

When Vanity Is Dangerous

Abstract: Unjustifiably expecting a higher form of regard from others than one deserves is a familiar vice; call it the “vanity-vice.” How serious of a vice is it? Rousseau claims that it is uniquely morally dangerous. I show how Rousseau’s claim is true of only one form of the vanity-vice. I first develop an account of dangerous vices that takes seriously Rousseau’s concern about the anti-egalitarian vices associated with inflamed amour-propre. I then apply two, cross-cutting distinctions in vanity: a distinction in whether one cares about the correctness of one’s expectations of high regard, and a distinction in the kind of high regard one expects. When we do not care about the correctness of our inflated expectations of regard, and when the unduly high regard we expect is authority-recognizing deference, we manifest a form of vanity that is uniquely dangerous, what I call “entitled smugness.”

Penultimate draft – please quote and/or cite from the published version.

1. Unjustifiably expecting a higher form of regard from others than one deserves is a familiar vice, which elicits such epithets as “arrogant,” “vain,” and “entitled.”¹ Call this general trait the “vanity-vice.” Vain people present a variety of problems. They are unpleasant to spend time with, they tend to be bad friends and colleagues, and they more generally tend to discount the legitimate interests and concerns of others. But Rousseau (1979) goes further when he discusses the dangers of vanity in *Emile*. He thinks that it is a uniquely dangerous moral vice. He worries about this when, imagining that life has gone well for his fictional pupil, Emile, he writes,

“Emile, in considering his rank in the human species and seeing himself so happily placed there, will be tempted to honor his reason for the work of [the tutor] and to attribute his happiness to his own merit. He will say to himself, “I am wise, and men are mad.” In pitying them, he will despise them; in congratulating himself, he will esteem himself more, and in feeling himself to be happier than them, he will believe himself worthier to be so. *This is the error most to be feared, because it is the most difficult to destroy.*” (245, emphasis mine)

My aim here is to show how Rousseau’s claim that vanity is uniquely morally dangerous applies to only one form of this vice, what I call “entitled smugness.”

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¹ By “expecting,” I do not primarily mean that the vain *believe* they deserve a higher form of regard than what they in fact deserve, although they do typically believe this. What I mean, as I explain in section 3, is that they take the norms governing the relevant forms of high regard to cast them as worthy objects of high regard and, accordingly, to call for others to hold them in high regard.

To show the unique dangers of entitled smugness, I first propose two criteria for evaluating the moral dangers posed by vices, which stem from Rousseau's worries about inflamed amour-propre and also cohere with a more general, relational egalitarian outlook. The two criteria are being resistant to moral correction (ineradicable) and being more broadly incompatible with a social practice of basic equality (inegalitarian). I then draw two, cross-cutting distinctions in vanity: between whether one cares (conceit) or does not care (smugness) about the correctness of one's expectations of high regard, and between whether the high regard that one expects is some form of admiration (arrogance) or the recognition of authority (entitlement). The first distinction mirrors Harry Frankfurt's (2005) distinction between lying and bullshitting; the second draws on Stephen Darwall's (1977; 2006) distinction between appraisal and recognition respect. There are four resulting forms of the vanity-vice: arrogant and entitled conceit, and arrogant and entitled smugness. Entitled smugness is the only form that is both fully ineradicable and inegalitarian and, thus, is uniquely morally dangerous.

It is easy to ignore and/or exaggerate the dangers of vanity when we do not pay attention to its importantly different forms. For instance, as I discuss in section 3, both Macalester Bell (2013) and Aaron James (2012) identify some of the central aspects and dangers of vanity (for Bell, the relevant vice is "superbia," for James, being an "asshole"), but neither fully appreciates the distinction between conceit and smugness. I conclude by considering some difficulties about holding smug people morally responsible, including the potential overlap between smugness and narcissistic personality disorder.

2. As I said above, there are many dangers and problems associated with the vanity-vice. What specifically is meant, then, in asking which form of this vice is most morally dangerous? To explain the relevant notion of moral danger, I construct an account that highlights two, interrelated dimensions along which vicious character traits are morally dangerous: (1) they involve being unresponsive

to standard forms of moral correction (i.e., ineradicable), and (2) they are incompatible with helping realize a republican ideal of egalitarian social relations (i.e., inegalitarian).

I should be clear that I am not assuming there is only one notion of moral danger that we can use to evaluate vices. I simply want to provide a concise way of unifying some of the main concerns that animate Rousseau's claim about the unique dangers of vanity, which I take to derive from his underlying worries about inflamed amour-propre. As will be clear below, the resulting criteria of dangerous vices are more broadly amenable to relational egalitarianism – the view that egalitarian moral principles are best explained in terms of the idea of relating as equals, i.e., the idea of social relations of equality.² (Anderson 1999; 2010) Even if you do not accept Rousseau's concerns about inflamed amour-propre, I suspect that, in order to explain how (certain forms of) vanity are uniquely dangerous, you still will need to draw on criteria that similarly cohere with relational egalitarianism.

This is because a worry about the dangers uniquely posed by vanity is ultimately a worry about individuals objectionably elevating themselves over others. The vanity-vice consists in unjustifiably expecting unduly high regard, and to expect high regard is to expect esteem or recognition as being superior to others in some way. (I further clarify this conception of vanity in section 3.) If we think that this vice, or some version of it, poses unique moral dangers – dangers that are especially serious, and that many other vices do not pose – then our conception of dangerous vices will need to be attuned to the problems that arise primarily when individuals objectionably elevate themselves over others. Since relational egalitarianism is the general view that gives pride of place to the idea of persons relating as equals, it is hard to imagine, then, accounting for how (a certain form of) the vanity-vice poses unique moral dangers without some commitment to relational egalitarianism.³ This is not an

² This view is most commonly used in debates in political philosophy, about the nature and scope of egalitarian principles of justice. But we can understand it more broadly as a view about the priority of the idea of relating as equals for explaining any egalitarian moral principles.

³ This is not to say that accounts without a commitment to relational egalitarianism, such as Aristotelian theories of virtue and vice, entirely ignore the problems of the vanity-vice. Aristotle (1984) views vanity as a vice of excess in relation to the

argument for relational egalitarianism. I am simply laying out the objective and limits of my inquiry: Supposing that (some form of) the vanity-vice poses unique moral dangers, I want to explain how and why this is so, and for that, I think we need an account of dangerous vices that treats as fundamental the idea of people relating as equals. While you could set aside the Rousseauian moral psychology of amour-propre and/or the associated practice-based conception of relating as equals I develop below, you still would need some specification of the idea of relating as equals according to which the self-elevation of (at least some form of) vanity is distinctively objectionable.⁴

To specify the idea of people relating as equals, I utilize Rousseau's distinction between benign and inflamed amour-propre, for this, again, is what provides the background for Rousseau's worries about vanity as "the error most to be feared," and I think it also provides a useful conceptual framework for addressing the broader set of issues at hand.⁵ Rousseau observes that, in being bound by social ties of any sort, we develop benign amour-propre – a desire to be taken seriously by others. Being bound by social ties makes us worried about being overlooked by those on whom we depend, where "overlooked" means, roughly, not having one's voice (i.e., judgments, decisions, interests) taken into account. This benign form of amour-propre underlies a kind of healthy self-respect. But Rousseau argues that, in typical social conditions, benign amour-propre is not a stable frame of mind.⁶ Persons tend to be taken seriously just when they attract others' attention and consideration. Once we impress, charm, or flatter others in some way, our voice is taken into account; otherwise, our voice is ignored. This general pattern of interaction makes us anxious about being taken seriously by others.⁷ For, not

mean of pride. (1125a24-32) But there is nothing especially worrisome about vanity for Aristotle; in fact, given that honor is worth pursuing as the highest external good, he thinks that the braggart who (vainly) exaggerates for the sake of honor and reputation is better than the one who does so only for the sake of money. (1127b10-14)

⁴ Here I take the basic moral equality of persons to be a widely shared background assumption, which I do more to substantiate in (Rozeboom 2018).

⁵ Rousseau introduces the previous quote about vanity as "the error most to be feared" as follows: "*Amour-propre* is a useful but dangerous instrument. Often it wounds the hand making use of it and rarely does good without evil." (1979, 244-5)

⁶ See (Dent 1988 and 2006), (Neuhouser 2008), (Cohen 2010), (Kolodny 2010), and (Rozeboom 2018).

