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ARROGANCE, TRUTH AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

Democracies, Dewey and others have argued, are ideally spaces of reasons – they allow for an exchange of reasons both practical and epistemic by those willing to engage in that discourse. That requires that citizens have convictions they believe in, but it also requires that they be willing to listen to each other. This paper examines how a particular psychological attitude, "epistemic arrogance," can undermine the achievement of these goals. The paper presents an analysis of this attitude and then examines four arguments for how its adoption – especially by the powerful – undermines the ideal of democracy as a space of reasons.

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoining communicated experience. Dewey (2012: 101)

1. THE SPACE OF REASONS

Democracies aspire to what Dewey thought of as a common space – a space where disagreements can be navigated without fear of violence or oppression. Operationally speaking, this common space of reasons is public discourse – discourse in the public square whether that is online or off. A hallmark of what are often described as "deliberative" conceptions of democracy is that public discourse should be *reasonable* – that is, allow for an exchange of reasons both practical and epistemic that are recognizable as reasons by those willing to engage in that discourse.[1] That requires that citizens have convictions they believe in, but it also requires that they be willing to listen to each other.

This latter requirement goes beyond ensuring legal protections associated with free assembly, speech, a free press and institutional norms of academic freedom (see Lynch 2018). These protections are vital for the very existence of democracy itself. But as recent events attest, their mere existence is not enough to make public discourse *reasonable*. As Dewey put it: "Merely legal guarantees of the civil liberties of free belief, free expression, free assembly are of little avail if in daily life freedom of communication, the give and take of ideas, facts, experiences, is choked by mutual suspicion, by abuse, by fear and hatred" (Dewey 1981: 227–8). Dewey's point is that to achieve a common space of reasons, our basic *attitudes* towards each other and ourselves matter. They must be attitudes conducive of mutual trust and not open hostility. But, Dewey emphasized, they also must include

1 Exactly how and why is naturally a matter of debate. But deliberative theorists generally hold that reasonable public discourse has both political and epistemic value. That is, it is both fair and is apt to produce more epistemically rational policy outcomes. For a range of discussion see for example Bohman and Rehg (1997), Anderson (2006), Rawls (2009) and Medina (2012).

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certain epistemic attitudes, or attitudes conducive of inquiry – those that encourage us to actually participate in the give and take of reasons in a landscape of plural and conflicting opinions. In short, if we are to approximate the ideal that public discourse be a space of reasons, we must find ways to encourage citizens to display attitudes connected to responsible epistemic agency – and to discourage those that aren't.

In this paper, I'll suggest that one such epistemic attitude is an unwillingness to learn from others arising from a distorted relationship with truth – a kind of bad faith. The epistemically arrogant are those whose passionate intensity flows from the conviction that they have it all figured out; that they know it all, that the light of truth shines within them. It is an attitude, sadly, that is not at all uncommon among we humans, especially when it comes to matters of conviction – the very matters with which politics must be concerned. It is also an attitude that seems particularly prevalent at this particular political moment, especially in the U.S. What follows is an attempt to grapple with how its adoption – especially by the powerful – undermines the ideal of democracy as a space of reasons.

2. CHARACTERS YOU KNOW

As I use the term here, epistemic arrogance is a complex social-psychological attitude.[2] Like other social attitudes, it can be functionally defined via its relationship to certain characteristic behaviors and motivations. To appreciate both its nature – and its widespread appearance in common life – it can be helpful to illustrate various features of the attitude via example. Perhaps the most obvious is:

> OBNOXIOUS UNCLE: Your uncle weighs in on any political topic and sees his own opinion as the last word on any subject. He refuses to acknowledge that anyone else might have something to contribute and loudly and profanely dismisses alternative viewpoints and relevant counter-evidence to his claims.

We've all known this guy, or variants thereof. Conversation with him is difficult and best avoided. He is arrogant but he is also uncivil and a boor.

Yet one can be epistemically arrogant without being uncivil. Consider:

> DOGMATIC LISTENER: You often have coffee with a colleague, and sometimes talk about politics. When you disagree, she does not interrupt; and she politely responds to the points you make. But she never changes her view or even admits that she might need to think of things from a different perspective. Over time you realize she is not actively listening to what you say. She is only waiting her turn to speak.

