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Kantian Self-Conceit and the Two Guises of Authority

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Abstract

There is a debate in the literature as to whether Kantian self-conceit is intrapsychic or interpersonal. I argue that self-conceit is both. I argue that, for Kant, self-conceit is fundamentally an illusion about authority, one's own and any authority one stands in relation to. Self-conceit refuses to recognize the authority of the law. But the law "shows up" for us in two guises: one's own reason and other persons. Thus, self-conceit refuses to recognize both guises of the law. Hence self-conceit is essentially double-sided, at once intrapsychic and interpersonal.

Keywords: Kant; self-conceit; respect; respect for others; moral motivation

This paper offers a novel analysis of Kant's concept of self-conceit, which will serve to shed light on a specific interpretive question. Self-conceit is a "claim to self-esteem that precede[s] agreement with the moral law" (CPR, 5:73),¹ an "illusion" (5:76) that respect for the law must entirely "strike down." Given the "extreme crypticness" of Kant's description of self-conceit, as Henry Allison puts it, understanding the basic nature of this claim to esteem is "difficult to say the least" (1995, 124). I will argue that the best way to understand self-conceit is as an illusion about *authority*, one's own and any other. The specific interpretive question this helps resolve is whether or not self-conceit essentially involves relations with other persons *or* is rather essentially self-involved and only contingently other-involving. That is, is self-conceit intrapsychic or interpersonal? I will argue that self-conceit is both intrapsychic and interpersonal, and that this simply follows from thinking through Kant's conception of the kind of authority enjoyed by finite rational beings.

My thesis has two parts. First, I propose that we interpret self-conceit as a fantasy of what Kant elsewhere calls "dictatorial authority," which constitutes, I argue, an ersatz conception of autonomy. The basic error of self-conceit, so conceived, is to mistake the "pathologically determinable" self for the entire self, and then to refuse any normative constraints on that self. On Kant's picture of proper practical moral cognition, the moral law is the only legitimate constraint on willing. This suggests that the posture of self-conceit involves a refusal to recognize the authority of the law. But crucially, the law "shows up" for human beings, as I will put it, in two guises: one's own reason and other persons. So, in self-conceit, one refuses to recognize *both* the authority of reason and the authority of other persons. Hence self-conceit is essentially double-sided, at once intrapsychic and interpersonal.

¹In the case of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I follow the standard practice of referring to the 1781 (A) and 1787 (B) editions. For all other texts, citations appear in the order of abbreviation, volume, and *Akademie* page number, from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

CPR = *Critique of Practical Reason*

G = *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

R = *Religion*

Self-conceit's essential double-sidedness also tells us something about respect, and this is the second part of my thesis. If the law strikes down self-conceit through the feeling of respect, then respect must also be double-sided, targeting both facets of self-conceit. Intrapsychically, respect institutes the proper order of practical principles; extrapsychically, respect institutes the proper order of equality between persons.

Respect and self-conceit are key concepts in Kant's moral psychology, and much depends on how we understand them. It can be tempting to conceive of moral psychology as something wholly mental or inner, especially in the context of Kant's moral philosophy, with its focus on reason and the will. My aim is to make perspicuous that Kant's moral psychology describes a complex cognitive and volitional relationship between self and world that integrates intrapsychic and extrapsychic elements. On this picture, reason and the law are conceived not as inner mental items but primarily as sources of authority, where, as we shall see, such authority is shared with other reasoners and established through the ongoing process of critique. Thus, when in the grips of self-conceit I refuse to recognize the moral law, this refusal distorts both the intrapersonal and interpersonal.

While the main aim of this paper is to clarify how we should understand these concepts in Kant's theory of moral motivation, it is concerned more broadly to develop a picture of the Kantian agent as situated in a world with others, where these others are integral (rather than incidental) to both proper and improper moral cognition. For Kant, as we shall see, what gets in the way of successful moral cognition and action is not lack of willpower but a kind of willful blindness; we avoid moral demands "by throw[ing] dust in our own eyes" (R, 6:38). But if moral life is social life, then this will manifest as a blindness to both self and other.

In the first section I outline Kant's discussion of self-conceit in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. I then turn to the two main interpretive positions in the literature: those who regard self-conceit as essentially self-involved (Allison, Moran, Ware) and those who see self-conceit as essentially involving depreciatory judgments of others (Darwall, Engstrom, Reath, Wood). In the third section, I present my own interpretation of self-conceit as a fantasy of "dictatorial authority" and an immature conception of autonomy, in order to show that self-conceit is double-sided—both intrapsychic and interpersonal. In the fourth section, I turn to the feeling of respect in order to show that it too is double-sided, and thus capable of striking down both aspects of self-conceit.

1. Self-love and self-conceit

While in the first two chapters of the second *Critique* Kant's aim is to show that pure reason can be practical of itself, the purpose of the third chapter is to articulate the relationship between practical reason and sensibility. More precisely, Kant must show how the law alone can function as an incentive. Both imperatives and incentives are moral psychological components of imperfectly rational beings: imperatives say that something would be good to do to a will that may not therefore do it (G, 4:413), and an incentive is the "subjective determining ground of a will of a being whose reason does not by its nature necessarily conform with the objective law" (CPR, 5:72). Put together, the kind of mind that experiences the moral law as an imperative is also the kind of mind that needs an incentive for action. As Kant puts it, such a mind needs both "spur and bridle" (CPR 5:85). Thus, Kant is providing an analysis of "what [the moral law] effects (or, to put it better, must effect) in the mind" (CPR 5:72) when the mind in question does not of itself accord with the moral law but must be constrained or obligated.

Kant begins the chapter not by discussing the *Triebfeder* of pure practical reason, but by discussing what gets in its way. He notes that the moral law operates by "thwarting all our inclinations" (CPR 5:73) and specifies that what the law thwarts are, in fact, not mere desires but organized forms of *self-regard* (*Selbstsucht*), specifically self-love (*Eigenliebe*) and self-conceit (*Eigendünkel*); the former involves benevolence for oneself, and the latter a form of self-satisfaction or self-esteem. This argumentative frame tells us something about Kant's vision of moral life. As Anne Margaret Baxley

put it, “the moral life as Kant imagines it is dialectical, involving a struggle in which moral agents must work to overcome a deep-seated tendency of the self and to reorient our wills in an effort to align more fully with our best (or rational) self” (2007, 400).