⁷ This incorporates both the genealogical story of social inequality that Rousseau tells in the *Discourse on Inequality* (1997a, 164-72) and his account of the psychological development of young children in *Emile* (1979, 65-7).

only is it difficult to continually attract others' consideration, we also may find ourselves stacked up against those who are more talented, witty, smart, etc. We thus face a persistent, uncertain threat of losing our basis for being taken seriously by others, and our anxiety about this threat makes us desire to control how others think and feel about us.⁸ That is, we desire to eliminate others' latitude to not take us seriously, which amounts to a desire for what Rousseau and other republican thinkers understand as domination; this is inflamed amour-propre.

The conditions associated with the generation of inflamed amour-propre, then, are conditions in which persons tend to take one another seriously only to the extent they are shown to be admirable, lovable, or remarkable in various ways. These conditions produce widespread anxiety about being well-regarded by others that, in turn, generates a strong desire for domination. As I argue in (Rozeboom 2018), we need a social practice of basic equality to alleviate these conditions of inflamed amour-propre.⁹ We need a practice by which all individuals who share and can help solve the problem of inflamed amour-propre are given the same basic standing to govern their lives and help structure their interactions with one another. (Ibid, 153-6) This would involve the widespread, publicly-known acceptance of certain norms that grant each individual the same basic authority (or rights) to govern their lives and structure their interactions. (Ibid.) What is most important for our purposes is seeing that this egalitarian social practice requires individuals to accept norms of mutual deference. In accepting that all persons have the same basic standing to govern their lives, individuals constrain themselves from paternalistic interference in one another's affairs. And in accepting that all persons have the same basic standing to help structure their interactions with one another, individuals constrain themselves from unilaterally dictating the terms of their relations to others.

⁸ This is because, following (Kurth 2016, 2-3), anxiety involves general (not targeted) risk-minimizing behavior.

⁹ See also Neuhauser (2008; 2014) and (Cohen 2010, ch. 4-5). Note that a social practice of basic equality may not be sufficient for addressing the problem of inflamed amour-propre – following the course of Rousseau's oeuvre, we may also need to consider the structure of intimate relationships, primary education, and, as Cohen emphasizes, political institutions – but I do think it will be a central piece of any adequate solution.

This suggests that, on my Rousseauian account, a central condition of morally desirable character traits is that they involve maintaining attitudes of regard toward oneself and others that are compatible with, and help constitute, the kind of mutual deference entailed by a social practice of equality. That is, how one is disposed to attend, care about, and give consideration to oneself and others must fit within relations that involve the above forms of mutual deference and so avoid central kinds of paternalistic and/or domineering modes of interaction. Without such attitudinal traits, persons are unable to participate in an egalitarian social practice that mitigates inflamed amour-propre. Now, this may strike you as a pragmatic or consequentialist account of good character traits, on which good character traits are determined by their desirable social effects. That is true but somewhat misleading, in two ways. First, my account is specific about the kind of desirable social effects good character traits must serve. They serve the aim of mitigating inflamed amour-propre. This is not a consequentialist account that focuses broadly on bringing about the best overall outcomes. (Bradley 2018) Second, the desirable traits that make us fit to participate in an egalitarian practice of mutual deference help constitute, rather than merely cause or make more likely, our solution to the problem of inflamed amour-propre. This means that, just as many Aristotelians claim that virtuous character traits are those traits that help constitute the collective realization of *eudaimonia*, a Rousseauian claims that virtuous character traits are those that help constitute the collective mitigation of inflamed amour-propre.¹⁰

¹⁰ But now you might ask: why is it so important to mitigate inflamed amour-propre? I think two potential answers to this question emerge from Rousseau's writings. In his earlier, more political writings, solving the problem of inflamed amour-propre is important because it constitutes our social recovery of freedom. He famously claims in *The Social Contract*, for instance, that the purpose of forming a political society is to make us "as free as before." (Rousseau 1997b, 50) He seems to think here that what makes the problem of inflamed amour-propre so serious is the fact that it encapsulates our failure to recover an artificial (but not deficient) version of the naïve, asocial freedom that he imagines we enjoy in the state of nature. (Neuhouser 2014, 135-6) A second option centered on Rousseau's later writings claims that the problem of inflamed amour-propre is, at bottom, a problem of alienation – our lack of a coherent sense of self (or "sentiment of existence") within society. (Gauthier 2006) (This second way of understanding the seriousness of the problem of inflamed amour-propre may be in tension with my emphasis on a social practice of basic equality, insofar as the role we play in a thin, ubiquitous social practice may not help shore up our sense of self, but unfortunately I cannot address this potential difficulty here.)

How, then, should we classify the moral dangerousness of vices on a Rousseauian view? There are two criteria, and they both derive from the idea of a social practice of mutually deferential relations of equality that mitigates inflamed amour-propre. First, a vice is dangerous to the extent that it is immune to standard forms of moral correction (such as reproach, critical questions, and requests to empathize). The sort of mutual deference discussed above involves taking seriously other persons' judgments about how to structure one's interactions with them, including their moral judgments about how they deserve to be treated. The expression of such judgments often involves some form of moral correction. Insofar as a vicious trait makes one discount or ignore such judgments, it makes one unfit to fully participate in egalitarian social relations (as specified above), and it does so in a way that is hard to cure, given that one is unmoved by the standard ways that persons help improve one another. It is thus morally dangerous as an *ineradicable* vice. This is the kind of danger that Rousseau emphasizes in the opening quote, when he describes vanity as the vice that "is the most difficult to destroy."

A related but broader criterion for moral danger is the extent to which a vice is more generally incompatible with participating in egalitarian social relations that mitigate inflamed amour-propre. This is the moral danger of being an *inegalitarian* vice. Vices that are ineradicable will be somewhat inegalitarian, because they resist moral correction, but the reverse is not true. A vice might be susceptible to standard forms of correction (and so not dangerous according to the first criterion) while still making its possessor unfit in some other way to participate in an egalitarian social practice of mutual deference. For instance, as I discuss below, the form of vanity that I call "entitled conceit" is incompatible with maintaining social relations of equality but is still susceptible to interpersonal moral correction. It is thus morally dangerous as an inegalitarian vice, even though it is eradicable.

You might wonder whether this second criterion of moral dangerousness simply lays out a broad, Rousseauian conception of what a moral vice is. I do not think so, because there may be vices, such as misanthropy, that are compatible with being a participant in egalitarian social relations (and so

also are susceptible to interpersonal correction) but that, nevertheless, undermine an individual's moral development as a participant in egalitarian social relations. While bad, such vices will not pose the kind of interpersonal moral danger captured by the two criteria above.

In sum, on my Rousseauian conception of dangerous vices, vices are morally dangerous to the extent they are ineradicable (i.e., resistant to standard forms of interpersonal moral correction) and/or inequalitarian (i.e., incompatible with egalitarian social relations).¹¹ These criteria derive from the idea that morally desirable character traits are determined by what it takes to fully participate in egalitarian social relations of mutual deference, which is what we need to solve the problem of inflamed amour-propre. They thus contain a more general commitment to relational egalitarianism.

3. Now that we are in a better position to evaluate the moral dangerousness of the vanity-vice, let me say a bit more about how I understand this vice and the different forms it can take. I initially characterized it as unjustifiably expecting a higher form of regard from others than one deserves. What does “unjustifiably expecting” high regard involve? The expectation of high regard that is central to vanity is normative, in the sense that it is not merely a descriptive belief about receiving high regard but further (or instead) involves the acceptance of norms of interpersonal regard. These are norms of the form that such-and-such attitude of high regard (respect, admiration, deference, etc.) should be directed (and perhaps expressed) toward individuals with such-and-such properties. By “expectation,” then, I refer to the application of norms to specific contexts and any resulting mental states. This means that there are two ways that the vain person's expectation of undeservedly high regard might be unjustified: first, they accept mistaken regard-norms and have no good reason for doing so, and/or they misapply correct regard-norms to themselves and have no good reason for doing so.

¹¹ It is worth stressing that vices can be ineradicable and/or inequalitarian to varying degrees, and when they register on these two measures only to very small degrees, it may seem inappropriate to call them dangerous.