The DOGMATIC LISTENER is civil, even pleasant, but she nonetheless displays a key feature of epistemic arrogance. She fails to be "open-minded" or "aware of one's fallibility as a believer, and to be willing to acknowledge the possibility that anytime one believes something, *it is possible that one is wrong*" (Riggs 2010: 180).

2 In treating epistemic arrogance and related phenomena as attitudes, I'm deeply influenced by Tanesini (2016); but also Darwall (2006); see also Tollefsen (2017).

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The phenomenon I'm calling epistemic arrogance, however, has other features. It extends beyond mere failures to recognize one's fallibility. When people adopt the attitude of epistemic arrogance, they can also fail to assign epistemic blame and credit appropriately. One way is like this:

> MANSPLAINER: You are pressing a point on a professional acquaintance. He argues back at first, but eventually says, "oh yes, now I see that you are right" – and proceeds to lay out your point in his own terms, all the while insisting that he has discovered the "real" flaw in his earlier position.

MANSPLAINER is aware that he can be wrong, admits mistakes, and may even admit that they are due to his own limitations. But he is (at least not in this case) willing to admit that his error was due to evidence supplied by someone else. Put differently, he is listening, maybe even learning; but he does not regard himself as learning from *you*. He sees his beliefs as being improved by his own genius, and improperly takes epistemic credit.

One can fail not only to properly assign epistemic credit; one can fail to properly assign blame. For example:

> GASLIGHTER: A politician is deeply biased about race, and his racism often leads him to make mistaken and harmful judgments about particular people and policies. Called out on these judgments, he strongly denies he is biased, even when he acknowledges mistakes that are clearly a result of that bias. Instead, he blames others for "racializing" the issue.

GASLIGHTER may be well aware of his biases. But he assigns blame for his mistakes (insofar as he admits they are mistakes at all) elsewhere, and in attacking those who dare to criticize him, he displays the defensiveness so typical of the arrogant (Tanesini 2018). He wants to shield himself from blame by blaming others.

Looked at together, the characters in these cases exhibit behaviors that are problematic for real dialogue and deliberation: not seriously listening, not admitting mistakes in one's own position and improper attentiveness to, and assignments of blame and credit. No doubt most of us can recognize – painfully – that we can and do exemplify some or all of these failings ourselves. More importantly for our purposes, it is obvious that present-day political discourse is often marked by them, and by Dewey's "mutual suspicion, abuse fear and hatred." And while these behaviors can come apart in different situations, I suggest they can also be the result of a single psychological attitude. That attitude encourages the boorish know-it-all behavior of OBNOXIOUS UNCLE, the dismissiveness of the DOGMATIC LISTENER and self-deceptive misattributions of credit by MANSPLAINER and GASLIGHTER. That is the attitude I'm calling epistemic arrogance.

3. EPISTEMIC ARROGANCE

One lesson from the above reflections is that the epistemically arrogant think that other people have nothing to teach them. They are, to put it somewhat differently, committed to the idea that some or more aspects of their worldview will not be epistemically improved by the evidence or experience of others. To be committed in the relevant sense means taking that idea as a premise in one's theoretical and practical reasoning; it

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is an adoption of the idea as a policy or practice (Lynch 2012).[3] As such, it is intrinsically motivational; it necessarily brings with it an unwillingness to update one's worldview in light of the evidence others bring to the table.

So understood, epistemic arrogance is relational. It is both self-regarding and an other-regarding attitude.[4] It is self-regarding by being an orientation towards one's own worldview, the sense of knowing it all, of having it all figured out. But it is other-regarding in that it is an attitude that, by definition, concerns your worldview's possible *relation to other people* or other sources of information. The epistemically arrogant are arrogant towards someone or some source trusted by others, to which they feel superior.[5]

Crucially, however, the fact that someone thinks she can learn nothing from others (or new sources of information) does not all by itself make her epistemically arrogant. Nor is she arrogant just because she overestimates the epistemic worth or correctness of her view – although the arrogant almost always do. True arrogance is not based on a mistaken assessment of the correctness of one's view, but on a self-delusion about *why* it is correct.[6] *The arrogant are committed to the superiority of their view not because it reflects the world, but because it reflects their self-esteem.* They are under the delusion, to varying degrees, that their *worldview is correct, just because it is their worldview.* Rather than seeing self-confidence as the natural effect of actual achievement, the arrogant come to treat it as an end in itself. That fact rarely if ever rises to consciousness, of course; and when it does, it will typically be denied. But that is to be expected. The arrogant rarely believe they are so.

