

POWER AND PRESTIGE



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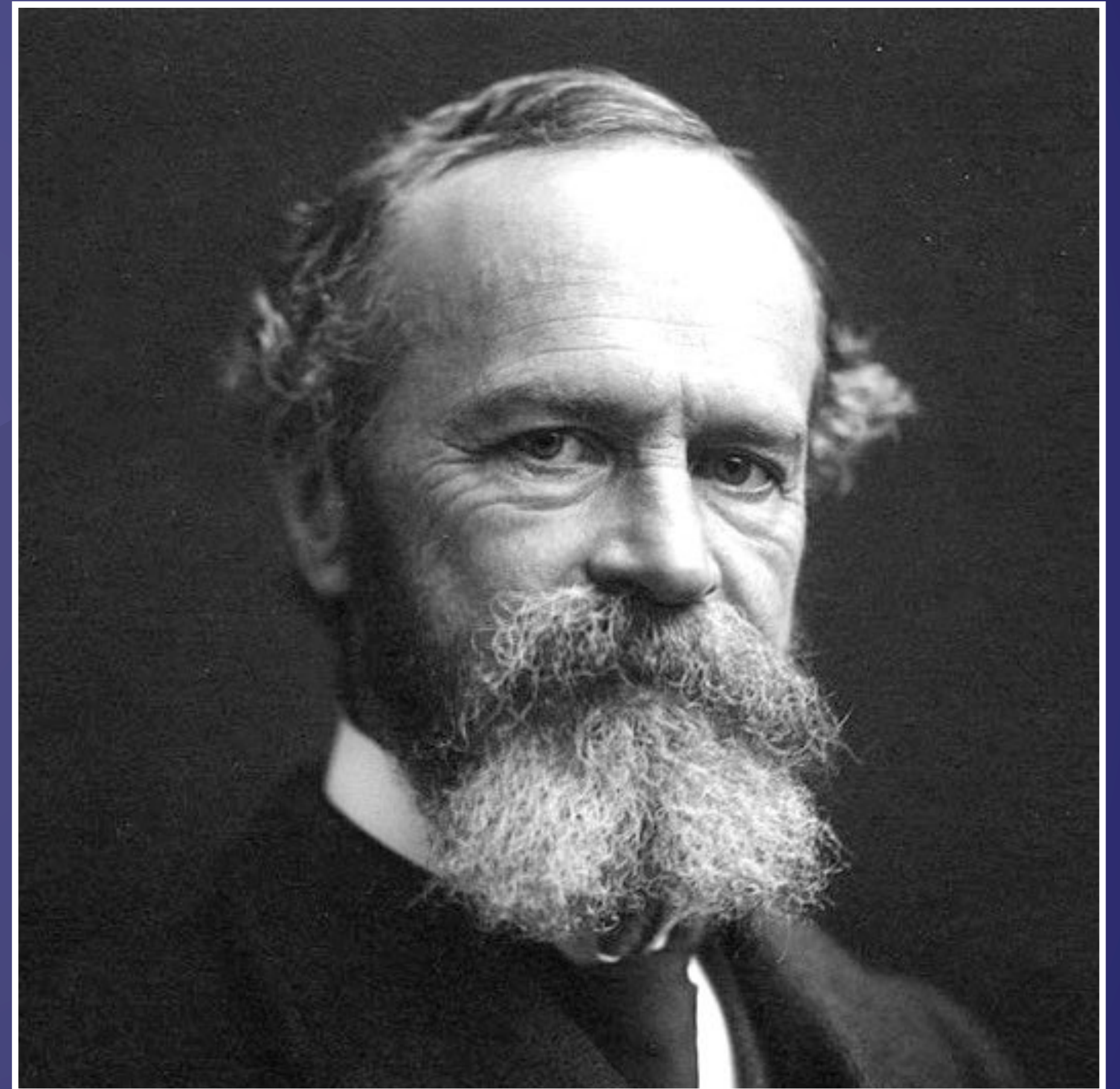
PRESTIGE AND SOCIAL COMPARISON

“

I, who for the time have staked my all on being a psychologist, am mortified if others know much more psychology than I. But I am contented to wallow in the grossest ignorance of Greek... We have the paradox of a man shamed to death because he is only the second pugilist or the second oarsman in the world. That he is able to beat the whole population of the globe minus one is nothing; he has 'pitted' himself to beat that one; and as long as he doesn't do that nothing else counts.

