Caring for Esteem and Intellectual Reputation: Some Epistemic Benefits and Harms

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Abstract

This paper has five aims: it clarifies the nature of esteem and of the related notions of admiration and reputation (sect. 1); it argues that communities that possess practices of esteeming individuals for their intellectual qualities are epistemically superior to otherwise identical communities lacking this practice (sect. 2) and that a concern for one's own intellectual reputation, and a motivation to seek the esteem and admiration of other members of one's community, can be epistemically virtuous (sect. 3); it explains two vices regarding these concerns for one's own intellectual reputation and desire for esteem: intellectual vanity and intellectual timidity (sect. 4); finally (sect. 5), it offers an account of some of the epistemic harms caused by these vices.

The desire to be esteemed and have a good reputation is a common feature of academic life. Intellectuals are often obsessed with being acknowledged, cited, read and discussed. Such concerns are not surprising since several aspects of academic careers depend on reputation. Markers of esteem figure implicitly or explicitly in promotion decisions, and in the award of research grants. Information about these is collected by universities, requested by governments, and used to produce reputational rankings. Hence, *ceteris paribus*, being esteemed and having a good reputation are of prudential value to those whose professional lives are dedicated to the acquisition and transmission of knowledge and understanding. It is therefore no surprise that intellectuals seek to obtain these accolades.

Being esteemed and having a good reputation are also epistemically valuable because they are evidence of the quality of one's performance, the reliability of one's abilities or the trustworthiness of one's opinions. Individuals often rely on others' judgments, as manifested in expressions of esteem and admiration, to gauge the value of their own achievements. For example, a scientist may develop an appreciation of the full significance of her discovery by first noting that it has earned her the esteem of other scientists whom she admires.

Facts about the esteem and reputation in which individuals are held can also be valuable evidence when trying to ascertain whom to

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believe among disagreeing parties. When one is not able to judge independently the likely truth of the views expressed in a debate, one may rationally rely on the reputations of the conflicting parties to decide whose opinion, if any, to accept. Hence, the existence within a community of a practice of esteeming is of epistemic value to its members.

The desire to be esteemed, however, can be at the root of vicious, including intellectually vicious, behaviour. It has a prominent place in the psychology of those who are best described as vain, who suffer from envy and are inordinately keen to impress. However, deliberate concealment to prevent others from making esteem-based judgements about oneself is also vicious. I label this vice 'timidity'. Both vanity and timidity have distorting influences on the relations of dependence that hold among members of epistemic communities. Vain individuals, unless exposed, may be taken to be more reliable, trustworthy or intellectually excellent than they are; those who are timid may not be called upon, because presumed to be ignorant, when they could supply valuable information. In this and other ways, vanity and timidity are obstacles to effective and responsible enquiry. That is, enquiry which is knowledge-conducive, sensitive to the evidence, careful and in other ways respectful of the obligations that bind epistemic subjects.[1]

This paper has five aims. The first is to clarify the nature of esteem and of the related notions of reputation and admiration (sect. 1). The second is to argue that communities which possess practices of esteeming individuals for their intellectual qualities are epistemically superior to otherwise identical communities lacking this practice (sect. 2). The third is to show that a concern with one's own intellectual reputation, and a motivation to seek the esteem and admiration of other members of one's community, can be epistemically virtuous (sect. 3). The fourth is to discuss two vices regarding these concerns for one's own intellectual reputation and desire for esteem. They are intellectual vanity and intellectual timidity (sect. 4). Finally (sect. 5), the paper explains some of the damaging effects of these vices on the relations of epistemic dependence among members of epistemic communities.

[1] See Q. Cassam, 'Vice Epistemology', *The Monist* **99** (2016), 159–180 for a defence of the view that intellectual character vices are character traits that are an impediment to effective and responsible enquiry. Although I do not fully endorse his account, it provides a useful way to approach the issues with which I am concerned in this paper.

1. Esteem, Reputation, and Admiration

In this section I define esteem as a positive or negative attitude, directed at a person, group or institution for their good or bad qualities.[2] I distinguish it from related notions such as reputation and admiration. I discuss some of its manifestations and bring to light some of the ways in which being esteemed is of prudential value.[3]

Observing people who seem good (or bad) in some respect, or are performing some action to a high (or low) standard, generally moves us to respond in positive or (negative) ways. We are impressed by the person who can skilfully juggle five balls; we applaud those who can overcome adversity; and we are full of admiration for those who excel in academic pursuits. These responses are typically based on comparative evaluations of another's performance with our own abilities.[4] I take these reactions to be expressions of esteem or disesteem.[5]

The qualities that attract esteem are diverse. Some are categorical: e.g., having sailed single-handedly around the globe. Only few people have achieved this feat. Those who have are generally held in high esteem by the many who have not, as well as by their peers. Other qualities belong to continua and attract esteem in proportion to the perceived nature of the accomplishment. For example, professional players of musical instruments are generally held in esteem by members of the public, but virtuoso players attract higher levels of esteem since they are esteemed more highly and by a larger group of people that includes highly accomplished players. Further, esteem can be bestowed because of positional features such as being the winner of a race, or the first to make a discovery.

[2] My focus in this paper is exclusively with esteem conferred by individuals upon other individuals.