Hence epistemic arrogance almost always involves a degree of self-deception, an act of epistemic bad faith. The arrogant fool themselves about the basis of their confidence. The exact character of the bad faith, can no doubt vary, but I suggest that at bottom, the epistemically arrogant are, at least to some degree, self-deluded about the connection between truth and their self-esteem.

Thus an *extremely* arrogant person, for example, might act on the policy that his beliefs are *true* (and hence correct) in virtue of being his.[7] In this case, it is as if he holds a divine command theory of truth, but believes, or least commits to the idea that he – at least with regard to some matters – is the divine. From the first person point of view, this amounts to the commitment that if I believe that p, then p. Note that this does not entail that I cannot change my mind, or that if I believe that p then I must always believe that p. What it entails (assuming classical negation) is that if not-p, then I do not believe that p, and if

3 The concept of commitment invoked here is similar to that of acceptance in Cohen (1989: 367–89).

4 For a related point about the relationality of intellectual humility, see Priest (Forthcoming).

5 The person or persons in question, in most cases, is actual; but the account leaves open that someone may adopt this attitude only counterfactually – as when they are trapped on a desert island.

6 This is a point first made by Alessandra Tanesini (2016). The present account owes clear debts to Tanesini's groundbreaking work.

7 Such a commitment may of course also reflect what an epistemically arrogant person believes to be true. That is, she might be committed to the unimprovability of her epistemic state (or some aspect of it) because she really believes it is unimprovable. But she might not too. In that case, the unwillingness and the accompanying commitment may be due to the arrogant person realizing – if only implicitly – that she is vulnerable to criticism. In such a case, she does not *believe* her view is unimpeachable, but still takes the attitude of the know-it-all because of self-defensiveness or insecurity.

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I come to believe that not-p, then not-p. The divine may change his mind; but when he does, reality changes along with it.[8]

Committing to such a view, in the manner of self-deception generally, is irrational, and doubly so, since it means not only embracing an absurd view of truth, but embracing it unstably – since people are rarely stable or uniform in their arrogance. Importantly, however, embracing such a view of truth is not necessary for being epistemically arrogant. It seems likely that in many cases, the distortion about the worth of their view – its correctness – arises not out of a mistaken view of truth, but from the fact that the arrogant don't care about truth in the first place. For them, the correctness of their views – their epistemic self-worth, as it were – doesn't stem from the truth of their positions but from some other feature they take themselves – and by extension, those positions – to possess. They take themselves to be correct, justified, even certain in their views because they are in power, or brilliant, or of the right class, gender, race, religion or political party. Such a person may assume that their views are true of course, but their being true is not what makes them correct. Truth is irrelevant to them, at least with regard to some aspect of their worldview. What matters is something else – something connected to their self-esteem.

In any form, epistemic arrogance can vary in degree – you can be more or less unwilling to learn from others because of this sort of bad faith. The strength of your unwillingness will be reflected in the modal force of the accompanying commitment. With regard to the extreme forms of arrogance just discussed, the epistemically arrogant commits to the idea that some aspects of their worldview are unimprovable in a very strong sense. The content of their commitment is that there are no nearby possible worlds where they have anything to learn about the relevant part of their worldview.

Epistemic arrogance can also vary in scope. You can be arrogant about some aspects of your worldview and not others. Aspects are rough domains or pluralities of convictions, beliefs, sentiments and the concepts and abilities that go with them, such as those concerning morality, politics, religion and perhaps philosophy. They are typically not single beliefs. It is not an aspect of your particular worldview that you believe that two and two are four, nor is it something towards which one typically has an orientation or attitude. It can happen, but more often, arrogance spreads widely.

You can also be arrogant towards more or less people or sources of information. Some people are arrogant only towards specific individuals, for example, but humble with others. Likewise, one might, acting out of the bad faith underlying epistemic arrogance, refuse to update one's worldview in response to evidence conveyed by sources of information you consider inherently biased, unreliable or simply "fake news" but remain open-minded towards other sources.