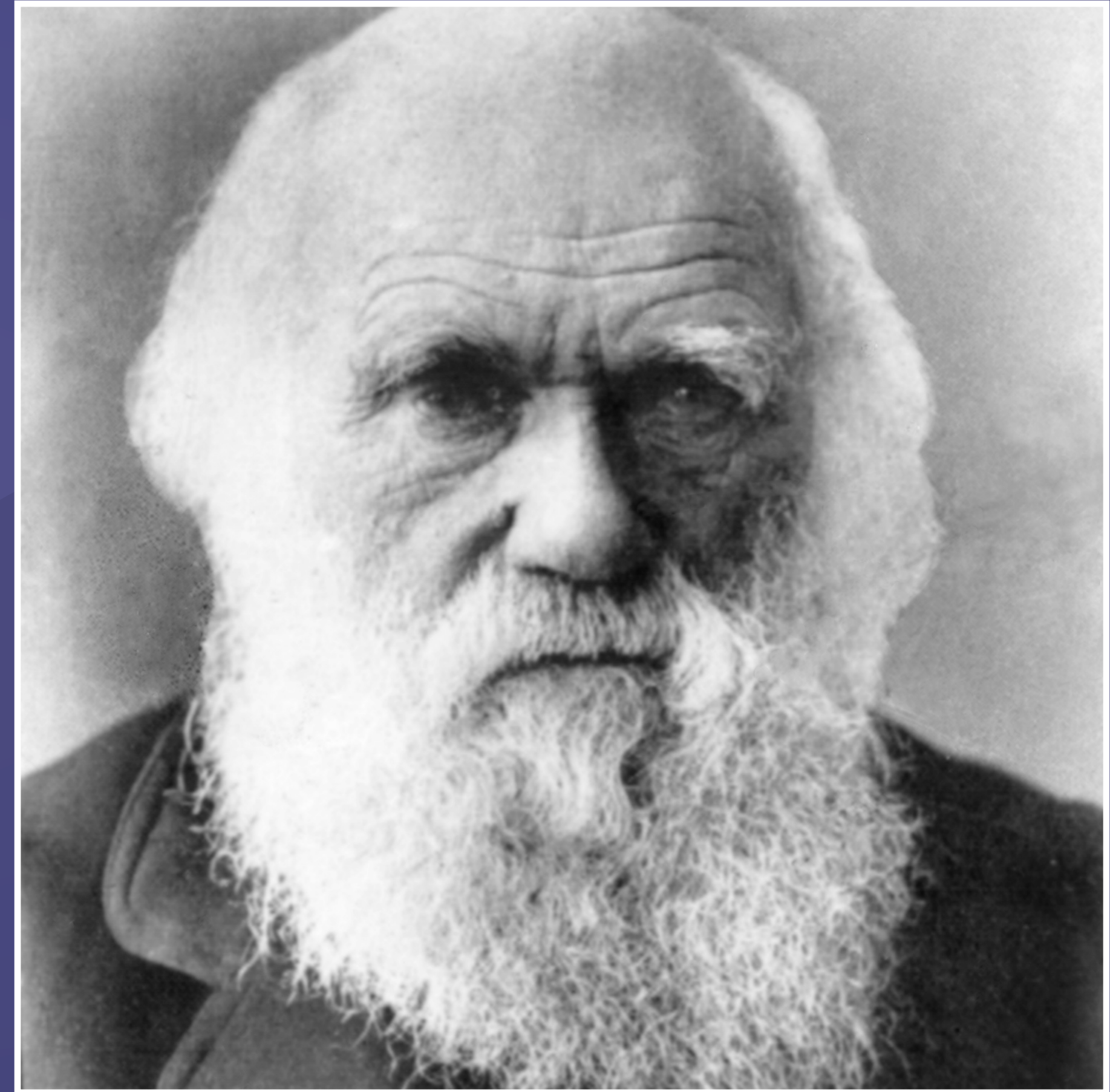
William James

Principles of Psychology (1890), Chapter 10.



WHY DO WE CRAVE PRESTIGE?

- Theory: Our state of nature is to pass on our genes
- This depends on evolutionary fitness
- What enhances fitness?
 - Money
 - Power
 - Prestige



Charles Darwin, 1809-1882

PRESTIGE REQUIRES SOCIAL COMPARISON ... AND THAT MEANS TROUBLE

- Favorable comparison in performance of activities increases blood oxygenation levels in the ventral striatum
- Ventral striatum is where rewards are processed
- Being #1 can mimic the feelings induced by drugs and alcohol
- Study of 978 U.S. Olympic medalists
 - Average age at death
 - Gold=76
 - Silver=72
 - Bronze=78