Now if self-love and self-conceit were just psychological possibilities for human beings, it would be unclear why Kant should give them such pride of place in his analysis of moral motivation. We can go wrong in all sorts of ways, but such endless empirical variation is not the stuff of a philosophical moral psychology. But for Kant, self-love and self-conceit are innate *propensities*—motivational tendencies characteristic of human reason itself. Conceiving of self-love and self-conceit as propensities means that while these describe basic motivational orientations to which we are prone, exactly how they gain expression—in which specific behavioral and psychological patterns—will vary widely. So while it may be tempting to think of self-conceit as some kind of conceited character or personality type, we should refrain from filling in too much psychological content to what are, for Kant, more formal motivational tendencies. In the *Religion*, Kant says that while propensities are innate, a propensity “*may* be represented as not being such; it can rather be thought of (if it is good) as *acquired*, or (if it is evil) as *brought* by the human being *upon* himself” (G, 6:29). So, while self-love and self-conceit are innate human propensities, we remain responsible for their cultivation and practical standing, and for whatever idiosyncratic way they gain expression in our lives.

Here is how Kant accounts for these propensities in the second *Critique*:

We find our nature as sensible beings to be so constituted that the matter of the faculty of desire (objects of inclination, whether of hope or fear) first forces itself upon us, and we find our pathologically determinable self, even though it is quite unfit to give universal law through, nevertheless striving antecedently to make its claims primary and originally valid, just as if it constituted our entire self. (CPR, 5:74)

Here, Kant is not only offering a philosophical moral psychology, but is providing, as Jeanine Grenberg (2013) has argued, a kind of moral phenomenology.² That is, Kant is giving an account of what it is like to be subject to both inclinations and the claims of reason *from* the conflicted first-personal, practical perspective of such a being. Kant’s proposal is that for us such beings, we experience our inclinations not only as forceful but as claim-making, where these claims are experienced as fitting (or not) with some self-conception or form of self-regard. He characterizes our needs and inclinations in the *Groundwork* as “impetuous and at the same time so seemingly plausible claims” (G, 4:405). From the agent’s perspective, then, possibilities for action are experienced not as pushes and pulls but as potentially legitimate claims (this is not to say that we experience inclinations dispassionately, but only to insist that they do not show up for us as brute forces).³ If I feel like watching a movie, I experience this as something that seems like a good thing to do; if I am inclined to cancel our plans because they feel inconvenient, I register this inclination not as an urge but as a plausible reason to do something other than what I’d promised. The “pathologically determinable self” thus names, not a homuncular inner self, but just the self *as* liable to heed the claims of need and inclination as valid. Kant argues that this liability takes two forms.

²Grenberg describes Kant’s moral philosophical methodology as “a phenomenological method of attentive reflection upon the experience of conflict and the attempt to resolve it via self-deception” (2013, 9). While Grenberg argues that for Kant, the problem at the heart of his practical philosophy is “the dear self,” it is striking that she mentions the concept of self-conceit only twice. See also Ware (2014a) for an extended discussion of Kant’s method of “ideal phenomenology” in chapter 3.

³In *Religion*, Kant writes that “freedom of the power of choice has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim (has made it a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself); only in this way can an incentive, whatever it may be, coexist with the absolute spontaneity of the power of choice (of freedom)” (R, 6:23–24). That is, incentives do not directly, through force, determine the will, but can only influence the will through choice. See also Allison’s influential account of Kant’s “Incorporation Thesis” (1994).

This propensity to make oneself as having subjective determining grounds of choice into the objective determining ground of the will in general one be called *self-love*; and if self-love makes itself *lawgiving* [my italics] and the *unconditional practical principle* [my italics], it can be called *self-conceit* (CPR, 5:74).

Self-love names a concern for one's own happiness that is "natural and astir in us even prior to the moral law" (CPR, 5:73) and so can be understood as a propensity that is developmentally prior to any awareness of morality. In the grips of self-love, one takes something's being conducive to one's happiness as a valid ground for choice and action. As a form of self-regard, self-love can thus be conceived as an initial, ultimately innocent conception of what makes something a reason for acting. To use language from earlier, the posture of self-love involves regarding the claims of need and inclination as legitimate *just because* they contribute to one's happiness. According to the principle of self-love, *that* watching a movie or breaking our plans would contribute to my happiness gives me a *reason* to pursue these options.

The question is how to differentiate self-love from self-conceit. There are two main differentiae. First, the posture of self-conceit takes the pretension to objectivity further than self-love by taking the claims of inclinations to be "unconditional" and "legislative." Kant says that self-conceit "prescribes as laws the subjective conditions of self-love" (CPR, 5:75). While the posture of self-love assumes that the pursuit of happiness is always good and rational, we shall see that self-love turns out to be defeasible and conditional; self-love can accommodate other considerations, and when moral considerations are given priority, self-love becomes "rational." By contrast, in self-conceit one relates to the merely subjectively valid claims of the lower faculty of desire as *unconditional laws*. That is to say, in the grips of self-conceit, the lower faculty of desire is regarded as the only practical authority. Any apparent counterclaim, any claim coming from some source other than one's own needs and inclinations, will be discounted as illegitimate.

Second, while self-love proposes that I pursue what would make me happy, and in this sense involves, as Kant puts it, benevolence for oneself, self-conceit involves *esteem* for oneself (CPR, 5:73). Esteeming something involves attributing objective value ([1788] 2001, 5:210), and more specifically a kind of sublimity or greatness (5:267). In the case of proper moral cognition, one esteems the law or the humanity in one's person. In the case of self-conceit, it is not merely that one likes oneself or wants to be happy, but that one esteems oneself as uniquely valuable, where what one esteems is not one's humanity but one's pathologically determinable self. Kant says that while self-love involves *Wohllollens gegen sich selbst*, self-conceit involves *Wohlgefallens an sich selbst* (CPR, 5:73). Pluhar translates the latter as "liking for oneself" while Gregor renders this as "satisfaction with oneself." The merit of Gregor's translation is not only that it maintains the distinction from self-love, it also captures the dimension of gratified self-sufficiency: self-conceit involves not mere fondness for oneself but a conception of oneself as already great, a fantasy that one is already morally perfect (CPR, 5:87). Recall that for Kant, imperatives only apply to imperfect wills. If self-conceit involves self-satisfaction, this suggests—to anticipate—that self-conceit will refuse any imperative or constraint on the will as inappropriate, as though any such imperative were actually a kind of brute, heteronomous counterforce. The second differentia of self-conceit is thus that it involves esteeming oneself as enjoying a privileged kind of standing or value.

So, first, in self-conceit one regards the claims of the lower faculty of desire as *unconditionally legislative* and second, one *esteems* oneself as already ideal, such that any counter claim is regarded as illegitimate. Whereas in self-love one is concerned with achieving happiness, in self-conceit one is convinced of one's own estimable authority.