[3] Conferring esteem upon others may also be of prudential value when, for example, it induces them to reciprocate. My discussion in this section is indebted to the account of the economy of esteem developed by G. Brennan and P. Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem: An Essay on Civil and Political Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[4] There is empirical evidence that humans assess other people's qualities by comparing them to oneself rather than by adopting objective standards of evaluation. See D. Dunning and A. F. Hayes, 'Evidence for Egocentric Comparison in Social Judgment', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* **71** (1996), 213–29.

[5] In what follows, for the sake of brevity, I shall often use 'esteem' as a shorthand for 'esteem or disesteem'.

So understood, esteem is a psychological state of taking a positive or negative stance toward other people based on the judgment that they possess qualities perceived as good or bad that make them a model or exemplar to imitate or to distance oneself from.

Esteem and reputation have normative dimensions since their conferral or withdrawal can be warranted or unwarranted. Esteem may be misguided when it is based on judgments which are false or inaccurate. For example, a plagiarist, whose fraud lies undiscovered, might be esteemed by many for his originality because they wrongly rate him highly in this regard. Conversely, it is possible that someone is not esteemed because her abilities are underestimated.

Esteem is closely associated with admiration. Both are directed at individuals whom one represents as models or exemplars that are worthy of emulation.[6] The attitude of admiration, however, differs from esteem in at least two respects. Firstly, admiration is a more positive attitude than mere esteem. We admire those we hold in high esteem. Secondly, admiration, unlike esteem, can accrue to people for features, such as some aspects of physical appearance or (if such a thing exists) natural talent, that are not even the indirect long-range result of voluntary activities designed to bring them about. Esteem, and its self-regarding equivalent proper pride, seems instead to be exclusively directed at qualities for which the agent can take credit.[7]

Esteem can be a fleeting attitude since it can be directed toward someone whom we would be unable to re-identify. For example, one may esteem an anonymous donor. Anonymity, however, prevents the gesture from contributing to the person's reputation. This latter is the socially shared equivalent of being the recipient of esteem. In general, a person may be said to possess a (good or bad) reputation when numerous members of the community esteem her, and at least some of these members base their esteem at least in part on the testimony of others.[8] Hence, attributions of esteem are not

[6] The connection between admiration and the desire to emulate is defended by L. Zagzebski in 'I – Admiration and the Admirable', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* **89** (2015), 205–21. Similarly, those who are held in disesteem are singled out as cautionary bad examples.

[7] Much more would need to be said to defend these claims. See Brennan and Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*, 21–22, and A. Tanesini, 'Intellectual Humility as Attitude', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **96**.2 (2018), 399–420, at 403–4.

[8] I use 'testimony' here rather broadly to include assertions testifying that one holds someone in esteem and other speech acts such as expressions of admiration.

always exclusively based on independent evaluations of others' qualities; they can also be partly based on information about whom others esteem. Learning that a person, whom we esteem in some regard, holds someone else in esteem for the same feature, gives us some defeasible evidence for esteeming the person who has this reputation. It also offers some evidence that such person is likely to be excellent in the relevant respect since she is held as a standard by someone who is herself a model for some.[9]

While esteem itself is a psychological state, it finds its expression in several verbal and non-verbal behaviours. I shall refer to these varied outward expressions of esteem and reputation as their markers.[10] I have chosen this term, rather than the commonly used 'indicator', to distinguish clearly actions and statuses which are marks of esteem and reputation from esteem itself as a psychological state which is an indicator of the presence of some notable feature. In short, markers of esteem are twice removed from the properties they are intended to track.[11]

Individuals mark the esteem in which they hold other people through their words and actions.[12] These include speech acts such as expressing one's admiration and asserting that the individuals in question are excellent or exceptional. Other markers of esteem in conversation include deference to the opinions of esteemed individuals. Those who are powerful and possess a good reputation also have other means at their disposal to bestow markers of esteem. They may invite esteemed individuals to become members of a research group; they may seek their views on a given topic.[13]

Often these gestures are reciprocated so that networks are created that enhance the reputation of all the agents involved. For example, the author of a book may suggest to the publisher that another

[9] When good or bad reputations become common knowledge, they can be described as fame or infamy. See, Brennan and Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*, 57.

[10] Brennan and Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*, at 55 and *passim* refer to these markers as esteem services.

[11] Barring insincerity, esteem markers manifest esteem. Esteem itself, however, may fail to track qualities that are worthy of it. This happens when one esteems someone, although this person is not worthy of esteem or vice versa.

[12] Markers of admiration are often also as markers of esteem.

[13] Other kinds of esteem markers include prizes, honours, credentials and giving credit to someone for a discovery or an innovation. See K. J. S. Zollman, 'The Credit Economy and the Economic Rationality of Science', *Journal of Philosophy* **115** (2018), 5–33, for a discussion of the epistemic value of the credit motive in science.

specialist is asked to write the blurb. The endorsement by an esteemed specialist clearly would enhance the reputation of the writer of the monograph; but it also strengthens and reaffirms the reputation of the author of the blurb as someone whose opinion of other people's work counts. In this manner, both parties gain reputational enhancement from the transaction. This example also illustrates an instance when markers of esteem do not merely track pre-existing attitudes of holding a person in esteem. Instead, the presence of esteem markers can also contribute to enhancing reputation by broadcasting that a person is esteemed by esteemed individuals.