To illustrate, think about the two different ways that someone might be vain about their intellectual abilities. They might accept for no good reason bad norms on which persons deserve basic respect to the extent they are smart and, accordingly, take themselves to deserve much more basic respect than most people, who are not as smart as they are. Or, they might accept correct regard-norms on which smart people are due a specific, narrow kind of admiration for their intellect, but since they are not actually very smart and should know this, they wrongly and for no good reason take these norms to cast them as an apt object of such admiration.

Note an important implication here: while it is necessary for the vanity-vice that someone expects high regard they do not deserve, this is not sufficient. There may be justifiable, non-vicious ways of expecting undeservedly high regard, hence the condition of having “no good reason.” Further specifying this condition depends on details about the nature of norm-acceptance that I cannot explore here and how these details, in turn, connect to broader debates about blameworthiness (e.g., can the prevalence of bad norms partially exculpate those who accept them?¹² (Calhoun 1989)).

Given this broad characterization of the vanity-vice, what are the different forms it can take? I will draw two, cross-cutting distinctions that reveal four importantly different forms of vanity. The first distinction concerns whether those who are vain care about the correctness of their inflated expectation of high regard. What I have in mind is parallel to the distinction Harry Frankfurt (2005, 54-61) draws between lying and bullshitting. The liar says what is false out of a concern, in part, with what is true. The bullshitter has no such concern. Similarly, one kind of vain person has an unjustified expectation of high regard that involves, in part, a concern with the correctness of their expectation of high regard, whereas another kind of vain person has no such concern. Let us call the former “conceited” and the latter “smug.” It may be tempting to draw this distinction by saying that the conceitedly vain individual is sincere in their vanity, while the smug person is not. But this is incorrect.

¹² Relatedly, in what ways are we responsible for hard-to-monitor attitudes such as implicit biases? (Mason 2018)

Both are sincere insofar as they both accept norms that they take to cast themselves as worthy objects of, and so genuinely expect, high regard. What separates them is whether they care about the correctness of their regard-expectations, not whether their expectations are genuine.

This does raise a puzzle about the smug person. How could they have a genuine normative expectation of high regard – which largely derives from accepting regard-norms – and be unconcerned about the correctness of this expectation? To explain how, let us first apply a general model of norm-acceptance developed by Chandra Sripada and Stephen Stich (2007). They focus on the intuitive idea that “intrinsic motivation” is central to “internalizing” norms:

“[We] refer to the type of motivation associated with norms as intrinsic motivation. Our claim is that people are disposed to comply with norms even when there is little prospect for instrumental gain, future reciprocation, or enhanced reputation, and when the chance of being detected for failing to comply with the norm is very small.” (284)

We are not simply intrinsically motivated to abide by norms; we also are intrinsically motivated to sanction norm-violations. Summarizing the relevant empirical literature, Sripada and Stich note that,

“... in various experimental situations and experimental games, people will punish others – *at substantial costs to themselves* – for violations of normative rules or a normative conception of fairness.” (288)

Could the smug person be intrinsically motivated to follow and enforce the pertinent regard-norms without caring about the correctness of their normative expectation? You might think it depends on how we characterize this intrinsic motivation. Sripada and Stich generically refer to how we intrinsically value abiding by the norms we internalize, whereas Darwall (2006, 158) appeals to a distinctively “deontological” form of motivation that characterizes norm-acceptance and is distinct from pursuing what we intrinsically value. But I think we can set that debate to one side. Regardless of whether we understand the motivation as just one instance of the broader phenomenon of pursuing what we intrinsically value, or rather as a distinctively deontological form of motivation, it seems that, in principle, individuals could be intrinsically motivated to follow and enforce norms without being concerned about the correctness of their corresponding normative expectations. Now, Darwall (*ibid.*)

might reply that, since regard-norms are second-personal and accepting second-personal norms entails accepting them as legitimate, i.e., as supported by second-personal reasons, it follows that accepting regard-norms involves being concerned with the correctness of one's normative expectations of high regard. But this does not follow. Taking there to be good reasons (second-personal or otherwise) that justify a norm that one accepts does not entail being concerned about whether the relevant considerations actually support one's normative expectations.

Why might smug individuals be motivated to follow and enforce regard-norms without being concerned about the correctness of their corresponding normative expectations? At a general level, they may be experiencing something akin to wishful thinking. They value receiving high regard for its own sake, and this can distort their normative expectations of high regard in something like the way wishful thinking works. Just as individuals sometimes believe that *P* because they want *P* to be the case, so do individuals genuinely expect high regard (according to the regard-norms they accept) because they want or enjoy receiving high regard. Beyond this general phenomenon, their more specific reasons for accepting norms without caring about the correctness of their normative expectations are likely diverse. Perhaps some deep-seeded insecurity attaches them to bad regard-norms that cast them as more estimable than they worry they are. Or perhaps they were raised with a sense of entitlement on which their entire sense of self is founded, so they cannot imagine questioning the regard-norms they accept. Nothing in my argument hangs on these speculative psychological diagnoses (but see my discussion below of how smugness relates to narcissistic personality disorder). I offer them simply as illustrations of how those who are smug could come to be intrinsically motivated to follow and enforce norms without being concerned about the correctness of their normative expectations.

I do want to rule out a couple of ways we might accept norms without caring about the correctness of our normative expectations that do not apply to smug persons. Peter Railton (2006) points out that we can accept a norm without endorsing it. This does not seem an apt way to describe the

smug, who are characterized, in part, by their wholehearted commitment to the relevant regard-norms. Alternatively, Cristina Bicchieri (2006, ch. 1) claims that we are motivated to abide by the social norms we accept because we expect others to follow them and they expect us to do the same. It seems that persons could be intrinsically motivated to follow (and enforce) regard-norms for this reason without being concerned about the correctness of their normative expectations. But this also does not aptly describe the smug, since, as I discuss below, they are characterized by a sort of self-satisfaction that insulates them from others' expectations.

It is more helpful to draw a parallel with the idea of “epistemic insouciance” in virtue epistemology. Quassim Cassam (2018, 2-6) describes epistemic insouciance as a vice that consists in a “casual disregard” and oftentimes outright “contempt” for the evidence and facts pertaining to one’s beliefs. Individuals who are epistemically insouciant do not care about how the evidence and facts bear on their beliefs and thus are unconcerned about the correctness of their beliefs, even though they maintain those beliefs all the same. Similarly, those who are smug genuinely expect to receive high regard (in virtue of accepting pertinent regard-norms), even though they are unconcerned about whether their normative expectations are correct. They do not care about whether or how the relevant considerations bear on their normative expectations.¹³

¹³ It may also be useful to contrast Kant’s (1996a) distinction in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (*KPV*) between self-love and self-conceit with my distinction between conceit and smugness. Kant famously claims that respect for the moral law “only restricts ... self-love” but “strikes down self-conceit.” (5:73) One thing that is immediately apparent here is the slipperiness of the term “conceit.” I think my technical usage of “conceit,” as distinct from “smugness,” reflects our patterns of ordinary usage, but any philosophical usage of these terms will require some stipulation. More to the point, I do not think that Kantian self-love entails vicious vanity, which means that Kant’s notion of conceit covers both conceit and smugness as I conceive of them. (This further implies that Kantian respect for the moral law will “strike down” both conceit and smugness, although perhaps in different ways.) Kant’s distinction between self-love and self-conceit is thus closer to a distinction between the vanity-vice and some related, non-vicious state, rather than a distinction between different forms of vanity. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant more closely focuses on the vanity-vice, what he calls “arrogance,” including a strain of arrogance that has some features of smugness. There, Kant claims that an arrogant person may be a “*conceited ass*, that is, that he shows an offensive lack of understanding in using such means as must bring about, on the part of others, the exact opposite of his end[.]” (6:465) What Kant calls “an offensive lack of understanding” may point toward the normative carelessness that I take to characterize smugness. But he still does not clearly draw the conceit-smugness distinction I am drawing here and, unlike in the *KPV* passage, does not highlight what is distinctively worrisome about this vice. It is merely one among several vices that oppose proper regard for other persons. The same is true for Kant’s (1997) discussion of the distinction between loving and “craving” honor in the *Lectures on Ethics* (27:407-412). There, he describes the vice of craving

We should note that there seem to be different kinds and degrees of not caring about the relevant reasons. Sometimes the smug rest their normative expectations on a thin rationale that functions, not to satisfy a real concern for the correctness of those expectations, but to preempt any serious questions about them. In other cases, no such perfunctory rationale is present. The smug also vary in the extent to which they do not care. For many smug individuals, there may be a threshold of seriousness in the concerns raised about the correctness of their normative expectations, above which they do care and below which they do not, and this threshold may be higher or lower for different smug individuals. It may also be that, for many smug individuals, they only care about certain kinds or sources of reasons that bear on the correctness of their normative expectations, e.g., they care about prudential considerations but not moral ones. While these are important complications, they do not bear directly on the main conclusion I reach below about the uniquely dangerous character of a certain kind of smugness, and so I will set these complications aside going forward.