Given these two defining qualities, notice that what makes self-conceit so morally treacherous is that it is a kind of distorted mirror of the *good will*. Kant himself recognized self-conceit's uncanny resemblance to proper self-esteem in the "Doctrine of Virtue" when he asks: "Is not the human being's feeling for his sublime vocation, that is, his elation of spirit or esteem for himself, *so closely*

akin to self-conceit (arrogantia), the very opposite of true humility?" ([1797] 1999, 6:437).⁴ This likeness operates on four levels.

First, in the good case, the agent makes the objective practical principle her subjective or actual practical principle (*ought* becomes *does*) so that her maxim really does enjoy objective validity. Self-conceit is the illusion that one's maxim *already* enjoys such validity, when in fact it is only subjectively valid. Second, in the good case, the agent recognizes the deliberative priority of the law over other considerations; in self-conceit, one takes one's needs and inclinations to enjoy this deliberative priority. Third, in the good case, "the will is not merely subject to the law but is subject to the law in such a way that it must be regarded also as legislating for itself and only on this account as being subject to the law" (G, 4:431); that is, the good will is the autonomous will. Self-conceit also insists that it is subject only to laws it gives itself, but here the legislating self is not the rational self but the pathologically determinable self, which lacks the requisite legislative authority. Finally, in the good case, the agent rightly values herself, qua rational, as a being of supreme value and dignity, a being without price (G, 4:435); as Kant writes, while the human being is imperfect, "the humanity in his person must be holy to him" (CPR, 5:87). Again, self-conceit also involves esteeming oneself, but makes two mistakes: first, one assumes one's value is unique (rather than shared with all other rational beings); second, one assumes one's value is uniquely merited, based on one's "voluntary good nature" (CPR, 5:85) (rather than the humanity in one's person).

Kant describes self-conceit as an illusion (CPR, 5:75), and from what has been said we now know this involves an illusion regarding one's own authority. Andrews Reath notes that when Kant says that self-conceit makes itself "legislative," this can be understood in two ways: "a law could provide overriding reasons simply for the agent... or a law could provide overriding reasons for anyone, in which case self-conceit is a tendency to treat oneself and one's interests as an authoritative source of *reasons for anyone*" (2006, 25). The question is, does self-conceit distort one's relation to the moral law or does it distort one's relation with other persons? Surveying the literature on self-conceit, we can discern two broad interpretive positions: according to the first, self-conceit concerns oneself, while according to the second, self-conceit concerns one's relations with others.

2. A puzzle about self-conceit: self- or other-directed?

According to the first group, self-conceit is essentially a distorted way of thinking about oneself and, more specifically, a distortion in how one conceives of one's relationship with the law, which is to say one's own rationality. Henry Allison (1995), Kate Moran (2014), and Owen Ware (2014a) argue for this "self-directed conception." For Allison, in self-love one takes one's desires and inclinations to be reasons for acting, but self-conceit treats desires as *unconditional* reasons for acting and thus "rejects any constraints on the requirements of inclination, treating their satisfaction as a matter of right or law" (1995, 124). Kant writes that while the "maxim of self-love (prudence) merely *advises*, the law of morality *commands*" (CPR, 5:26). When properly rational, self-love is merely advisory and can be brought into compliance with or be overruled by the moral law; self-conceit, however, tries to usurp this authority to command and this is why it needs to be completely struck down. None of this has anything to do with one's standing vis-à-vis other persons.

Ware argues that self-conceit involves the tendency to overvalue one's sensible nature, where this tendency makes no essential reference to other people. For Ware we are prone to the illusion of self-conceit in virtue of our being both sensible and rational: because the demands our sensible nature

⁴Kant raises this as a real, practical problem in the form of a caustical question: "Is not the human being's feeling for his sublime vocation, that is, his elation of spirit or esteem for himself, *so closely akin to self-conceit (arrogantia)*, the very opposite of true humility that it would be advisable to cultivate humility even in comparing ourselves with other human beings, and not only with the law? Or would not this kind of self-abnegation instead strengthen others' verdict on us to the point of despising our person, so that it would be contrary to our duty (of respect) to ourselves?"

makes on us are both developmentally prior and insistent, we are prone to imagining that they should thereby have priority in deliberation (2014a, 736). Self-conceit thus “orients the will by making sensibility a source of law” (737). But again, this is entirely intrapsychic, involving no reference to other persons.

Finally, Moran analyses self-conceit in both its practical and theoretical guises and concludes that it is fundamentally a failure of rationality and self-knowledge, a posture of insisting on one’s own theoretical or practical conclusions at any cost, including the cost of self-deception (2014, 422). In this way, “the fundamental failure of self-conceit is a failure in the way an agent assesses herself” (438). Depreciatory, comparative judgments of others are at best a possible *result* or *consequence* of this basic, illusory self-conception, or they may function as buttress for it. But for Moran, self-conceit “does not seem to be preoccupied, in the first instance, with the worthlessness of others” but rather solely with the worth of the self (429).

Thus, on the self-directed conception, self-conceit involves a culpable delusion concerning the legislative standing of one’s subjective claims (as always already justified and enjoying deliberative priority) and thus involves an illusory self-conception. It is one’s relationship to the law or one’s own reason that is fundamentally distorted. One is deluded about the real source of one’s authority, taking it to be the self qua pathologically determinable rather than the self qua rational. But other persons are not essential to this intrapsychic dynamic.

Stephen Darwall (2006), Stephen Engstrom (2009), Andrews Reath (2006), and Allen Wood (1999) argue that self-conceit essentially involves distorted relations with other persons. The trick for these interpreters, though, is to show why depreciatory judgments of others are *essential* rather than merely optional, just one way amongst others in which self-conceit might express itself (as Moran suggests). The self-directed interpreters, after all, can admit that for unsocially social beings like us (Kant, [1784] 2007, 8:20), predisposed to compare ourselves to others (R, 6:27), such other-directed judgments may be a common consequence or expression of self-conceit. Recalling the distinction I drew above between the basic propensity to self-conceit and the various idiosyncratic ways this propensity may be expressed, the self-directed camp would argue that the basic propensity need not involve any distorted relation to others, though it *may* often be expressed *via* such relations. The point, though, is that one can fully articulate the basic structure of self-conceit without any mention of other persons.

The other-directed interpreters take the legislative pretensions of self-conceit to be essentially other involving. For them, self-conceit involves taking one’s subjective claims as unconditional and legislative, where this specifically means that one is precisely *legislating* one’s principles *for* or *over* others, where this involves taking oneself to be the only one (amongst everyone) with such legislative authority. On this interpretation, disordered relations to others are *constitutive* of self-conceit.