Crucially, you can also be arrogant towards groups (or individuals insofar as they are members of those groups). Thus someone might be arrogant towards republicans or democrats, towards African-Americans or immigrants, towards atheists or religious believers. The more individual and group testimony you see as epistemically irrelevant to your worldview, the wider the scope of your arrogance. And just as someone can be arrogant *towards* a group, one can be arrogant *because* of a group. By this, I mean that people are often arrogant about their worldview *not* because it is theirs alone but

8 Those in the grip of this delusion could, at an even farther extreme, also act on the idea that if p, then I believe that p. If so (again assuming classical negation), then if not-p, I believe that not-p.

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because it is theirs *qua* membership in a group – where membership in that group is crucial to their self-esteem. Call this *tribal epistemic arrogance*. Someone can be group arrogant – committed to the epistemic worth of their group's viewpoints – because they conceive of it as part of the "social imaginary" of a particular group with which they identify. In line with our remarks just above, their arrogance may arise from the delusion that if the relevant group or community is convinced of something, then it is true. Or it may be that the truth of the matter is simply unimportant or ignored. What matters is group loyalty. They are arrogant, we might say, on behalf of that loyalty. Thus the mere fact that the group holds a certain conviction is sufficient to make it superior to others and immune from revision.

The above points underline the fact that epistemic arrogance here is not being understood as a trait, although nothing precludes there being traits that cause people to be epistemically arrogant. Traits are stable dispositional qualities of a person – dispositional in the sense that someone can have the trait even when failing to overtly exhibit it, and stable in that one does not typically have a trait on Monday but lack it on Tuesday. A personality trait is part of one's psychological architecture so to speak. Attitudes can also be dispositional. One can have the attitude of contempt towards something without it always rising to one's conscious attention. It can be implicit. But unlike traits, attitudes need not be stable across time.

It can be helpful to compare arrogance, as an attitude, to contempt. Being contemptuous of religion, for example, means more than believing (or being disposed to so believe) any given religious belief is false. To be contemptuous in this way is to commit to the idea that religious worldviews are inferior, or unworthy in certain respects, and to see those who have them as perhaps feeble-minded or deluded or both. To have contempt towards religion (or a political ideology, like Marxism) is to have a distinctive kind of negative orientation to forms of life that embody it. Like epistemic arrogance, contempt is a psychological attitude, not a trait, although a trait could be its basis. And it is relational. One has contempt for someone or something. Moreover, and as we will see in the next section, contempt is also like epistemic arrogance in that to have contempt for others is to fail to respect them in a basic way.

Epistemic arrogance can be regarded, under some definitions, as a particular kind of dogmatic close-mindedness. Following Battaly, we can define close-mindedness *in general* as either an unwillingness or an inability to seriously engage with relevant alternatives to one's view (Battaly 2018*a*, 2018*b*). Thus, as Battaly notes, some people may be close-minded in the general sense even when they are willing to engage with others about some issue but lack the ability to do so. One might lack the ability to do so for a variety of reasons, including living in an epistemically polluted environment where critical thinking skills are not encouraged or taught; they lack certain concepts, or where government prevents them, perhaps via censorship, from engaging in debate. Such a person might count as close-minded with respect to that issue but not epistemically arrogant about it in the above sense.

Moreover, someone might even be willingly close-minded and still not be epistemically arrogant, since one might be unwilling to seriously engage with relevant alternatives out of concern for the truth rather than a sense of their own superiority and a concern for their self-esteem. Consider, for example, the scientist who refuses to spend time refuting flat-earthers, despite an alarming upsurge in people taking the view seriously. Such a person may feel that engaging with the view only encourages it and distracts people from real

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science. Arrogance, on the other hand, is the kind of dogmatic close-mindedness that stems from a degree of bad faith on the part of the arrogant. They are unwilling to learn from others because, at least to some degree, they've deluded themselves into thinking that their view is superior because it is theirs.

As a consequence, while anyone can find themselves being close-minded, arrogance is often, although not exclusively, an affliction of the powerful, the privileged, or those that perceive themselves to be so (Medina 2012; Tanesini 2016). For one of the ways that power corrupts is in convincing us that we are in some sense immune from error, that any blame lies elsewhere, and that the basis for our confidence is genuine and not based on bad faith.