It should by now be obvious that there are numerous advantages to being esteemed and having a good reputation. Some are straightforwardly financial. Some esteem markers such as prizes and promotions involve monetary gains, these markers track (to some extent) pre-existing attributions of esteem which it is therefore advantageous to have. The prudential benefits that accrue to being esteemed go beyond financial incentives. People who are held in esteem are generally better treated by others who are therefore more attentive to their needs, and more forgiving. Fame and reputation also open doors so that one may find it easier to get what one wants. In addition, people who are held in esteem are more trusted, and thus likely to gain the cooperation of others when they need it. In sum, being esteemed is, in normal circumstances, a prudential good.

2. The Epistemology of Esteeming

In this section I argue that the practice of esteeming each other is generally epistemically valuable in epistemic communities whose members have finite resources and limited abilities. In many of our activities we rely on reputation to make choices and achieve our goals. For instance, we depend on word of mouth to select a dentist or an electrician. This kind of information is of great assistance because knowing that another person holds a third in esteem is defeasible evidence that that individual is worthy of the accolade. In what follows, I restrict my discussion of the epistemic value of the practice of esteeming to activities whose goal is distinctively epistemic such as the acquisition of understanding or knowledge, the transmission of information, or the formulation of good and precise research questions.

When engaging in enquiry or in other activities whose goals are epistemic, individuals often rely on other people for pertinent information, for informed and constructive challenges to their views, or for suggestions about avenues of further enquiry. Such reliance is

both widespread and inevitable. It is also becoming more extensive with the rise in the specialisation of knowledge. Since no single person can be an expert even about all topics within one's own discipline, reliance on the results achieved by others, and trust in their testimony are pervasive features of contemporary intellectual lives.

Increasing specialization intensifies the reliance of members of epistemic communities on each other at the same time as it makes it harder to make reasoned judgements about whom to trust.[14] Individuals are often faced with the task of adjudicating between contradictory testimonies, or of deciding whether to change their pre-existing opinions in the light of the views expressed by their critics. It is not always feasible or possible to proceed by assessing independently the likely truth of the views themselves. One may lack either the resources or the knowledge required rationally to evaluate the positions at hand. Further, one may also be unable to evaluate the competence of the disagreeing would-be experts.

In some of these cases esteem supplies evidence that assists one's evaluation. Often we need to assess the testimony of so-called experts about whom we have not ourselves formed any evaluative belief at all. Markers of esteem, admiration and of reputation are especially helpful in these cases. For example, if I know that a colleague admires another researcher for her expertise or intellectual integrity because I have heard him praise her for these qualities, I have some additional evidence to accept, or at least take seriously, the views of the esteemed individual. Praise is evidence that the colleague esteems this researcher; and the colleague's esteem is evidence that the researcher is worthy of it. Such evidence is defeasible. My colleague may be a bad judge of people's abilities and intellectual characters. He may be biased or insincere. Even so, relevant esteem markers often provide some evidence for trusting the claims made by an esteemed person.

One may wonder whether we should rely on our practices of attributing esteem and reputation since we may suspect them to be marred by self-serving motives and by systemic biases and prejudices, both conscious and not.[15] In response I wish to make two related points.

[14] A. I. Goldman, 'Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?', in A. I. Goldman and D. Whitcomb (eds.), *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 109–133.

[15] The presence of these problems is well-established. For a review of bias in peer review see C. J. Lee, C. R. Sugimoto, G. Zhang and B. Cronin, 'Bias in Peer Review', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* **64** (2013), 2–17. For a powerful argument that less powerful individuals receive less credit or esteem than they

First, I acknowledge that in communities, where individuals' concern for esteem is vicious, the practice of esteeming can go badly awry by becoming utterly unreliable. In such cases, the harms generated by the practice may outweigh the benefits it brings in its trail. When this occurs, it may be epistemically prudent to suspend one's reliance on the practice. In this paper, I shall not try to ascertain whether one should adopt this stance toward the practices of esteeming in use in current academic communities, for instance. Instead, I leave this empirical issue as an open question. It is a question that is partly to be settled by establishing whether the vicious traits discussed in the fourth section below are widespread.

Second, I defend the claim that an epistemic community of individuals who have finite cognitive powers, care for knowledge and understanding, but also for esteem and reputation, without attempting to earn undeserved accolades, is superior to another otherwise identical community in which people have no concern for others' opinion of them. Several considerations speak in favour of this claim. The difficulties highlighted above faced by lay persons when assessing conflicting claims by self-proclaimed experts are pressing and not easily resolvable. The presence of a practice of esteeming others in a community offers a solution to this problem. Since esteem markers are more easily observable than the features they indicate, they prove to be epistemically valuable especially in communities characterised by highly specialised knowledge domains. So, if attributions of esteem are somewhat reliable, an epistemic community that has a practice of esteeming is superior to one without this practice.

In addition, we should expect esteeming practices to be reasonably reliable whenever individuals care to be esteemed but also to be worthy of that esteem. The argument for this claim depends on the intermediary conclusion that the esteem motive supplies a prudential reason that favours basing one's esteem of others at least partly on independent evaluations. Hence, widely shared reputational judgments deserve the trust that befits consensual, yet independent, opinions.