For Reath, self-conceit is a zero-sum game: “if your standing to make claims is based on your superior personal worth, then you take yourself to have standing to make claims that others do not possess” (2006, 25). This means that self-conceit involves “a form of value which one *only* achieves at the expense of others—e.g., by surpassing them, or by being perceived to surpass them” (15). On this picture, negative judgments about others constitute the essential illusion of self-conceit.

Darwall similarly argues that self-conceit is zero-sum, and he calls attention to the fact that Kant’s conception of self-conceit develops throughout his writings. It is not really until *The Metaphysics of Morals* that self-conceit takes on a specifically interpersonal or second-personal dimension: as Kant writes there, “lack of modesty in one’s claims to be respected by others is self-conceit” ([1797] 1999, 6:462). For Darwall, self-conceit involves the delusion that “one has a unique authority to make claims and demands of others that they may not make of one, that they are answerable or accountable to one, but not vice versa” (2008, 185). Self-conceit is thus the “fantasy that one has a fundamental ‘lawgiving’ standing that others simply don’t have” (2006, 136).

Engstrom argues that the favorable self-directed judgments of self-conceit need to be routed through negative judgments about others. Because all judgments of esteem are essentially

comparative, “holding a person in esteem always involves an implicit comparison with some standard or measure” (2010, 109). *Valid* judgments of self-esteem are made with reference to the standard provided by the moral law (CPR 5:73), but with respect to what standard or measure are *invalid* comparative judgments of self-conceit made? In response to this puzzle, Engstrom argues that “self-conceit’s esteem for self can therefore only be indirect, through depreciatory judgments concerning others... Thus, the self-esteem constituting self-conceit rests essentially on comparative aesthetic judgments asserting one’s superiority over others” (2010, 109).

For the other-directed interpreters, the fantasy of being the uniquely, unconditionally legislative authority, and the need for a standard against which to favorably measure oneself, make depreciatory judgments of others constitutive of self-conceit. Thus, one can only presume to enjoy such unique standing if one’s relations with others are disordered.

I think we can discern a common interpretive approach in both camps, namely that the self-conceited agent is conceived as standing in two fundamentally different relationships. For the self-directed camp, disordered relations with others are either a contingent consequence of the more fundamental intrapsychic disorder, or they are a secondary supplement serving to buttress the more fundamental faulty self-conception. Here there is, first and fundamentally, a disordered relation with oneself or the law, and second—and only contingently—a disordered relation to others. For the other-directed camp, disordered relations with others are a condition for the faulty self-conception, the depreciatory judgments through which esteem for oneself is routed and on which it is based. What is common to these interpreters is the idea that self-directed relations and other-directed relations are neatly separable and fundamentally different.

I want to question this approach, which pictures the self-conceited agent as standing in two different relationships, an intrapsychic relation to the law on the one hand, and an interpersonal relation to others on the other. Each seems to miss something crucial: the self-directed camp seems to make our relations with others wholly inessential to Kant’s moral psychology, while the other-directed camp risks losing sight of the importance of the intrapsychic relation with the law. I suggest that as long as we remain on this seesaw—self-conceit is *either* fundamentally self-directed *or* fundamentally other-directed—we will not appreciate the intrinsically complex natures of either self-conceit or respect, their having both inward and outward faces.

In the next section, I provide my own interpretation of self-conceit as a fantasy of dictatorial authority, which can be understood as an immature conception of autonomy. On my view, self-conceit fundamentally distorts one’s relation with authority. For Kant, being morally motivated involves acting from respect for the law, and self-conceit distorts this relation to the law. Yet while the source of law is always “internal” insofar as it is identified with reason, the law “shows up” both “inside” and “outside” the individual agent. That is, the law—the only legitimate constraint on the will—shows up both in the form of agent’s own reason *and* in the form of other persons. If this is so, then a disordered relation to the law will necessarily and at once implicate both “sites” of the law, one’s own self-relation and one’s relations with others. On my interpretation, disordered relations with others are neither a consequence of the more fundamental intrapsychic disorder, as Moran has it, nor are they a condition for it, as with Engstrom. Rather, self-conceit perverts one’s relation to authority full stop, where this interpretation names a single complex relationship, both intrapsychic and extrapsychic at once.

In the next section, I articulate the double-sidedness of self-conceit, and in the following section, the double-sidedness of respect.

3. Self-conceit as dictatorial authority

Let us begin by recalling the nature of the wrong involved in self-conceit. Exactly what kind of error is this?

As a point of contrast, note first that self-love is a kind of innocent error that can be brought into agreement with the law by making the pursuit of happiness conditional upon agreement with the

law (rather than the other way around). There is nothing inherent to self-love that resists this correction. For example, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant affirms that:

since our self-love cannot be separated from our need to be loved (helped in case of need) by others as well, we therefore make ourselves an end for others; and the only way this maxim can be made binding is through its qualification as a universal law, hence through our will to make others our ends as well. ([1797] 1999, 6:393)

In being brought into agreement with the law, self-love is made rational. It is not entirely overcome but, rather, given proper form. Because of this, as Barbara Herman puts it, “contrary to what one might have thought... there is no deep tension between morality and happiness” (2005, 26).

By contrast, self-conceit cannot be made rational or brought into agreement with the law: insofar as it assumes unconditional legislative authority, the stance of self-conceit is structurally unable to recognize any competing claims as authoritative. To be rationally correctable involves the capacity to acknowledge some authority other than one’s own qua particular reasoner, and yet self-conceit rejects the very idea of another authority. Moreover, if self-conceit involves taking subjective practical principles *as if* they were (already) objective, then self-conceit involves the delusion that one already is fully authoritative and justified. So, whereas the error of self-love arises out of innocence of the demands of the law, self-conceit reflects an awareness of the rational, moral standard for choice. As Engstrom notes, the person in the grips of self-conceit operates under “some antecedent, if only implicit, consciousness of the moral law” (2010, 111). Indeed, it is only in light of such consciousness that there would be any endeavor to present one’s claims *as if* they were objectively valid laws.⁵

Yet, while self-conceit issues in maxims that fail to realize the proper form of the law, the person in the grips of this motivational tendency will not consciously recognize this failure (“we throw dust in our own eyes”).⁶ Thus, in the *Religion*, Kant claims that the real threat to morality is not the mere fact of our sensible nature but is instead “an invisible enemy that hides behind reason... in perverted maxims, and hence in freedom itself” ([1793] 1998, 6:57–58). Self-conceit is a form of unreason that takes the guise of reason, an ersatz version of reason’s form. Because of this, Kant calls self-conceit not simple error but *illusion* (Gregor) or *delusion* (Pluhar). The German word is *Wahn*, which is related to both madness (*Wahnsinn*) and mania (*Wahnwitz*), which, in the third *Critique*, Kant describes as a way of “raving with reason” ([1788] 2001, 5:275).