While we are focusing here on epistemic arrogance, it is worth noting that epistemic arrogance's contrasting or opposing attitude is epistemic or intellectual humility, which we can define as the contrasting commitment and willingness to learn from others and new sources of information; to update your beliefs because of testimonial evidence from others.[9] On this account, epistemic humility, like epistemic arrogance, is both other-regarding and self-regarding. It is other-regarding by being an orientation towards others' testimony; but it is also an orientation towards one's own worldview.

A willingness to improve implies the thought that one *can* improve. As a result it involves acknowledging one's intellectual limitations and biases (Whitcomb *et al.* 2017) and "owning" those biases by taking that fact as relevant in one's practical and theoretical reasoning. Of course, a willingness/unwillingness to improve is not the same as a willingness/unwillingness to simply acknowledge your mistakes. It includes the latter (since again, you can't improve if you don't think there is anything to improve) but it goes beyond it as well. To see this, consider another example:

> NO-INTEREST: Your friend will often admit when she is wrong about certain subjects. But she shows no inclination to actually improve her belief system or knowledge in that area when others point them out, or give her new evidence. In those cases, she just notes her mistakes, puts her head down and carries on just as before, and as a result, often makes the same mistakes over and over again.

NO-INTEREST is like the person who plays a game poorly and realizes it, but doesn't care to even try to improve. In this case, she lacks the motivation to improve her epistemic state. Whether she counts on that score *alone*, however, as epistemically arrogant will depend on other factors – including whether her lack of interest in improvement is due to a manifested unwillingness, as opposed to weakness of will or a hardwired inability. Where

9 "Intellectual humility," is a technical term whose meaning and reference is still under negotiation within both philosophy and psychology. Like many other technical terms, it has been introduced in the hope of more perfectly picking out assorted phenomena only imperfectly picked out by ordinary language. Thus, for example, it is commonly thought that "intellectual humility" is not just humility proper, but either a *kind* of humility (humility towards one's intellectual or cognitive or epistemic states for example) or as an extension of the concept of humility. In other words, it is agreed that the concept of intellectual humility refers to phenomena sometimes included within the extension of concepts more often used in non-technical discussions, but there is disagreement over how best to explain the relationship between intellectual humility and more ordinary concepts like open-mindedness and humility. Rather than try to adjudicate these discussions, I have tried to indicate where the extensions of the relevant terms, as I use them, overlap. See Hazlett (2012), Spiegel (2012), Christen *et al.* (2014), Church (2016), Kidd (2016), Whitcomb (2017) and Tanesini (2018).

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her behavior is the result of the latter, she may count as close-minded but not arrogant or dogmatic.[10] In any event, NO-INTEREST is not being epistemically humble since she lacks a motivation to epistemically improve.

Finally, while epistemic humility and epistemic arrogance are contrasting and opposing attitudes, one can fail to be epistemically humble without being epistemically arrogant. One way that can happen we've just noted: one might be close-minded, and therefore not epistemically humble, without being epistemically arrogant. But it can also happen for more mundane reasons as well. Indeed, I suspect that most of us are neither open-mindedly humble nor close-mindedly arrogant most of the time. We form our beliefs willy-nilly and without any commitment, positive or negative, towards truth or our self-esteem, bobbing along like corks in a vast sea of information.

4. THE HARMS OF ARROGANCE

It seems likely that being epistemically arrogant can have bad epistemic effects for the arrogant individual. Being close-minded in general seems more conducive to ignorance than learning. It prevents the acquisition of new knowledge and compounds the bad effects of already false beliefs (see Battaly 2018*b*). And it seems that it could have bad moral effects as well, since arrogance seems connected to haughtiness, selfishness and a general disdain for others.

But in addition to the bad effects it might have on an individual, there are also at least four ways in which epistemic arrogance can adversely affect the reasonableness of public discourse. As we'll see, the harms are in many cases contingent on how widespread the arrogance is among the public(s) in question; but they also deepen depending on *who* is being arrogant. In particular, I'll suggest, the arrogance of the privileged can deepen the harmful consequences for discourse.

Before outlining these harms, however, allow me to make two preliminary notes. First, I will leave untouched the question of whether, even if arrogance always constitutes a *pro tanto* harm on public discourse, it always presents an all things considered harm. I am inclined to think it does (and that any thoughts otherwise rest in part on a confusion between the mere close-minded and the truly arrogant). But I leave this question to the serial, along with the more difficult (and distinct) question of why it may sometimes be best to not be epistemically humble.