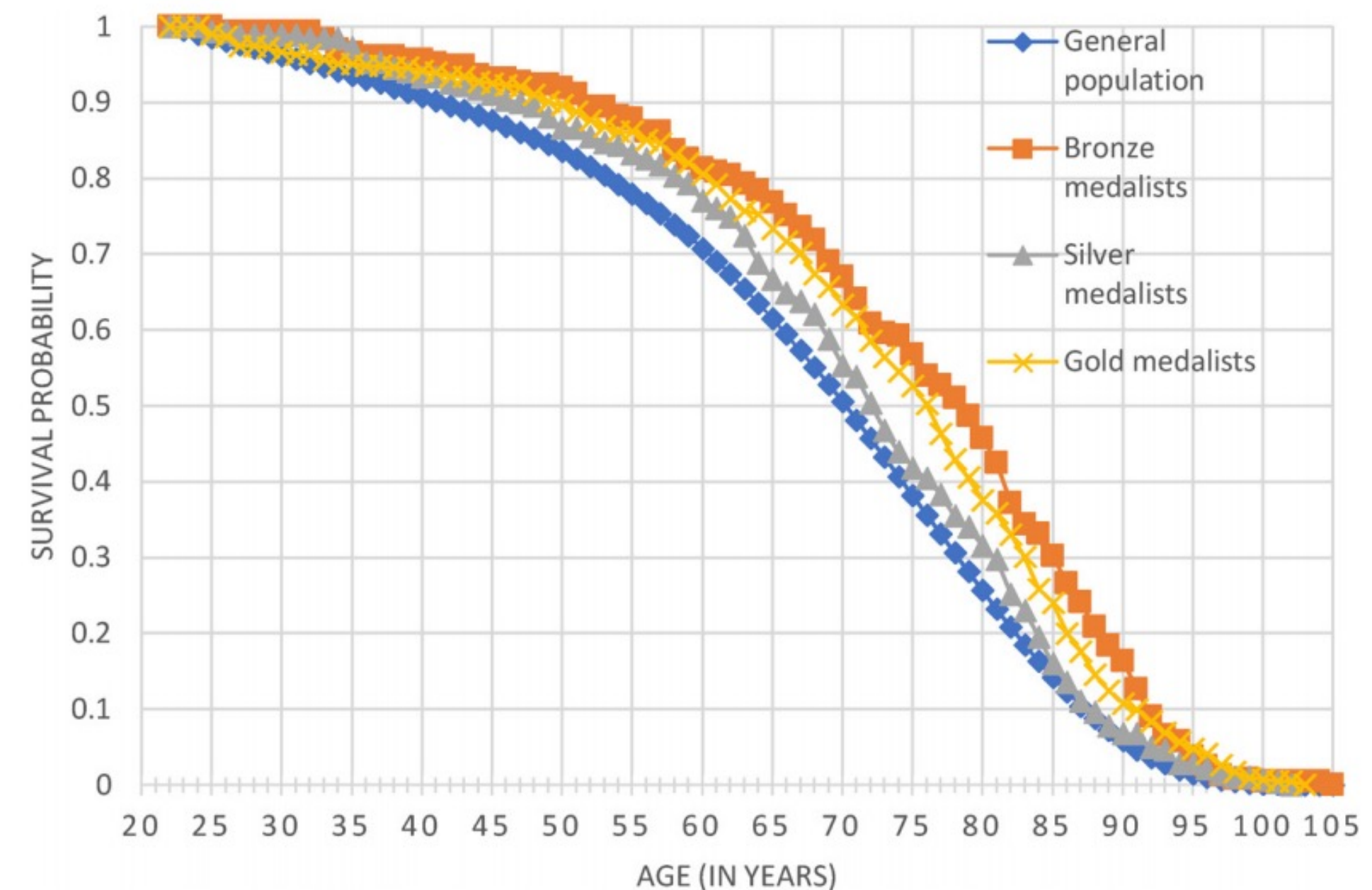
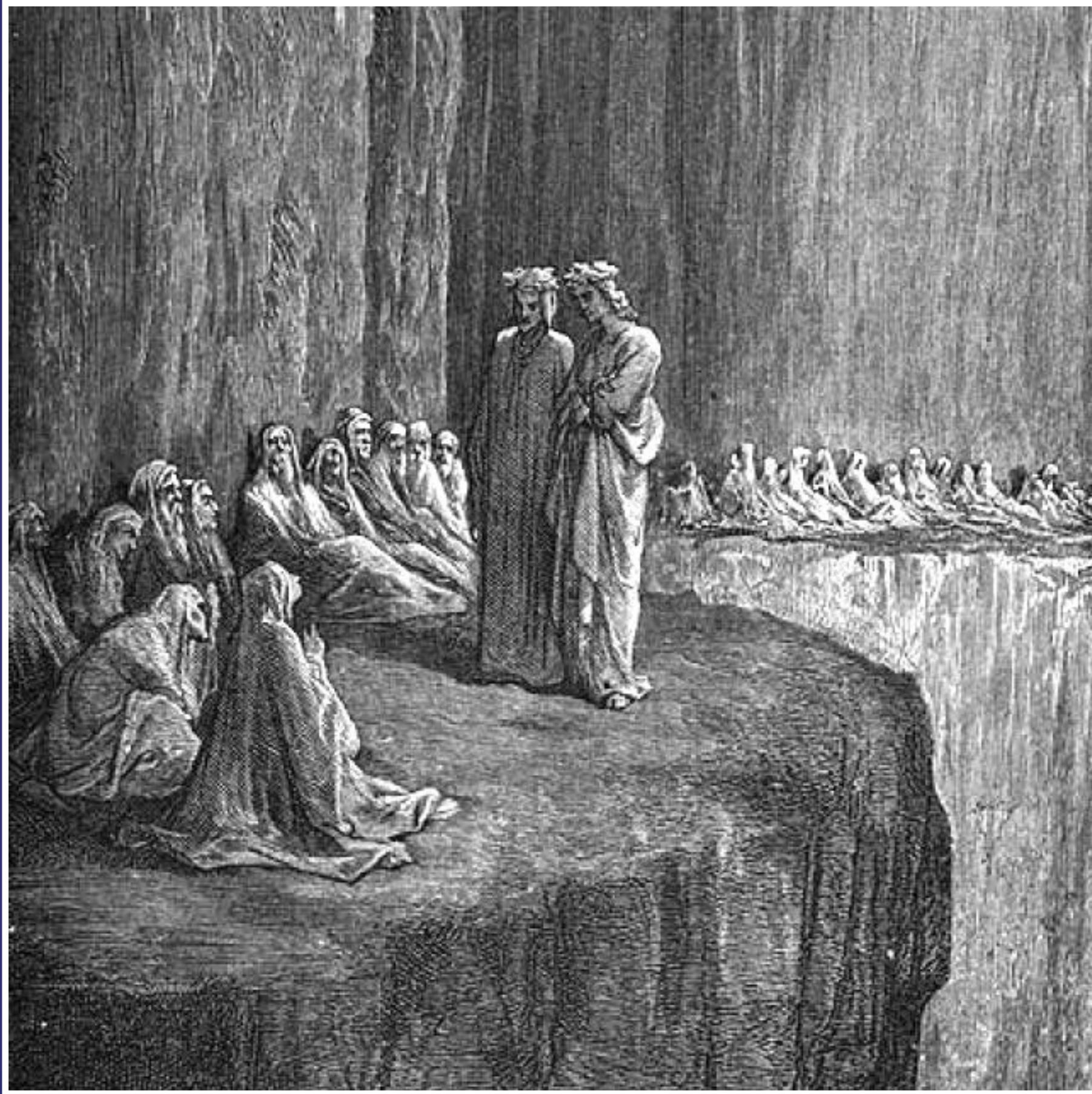