Thus, while an error is a single mistake that can be isolated and amended, *Wahn* is a holistic illusion of reason, a way of going wrong in one’s basic practical orientation, where “going wrong” here means assuming unique legislative authority and esteeming oneself for this. What needs to be corrected or “struck down,” then, is not something like a single mistaken belief, but a general orientation, a practical way of understanding both oneself and the world. Self-conceit is thus best conceived as an illusory practical orientation and self-conception that implicates both intrapsychic and extrapsychic relations. What then is the structure of this delusion?

I propose that the best way to understand self-conceit is in terms of what Kant calls “dictatorial authority,” which we can understand as an immature conception of autonomy. Recall that self-conceit superficially mimics the proper form of practical cognition and willing, which is to say that it mimics real autonomy. The specific way it fails to realize this form, I am suggesting, is by adopting a “dictatorial,” immature version of it.

In the “Doctrine of Method” in the first *Critique* Kant writes:

reason must subject itself to critique in all its undertakings, and cannot restrict the freedom of critique... the very existence of reason depends upon this freedom, which has no dictatorial

⁵Moran refers to this as self-conceit’s “disturbing sincerity” (2014, 441). See also Reath (2006, 20–22).

⁶Moran and Reath both emphasize the failure of self-knowledge, or active self-deception, involved in self-conceit.

authority, but whose claim is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able to express his reservations, indeed even his *veto* without holding back. ([1787] 1999, A738/B766)

Kant here contrasts proper and improper ways of conceiving of reason. Because we are reasoners, these can be seen as proper and improper self-conceptions. In this passage Kant suggests that reason enjoys the authority it has in virtue of consistently subjecting itself to critique. As Onora O'Neill writes, "the warrant that we have for following and trusting such procedures [of reasoning] is that they are always subject to self-scrutiny and correction" (1986, 532). Yet while this critique comes from reason itself, it may often appear in the guise of other reasoners (other "free citizens"). Reason's *self-scrutiny* thus means the scrutiny of purportedly rational claims by reason itself; when a claim is fully *vetoed*, it is struck down by reason itself. But such rational critique can be voiced either by oneself or by another reasoner.

"Dictatorial authority" by contrast is the idea that one's own claims are authoritative independent of being subject to rational self-scrutiny and correction. Because of this, critique or reservation voiced by other free citizens cannot be tolerated and the idea that they have full veto power is incomprehensible. I want to develop this fantasy of dictatorial authority in order to show that self-conceit is the illusion of enjoying just such dictatorial authority. If dictatorial authority is, for Kant, the wrong (though uncannily similar) way of thinking about reason, we can also understand it as the wrong way of thinking about autonomy. Thus, we can conceive of self-conceit as a faulty conception of autonomy.

Properly understood, a person wills or acts autonomously when she acts not from some contingent subjective interest and not under the dictates of another's arbitrary authority, but instead for reasons that she endorses and that others could share. In this case, she makes the objective practical principle her motivating, subjective practical principle; she ensures that her maxim enjoys the form of law and is moved by respect for this law (G, 4:400). Because, as a finite rational being, her will is imperfect, the way she experiences this law is as an imperative and a constraint, and her relationship to the law takes the form of duty. She respects the law as it shows up in her own capacity for reasoning, and as it shows up in the form of other persons, whom she recognizes as ends in themselves and thus as absolute limits on all choice (G, 4:428). But again, since this constraint is exerted by reason, the constraint is legitimate and her willing is autonomous. Part of what this involves is an implicit, practical understanding of herself as not merely finite but as constituted by desires and inclinations that do not naturally harmonize with the law (CPR, 5:84); she knows herself to be a creature with a mind that requires both "spur and bridle" (CPR, 5:85). Kant refers to this as a posture of humility that is at the same time a form of genuine self-cognition (CPR, 5:86). In sum, proper autonomy involves acting for objectively valid reasons, moved by respect for the law, and guided by an implicit, background appreciation of the kind of creature one is, of one's "station" among rational beings as merely human (CPR, 5:82).

Ersatz autonomy, the fantasy of dictatorial authority, misconstrues these three basic features of autonomy. First, acting from within this fantasy I take the claims made by my needs and inclinations as always already legitimate and uniquely, unconditionally legislative. While proper autonomy involves the self-critical work of making the objective practical principle (or law) one's subjectively practical principle, *ersatz* autonomy involves the belief that my subjective practical principle is *already* objectively valid, as though my desires and inclinations were naturally and legitimately legislative, hence in no need of critique or constraint. Second, correlatively, any limit on choice or purported constraint coming from a source other than *me* (qua pathologically determinable self) is *thereby* regarded as invalid, lacking any authority. On an *ersatz* conception of autonomy, I register what are actually legitimate critiques and constraints as if they were unauthorized impositions, simply because they haven't come from me or don't align with what I happen to want. Third, underwriting this *ersatz* conception of autonomy is an understanding of oneself as needing *no spur or bridle*—as subject to no imperatives, criticisms, or normative constraints—but rather as always spontaneously, naturally

justified. This produces “a frivolous, high-flown, fantastic cast of mind” where one flatters oneself “with a spontaneous goodness of heart” (CPR, 5:84-85). In sum, ersatz autonomy involves acting for subjective reasons as if they naturally enjoyed objective validity, where one feels no respect for law but rather regards all constraint as invalid imposition, and where the humility or self-cognition of oneself as an imperfectly rational creature is utterly lacking.

Insofar as this faulty conception of autonomy refuses to recognize any legitimate imperatives or the critique of other free citizens, it can also be helpfully described as a fantasy of individual sovereignty. As Kant writes in the *Groundwork*:

a rational being belongs as a *member* to the kingdom of ends when he gives universal laws in it but is also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it *as sovereign* when, as lawgiving, he is not subject to the will of any other... Duty does not apply to the sovereign in the kingdom of ends, but it does apply to every member of it and indeed to all in equal measure. (G, 4:433–34)

Or again in the second *Critique*:

Duty and what is owed are the only names that we must give to our relation to the moral law. We are indeed lawgiving members of a kingdom of morals possible through freedom and represented to us by practical reason for our respect; but we are at the same time subjects in it, not its sovereign and to fail to recognize our inferior position as creatures and to deny *from self-conceit* the authority of the holy law is already to defect from it in spirit, even though the letter of the law is fulfilled (CPR, 5:82).