My second note concerns the kind of harm to public discourse we'll be discussing. The four ways in which epistemic arrogance damages or undermines a public's ability to engage in reasonable political discourse are principally *epistemic* in character. Yet as it is a democratic ideal, anything that undermines one's ability to engage in reasonable public discourse also constitutes a political harm. Epistemic harms, as it were, can add up to political harms when the former undermine or otherwise prevent the realization of a political ideal.

10 For an overlapping account of close-mindedness, see Heather Battaly's contribution to this special issue (Battaly 2018*a*).

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4.1 *Diminishes participation*

Perhaps the most obvious harm to the ideal of reasonable public discourse is that arrogance can encourage us not to engage in discourse at all – reasonable or otherwise.

This can happen for two broad reasons. First, other things being equal, the arrogant citizen is not inclined to engage in reasonable public discourse at all. Indeed, she is apt to regard the prospect of exchanging reasons with those who have differing views with suspicion, both because if you think your views are unimprovable, then talking to those who disagree can be a waste of time, and because it might encourage those with less conviction to waiver. To the dogmatic, the demand that public discourse be a space of reasons is both a bother and a bad influence.[11] As a result, the more prevalent epistemic arrogance is, the less likely the arrogant citizens will be motivated to engage in discourse with those they are arrogant towards.

Arrogance not only encourages the arrogant to opt out of public discourse, it discourages those they are arrogant towards from opting in. Group epistemic arrogance, particularly amongst the powerful towards the marginalized, can discourage the latter from participating in discourse. The marginalized may feel that their concerns are not being heard by the arrogant. And that, of course, is correct: the arrogant aren't listening. As a result, it will come to seem pointless to engage in reasoned debate with them, and indeed can be perfectly justifiable on that basis not to do so.

Moreover, the experience of having one's viewpoint systematically discounted by majority or privileged community sows doubt, making one wonder about the veridicality of your experiences and the accuracy of one's own judgments, and instead to defer to the majority's representation of that experience. Indeed, this is just the result the arrogant politician in the GASLIGHTER case may hope to achieve. Encouraged by the normative pressure applied by the majority or privileged community, the less powerful can come to unjustifiably believe that they are not being harassed, discriminated against or undervalued.[12] As a result, they may be less prone to participate in public discourse, not just because they realize (justifiably) that they are not being listened to, but because they may (unjustifiably) have come to believe they have nothing to say.

4.2 *Undermines mutual accountability*

The ideal that democracy should be a space of reasons is founded in part on the thought that people in an egalitarian society are answerable or accountable to each other. That's why claims on public resources, policy proposals and exercises of power are not to be justified by force in a democracy, but by appeals to recognizable reasons. By trading in reasons, we acknowledge that we owe each other some respect – including, arguably, a kind of basic epistemic respect. Being epistemically arrogant towards others, I'll argue, is incompatible with treating them with this respect; hence it is incompatible with meeting

11 This is not to deny that an epistemically arrogant person couldn't find it practically valuable to engage in reasonable public discourse. He might, for example, find it useful to engage with objections to his view in order to persuade those on the fence, or find it necessary to avoid violence. My point is that absent these practical considerations, there is no pressing epistemic reason for him to engage, and there might be moral and political reasons to not engage.

12 For discussion of this sort of phenomena, see Fricker (2007), Dotson (2011) and Saul (2013).

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the demands of mutual accountability, and as a consequence, undermines the ideal of reasonable public discourse.

The connection between arrogance and disrespect has been developed by Robin Dillon with regard to arrogance generally, who sees it as originating in Kant (Dillon 2003, 2015). And while what is true of arrogance need not always be true of epistemic arrogance, I think it is clear that in this case there is a connection. The epistemically arrogant don't respect others as epistemic agents.

As Stephen Darwall and Dillon have both argued, there are at least two kinds of respect, and both kinds are relevant here in different ways (Darwall 2006). What Darwall calls "recognition respect" differs from "appraisal respect." Appraisal respect is a kind of esteem – as when we respect someone's performance as a scientist, athlete or chef. Recognition respect, on the other hand, is not esteem, but a recognition of dignity; "it concerns not how something is to be evaluated or appraised but how our relations to it are to be regulated or governed" (Darwall 2013: 19).