These points are based on the observation that reputation and esteem are scarce goods. Firstly, they are scarce because to earn them, one must be noticed. Since attentional resources are finite, the more attention is given to one person or group, the less is available

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are due for their contributions to collaborative research see J. Bruner and C. O'Connor, 'Power, Bargaining, and Collaboration', in T. Boyer, C. Mayo-Wilson and M. Weisberg (eds.), *Scientific Collaboration and Collective Knowledge,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 135–157.

for others. Secondly, esteem and reputation are also scarce because they are essentially based on favourable comparisons. Since to esteem someone is to think of her as a model, typically esteem is conferred by each person only to a limited number of individuals.[16] Further, reputation requires the one is esteemed by many in a community and that at least some of these evaluations are partly based on knowing that other esteemed individuals hold that person in esteem. Knowing that a person whom I esteem for a given quality takes another person to be an example gives me a reason not only to esteem this individual but also to presume that she is likely to be excellent in the relevant respect since she is held as an example by those whom I take to be exemplar. Hence, as a person's reputation rises, that of some others is likely to fall since the group of those who are thought to be among the best for some quality or ability cannot indefinitely increase. Thirdly, sometimes esteem is allocated for one's position in a ranking such as being the winner in a context. When esteem is explicitly positional, one gains it to the exclusion of all others.[17]

Esteem testimonials sometimes can raise the reputations of the person who confers the esteem and of the one receiving it. Hence, the scarcity of esteem does not entail that if I express my esteem for you, the esteem in which I am held by others must automatically suffer. However, unless the context is such that the granting of esteem is mutually advantageous, competition entails that when one bestows esteem upon another for possessing some good feature, one runs the risk of seeing that the extent to which one is esteemed for the same quality is somewhat reduced.[18] For example, if I heap admiration on a colleague for his original ideas, I may be instrumental in drawing attention to his work and away from mine. I could thus contribute to lessening my reputation.

These considerations show that any marking of esteem in words or deeds can lead to shifts in the distribution of esteem in which people are held with some emerging as winners and others as losers. This feature of the economy of esteem indicates that, barring evidence of mutual recognitional gain, when individuals express their esteem

[16] It is extremely unlikely that any one person would regard everyone else as their model regarding a relevant good feature.

[17] See Ch. 1 of Brennan and Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*. The notion of credit as discussed by Zollman, 'The Credit Economy' is also positional.

[18] It is worth noting therefore that esteem is different from attributions of credibility or of authority. If I find a person more credible or authoritative than I did before, there need not be another person whose standing by my lights is therefore diminished.

for others with whom they are in competition for reputation, they defeasibly can be presumed to be sincere and their relevant judgments, if in agreement, can be assumed to be reasonably reliable.

Suppose a person A conveys to another D, that she (A) holds an individual C in esteem and that B does too, what should D conclude based on this information? Given competition among A, B and C over being esteemed with regard to the same quality, D has reasons to believe that A is sincere in her claim that she esteems C for that feature and that she believes that B does too. By conveying her esteem for C, and by offering further support that C is worthy of esteem by reporting B's attitude, A knowingly runs the risk of lessening her own reputation. Given these incentives, A's testimony is likely to be sincere since in giving it she is going against her self-interest.

Facts about competition also give D a reason to believe that A's esteem of C is at least partly independent of B's attitude toward C under the assumption that A cares for her reputation. Since A has a concern for her reputation, learning that B esteems C, she learns of a fact that potentially puts at risk something that she cares about. The presence of risk means that much is at stake for A in B's testimony. Therefore, A is unlikely to accept uncritically that C is worthy of esteem on B's saying-so. These considerations give D a defeasible reason to believe that A and B's evaluations of C are at least in part independently arrived at. Therefore, reports about a person's reputation coming from various sources can be presumed not to be entirely derivative. So, the audience of such reports, especially if they are numerous, has a defeasible reason to believe that they are not in the position of the person who checks the reliability of a newspaper report by buying another copy of the same edition of the same newspaper. This feature of judgements about esteem means that one can presume that when an assessment of esteem is shared and grows into a reputation, one can put some trust in numbers since the incentives of competition make it probable that the agreeing sources are somewhat independent of each other in their assessments.

These considerations do not rule out the possibility of run-away backscratching through the creation of communities of mutual admiration. Such situations can always occur especially when individuals in an epistemic community are motivated to seek to be esteemed regardless of whether they are worthy of it. However, the arguments above show that these epistemically negative results are not inevitable. In addition, there are reputational risks to bestowing esteem in a self-serving manner. The person, who writes a positive endorsement to a book which is subsequently widely judged to be terrible, would see her reputation suffer since she may be thought to

have bad judgement or disreputable intentions. In sum, since bestowing esteem in a self-serving manner is widely disapproved, there are self-serving reasons not to engage openly in this kind of behaviour. Dissimulation, of course, remains a possibility but it is a strategy that makes one vulnerable to being found out. This is a serious risk since dissimulation itself attract further disapprobation.

The argument so far seeks to establish that epistemic communities where people care about reputation and have thus developed practices of esteeming others are epistemically superior to similar communities in which the practice has not developed because agents do not care for reputation. The argument is based on the incentives provided by competition over esteem and reputation. Provided individuals seek to be esteemed only to the extent to which they are worthy of it, the esteem motive promotes both the sincerity and the reliability of reputational claims about which there is broad consensus.