To take oneself to be a sovereign is to imagine—“from self-conceit”—that one is not legitimately subject to any kind of constraint, as though one were a giver of law and yet subject to none. But in truth, there are two legitimate constraints to which finite rational beings are rightly subject: *other persons* (other members) and *one’s own practical reason*, issuing in the form of law. Thus, to be properly autonomous is to have one’s will rightly constrained both by moral imperatives and by other persons. The self-conceited fantasy of sovereignty rejects all such constraints as illegitimate.

Notice that we can also connect the ideas of dictatorial authority and ersatz autonomy to what Kant says in “What Is Enlightenment?” There Kant describes enlightenment as man’s emergence from self-incurred immaturity, which he defines as the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another ([1784] 1999, 8:40). So, we can trace a developmental dialectic of reason here: first, out of fear and lack of practice, one relies too heavily on others in the exercise of one’s cognitive capacities (this is “self-incurred immaturity”); then one swings in the other direction, inflating oneself in a fantasy of sovereignty or self-conceit. Proper autonomy, or enlightenment, names the mature exercise of one’s cognitive capacities, where this involves the capacity to engage with the critique of other free citizens, sometimes arguing for one’s own position, and sometimes accepting their veto.⁷

It should now be clear how interpreting self-conceit through the idea of dictatorial authority clarifies the status of relations with self and other in self-conceit. For Kant there is, of course, only one legitimate moral constraint, pure practical reason or the moral law. For us imperfectly rational beings, this law is objectively necessary but subjectively necessitated, which means that it takes the form of a categorical imperative, an absolute constraint on the will, which we relate to in the mode of duty. But Kant specifies two *guises* that such legitimate constraint may assume: one’s own practical reason and other persons. Presuming dictatorial authority, the person in the grips of self-conceit

⁷See also Wood on Kant’s conception of enlightenment (2008, 18): “thinking for yourself not only permits but even *requires* that you take account of the thoughts and information of others. The crucial difference is whether what others tell you contributes to your own use of your reason or instead replaces your own thinking with a prejudice, deferring to others and letting their thinking substitute for your own.”

refuses to recognize any legitimate constraint on her will, and thus refuses to recognize the law in *any* of its guises. But this means that disordered relations to others are, in fact, constitutive of the illusion of self-conceit, built into its basic structure. Self-conceit *is*, then, a failure of reasoning and a faulty self-conception, as Moran rightly notes. But Moran is wrong to infer from this that self-conceit is concerned with the self and the law *rather than* other persons. If the failure of reasoning and faulty self-conception that defines self-conceit is, fundamentally, a faulty understanding of authority and an inability to recognize any legitimate constraint, then intrapsychic *and* extrapsychic relations to authority will be corrupted at once.

Thus, the self-directed conception is wrong to suggest that the extrapsychic, interpersonal dimension of self-conceit is somehow optional, a contingent effect of, or supplementary buttress for, the more fundamental intrapsychic dimension. But I have also offered a different kind of argument than those provided by the other-directed camp. As we have seen, those in the other-directed camp argue that the self-conceited agent makes depreciatory judgments of others, and that such judgments are integral to self-conceit's structure. In response, the self-directed camp has argued that it seems intuitive that one could be in the grips of self-conceit without thinking or making judgments *about* other people. Recall Moran, who observed that self-conceit "does not seem to be preoccupied, in the first instance, with the worthlessness of others" (2014, 429).

My argument hinges on the idea that for imperfectly rational beings, the law takes the form of a constraint, and that legitimate normative constraint takes both intrapsychic and extrapsychic guises. If self-conceit constitutes a disorder in one's relation to the law or reason, then this disorder will pervert one's relation to reason, wherever it shows up. Thus, self-conceit disorders one's relations to one's own reason *and* other reasoners. But this does not mean that one needs to be consciously preoccupied or concerned with other persons or with one's standing relative to them (as Engstrom, Darwall, and Reath argue). My argument centers instead on the imperatival forms that the law takes for imperfect rational agents, rather than on the psychology or preoccupations of self-conceited agents.

Self-conceit is thus double-sided—both intra and extrapsychic. But in order to fully appreciate the place of self-conceit in Kant's moral psychology, we also need to understand how the law strikes it down. In the next and final section, I look at Kant's discussion of respect in order to show that in striking down self-conceit, respect corrects both sides—its intrapsychic and extrapsychic dimensions—just as we should now expect.

4. Respect for the law, respect for persons

Just as self-conceit is constituted by intrapsychic and extrapsychic dimensions, so too is respect. The idea that the structures of self-conceit and respect must mirror each other in this respect has not been sufficiently appreciated in the literature on self-conceit. More specifically, it has not been appreciated that there must be an other-directed dimension of respect that targets the other-directed dimension of self-conceit. In his analysis of respect, Engstrom, for instance, focuses on how acknowledgment of the "magnitude" of the moral law strikes down self-conceit by revealing the latter's claims to be wholly subjective and particular, hence empty and null (2010, 117). And Reath argues that striking down self-conceit involves bringing one's actual but unacknowledged maxim to reflection, so that its (empty, null) value can be properly compared with the moral law (2006, 19). In both cases, the purported self-worth esteemed in self-conceit is revealed to be nothing in comparison with the law, and its illusion is struck down.

The problem is that these accounts do not show how respect for the law targets the *other*-directed dimension of self-conceit, the very dimension that these authors take to be so essential to its structure. If self-conceit essentially involves distorted relations with others, and if respect strikes down self-conceit, then how does respect manage to radically reorient self-conceit's faulty relation to other persons?

Kant describes respect as a "peculiar kind" of "odd feeling" because it is the only feeling that is "practical" rather than pathological. While all other feelings are responses to some sensibly given

object (G, 4:402), with the feeling of respect I recognize an authority *as* a law for me. In the *Groundwork*, Kant writes that “what I cognize immediately as a law for me I cognize with respect... Respect is properly the representation of a worth that infringes upon my self-love” (G, 4:402). Respect must thus be understood primarily as a special kind of practical cognition. For Kant, such a representation can be at the same time an incentive, a feeling, because respect involves not theoretical cognition of a given object, but the recognition of the law as a categorical demand that applies to me: when I recognize the law as rightfully directed at me, respect is *how* I recognize it. Respect is thus a mode of cognition that places the subject in relation to authority in a way that is consistent with autonomy and immediately practical: there is no step separating cognition from motivation, since to recognize the law just is to recognize its authority as a rightful constraint on my will.⁸ Of course, this is not to say that we always yield to respect without resistance. But it is important to notice where Kant situates this gap or resistance: it does not arise between recognition of the law and motivation (as though I fully recognize what I ought to do but remain unmoved); rather self-conceit avoids that recognition in the first place.