In addition to the distinction between those who do (conceited) and those who do not (smug) care about the correctness of their expectations of high regard, there is a distinction between the kinds of high regard that vain persons expect. Following Darwall (1977; 2006, 122-6), we can distinguish the vain person who expects a kind of high “appraisal” that is putatively earned or merited along some measure of human excellence from the one who expects “recognition” of (and thus deference toward) some presumed authority that is grounded in his capacities, traits, and/or roles. Call the former “arrogant” and the latter “entitled” (in the pejorative sense). To illustrate, someone who thinks they are

honor roughly as I describe the vanity-vice, but without drawing any distinction between those who do and those who do not care about the correctness of their regard-expectations. (However, he does draw something like the second distinction I draw below between arrogance and entitlement; he puts this in terms of whether or not the honor we crave concerns “the worth of our person.” (27:409) Thanks to Andrew Flynn for this reference.) See also Kant’s (1996c) *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, where he discusses “diabolical vices” associated with a distorted concern for our relative social standing, a concern which stems from our morally innocent “predisposition to humanity.” (6:27) While the vanity-vice figures among the diabolical vices (which also include envy and schadenfreude), Kant again does not distinguish between the diabolical vices that do, and those that do not, involve caring about the correctness of one’s expectations of high regard (or beneficial treatment, or comparatively good fortune, or whatever undeserved good is the focus of the vice in question).

a much better judge of moral character than they really are and unjustifiably expects to be *admired* as such is vain about appraisal, and so, on my usage, is arrogant. By contrast, if they take their capacity for character-assessment to ground some authoritative standing to make pronouncements that other people must *heed*, then they are vain about authority-recognition and so, on my usage, are entitled. This second distinction is important because, as I explain in section 4, an exaggerated expectation of appraisal fits more easily into egalitarian social relations (of the sort that can mitigate inflamed amour-propre, at least) than an exaggerated expectation of authority-recognition. Those who unjustifiably expect undue authority-recognition are demanding deference from others in a manner that is incompatible with maintaining egalitarian social relations.

When we combine the two distinctions above, we find four basic forms of the vanity-vice: **(i) arrogant conceit:** someone unjustifiably expects high appraisal they do not deserve, and they care about the correctness of their expectation, **(ii) entitled conceit:** someone unjustifiably expects authority-recognition they do not deserve, and they care about the correctness of their expectation, **(iii) arrogant smugness:** someone unjustifiably expects high appraisal they do not deserve, and they do not care about the correctness of their expectation, and **(iv) entitled smugness:** someone unjustifiably expects authority-recognition they do not deserve, and they do not care about the correctness of their expectation.

It is illuminating to see how this four-fold account of the vanity-vice overlaps with, but still departs from, Bell's (2013) account of "superbia" and James' (2012) account of "assholes." Bell describes superbia as the vice of believing that one has comparatively high status, desiring that this status be recognized, and, in so believing and desiring, manifesting ill will. (Bell 2013, 109) Our accounts are not so far apart at a first pass. Where I place weight on the idea of unjustifiable normative expectations, Bell depends on the idea of ill will. If we apply the Darwallian distinction between appraisal and recog-

nition (which Bell uses elsewhere (*ibid.*, 170-1)) to distinguish between appraisal-meriting and recognition-meriting forms of high status, we arrive at something like my distinction between arrogance and entitlement. And if we apply Cassam's (2018) notion of epistemic insouciance to the superbiic agent's belief in her high status, then we arrive at something like my notion of smugness. However, Bell's account of how we should respond to superbia does not make room for this notion of smugness. She thinks that the attitude of contempt is the appropriate response to superbia, and it curbs superbia by presenting "its target as having a comparatively low status ... in virtue of their superbia." (Bell 2013, 128) That is, contempt draws the superbiic agent's attention to the inferior moral status he earns through his superbia. If we take seriously my distinction between conceit and smugness, it is clear that contempt will not curb smug vanity. As I discuss below, it is only if someone cares about the correctness of their inflated normative expectations that they are susceptible to reform in light of being shown how their expectation is incorrect. The smug have no such concern.

For James (2012, 12), an asshole is someone who "systematically allows himself to enjoy special advantages in interpersonal relations out of an entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes him against the complaints of other people." This is both wider and narrower than my conception of the vanity-vice. It is wider, because "special advantages" may include other things than the forms of high regard that the vain expect to receive. It is narrower, because not all forms of the vanity-vice involve being "entrenched" against others' complaints. If we focus only on what I call smugness, and if we narrow James' account to focus on high regard (and not the wider class of special advantages), there still remains an important difference between my account of smugness and James' account of being an asshole. Someone might be immune to others' complaints about their inflated expectations of high regard and still care about the correctness of those expectations, and so they might be an asshole without being smug. This matters, because the asshole who cares about the correctness of their inflated expectations of high regard is still open, in principle, to revising those expectations in

light of being shown how their expectations are incorrect (of course, this demonstration will have to come through some other means than others' moral complaints).¹⁴ The same is not true for the smug person. Their immunity to complaints is just one symptom of their broader lack of concern about the correctness of their regard-expectations.

4. We are now in a better position to begin evaluating the dangerousness of the different forms of the vanity-vice. Using my Rousseuaian framework, there are two main questions we need to ask about each of its forms: Is it eradicable by standard forms of moral correction,¹⁵ and is it compatible with participating in (the relevant kind of) egalitarian social relations?

Let us begin with arrogant conceit, which I think is the most benign form of vanity. (This is faint praise, to be sure.) Think of the student who expects high praise for his aggressively mediocre work and, yet, is attentive to evidence for and against his self-estimation. On its own, such conceit is eradicable by moral correction.¹⁶ This is because the arrogantly conceited care about the correctness of their expectations of high regard (they are conceited, not smug), and the kind of high regard they expect to receive does not entail demanding deference from others, at least not in any way that would preclude taking seriously the moral correction others offer. Of course, whether they actually do so will depend on myriad factors – how they are related to the individual offering correction, how the correction is expressed, and the source of their arrogant conceit. But there is nothing about arrogant conceit itself that resists revision in the face of interpersonal moral correction.

¹⁴ I should note that I have no qualms with James' own use of the terms "smug" and "smugness" (ibid., 39-43), but it is clear that he does not use these terms to capture the important distinction I want to draw here.

¹⁵ I claimed just above that smugness is importantly different from being an asshole in James' sense because the normative carelessness of smugness extends beyond its immunity to the moral complaints of others. Am I here walking back this claim, in focusing on the danger of being immune to moral correction? No, because moral correction extends beyond moral complaints, including such things as critical questions and requests to empathize. James (ibid., 25-6) focuses narrowly on the kinds of interpersonal confrontation that fit into the cast of second-personal accountability. There are many important forms of correction that are not expressions of second-personal accountability.

¹⁶ It is worth noting that not all forms of arrogant conceit may be morally vicious and, accordingly, not all forms of correction directed at it may count as moral correction.

This claim calls for further clarification of the idea of being eradicable by moral correction.¹⁷ In what sense is arrogant conceit open to revision in the face of moral correction? How might it coincide with taking moral correction seriously? All that is required is that the vice is compatible with being responsive to some of the reasons for revising one's expectation of high regard that are expressed by legitimate (i.e., actually reason-conveying) moral correction.¹⁸ One need not be responsive to the full range of reasons conveyed by legitimate correction. That would require not having any form of vanity at all, given that sustaining unjustifiable expectations of high regard involves being insensitive to some of the pertinent moral considerations.¹⁹ My claim above, then, is that arrogant conceit is compatible with being responsive to some of the reasons conveyed in legitimate moral correction, given that it involves caring about the correctness of one's expectations of high regard, i.e., caring about how (at least some of) the relevant reasons bear on one's regard-expectations.