3. The Value of Being Esteemed

In this section I discuss the epistemic value of being esteemed before arguing that desiring to be the object of others' esteem is also epistemically valuable. Finally, having established that being esteemed and having a reputation are epistemic goods, I argue that they can be rationally and virtuously pursued, and explain what such pursuit may involve.[19]

While there are community-wide epistemic advantages that result from adopting a practice of esteeming, being the object of others' esteem is of epistemic value to the individual in two further distinctive ways. First, others' esteem supplies information about oneself that aids the acquisition of self-knowledge. Second, the desire to be esteemed by others provides an incentive to raise performance and become a better epistemic agent.[20]

[19] Aristotle makes this point when he states that loving honours in the right amount and when conferred by the right people is a virtue which is flanked by two vices: that of the honour-lover who aims at 'honour more than is right, and from the wrong sources', and that of the person who is indifferent to deserved honour. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, T. Irwin (trans.) (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 1125b 1–25.

[20] This desire is likely to be qualified along several dimensions. One may desire to receive positive evaluations for some features, whilst not caring very much about other qualities. One may seek the esteem of some

First, in normal circumstances, when a person discovers that she is esteemed by others for some quality, she acquires evidence about others' opinion of her and also about herself. That is, she can treat their marks of esteem as expressing their esteem (disesteem) for her, which is to say their belief that she possesses some good or bad feature. Further, she can take their esteem as offering some defeasible evidence that she possesses the quality for which they esteem her. Therefore, knowing about the esteem in which others hold one promotes the acquisition of self-knowledge.

Second, wanting to be esteemed is an incentive to raise one's performance and improve since others esteem only good performances and admire excellence. It may be objected that although the desire to be esteemed is an additional motive for performing, it leads to raised performance only if the agent would otherwise lack sufficient motivation to strive to improve. Whilst this objection is well-taken, its scope is somewhat limited. Human agents, even when motivated to seek knowledge and understanding, are often prone to temptations to cut corners. Given this generally accepted fact about human psychology, the desire to be esteemed is a powerful incentive to raise one's game.

If this is right, the practice of esteeming is, at least in the absence of systematic self-serving biases and prejudices, epistemically valuable to those communities that adopt it. In addition, both being the object of esteem and having a desire to be esteemed are of epistemic value to individuals because they are instrumental to self-knowledge and to improved performance.

Yet it may seem that esteem and reputation cannot be virtuously (or even rationally) pursued.[21] There is a difference between demonstrating one's abilities in front of an audience and behaving in a way that is designed to attract approval or praise. The person who is seeking to be esteemed engages in behaviour of the second kind as well as of the first. It is precisely this desire to be praised or admired that is said to be not impressive. In short, despite the prudential and epistemic values that accrue to being esteemed and having a reputation, it would seem that one cannot rationally take their acquisition to be an explicit goal of one's activities unless one, at the same time,

people but not value the opinion of others. Finally, and most importantly, one may desire esteem only if it is deserved, rather than at any cost.

[21] See J. Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

conceals one's motivations. The desire for esteem, therefore, appears to be essentially self-stultifying.

This conclusion is premature. There are cases in which behaviour that is transparently motivated by the desire to be esteemed attracts no disapproval. For example, the woman who draws attention to her, unjustly neglected, contribution to a collective success may be admired for her courage and gain a larger share of esteem without suffering any reputational damage because of her self-publicity. More generally, at least in contemporary Western societies, there is no automatic disapprobation for presenting oneself in one's best light in front of an audience with the intention that one's good features are noticed. What is frowned upon is the desire to draw attention to one's own good features in an unfair attempt either to divert attention from the achievements of others, or to showcase our successes in a manner that is at least likely to mislead about their significance.

The desire to be esteemed goes hand in hand with the desire to gain others' evaluative respect which is respect that accords with one's admirable features.[22] Demanding that one is accorded respect which is calibrated to one's actual intellectual worth is not vicious; rather, it may be a requirement of self-respect. Since it is impossible to receive this kind of respect when one is unnoticed, behaving in a way designed to highlight one's good features in front of others, is compatible with possessing a virtuous psychology. However, this is so only when the desire to be esteemed is accompanied also by the desire to be worthy of the esteem one seeks.

One might object that, since positive esteem is allocated only to performances and qualities that are highly rated, to desire to be esteemed is to want to be seen to be better than some other people. However, one may add, the possession of this desire is incompatible with humility. True; wanting to be thought to be better than others can lead to bragging. It is also generally considered unimpressive. However, to seek to be esteemed is to want a positive evaluation because of one's qualities. This is not the same as wanting to appear to be better than others. One may have the first desire without the second. This might be true even though one may also realise that unless one's

[22] For a discussion of distinct kinds of respect see R. S. Dillon, 'Kant on Arrogance and Self-Respect', in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Setting the Moral Compass: Essays by Women Philosophers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 191–216. For some connections between arrogance and disrespect see also A. Tanesini, 'I – "Calm Down, Dear": Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* **90** (2016), 71–92.

audience thinks that one is better than some people, its members are not going to hold one in high esteem. Hence, to want to be esteemed is not clearly incompatible with humility and may at least in some circumstances be required by proper pride.[23]

One may also object to the view that esteem can be virtuously desired on the grounds that virtue requires that one is motivated by the desire for some final or intrinsic good whilst esteem would seem to be prudentially valuable and its epistemic value is at best instrumental. In response one may reject the presumption that good motives are a requirement of virtue. The identification of intellectual vices as obstacles to effective and responsible enquiry that I have adopted in this paper invites exactly such a response. That is, one may propose that esteem is virtuously pursued whenever in ordinary circumstances it reliably leads to good epistemic effects.[24]