Fig. 1. Survival functions. Medal color is based on best overall performance. All medalists survived to at least age 23.

SOCIAL COMPARISON LEADS TO ENVY



Virgil shows Dante the Envious: Dante Il Purgatorio, Canto 13

- Envy: the resentful longing for what someone else possesses
 - Benign
(deserved, stimulates self-improvement but for negative reasons)
 - Malicious
(undeserved, stimulates urge to tear down)
- Effects
 - Stimulates the dACC so we experience pain
 - Predicts poor mental health in the future
 - Provokes anxiety and depression

HOW TO DEAL WITH SOCIAL COMPARISON

- Social comparison is useful so we understand ourselves and our abilities
 - In general, social comparison raises happiness briefly for people on the favorable side
 - It depresses well-being much more on the other side
 - So it is net-negative
 - Social comparison is found to have most negative impact on people who experience depression or “excessive affective sensitivity.”
 - What does this say about the welfare effects of social media?
- Implications
 - Good leaders should refrain from status comparison among those they lead
 - People at risk for mood disorders should avoid comparison as much as possible

BUT WON'T THIS MAKE ME LESS “HUNGRY?”

- Relative success and job satisfaction are closely linked
- Teams in the top percentile in employee engagement
 - 73% over company average
 - 78% over industry average
- Assumption: Success at work → job satisfaction → life satisfaction
- To be more successful and happier, just work for happiness