I want to argue that striking down self-conceit must involve respect for others. But one might want immediately to object that for Kant it is always ultimately one’s recognition of the *law* that strikes down self-conceit, not recognition of other persons. As Kant insists in the *Groundwork*, “any respect for a person is properly only respect for the law” (4:402). The puzzle is that if respect is nonpathological and *self-wrought* by means of a rational concept (4:402), how can the feeling of respect be essentially *other-involving*? Let us begin by looking at how Kant introduces the concept of respect in the second *Critique*.

Strikingly, immediately after insisting that respect is brought about “solely by reason,” Kant’s next major claim is that respect “always applies only to persons, never to things” (CPR, 5:77). After distinguishing respect from feelings we have for both things and persons (like love, fear, admiration), Kant writes:

before a humble common man in whom I perceive an uprightness of character in a higher degree than I am aware of in myself *my spirit bows*, whether I want it or whether I do not and hold my head ever so high, that he may not overlook my superior position. Why is this? His example holds before me a law that strikes down my self-conceit when I compare it with my conduct, and I see observance with the law and hence its *practicability* proved before me in fact. Now, I may even be aware of a like degree of uprightness in myself, and yet the respect remains. (CPR, 5:76)

I propose that we read this passage, and those immediately following it, as evidence of the other-directed dimension of respect.

The fact that Kant turns, rather abruptly, to the emphatic experience of respect for another person in the middle of his discussion of self-conceit and moral motivation already indicates that other persons have some crucial role to play here. Kant is not in this chapter concerned with our more particular duties to others, as he will be in the “Doctrine of Virtue”; nor is he concerned with the other-involving formulation of the categorical imperative, as he is with the Formula of Humanity in the *Groundwork*. Kant is here concerned with moral psychology, with how we can be morally *moved* (in a way that is consistent with autonomy). So, the presence of the “humble man” passage right here suggests that respect for others plays some important role in his story of moral motivation.

⁸Grenberg (2013) thinks that this is also true philosophically or logically; that is, she argues that our only access to the moral law is through feeling, thus effectively collapsing the distinction between consciousness of the law and moral motivation, of the distinction between the Fact of Reason and respect. Allison (1993) and Ware (2015) argue that consciousness of the law should be kept distinct from moral feeling.

The passage begins with Kant describing what it is like to see someone whom he perceives to be in some way morally better. At least in the first moment of this encounter, Kant presents a case of a comparative moral judgment: from the perspective of the self-conceited person, seeing the other as upright in character humiliates what are now revealed to be my mere pretensions to authority. It looks like respect strikes down the other-directed dimension of self-conceit precisely through recognition of the other as “upright in character” in a way that I am not.

But for Kant, the feeling of respect is *not* a comparative or evaluative judgment. Kant insists that respect “does not serve for judging actions” (CPR, 5:76), and he rejects any form of moral comparison between people. He writes, for example, that “moral humility, regarded as the curbing of our self-conceit in the face of the moral law, can thus never rest on a comparison of ourselves with others, but with the moral law” ([1784] 1997, 27:349). The *only* morally relevant form of comparison is between myself and the moral law. Given its explicitly comparative language, the question, again, is: why should we regard this passage as a case of respect for others?

According to Kant, “what in our own judgment infringes upon our self-conceit humiliates” (CPR, 5:74), which means that we are humiliated when we realize that what we had taken to be our dictatorial authority is in fact a sham. Just as respect is our felt response only to what we recognize as a legitimate authority, humiliation is our felt response to what we judge as having the authority to undermine our mere pretensions to merit. Humiliation is for Kant an element of the feeling of respect, but it is only one, negative moment of it. It is the moment when the illusion of self-conceit is pierced, as it were, and this infringement on self-esteem is felt to be painful. But at the moment when I am comparing myself with the other person, respect is not yet on the scene. I am, as it were, still caught up on the seesaw set up by self-conceit: either I am superior and they are inferior *or* they are superior and I am inferior, humiliated.⁹ But if recognition of the other as rational and moral begins with a feeling of humiliation, how is this recognition completed such that it becomes respect proper?

Kant says that when I recognize the other person, I see “observance of the law and hence its *practicability* proved before me in fact,” and so I see the other person as “the law made intuitive by an example.” Now insofar as the scene centers on recognizing another as “upright in character,” this might seem to be describing appraisal respect for individual moral merit, rather than the respect that is due to any person as a being with absolute inner worth or dignity (G, 4:428; 4:435). The latter is the kind of respect for persons that Kant emphasizes in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, and which Darwall (1977, 2008) terms “recognition respect.” as Kant writes, “every human being has a legitimate claim to respect from his fellow human beings and is in turn bound to respect every other” ([1797] 1999, 6:462). So, it may seem that Kant feels appraisal respect for the humble man, but not recognition respect.

But, in fact, Kant notes that one may even become conscious of the same righteousness in oneself or realize that some impurity attaches to him and *yet the respect remains* (CPR, 5:77). So, what began as appraisal respect for someone’s apparently superior moral status is revealed to be respect for him *as* an imperfect moral and rational being. As Kant writes, “since in human beings all good is defective, the law made intuitive by an example still strikes down my pride, the standard being furnished by the man I see before me” (CPR, 5:77). Kant is here describing a form of recognition of authority: I recognize this human being as imperfect (his goodness is “defective”) and yet I still recognize him as a site of authority, where this recognition strikes down my self-conceit. It is as if the humble, common imperfection of this human being recalls me to my own; and if that is so, then I recognize in him a capacity and form of authority which I share as a fellow human being. Here, I do not regard him as an object of appraisal or comparison, whether better or worse. Rather in recognizing this imperfect example of morality I recognize an authority—both in him and in myself—where Kant describes this recognition as a feeling of respect.

⁹Grenberg also discusses this idea of a comparative “seesaw,” though she does not use this term (2005, 121).

So, even though the scene begins with admiration or appraisal respect for this man, this cannot be the only kind of respect present, since this would still be a form of comparative judgment, which has no place in a discussion of moral motivation. Instead, it is through respect for him simply qua human being, where this in turn involves acknowledging myself as a human being (not a sovereign), that self-conceit can be properly struck down. In his reading of the passage we've been considering, Wood argues that we must reinterpret what *looks* to be a comparison with another person as really involving comparison of self with law, not a comparison with others at all: "every comparison between people drops out" (1999, 137). I have been trying to show that while *comparison* with other persons drops out, the *other person* does not. Or more emphatically: it is only when comparison drops out that other persons can finally, properly appear.