However, a supporter of a motivational account of virtue can also address this objection by drawing attention to the connection between esteem and evaluative respect. Respect, like esteem, requires that one is paid attention to, since to demand respect is to demand that one is noticed rather than ignored. The connection between esteem and respect is even deeper since the latter can be thought of as the tribute that others attribute to merit, and those who receive it acquire a good whose value is arguably not purely prudential or instrumental. Therefore, when - and to the extent in which - seeking esteem is desiring only that one is given credit for those among one's features which are worthy of esteem, it can be thought as a desire for an intrinsic good. In short, the desire to be esteemed can be virtuous when it consists in desiring other people's evaluative respect.[25]

[23] More needs to be said to support this claim. It is opposed by R. C. Roberts and W. J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 239. See Tanesini, 'Intellectual Humility as Attitude' for a defence.

[24] This position would be a kind of virtue reliabilism. For a useful characterisation see H. Battaly, 'Epistemic Virtue and Vice: Reliabilism, Responsibilism, and Personalism', in C. Mi, M. Slote and E. Sosa (eds.), *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Western and Chinese Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2016), 99–120.

[25] I wish to thank Charlie Crerar for pushing me to consider these issues. There are further complications here since virtue may require that not only one desires esteem in the right way but also from the right people. I shall ignore this issue here.

4. The Vices of Esteem: Vanity and Timidity

Some desires for esteem are vicious. In this section I focus on the kinds of desire for esteem associated with two vices of self-presentation. These are: intellectual vanity and intellectual timidity. Vanity involves a positive evaluation of one's own intellectual character, an unwillingness to accept or own one's limitations, and an engrossing desire to be held in high esteem.[26] Intellectual timidity is the opposite of vanity since it is associated with a negative self-evaluation, and a resigned acceptance of one's real or presumed limitations. It finds expression in a desire not to be noticed and a fear of others' evaluation of the self.[27]

To get a grip on intellectual vanity, it is helpful to highlight some of its behavioural manifestations. The intellectually vain person constantly compares herself to others. Consider, for example, a person who often checks her h-index on the software *Publish or Perish*, or who always first opens a book in her area of research at the index pages merely to check whether she is cited in it. Not everyone who checks these things is vain, but those who are overwhelmingly preoccupied with them usually are. These people clearly are prepared to trade-off knowledge and understanding for their reputations.[28]

One of the defining features of intellectual vanity is an inability to accept one's intellectual limitations.[29] This inability is not the same as a tendency to have false beliefs which underestimate one's limitations or overestimate one's intellectual strengths. Rather, it is manifested either by obsessing about defects that others would consider to be trivial, or by being in denial about the existence of any such

[26] Vanity may not be the only vice characterised by a consuming desire to be esteemed. There might be others which do not share the other two features of vanity highlighted here.

[27] Fear may not be the only motive. Thus, there may be vices of deficient concern for others' esteem other than timidity.

[28] A. T. Nuyen, 'Vanity', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* **37** (1999), 613–627; V. Tiberius and J. D. C. Walker, 'Arrogance', *American Philosophical Quarterly* **35** (1998), 379–390; and S. L. Bartky, 'Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation', *Social Theory and Practice* **8** (1982), 127–143 offer some discussion of the topic. None focus on the intellectual variety of this vice. An exception is M. Kieran, 'Creativity, Vanity, Narcissism', in B. Gaut and M. Kieran (eds.), *Creativity and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2017), 74–92.

[29] It is therefore opposed to humility as the latter is understood by D. Whitcomb et al. 'Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **94** (2017), 509–39.

faults. A vain person, for example, may become obsessed with a small defect and feel very embarrassed and ashamed by it. At the root of this obsession is the fear that others may notice this limitation and evaluate her accordingly. Her reaction to this blemish may seem to all others totally out of proportion.[30] For example, a person during a talk to an audience of fellow philosophers may fail to give an adequate answer to a question from the audience. In the days ahead, she may focus on this small failure and instead of thinking of a better answer to the question to use on future occasions, she continually revisits the episode, worrying about how it reflects on her reputation.

At the same time, the intellectually vain often seek the spotlight because they want to be the centre of attention. If they succeed in receiving the praise they crave, they may gradually come to believe that they have very few intellectual shortcomings; they may then tend to ignore their defects or suppress any evidence of their existence. When it is motivated by a desire to wish away any limitations so that one can gain the admiration of one's peers, behaviour of this sort exemplifies another way in which vanity as a lack of acceptance of one's limitations can manifest itself.

In sum, there are three aspects to intellectual vanity. The first is a sense of self-regard or self-importance which results from a high estimation of one's own qualities shaped by a need to be socially valued or esteemed. The second is an inability to accept one's shortcomings which results in attempts to hide them from view. The third is an all-consuming desire to be admired without caring whether one is worthy of the admiration, which leads to an excessive focus on comparing oneself with others. Vain individuals therefore often are envious of those who are successful and engage in spiteful behaviour designed to prevent others from receiving the praise that one craves for oneself.[31]

The characterisation offered above helps to distinguish virtuous concern for the esteem of others from vain concern for the same. What characterises the latter is not necessarily the intensity of the

[30] Thanks to J. Adam Carter for this example of vanity.