In the epistemic realm, appraisal respect is essentially esteem for another's epistemic virtues, abilities, and earned knowledge base. You respect someone in this way when you see her as either knowledgeable about some subject, for example, or as open-minded or perceptive or careful. What I'll call basic epistemic recognition respect, on the other hand, is "realized in our epistemic conduct in relation to her" (Darwall 2013: 20). That is, in giving her views at least some possible role in deciding what to believe ourselves.

It is worth stressing that the epistemic authority or dignity we grant another when we give them the most basic form of epistemic recognition respect is not due to the fact that we think of them as an expert. Acknowledgement of expertise is a form of appraisal respect; in treating someone as an expert, I assess them as having the skills and knowledge-base to warrant that respect. What we recognize in others when we give them basic epistemic recognition respect, on the other hand, is a more fundamental kind of authority stemming from our recognition that they are a potential knower or cognizer, and as such, we are prima facie accountable to them in any exchange. When we respect someone in this way we see them as a *possible* source of reasons and knowledge. As such, we take ourselves to be accountable, other things being equal, to answering their objections should they raise them. When two people respect each other in this way they need not agree, but they will hold each other, to that degree, mutually accountable. They see themselves as equal players in the game of giving and asking for reasons.

Of course, when you subsequently discount someone's views because you justifiably take them to have little or no expertise on the subject at hand, one is neither close-minded nor arrogant. You show a justified lack of appraisal respect towards the person and their views on the matter. But that is not what is going on with characters like the DOGMATIC LISTENER or MANSPLAINER. Those characters aren't discounting their conversational partners because they think they take them to be less informed, but because they see their contributions as fundamentally having no positive epistemic impact on their own. The epistemically arrogant is unwilling to take the other as having anything relevant to say. To the truly arrogant know-it-all, others are like small children; they do not see them as equal players in the same game.

The arrogant, in other words, do not believe they are accountable to those they are arrogant towards. And it is precisely here that we see how such arrogance, when it becomes widespread, can deeply undermine reasonable public discourse. As noted, the ideal that democracy should be a space of reasons is founded in part on the thought

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that people are answerable to each other. To hold each other accountable in this way requires – at a minimum – treating each other with basic recognition respect. And that includes basic epistemic recognition respect. Yet, as we've just seen, the arrogant believe they are only accountable to themselves. And that is a fundamentally anti-democratic attitude. It violates basic recognition respect and in turn undermines the norm of mutual accountability central to liberal democracy.

Importantly, when it comes to political matters, interpersonal epistemic arrogance is often what I earlier called *tribal arrogance*. That is, it stems both from group identification and is directed at a group. That is, some white people for example, will adopt an attitude of epistemic arrogance towards minorities with regard to some aspects of their worldview because of their views about the superiority of "white culture." Thus some whites can take themselves to be unaccountable to members of another group. For whites feeling this way, the experiences of injustice brought by minorities, and the evidence thereof, are not worthy of consideration or refutation. They are discounted, and disrespected.

The harm wrought on the ideal of reasonable public discourse by this kind of phenomenon is profound because it undermines the very basis – equal respect – of egalitarian democracy. This is, I suggest, an intrinsic harm. It stands whether or not the particular consequences of a particular act of group arrogance are particularly widespread or damaging.

In fact, however, the consequences often *are* widespread and damaging. As we've already noted, arrogance not only encourages the arrogant to forgo discourse, it also encourages those on the receiving end of that arrogance to bow out of public discourse. Moreover, and more insidiously, those subjected to systematic group arrogance can have their self-respect undermined as well. Fundamentally, as Dillon has noted, that is because as with arrogance generally, "it is a violation of respect for others because it both denies the intrinsic dignity of others and strikes at their self-respect" (Dillon 2003: 195). To fail to recognize that another may have something to teach you – even if the lesson you draw isn't perhaps quite the same as they intended – means you not only fail to recognize their dignity as an epistemic agent, you can make them question their own self-regard as fellow rational agents and knowers.[13]

4.3 *Undermines epistemic trust*

The third harm that epistemic arrogance can have for reasonable public discourse concerns a harm to trust. To the degree that citizens are epistemically arrogant towards each other, this will undermine the epistemic trust necessary for public discourse to flourish.