It should be noted here that Kant presents the scene with the lowly, plain, common man as a phenomenologically rich reminder of how we can be *struck* by the feeling of respect for another person, and how such encounters can be morally motivating. Indeed, Kant employs the scene to dramatic effect in a way that *strikes* the reader, too, jolting her into a kind of moral self-awareness. But, of course, we are not always so consciously, emphatically struck in the face of another person and, crucially, we need not be for the law to operate as an incentive. When we recognize someone with respect, we recognize that person as authoritative, but the affective register of this recognition can range from calm and hardly noticeable to deeply felt and emotionally charged. What is essential is that we recognize the other as a site of authority and act *from* respect for that authority.

Notice also that in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Groundwork*, respect for persons is articulated in third-personal terms. In the former text, it is my vivid perception of another person that strikes down my self-conceit; in the latter, I conceive of persons in such a way that their rational nature marks them out as ends in themselves, where this representation places an immediate limit on my practical reasoning (G, 4:429). But, as Darwall argues, it is really in the "Doctrine of Virtue" that Kant gives respect for persons a properly second-personal articulation. As Kant there writes, "every human being has a legitimate claim to respect from his fellow human beings and is *in turn* bound to respect every other" ([1797] 1999, 6:462). Here, respect is something that I can legitimately and authoritatively claim from you, where what is being demanded is that you acknowledge my authority to make such demands, *and* where such respect is reciprocally owed to you in turn (see Darwall 2008, 188–90). Crucially, Kant defines self-conceit here in exactly such second-personal terms: "self-conceit is lack of modesty in one's claims to be *respected* by others" ([1797] 1999, 6:462). Here too self-conceit involves a fantasy of authority, yet Kant gives this fantasy a second-personal inflection, as a fantasy of what I can authoritatively claim from *you*, hence a fantasy that you have no such claim on me. By contrast, the proper relationship to authority involves respect, where such respect is felt both for the law within and the law without, for my own rationality and for yours.

In a recent paper, Melissa Merritt argues that recognizing other persons with respect should be understood as a form of "practical receptivity." That is, when I recognize something as a *person*, this should not be seen as an instance of theoretical cognition that supplies a premise in practical deliberation; on such a conception, I must, in a second step, infer something practical from an originally theoretical cognition. Rather, for Merritt recognizing a person *as such* is a form of thoroughly practical perception. Merritt's idea is that while practical reason in its productive aspect aims to bring about the good, i.e., a good "way of acting [or] maxim of the will" (CPR, 5:61), practical reason must also be *receptively* or *passively* engaged in the form of recognition respect for persons. For Merritt, such practical receptivity will be "involved in any sound exercise of practical cognitive capacities *in concreto*" (2017, 67).¹⁰ Using the terms I have developed here, practical receptivity, i.e., respect for persons, describes one essential way that the law shows up for us.

¹⁰For Merritt, practical reason needs a receptive mode engagement because, as a form of *knowledge*, practical reason must be responsive to what is "there anyways." Thus, recognition respect is a kind of receptivity to how things are: "it is how we recognize *here is a person*" (2017, 68).

Merritt does not discuss self-conceit, but her analysis of recognition respect harmonizes with my arguments. I have argued, first, that self-conceit is defined by its refusal to recognize any constraint on the will as legitimate and, second, that legitimate normative constraint takes two guises for Kant—one’s own reason and other persons. And I argued that this shows that self-conceit essentially involves disordered relations with others. For Merritt practical cognition involves an essentially receptive mode of engagement, namely recognition respect for other persons. Together, we get a picture on which self-conceit involves a failure of practical reasoning in its receptive exercise, which in turn means that striking self-conceit down involves *activating* that receptive exercise through recognition of other persons *as* persons. Such recognition, as Merritt puts it, constrains choice full stop (2017, 68). To have one’s self-conceit struck down is to become receptive to the presence of other persons in their full practical, moral significance.

So, when Kant writes that “any respect for a person is properly only respect for the law” (G, 4:402), we need to hear this in the right way. The point is not that we respect the law, conceived as a kind of special inner or immaterial object, *rather* than persons, as though we shift from one target object to another. That respect is “self-wrought” means that it is not responsive to anything outside *reason* (it is not heteronomous); it does not mean that it must be wrought “inside” the individual self. Thus, in respecting persons, I precisely stop apprehending them as external objects, as arbitrary limits to my dictatorial authority or as objects of comparison. Instead, insofar as I recognize another person as a person, I respect their authority and my will is immediately, legitimately constrained. Here I *am* respecting “the law,” but this is not some *other* thing, it is just that aspect of their personhood that rightfully constrains my will (just as respecting the law concerns just that aspect of *my* personhood that rightfully constrains my will). Here too, then, there is no two-step process: it is not that I primarily respect the law and then extend this to other persons; rather, respect for proper authority immediately takes two guises for human beings and is thus at once intrapsychic and interpersonal. This is the sense in which respect for persons, as loci of law, immediately strikes down my self-conceit. In this way, respect for persons is not secondary vis-à-vis respect for the law. Rather respect for persons *is* respect for the law, considered from the perspective of a being for whom another person is an essential way in which such law shows up.

5. Conclusion

If Kant’s critical project involves reason critiquing itself and correcting its innate tendencies to illusion at the level of philosophical thinking, then we can see the moral law as the critical project unfolding at the first order. At the first-order level of practical experience, human reason can generate an ersatz conception of its own activity, self-conceit, where—somewhat paradoxically—only reason itself can strike this posture down. I have argued that self-conceit’s illusion, its refusal to recognize the authority of the law, is double-sided—at once intrapsychic and interpersonal. This is because the law “shows up” for us human beings in two guises: our own reason and other persons. Respect is likewise double-sided: respect for the law just means respect for the authority of reason, one’s own *and* other persons. For Kant there is only one law, one reason, but there are as many concrete sites of authority and rationality as there are particular rational beings. Self-conceit names the propensity to refuse this practical reality; respect our mode of recognizing it.

Acknowledgments. This paper has been transformed and improved through conversation with Anastasia Berg, Stephen Darwall, Stephen Engstrom, Rafeeq Hasan, Thomas Khurana, Jessica Tizzard, Owen Ware, two anonymous referees, and participants at both the “Form of Practical Knowledge Conference” in honor of Stephen Engstrom at Leipzig Universität in 2015 and a session at the Central APA in 2018. Many thanks to them all.

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