[31] Theories about the nature of vanity have generally selected one of these aspects as fundamental. For example, Roberts and Wood, (*Intellectual Virtues*, 237) define vanity 'an excessive concern to be well regarded by other people'; Walker and Tiberius ('Arrogance', 383) think of it as 'having an excessively high self-estimation'. In my view, vanity is not a matter of thinking too well of oneself or of being too concerned that others' think highly of one, instead it is a matter of developing a positive self-assessment which is driven by others' alleged perception of the self.

desire for esteem. Rather, the distinguishing features of this desire are: its disregard for being worthy of the admiration one seeks;[32] its related willingness to receive this admiration at the cost of others' receiving unfair treatment; and an envious attitude that gives rise to spiteful behaviour.[33] In addition, vanity is often accompanied by dissimulation; since envy and the desire to be admired without caring to be admirable are, if uncovered, likely to attract disapproval, vain individuals are unlikely to be open about their motivations.

If vanity is characterised by a desire to grab the spot light of attention, timidity has the opposite effect. Intellectual timidity manifests itself as unwillingness to express one's own opinions, to trust one's own hunches, to show adventurousness in exploring one's trains of thought. The timid lacks conviction in her own opinions, and in her ability to discover the truth. She is riven with doubt and anxiety about the correctness of her views, and she is afraid that her alleged shortcomings might be exposed. For these reasons, she remains silent in conversation, and exhibits conservative dispositions in enquiry. The person who exhibits these tendencies is also likely to be aware that others may form a negative estimation of her intellectual abilities because of her silence. Despite this awareness, the timid keeps herself to herself since she would rather pass unnoticed and unappreciated than risk failure and disapproval.[34]

Although individuals who are timid may believe that they are intellectually inferior to other agents, beliefs of this kind are neither necessary nor sufficient for timidity. Instead, what characterises timidity is fear of criticism which trumps regard for one's intellectual standing in the community. This anxiety gives rise to feelings of self-doubt which in turn heighten anxiety. Thus, timidity is primarily a negative affective stance toward one's own cognitive abilities rather than a set of beliefs about one's intellectual capacities.

[32] Some, including Hume and more recently Kieran 'Creativity' argue that vanity is a vice close to virtue since one can use the desire to be esteemed that is characteristic of vain individuals and rely on it to educate them to care about being worthy of esteem. Hence, vanity can be instrumentally valuable. Nevertheless, the vain desires esteem irrespective of whether it is proportional to the evaluative respect that is due to one.

[33] On how the desire to be admired can turn into envy see L. Zagzebski, 'I – Admiration and the Admirable'.

[34] Intellectual timidity is therefore a vice which is also opposed to intellectual courage. It seems possible and plausible that one vice may be opposed to more than one virtue. Timidity is opposed to courage in so far as it exemplifies excessive risk aversion and to proper concern with one's intellectual standing because it exhibits insufficient care for esteem.

To appreciate this dynamic, consider the predicament of many young girls when doing mathematics in school. They may have heard that boys are meant to be better than girls at this subject. Hence, girls may experience a certain amount of self-doubt and anxiety in class which may lead to timid attitudes. Thus, imagine one such girl who refrains from raising her hand when the teachers ask questions to the class. Even when she thinks that she may know the answer, her fear of criticism prevents her from putting herself forward. Thus, she avoids being the centre of attention since she perceives the opportunity to be noticed as a risk of being exposed as lacking in talent. Her timidity may be partly the product of her temperament, partly the result of her interpretation of gender norms, and partly still due to the contingencies of her experiences. More darkly, it may also have been in part the result of acts of intimidation. She may have been mocked when she made a mistake in the past or she may have simply sensed that her contributions were not welcomed by classmates or teachers. Either way she has developed a tendency to bite her tongue and hide away.

Unsurprisingly over time this same person may have acquire the belief that she has nothing to say.[35] She may come to the conviction that she lacks ability and that she cannot improve. Once she has moved from mere intellectual timidity to defeatism and resignation that she has little in the way of intellectual strengths she will have become fatalistic in her outlook.[36] Her inability to demand evaluative respect is thus instrumental in her loss of self-respect.

5. Some Epistemic Harms Resulting from Vanity and Timidity

In this closing section I draw on the conclusions defended above to highlight some of the epistemic harms that flow from intellectual vanity and timidity. I presume that everyone has an interest in the acquisition of epistemic goods such as knowledge, information or understanding. When these interests suffer setbacks, individuals are harmed. Some of these harms may be systematic rather than due to

[35] On this point see Tanesini, '"Calm Down, Dear"'. For a contrasting higher-order evidence account of this psychological transition see Sanford Goldberg, 'Arrogance, Silence, and Silencing', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* **90** (2016), 93–112.

[36] It should be clear to the reader versed in the literature on implicit bias and stereotype threat that the vice of intellectual timidity is one to which individuals who suffers from stereotype threat may be particularly prone.

the peculiar aspects of a given situation. Further, some harms may also be wrongful; when they are, the person who is harmed epistemically also suffers a wrong. In this paper my focus is exclusively on the systematic epistemic harms caused by vanity and timidity; I set aside all questions of wrongness.