Arrogant conceit is also generally compatible with participating in egalitarian social relations. Unjustifiably expecting admiration along some measure of excellence is not, by itself, in tension with maintaining relations of mutual deference with others, whom one takes to have the same basic standing as oneself to govern their lives and interactions. That is, unjustifiably expecting admiration as a great pianist, or astute judge of character, or math whiz, does not entail rejecting other people's standing to govern their lives or weigh in about the structure of one's interactions with them, or even thinking that one has higher standing than them to govern one's life and interactions. This is not to say that people do not often slide from arrogant conceit into some other form of vanity that does disrupt their ability to relate to others as equals. But there is nothing about arrogant conceit itself that is incompatible with egalitarian social relations (of the sort that mitigates inflamed amour-propre).

¹⁷ Thanks to Wendy Salkin and Lilian O'Brien for helping me clarify this component of my view.

¹⁸ Here I borrow the idea of reasons-responsiveness from the literature on moral responsibility, especially as articulated in (Fischer and Ravizza 1998), although it has been refined and recast by other philosophers in light of many recent debates. The relevant notion of reasons-responsiveness also overlaps with Philip Pettit's (2001) idea of "discursive control."

¹⁹ This qualification is similar to Fischer and Ravizza's (ibid., 69-84) idea of "moderate" reasons-responsiveness.

Like arrogant conceit, entitled conceit is open to moral correction, with an important caveat: if the expansive authority-recognition expected by the entitled conceited person concerns their authority to settle moral questions, then their entitled conceit will make them resistant to moral correction, at least from those who do not recognize and/or share their presumed moral authority. Imagine, e.g., the nosy neighbor who presumes to make unilateral, authoritative judgments about the moral quality of one's parenting, and who cares a great deal about whether these judgments should be heeded. In this case, even though the entitled conceited person cares about the correctness of their expectation of high regard and so, to some extent, is responsive to reasons to reject it, they will discount such reasons when offered by those who fail to recognize and/or share their presumed moral authority. (So, this kind of entitled conceit involves regard-expectations that are less reasons-responsive than the regard-expectations of arrogant conceit.) Otherwise, entitled conceit is susceptible to interpersonal moral correction in the same basic way that arrogant conceit is.

You might wonder whether conceit (either arrogant or entitled) is as correctable as I have suggested. Following James (2012, 27-8), you might point out that the conceited are often "entrenched" in their expectation of high regard and, accordingly, are not open to adjusting their expectations in light of other persons' concerns. But I think much hangs on why their inflated expectations are entrenched. When we examine the causes of their entrenchment, we see that it does not strictly follow from their conceit. Sometimes the conceited have entrenched expectations because central aspects of their self-conception depends on sustaining their expectation of high regard. If so, then it is not their conceit, but how their self-conception depends on their conceit, that makes them resistant to interpersonal moral correction. Other times they have entrenched expectations because, as I discussed above, they are morally entitled, i.e., they expect other persons to non-reciprocally defer to their standing to issue moral judgments. This is a narrow form of conceit and so does not pose any problems for my claim that conceit is generally susceptible to interpersonal moral correction. And in

yet other cases, being conceited is conjoined with having a dismissive attitude toward others by which one discounts or ignores their moral judgments. This is the kind of dismissive entrenchment on which James (*ibid.*) focuses. But such dismissiveness does not follow from being conceited and so also does not entail that my claim – about the general eradicability of conceit – is incorrect.

Entitled conceit is clearly worse than arrogant conceit along the second dimension of moral danger (of being inegalitarian). This is because any form of entitlement, as described above, unjustifiably expects undue deference. If one unjustifiably expects undue deference, then one is expecting authority-recognition in a manner that is incompatible with upholding social relations of basic equality. Why think that? I am not sure there is a theory-neutral answer to this question. From the broadly Rousseauian perspective I have taken here, the basic criterion of justifiable expectations of deserved authority-recognition just is the compatibility of these expectations with social relations of equality (that mitigate inflamed *amour-propre*). That is, are these expectations based on norms that support the mutual deference of social relations of equality, and do the agent's reasons for holding these expectations cohere with her participation in such social relations? (These two questions address the two ways that an agent's normative expectation of undeservedly high regard might be unjustifiable, as I explained in section 3.) When an agent exhibits entitled conceit, the answer to one or both questions will be "no," because she will be applying norms calling for authority-recognition that is incompatible with the mutual deference of social relations of equality, and in doing so, she likely will be motivated by considerations that undermine her participation in egalitarian social relations.

Let us now turn to the two forms of smugness (which, again, involve not caring about the correctness of one's inflated expectations of high regard). Arrogant smugness will be more morally dangerous than either form of conceit insofar as it is generally immune to moral correction. If someone unjustifiably expects appraisal-regard for some form of perceived excellence but does not care about the correctness of their expectation – e.g., a student who expects high praise for mediocre work

but does not care about the reasons for or against this expectation of praise – then they will be unmoved by the concerns expressed by others. They might be bothered or offended if the expression of others' concerns prevents them from receiving the praise they expect, but this will not lead them to question their expectations. They thus will not be responsive to the reasons for questioning their regard-expectations that are conveyed through moral correction.²⁰ (To return to James' idea of entrenched expectations, this is a kind of entrenchment that is essential to smug forms of vanity.)

When we look at the second criterion of moral danger, however, arrogant smugness is less dangerous than entitled conceit. This is because, as with arrogant conceit, it is not incompatible with egalitarian social relations beyond its resistance to correction, whereas the authority-recognition expected by entitled conceit is more broadly inegalitarian. That is to say, the incompatibility of arrogant smugness with egalitarian social relations is limited to its resistance to correction.²¹ Outside of contexts in which reasons are being given for revising one's inflated expectation of appraisal-regard, arrogant smugness does not preclude taking seriously others' judgments, concerns, and decisions in the manner required by a mutually deferential social practice of equality. The same is not true for entitled conceit. As I argued above, its unjustifiable expectation of undeserved deference is more broadly incompatible with participating in mutually deferential social relations of equality.

Entitled smugness is the worst, compared not just to arrogant smugness, but to all other forms of the vanity-vice. It is immune to moral correction, given that it involves not caring about the correctness of one's expectation of high regard. And it is broadly incompatible with social relations of equality, given that it involves an unjustifiable expectation of undeserved authority-recognition. This is the form of vanity that truly fits Rousseau's description of being "most to be feared." Now, you might think this is trivially true, because entitled smugness seems to most fully manifest inflamed

²⁰ This raises difficult questions about the smug agent's moral responsibility for her inflated regard-expectations, given that moral responsibility seems to require more reasons-responsiveness than smugness allows. I turn to these in section 5.

²¹ To restate a qualification I noted above (n. 16): not all correction aimed at arrogance will count as moral correction.

amour-propre. But actually, while entitled smugness disrupts the egalitarian social relations that mitigate inflamed amour-propre and can be an indirect consequence of inflamed amour-propre, it is not a direct expression of inflamed amour-propre. Inflamed amour-propre is borne out of an anxiety about being taken seriously by others. Those who are smug tend not to be anxious; they are “above” being anxious about what others think of them.²²

This might lead you to wonder how entitled smugness compares to the opposing vice of unjustifiably expecting lower authority-recognition than one deserves and not caring about whether one’s low expectations are correct, a version of what Thomas Hill, Jr. (1973) theorizes as servility.²³ Such a vice would also seem to be ineradicable – since it involves not caring about the correctness of one’s expectations of unduly low regard – and inequalitarian – since it is incompatible with mutually deferential, egalitarian social relations. This strikes me as largely correct, and in keeping with the spirit of Hill’s account, although I cannot further explore this implication of my view here.²⁴

To illustrate the uniquely dangerous nature of entitled smugness, it might be helpful to consider a familiar kind of entitled smug character. Consider the “tech bro” of Silicon Valley, a type made infamous by Justin Keller’s open letter to then-San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee and Police Chief Greg Suhr in February 2016. (I should stress that, in what follows, I will be focusing on what Keller writes in his letter, and not on any other evidence about his character or attitudes.) In the letter, written against the backdrop of rapid gentrification in San Francisco and surrounding areas, Keller complains

²² This, again, is not to deny that anxiety about being well-regarded can play an important indirect role in the generation of entitled smugness. What I doubt is that such anxiety can coincide with the normative carelessness of entitled smugness. For, the relevant kind of anxiety entails desiring to prove that one should receive some form of regard that one is not receiving or that one is worried about losing. It is hard to see how one could care about demonstrating that one should receive some form of high regard without also caring about the correctness of one’s corresponding regard-expectations.