We form beliefs within a social community of knowers, and thus part of being a responsible epistemic agent is being a responsible member of that community, a community that is bound together by the fabric of epistemic trust. If so, then the epistemically arrogant – such as the character types we discussed above – fail to be responsible epistemic agents not only because they lack the proper motivational structure, but because their

13 In this way, epistemic arrogance can contribute to epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007). If I discount the knowledgeable testimony of a member of a marginalized group simply because of their status, I am acting in an epistemically unjust way.

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attitudes and resulting behaviors undermine the conditions necessary for epistemic trust – that is, the conditions that make it possible for us to rely on others for knowledge.

Among those conditions are giving and receiving epistemic credit where it is due; and trusting that those in the community of inquiry are, in fact, engaged in inquiry and not, e.g. some other end, such as power or career advancement.[14] Thus, for example, MANSPLAINER and GASLIGHTER undermine epistemic trust by committing a form of epistemic injustice – failing to treat others as full-fledged epistemic agents. And the undermining happens in both directions, as it were. The arrogant does not trust those he is arrogant towards to increase his knowledge, and those who perceive others as arrogant are less inclined to reciprocate. For to perceive someone as truly arrogant (as opposed to seeing them as confident and knowledgeable) is to think of them as being more concerned with self-esteem than objective truth.

It is here that we see the kind of damage that the undermining of trust can do to public discourse. We rely on each other for knowledge against a background of a distribution of epistemic labor. Even in ideal conditions, none of us can know all that we need to know; we rely on doctors, plumbers, lawyers, accountants, professors, and, of course, Google, to give us the information we need. This fact is, or should be, reflected in public political debate, where we ideally will supply reasons for our views by appealing to the conclusions of experts. To the extent that we are epistemically arrogant, we will not feel the need to either appeal to, or to defer to such experts. And to the extent that said experts are themselves arrogant or perceived to be so, to that extent we may find ourselves less tempted to trust them.

This real impact of this point concerns institutions, not just individuals. As recent events in American politics suggest, the more tolerant we are of cavalier attitudes towards objective truth, the more we are willing to celebrate self-esteem and the arrogance of the powerful in our public discourse, the less people are willing to put their trust in the media and scientific institutions whose function is to disseminate reliable information. And the less willing citizens are to trust such institutions, the less reasonable public discourse is apt to be – if only because this lack of trust devalues the common currency of reasons in which public discourse is meant to trade.

4.4 *Undermines the value of truth*

This brings us to the last and most insidious effect of epistemic arrogance on our political life. As we noted above, the arrogant have a distorted relationship with truth and evidence. They are prone, at the extreme, to see their or their group's views as true simply because it is theirs, or to simply not care about truth at all. Thus, the epistemically arrogant, whether or they know it or not, manifest a lack of concern for objective truth. If, as I believe, objective truth is itself a central democratic value, a concern for which is important for reasonable political discourse, this lack of care for truth arguably constitutes a fourth harm to public discourse.

I've discussed the ways in which truth matters for democracy at length elsewhere (Lynch 2004, 2012); so I'll close with a single point that seems particularly relevant

14 This is not to deny, of course, that our characters further undermine epistemic trust in very different ways. MANSPLAINER undermines epistemic trust by committing a form of epistemic injustice – failing to treat others as full-fledged epistemic agents.

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both to public discourse and to this political moment. It is always worth remembering that a well-functioning egalitarian democracy values public inquiry into truth. That means valuing institutions and social practices that are transparent, support the public dissemination of information, and function by rules the application of which can be publicly assessed by legal and journalistic means. Democracies value public inquiry because doing so implicitly acknowledges the equal respect for persons – and the mutual accountability that comes with it – that is fundamental to that conception of politics (Darwall 2013: 21). As a consequence, functional democracies support a free press, academic freedom in research, and a strong judicial and legal system capable of investigating and assessing other branches of government – including, especially, the executive branch. Democracies promote such inquiries and the institutions that support them precisely because in doing so they realize mutual accountability, and the ideal that democracy is a space of reasons.

I noted earlier that the harms of epistemic arrogance are particularly worrisome when it is the powerful who are arrogant. Here again that is borne out. When the powerful become, as they are prone to be, epistemically arrogant, they will be inclined to see public inquiries into the facts as a waste of time. After all, they will feel that they are only accountable to the facts as they see them. For them, criticism emerging from such inquiries can only be "fake news."

In this way, epistemic arrogance encourages despotism, and tyranny.[15]

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