Some of these harms are self-inflicted. Each person has an interest in knowing herself or himself. Both intellectual vanity and timidity are obstacles to the pursuit of self-knowledge. For instance, intellectual vanity promotes the formation of false beliefs about oneself. It is therefore an obstacle to effective and responsible enquiry. To see why this is so, consider that vain individuals seek to be praised. Therefore, they learn to value above all those aspects of themselves that attract the most praise. Thus, their sense of self-worth is excessively bound up with others' esteem of them. However, were they to become aware that they do not deserve the esteem that they have accumulated, the acquisition of this information would make it difficult to sustain their own positive conception of the self. Discovering that others are mistaken in their positive evaluations of the self would undercut one's positive self-esteem because it is largely based on others' positive estimations of the self; but if these are believed to be wrong, it would be unreasonable to rely on them. Therefore, when praise is not commensurate to desert, vain individuals are motivated to ignore any evidence to this effect.

Intellectual timidity is also an impediment to self-knowledge. Those who are timid, and shy away from others' estimation of their features, deny themselves access to relevant evidence about their own intellectual characters. Insofar as others' opinions of us, as manifested in their esteem, are a valuable source of information about the self, intellectual timidity is an obstacle to both effective and responsible enquiry since it makes those who are timid less likely to know truths about themselves and less sensitive to the evidence relevant to acquire such knowledge. In addition, for reasons outlined in section 4 above, intellectually timid individuals are also likely to form several false beliefs about their abilities or expertise. To rationalise their fear of others' judgments, they are likely to underestimate their good qualities.

In sum, intellectual vanity and timidity are sources of epistemic self-harm. Those who possess these traits are likely to engage in wishful thinking and rationalisation; they ignore relevant evidence or deprive themselves of the opportunity to access it. As a result, these individuals harbour numerous false beliefs about themselves, and are limited in their self-knowledge. These setbacks to their epistemic interests are systematic and stubborn because, if the dynamics

described above are correct, both vanity and timidity are to some degree stealthy. Vanity blocks in vain individuals the realisation that their sense of self-importance may be due to their vanity rather than to an honest self-assessment of their abilities. Similarly, timidity is an obstacle to the realisation that one's pessimistic assessment of one's intellectual character is the result of timidity. Thus, both vanity and timidity can evade detection in those who suffer from them. It is not impossible for people to come to realise that they are vain or timid, rather it is difficult because of the self-occluding nature of these vices.[37]

Intellectual vanity and timidity are also sources of epistemic harms inflicted upon other members of an epistemic community. I have argued in the second section of this paper that esteem is a valuable, albeit imperfect, indicator of key features of epistemic agents such as reliability and trustworthiness. Markers of esteem, barring dissimulations, are the outward expressions of esteem and are therefore an important source of information about whom to trust and believe. Both vanity and the timidity cause the mis-calibration of esteem so that it becomes a less reliable indicator of those features which would be worthy of esteem. Hence, they degrade the quality of the evidence available to members of the community to assess when they are warranted in relying on others in their enquiries. Vain individuals may engage in dissimulation to big themselves up or they may, out of spite, describe the actions of another person in the worst possible light. Unless exposed, they may succeed in gaining more esteem than they deserve and in depriving others of some esteem to which they are entitled. Consequently, other members of the community may treat some as reliable, who are not, and others as unreliable, when they are reliable. Either way, intellectual vanity is an impediment to effective enquiry since it may lead agents to trust unreliable testimony and distrust testimony which is reliable. Therefore, the widespread presence of vanity in an epistemic community has such a negative impact on its practice of esteeming that it might make it unwise to rely on it.

Intellectual vanity is corrosive of relations of epistemic dependence in other ways. Epistemic communities work better if their members can presume a degree of co-operation and good will. Intellectual

[37] See Q. Cassam, 'Stealthy Vices', *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* **4** (2015), 19–25 and 'Vices of the Mind' (book manuscript) for the point that some vices are stealthy. Stealth is a matter of degree. Other vices, e.g., intellectual arrogance, may be stealthier than either vanity or timidity.

vanity is especially harmful because it is corrosive of these. The harms inflicted by vanity are not nullified by exposure, since other agents' may not trust the apparent esteem that surrounds the vain, but do not thereby acquire the means to assess how reliable or knowledgeable the vain individual may be. Some supremely vain individuals may be genuine authorities in their field, but the lay person is unable to assess this fact, if they cannot independently evaluate track records, and cannot trust reputations.

Individuals who are intellectually timid are reticent to share information or answer questions out of fear to make a mistake or appear stupid. Yet, it is possible that they may alone possess information which would be valuable to other agents. Thus, timid individuals are likely to deprive others of knowledge which is otherwise hard to acquire. In addition, individuals who are timid are unlikely to criticise or question the opinion of other people. Their uncritical stance is a further hindrance to the pursuit of effective and responsible enquiry. These considerations lead to two further questions which I must leave for future research. The first concerns the conditions under which these harms are wrongful. The second regards whether those who wrong others in these ways should always be blamed for these outcomes.

In conclusion, the desire to be held in others' esteem can, contrary to what one may think, be part of a virtuous psychology and yield genuine epistemic benefits to individuals and their communities. When this desire, however, is distorted as is the case for those who are vain and those who are timid, it contributes to traits which, in so far as they are impediments to effective and responsible enquiry, are epistemically vicious.[38]

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