²³ Thanks to an Associate Editor of this journal for raising this important question about servility. Although Hill’s examples of servile persons all seem to have some concern with the correctness of their normative expectations of low regard, we can imagine a form of servility that involves no such concern.

²⁴ One complication is that, while servility of this form will disrupt mutually deferential egalitarian social relations by being resistant to other’s deference to oneself, it is compatible with (and perhaps requires) deferring to others in ways that fully acknowledge their standing. It thus seems less prone to disrupt egalitarian social relations in a manner that will directly make others anxious about their relative standing – the kind of anxiety that, on my Rousseauian view, gives way to inflamed amour-propre – than entitled smugness.

about various relatively harmless encounters he had with putatively homeless individuals in San Francisco. He summarizes his argument as follows:

“The wealthy working people have earned their right to live in the city. They went out, got an education, work hard, and earned it. I shouldn’t have to worry about being accosted. I shouldn’t have to see the pain, struggle, and despair of homeless people to and from my way to work every day. I want my parents when they come visit to have a great experience, and enjoy this special place.” (<https://justink.svbtle.com>)

While there are many obvious criticisms to make here, I want to focus on two aspects of the vain attitude Keller expresses that I think aptly illustrate my notion of entitled smugness. First, Keller unjustifiably takes himself to occupy a special socio-economic position – one of a “wealthy working” person – that commands undeserved deference from others – in particular, he demands that those who manifest symptoms of homelessness, substance addiction, and/or mental illness not disturb his sensory field. Second, Keller’s expression of his normative expectation casually disregards the relevant considerations, insofar as he is impervious to the countervailing claims that the dispossessed of San Francisco might make on him.²⁵ He (and his kin) deserve “to have a great experience” (and, more broadly, to have the world cater to their enterprising desires²⁶), and he seems to have no concern about whether there are good reasons to question this overblown normative expectation. In short, he unjustifiably expects the deference he thinks is due a wealthy working person, and he does not care about the correctness of this expectation. He manifests entitled smugness. (I say “manifests” to emphasize, again, that I am drawing inferences only on the basis of what Keller writes in his open letter, and not on any other evidence about his character. I certainly do not know the bro.)

Some of what is maddening about the attitude Keller conveys reflects the two dimensions of the unique moral dangerousness of entitled smugness. First, we feel that he manifests an inegalitarian vice – he is unjustifiably elevating himself above us and, in doing so, he takes himself to have a kind

²⁵ He acknowledges that “people are frustrated about gentrification,” but he does not consider what the frustrations are.

²⁶ See Emily Chang’s (2018) description of Silicon Valley’s “brotopia”: “... [F]ounders think they can change the world. And they believe that their entitlement to disrupt doesn’t stop at technology; it extends to society as well.”

of authoritative standing that we must heed. Second, we sense that his vice is ineradicable, that there is no way we could lodge our legitimate concerns about his objectionable regard-expectations in his mind. Even if we were fellow wealthy working people, we expect him to brush off any concerns we try to convey with a characteristic, “Whatever, bro.” While all forms of vanity may deserve some rebuke, entitled smugness is unique in the moral danger it contains.

We should note that a further, important dimension of the outrage that Keller’s smug letter elicits concerns his privileged social position. He ignores the good fortune that contributes to (and flows from) his status as, among other things, a “wealthy working person,” instead crediting himself with the socio-economic benefits he enjoys. (Rousseau targets this common feature of vanity in the opening quote: “he will ... attribute his happiness to his own merit.”) While I cannot fully discuss these issues here, I do want to highlight how Keller’s social privilege may play an important role in enabling his entitled smugness. It protects him from being made to care about the correctness of his expectations of deference, insofar as he is not persistently confronted with social signals that make him feel unsure of his status as someone who deserves consideration and deference.²⁷ Individuals who did not enjoy similar forms of privilege could not as easily develop entitled smugness, it seems, because it would be much more difficult for them to be careless about their expectations of deference.

An important upshot of my claim that entitled smugness is uniquely worrisome concerns the potential dangers posed by those who hold positions of official power and authority. For instance, as I argue in (Rozeboom unpublished), when managers of private, at-will employees exhibit entitled smugness, they are prone to abuse their organizational power in ways that demean their employees, treating them as social inferiors and dismissing their justified complaints out of hand.²⁸ This is due to the unresponsiveness of their vice to moral correction, their deep concern with authority-recognition,

²⁷ See, e.g., the classic list of 46 symptoms of white privilege in (McIntosh 2001).

²⁸ This parallels Rousseau’s (1997c, 198-9) concerns about the abuses of “petty Despots” in Poland’s divided executive.

and the expansiveness of their organizational power. (Ibid.) And even if their power were more constrained – as is generally true, for instance, of public officials in democratic states, or managers in firms that incorporate rule of law and workers’ voice protections²⁹ – their entitled smugness still would pose serious problems. For the opportunity to demean others by abusing one’s power arises whenever one’s role-authority includes some significant discretion in how one exercises one’s power, and such discretion is difficult to avoid in well-functioning organizations and institutions. (Anderson 2017, 132-3) Thus, even if power-holders were institutionally constrained to avoid certain abuses of their power by, e.g., due process procedures for dismissing subordinates, they would not cease being willing and able to abuse their power in a demeaning manner. This suggests that the institutional dangers of entitled smug power-holders cannot be eliminated by structural reform, which is one application of the familiar republican idea that virtue (and lack of vice) is needed alongside just institutions.³⁰

5. My characterization of smugness – both arrogant and entitled – suggests that the smug lack the “moderate” level of reasons-responsiveness (i.e., responsiveness to some pertinent reasons) with respect to their inflated regard-expectations that is often taken to be required for moral responsibility.³¹ This is what seems to follow from the normative carelessness that explains the ineradicability of their vice. The smug person’s lack of regard for the correctness of her inflated regard-expectations entails that, if she were to encounter reasons calling into question those expectations, she would not take these reasons into account – they would not register in her deliberations about the regard she deserves, they would not lead her to feel badly about her demands for high regard, they would not lead her to

²⁹ See the proposals in, e.g., (Hsieh 2005), (Anderson 2017, 66-9), and (Singer 2018, ch. 10).

³⁰ Of course, more work would be needed to fully explore and establish this conclusion. Some of this investigation would need to be empirical in character, examining the behavioral patterns of managers and office-holders with different forms of the vanity-vice, operating in organizations that give them more or less constrained power.

³¹ Much contemporary thinking about moral responsibility claims that, if an agent is responsible for some trait, attitude, or action *X*, then *X* manifests the agent’s responsiveness to the reasons pertinent to *X*. This requirement has been laid down by compatibilist (e.g., Fischer and Ravizza 1998), revisionist (e.g., Vargas 2013), and incompatibilist (e.g., Rosen 2002) views alike.

revise her regard-expectations, etc. We can further specify this implication of smugness using Fischer and Ravizza's (1998, 69ff) widely accepted distinction between receptivity and reactivity to reasons: roughly, receptivity is being prone to recognize reasons, while reactivity is being prone to act on them. While moral responsibility requires moderate receptivity (but only weak reactivity, at least according to Fischer and Ravizza), the smug have only a weak level of both receptivity and reactivity. They are disposed to not even register the reasons that are pertinent to their inflated regard-expectations, given their persistent lack of concern for whether and how the considerations at hand bear on the correctness of these expectations. A weak level of reactivity follows from this: if they do not register the pertinent reasons, then they cannot revise their regard-expectations on the basis of those reasons.

Now, this may overstate the conclusion we can draw about the reasons-unresponsiveness of smug persons, especially if we make room for different modes and degrees of not caring about the correctness of one's regard-expectations, as I previously suggested. Even so, a problem arises if any smug people are insufficiently reasons-responsive in virtue of their normative carelessness. For if some are insufficiently reasons-responsive, such that they are not morally responsible for their inflated regard-expectations, then we may be mistaken in regarding those smug people as vicious rather than (merely) pathological. This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that, as I discuss below, smugness shares a number of key features with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). Such a denial of their moral responsibility would amount to saying that their vice excuses itself.

