* (New International Version). Proverbs xxiii,21.
- 4 *Holy Bible* (New International Version). The epistle of St Paul to Titus, i,12.
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Sloth

James McCormick

Sloth is an ugly word, one of the ugliest in the language. It has the great virtue of being underused. How many times have you said it, read it, or heard it in the past year?

Sloth is a sin because it does not take a fair share of the washing up. "Find yourself something to do dear, find yourself something to do." Those of us old enough to have had adolescents at home have little difficulty in remembering the rage induced by their extraordinary ability to lie abed until lunch time.

Sloth does not have many entries in the *Oxford Book of Quotations*. Among them are George Herbert:

O England, full of sin but most of sloth;
Spit out thy phlegm, and fill thy breast with glory

or Bishop Thomas Ken:

Awake my soul and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;

Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
To pay thy morning sacrifice.¹

Ugh! "What is this world, if full of care we have no time to stand and stare?" Time to stand and stare, time to think, is seen by others as sloth. It is told that Petr Skrabanek, while working in the laboratory, was party to a discussion about the importance of obtaining new equipment. His response: "We do not need more equipment, we need to think, we need a chaise longue."

More recently sloth has literally become a deadly sin. The "couch potato" not only gives offence but shortens his life. As somebody who looks after several people who are living to die the slow death of senescence, there seems to me to be a strong case for relatively early and speedy death. In a world where all women are taking hormone replacement therapy and all men are taking statins, the possibility of peaceful myocardial infarction will diminish, and many more can look forward to life "sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

I wonder how great thinkers, who were obliged to do their thinking at home, managed to escape the accusation of sloth. I suspect that Darwin used the "sick role" to create the necessary escape from obligatory trivia. Montaigne had the luxury of sufficient money to employ others to complete "the daily round, the common task." For many others—by no means all great thinkers—the university and academia provide the opportunity to be slothful to good purpose.²

Walking is certainly compatible with thinking. I know of one family which responds to problems with "let's go climb a hill." Digging is also compatible with thinking but I have doubts about jogging. Certainly my own shortlived and puny efforts were about pain, and observing others there seems to be evidence of masochism rather than thought.

I suppose that the Protestant work ethic is largely responsible for the notion of laziness as sin. It seems to be very distant from those countries where the siesta is seen as essential. There are aspects of the siesta which have little to do with the heat of the midday sun. We all need time out of life. Perhaps it would be good if this were a daily occurrence rather than something achieved occasionally by "going on a retreat." A little justified sloth might reduce consumption of benzodiazepines as well as of alcohol.

Sloth, I would argue, is not a synonym for idleness. It is a sin in the eye of the beholder but the slothful make a positive decision to opt out of the demands of lovers and friends to be busy to little purpose. We need the luxury and benefits of occasional sloth.

1 *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. 2nd edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

2 McCormick JS. The academic task. *Lancet* 1988;iii:26.

Greed

Ralph Crawshaw

Greed, now there is a subject to turn off a medical audience, to send patients packing. I know, having been laughed off the podium for broaching the subject at a medical meeting, this despite the "Me" generation's glorification of greed in films such as *Wall Street*.¹ Granted that the exchange of money, albeit tax money, information, medications, and information between doctor and patient is generally respected as an ethical enterprise yet with the doctor and patient relationship it is never out of place to cock a clinical eye at any nidus of greed.

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