I assume we should try to avoid this counterintuitive result. Thus, I am going to explore how, even if and when smugness lacks sufficient reasons-responsiveness, we can still establish that the smug are responsible for their inflated regard-expectations. I should stress the word "explore." My aim is to lay out four initially promising views, drawing on the recent literature about moral responsibility, and highlight some of the serious theoretical costs they each involve. I then will suggest (without reaching a final determination, which would require a more extensive engagement with broader debates about

moral responsibility than I can provide here) that any adequate account of how the smug are responsible for their regard-expectations will be revisionary – it will require us to revise some of our persistent, pervasive commitments about when and how to blame the smug. I should also note that while there has been much discussion of moral responsibility and antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), under the guise of psychopathy, relatively little attention has been paid to other personality disorders, including NPD. Some of my discussion will focus on what we can and cannot learn about moral responsibility, smugness, and NPD from the examination of psychopathy.³²

Let us first consider the overlap between smugness and NPD, since this makes the challenge of explaining the moral responsibility of the smug more vivid. According to the DSM-5 (APA 2013), NPD is one of the “Cluster B” personality disorders, alongside antisocial, borderline, and histrionic personality disorders. A distinctive feature of Cluster B disorders is their apparently morally-laden diagnosis, including such criteria as “reckless disregard” and “consistent irresponsibility” (ASPD), “impulsivity” and “inappropriate, intense anger” (borderline), and “a sense of entitlement” and being “interpersonally exploitative” (NPD). These morally-laden criteria suggest that, in addition to being treated as psychiatric conditions, Cluster B disorders involve moral vice, which raises a general question about how the diagnosis and treatment of these conditions should involve making moral character assessments of patients. (Zachar and Potter 2010, 107-8; Reimer 2010)

Focusing on NPD, five of its nine diagnostic criteria clearly overlap with smugness:³³

- “Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).”

³² See especially the work of Heidi Maibom (2008) and Neil Levy (2007; 2010; 2014), and for some further commentary, (Vargas and Nichols 2007), (Talbert 2008), (Shoemaker 2011), (Watson 2011) and (Nelkin 2015). There are considerable complexities in understanding the relationship between psychopathy and ASPD. The DSM-5 criteria for ASPD were designed, in part, to better capture psychopathy than previous versions of the DSM, but problems remain. (Few et al. 2015) These difficulties are mostly orthogonal, however, to understanding the broader issues about moral responsibility, and since narcissism does not have an independent, theoretical typology outside the DSM, as psychopathy does, I primarily rely on the DSM categories of NPD and ASPD for framing my discussion here.

³³ Only seven criteria need to be met for a diagnosis. Note that only smug forms of the vanity-vice, not its conceited forms, are likely to involve NPD’s overarching condition of having a “pervasive pattern of grandiosity” that is “present in a variety of contexts,” (APA 2013) given smugness’ intrinsic resistance to correction and conceit’s eradicability.

- “Believes that he or she is ‘special’ and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions).”
- “Requires excessive admiration.”
- “Has a sense of entitlement (i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations).”
- “Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.”

These all closely align with my general description of smugness. The “sense of entitlement” criterion points specifically toward entitled smugness, since it describes something like an inflated expectation of authority-recognition, while the “requires excessive admiration” criterion most directly concerns arrogant smugness. The only criterion for NPD strongly emphasized by the DSM-5 that does not immediately line up with my account of smugness is a lack of empathy: being “unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.” (Ibid.) Lacking empathy does not obviously follow from not caring about the correctness of one’s regard-expectations. But it is plausible that having high levels of empathy makes it difficult to not care about the correctness of one’s regard-expectations, insofar as being prone to “recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others” will involve giving some weight to their concerns about one’s regard-expectations. Lacking empathy, then, may make it easier to develop smugness, and lessening empathy may be a part of developing smugness. It seems likely, then, that smugness can overlap with NPD, especially when its normative carelessness derives from an empathy-deficit.³⁴ Insofar as we are reluctant to blame those who are mentally disordered for the symptoms of their disorder, this overlap suggests some caution about holding the smug responsible for their inflated regard-expectations.

This caution complements the argument above that smugness (or at least some instances of it) entails being insufficiently reasons-responsive. What smugness shares with NPD, even when it does

³⁴ A further DSM criterion is that the disorder has developed by late adolescence or early adulthood.

not coincide with NPD (in part by involving an empathy-deficit), is a persistent “pattern of grandiosity ... present in a variety of contexts,” which, as a manifestation of smugness, I take to derive from an inflated expectation of high regard paired with a lack of concern for the correctness of this expectation. Such normative carelessness plausibly often entails, again, a failure to be adequately responsive to the reasons bearing on one’s inflated regard-expectations.³⁵ (It is important to clarify here that I am focusing only on whether the smug are responsible for their inflated expectations of high regard, which, again, are expectations that derive from the acceptance of certain regard-norms.³⁶)

My worry here runs parallel to some of the difficulties philosophers have encountered in accounting for the moral responsibility of psychopaths, who suffer from ASPD. Psychopaths are often cruel and manipulative, intentionally trampling on the rights of others and taking pleasure in others’ suffering, and to this extent they seem morally responsible for what they do. Yet, they also seem to lack the full range of reasoning capacities that morally responsible agents are presumed to possess. They seem unresponsive to reasons concerning others’ welfare (Levy 2007; 2010) and legitimate interpersonal demands (Watson 2011; Shoemaker 2011).³⁷ Neil Levy (2007; 2010) has argued that this is because psychopaths cannot fully comprehend the pertinent moral reasons. If so, then the reasons-unresponsiveness of smugness – even when it involves NPD – will differ from the unresponsiveness of ASPD, because smugness is compatible with a normal level of moral comprehension.³⁸ A lack of

³⁵ Now, you might suggest that, even though a smug person may not currently be responsive to the considerations pertinent to her inflated regard-expectations, she was responsive to them when she developed her smug traits. This is an appeal to responsibility “tracing,” and I do not think this appeal covers all of the cases where we need to establish that a smug person is responsible for her smug expectations. Extending Manuel Vargas’ (2005) discussion of “Jeff the Jerk,” it seems clear that there will be cases where someone’s smugness develops in a non-reasons-responsive manner (especially when it overlaps with NPD), and yet they are morally responsible for their inflated regard-expectations.

³⁶ This is different from asking whether they are responsible for their smugness more generally, which also encompasses their disregard for the correctness of their regard-expectations, or for the actions that issue from their smugness.

³⁷ I say this keeping in mind the complexities noted above (n. 32) in understanding the overlap between psychopathy and ASPD. A relatively safe assumption is that psychopathy is sufficient for ASPD, even though the reverse may not be true, and that assumption secures the points that follow.

³⁸ This is suggested by the differentiation of ASPD from NPD in the DSM-5 (APA 2013): although persons “with antisocial and narcissistic personality disorders share a tendency to be tough-minded, glib, superficial, exploitative, and unempathic,” persons with NPD do not “necessarily [possess] characteristics of impulsivity, aggression, and deceit.” When Levy

empathy is a more likely shared basis of reasons-unresponsiveness.³⁹ But whether or not the basis of reasons-unresponsiveness is shared, a common problem remains: there are individuals who seem to be morally responsible for their vicious attitudes (and actions) but their viciousness involves a lack of reasons-responsiveness that threatens to erase moral responsibility. Accordingly, it is useful to canvass four general approaches philosophers have developed for explaining the (perhaps partial) moral responsibility of psychopaths, to see if these approaches can account for smug persons' responsibility for their inflated regard-expectations, even when they suffer from NPD.

The first approach distinguishes between two forms (or “faces,” to borrow Gary Watson’s (1996) terminology) of responsibility. While there are more than two forms of responsibility that philosophers now recognize, the relevant two here are attributability and accountability. Attributability concerns whether an agent is morally criticizable for some attitude, trait, or action. (Watson 1996) Accountability concerns whether an agent is blameworthy for failing to meet some legitimate demands. (Ibid.; Darwall 2006, 67-70) Attributability is not sufficient for accountability, given that an agent might be criticizable for something that is not a blameworthy failure to meet a legitimate demand. Accountability, in turn, requires more reasons-responsiveness than attributability. Accountability requires responsiveness to the “second-personal” reasons contained in legitimate demands. (Darwall 2006, 70) Philosophers have argued, accordingly, that the cruel attitudes and behaviors of psychopaths are attributable to them, even though psychopaths are not accountable for them. (Watson 2011; Shoemaker 2011; Nelkin 2015) Perhaps the same is true for smug persons, insofar as they are not responsive to the reasons bearing on their inflated regard-expectations, which include the reasons that derive from legitimate demands to revise those regard-expectations. We cannot regard them as

(2007, 130; 2010, 361) argues that psychopaths lack the requisite forms of comprehension, he is referring in part to the underlying features of the disorder that give rise to its distinctive impulsivity, aggression, and deceit.

³⁹ For a discussion of psychopathy, empathy, and moral responsibility, see (Maibom 2008).

accountable for their inflated regard-expectations, but we can regard them as criticizable, using the very terms deployed in this paper – they are arrogant, entitled, smug, etc.

The problem with this first approach is that it fails to fully vindicate our common responsibility reactions to smug individuals, insofar as these reactions involve not just moral criticism but blame (and the reactive attitudes associated with it, such as resentment).⁴⁰ Think of the angry responses that smug people elicit, and it is hard to avoid the thought that they are being blamed. They are not merely being criticized for having inflated expectations of high regard; they are being held to account, as though they have failed to meet some legitimate demands. This difficulty suggests a second approach, on which attributability is sufficient for accountability. That is, perhaps being accountable for inflated regard-expectations does not require moderate reasons-responsiveness after all; all that is required is that those expectations be rightly attributed to one's character, such that that one is criticizable for them. But what exactly does such attributability require? On T. M. Scanlon's (1998, 288) view, the expectations must simply be judgment-sensitive, i.e., tied to our judgments about what does or does not count as a reason.⁴¹ In the same vein, James (2012, 107-118) argues that assholes are to blame simply because, as assholes, they manifest objectionable attitudes of disregard toward others that involve judging that certain morally important considerations do not count as reasons.⁴²

The second approach faces a serious difficulty: if accountability is tied to legitimate demands, and if legitimate demands can apply to someone only when we can aptly make those demands of them, then the fact that a smug person's regard-expectations manifest objectionable reasons-judgments does

⁴⁰ Is this really our common response to the smug? I am not sure, but given what philosophers want to say about similar figures such as "incorrigible racists" (as demonstrated in Nelkin 2015), we can assume so.

⁴¹ Matthew Talbert (2008) agrees, pointing out that such judgments can amount to morally objectionable forms of disregard or callousness, as when the smug person judges, e.g., that the fact that someone else is a person does not provide a reason to regard them as one's moral equal.

⁴² One caveat: James (*ibid.*, 114, n. 17) is neutral about whether being to blame is sufficient for being accountable, thereby deflecting the difficulty I raise immediately below. Like Watson and Darwall, I take being blameworthy to be sufficient for being accountable, given that the concept of blameworthiness involves the idea of failing to meet a legitimate demand. I think the onus is on James to offer a different understanding of blameworthiness.

not suffice for them to be accountable for those regard-expectations. (Nelkin 2015, 375-8) For, it is apt to make legitimate demands of someone only when they can respond on the basis of those demands, and smug people are not responsive to (among other things) legitimate demands to revise their regard-expectations. There may be ways to resolve this difficulty – for instance, by severing the link between blameworthiness and accountability (James 2012, 114) – but it is serious enough to motivate considering a third approach, which holds that smug people are accountable for their inflated regard-expectations because, even when they are not reasons-responsive with respect to those expectations, they are more generally rationally competent as agents.⁴³ Even when the smug are not responsive to the considerations that bear on their expectations of high regard, they maintain sufficient overall rational competence to be held accountable for those expectations.

I think this approach conflates the question of whether someone is an accountable agent – that is, whether they are the sort of individual who can be held accountable for their attitudes and actions – with the question of whether someone is accountable for some of their specific attitudes or actions. I do not doubt that smug persons generally fall into the category of accountable agents. What is harder to establish is that they are accountable for their inflated regard-expectations, at least when those expectations fail to manifest reasons-responsive agency.

A fourth approach returns to some of the ideas put forward in the first two approaches. Hanna Pickard (2013; Lacey and Pickard 2013) argues for a stance of “responsibility without blame” toward blameworthy wrongdoers with personality disorders. Her central idea is that we can regard someone as responsible for some attitude or action, first, by taking them to have enough control to count as choosing that attitude or action and being able to do better in the future (which is a weaker form of

⁴³ Speaking of “incorrigible” agents such as smug persons, Watson (2011, 318) argues that such agents are still accountable because they have a “suppressed or partial or partitioned” moral sensibility that involves “an at least selective concern for some moral values, virtues and for some individuals.” Along similar lines (but reaching a different conclusion about psychopaths), Heidi Maibom (2008, 176-7) argues that the “impairments” in reasoning abilities that psychopaths manifest are compatible with “abilities associated with deep moral understanding,” which also seems true of smug persons.

agency than the moderate reasons-responsiveness typically required for moral responsibility), and second, by encouraging them to do better by “emphasizing the unwanted consequences ... of their behavior,” giving “challenging feedback,” and demanding that they “answer and explain themselves.” (Lacey and Pickard *ibid*, 13) None of this entails blame, understood as an affective state that involves feeling angry and feeling entitled to feel angry about some wrongdoing. (Pickard 2013, 1145-7) Affective blame is inappropriate, because conveying its punitive message will tend not to register with sufferers of personality disorders and is likely to antagonize them and make them less likely to do better in the future. (*Ibid.*) What follows is that we can take smug persons, including those with NPD, to be fully responsible for their inflated regard-expectations, insofar as they generally have weak control over those expectations, without any inappropriate, counterproductive blame.⁴⁴

Like the first approach, Pickard draws a distinction between different forms of responsibility, focusing on different modes of holding others responsible. Like the second approach, she lowers the bar for the kind of agency that is needed to be fully responsible for one’s attitudes and actions. Does she end up avoiding the problems that beset these approaches? I do not see how. In claiming that affective blame is inappropriate, she fails to vindicate our angry, accountability-focused reactions to smug persons (the same problem faced by the first approach). And in lowering the bar for responsible agency, she fails to explain how the smug are accountable for their inflated expectations (the same problem faced by the second approach).

Now, perhaps we could understand Pickard as paving the way for a revisionary view of our responsibility practices, on which the form of responsibility the smug bear for their inflated regard-expectations does not warrant angry blame. (Perhaps we could reconsider the first approach in a similarly revisionist cast.) This may be a promising route to explore, because I do not yet see a fully

⁴⁴ I should note that Pickard is cautious about how widely her conclusions about responsibility without blame can be applied; her argument is limited to clinical (between therapist and patient) and legal contexts. But it is worth exploring whether her view gains traction in thinking about holding smug persons responsible for their inflated regard-expectations.

satisfying way of accounting for the moral responsibility of smug persons that vindicates, rather than revises, our standard responsibility-reactions toward them. Such a revisionist account – which I cannot develop here – would require showing how the overarching purposes of our responsibility practices require tempering our angry reactions to the smug. (Vargas 2013, ch. 6-7; McGeer 2015)

Alternatively, you might question my characterization of smugness as (at least sometimes) lacking reasons-responsiveness. Perhaps the distinction between conceit and smugness – between those who do and those who do not care about the correctness of their regard-expectations – should be understood differently. Or perhaps that distinction does not capture an important moral difference in the structure of the vanity-vice. But remember where we started: if we agree with Rousseau that there is some form of the vanity-vice that is uniquely morally dangerous, and if this is in part because that form of vice is “the most difficult to destroy” (i.e., is ineradicable), then it is hard to see how we could account for this uniquely dangerous form of vanity without running into some of the above difficulties in explaining how those who possess this vice are morally responsible for the vicious attitudes it involves. The trouble seems to come from our Rousseauian starting point. Given that this starting point is compelling, further work is needed to either revise the norms of moral responsibility, as discussed above, or to provide a different account of the ineradicability of smugness, to show how it is compatible with a higher degree of reasons-responsiveness.

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