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"Calm Down Dear": Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance

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In 2011 the Prime Minister of the UK David Cameron during a Commons debate told the then shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury Angela Eagle to “calm down, dear”. His words were widely taken to be sexist, patronising and arrogant. They betrayed a fairly transparent attempt to rely on stereotypes about women’s judgement being clouded by emotion in order to undermine or deflate the credibility of her questioning of his policies.¹ They also were an attempt to silence her. Cameron did not intend literally to prevent her from speaking by physically closing her mouth or by interrupting her, although he may have done the latter. Rather, he wanted her attempts to describe what she saw as the failures of his policies, not to have, in the eyes of the other present members of the Commons, the status of assertions. He attempted to achieve this by feigning that he had not recognised her intentions. By saying to her to calm down, he was insinuating that because of her emotional state it was impossible to surmise what she may be saying. He was telling their audience that her speech did not constitute an input to rational debate because her intentions could not be recognised. His gambit did not pay off, as it was transparently disingenuous, but it was an attempt to silence his opponent by causing her assertions to misfire.²

Intellectual arrogance is a very common and varied phenomenon. The fairly recent episode mentioned above is only one example; but arrogance is encountered in all walks of

¹ On deflating credibility as a kind of testimonial injustice see, Miranda Fricker’s ground-breaking *Epistemic Injustice* (2007).

² As a matter of fact the gambit backfired because it was widely interpreted as indicating an inability to remain cool under pressure. By telling Eagle to calm down, Cameron had shown that he was flustered and unable to address the content of her challenge. I shall explain the nature of illocutionary disablement or silencing by causing a speech act to misfire below. For reporting of this episode see <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/apr/27/david-cameron-calm-down-dear> [accessed on 30 July 2015]. The *locus classicus* on illocutionary silence is Rae Langton (1993) see also her (2009).

life.³ It is exhibited by individuals who do not respect their turn in conversation, who interrupt others, who take up an unfair share of the available time. It shows up when a person boasts about his achievements, never admits to a mistake, publicly puts other people “in their place”, or thinks that he is always right.⁴ It is also manifested by excessive risk takers, by people who do not tolerate dissent, by those who try to intimidate others into agreeing with them.

Despite its prevalence intellectual arrogance has not received the detailed philosophical attention that it deserves. To my knowledge very little has been written in recent years about arrogance in general, while intellectual arrogance in particular has received almost no attention whatsoever.⁵ The main aims of this paper are: (i) to provide an account of some intellectually arrogant behaviours, (ii) to detail some of the ethical and epistemic harms they cause and (iii) to explain their role in fostering the intellectual vices of timidity and servility in other agents and, therefore, their contribution to the creation and maintenance of various forms of ignorance. More specifically, I show that arrogance produces ignorance by silencing others (both preventing them from speaking and causing their assertions to misfire) and by fostering self-delusion in the arrogant themselves.⁶

The paucity of work on arrogance is typical of the almost exclusive focus on virtues, rather than vices, in the revival of virtue theory in epistemology.⁷ In part this one-sidedness must be due to the presumption that vice is simply the absence of virtue. This assumption is unwarranted since vice can be actively cultivated, and strengthened. If we are concerned with the regulation and improvement of our epistemic lives, we need to understand the mechanisms which foster vices so as to minimise their effectiveness.⁸

³ For reasons of brevity in the rest of this paper I use ‘arrogance’ as a shorthand for ‘intellectual arrogance’. Whenever arrogance in general is intended, this fact is indicated explicitly.

⁴ I use the pronoun ‘he’ when referring to arrogant individuals because arrogance in general tends to be gendered, since positions of power are frequently occupied by men, and arrogance is a trait which is more likely to be developed in powerful individuals.

⁵ The medieval thought of the moral vice of arrogance or pride as a deadly sin and wrote extensively about it. The exceptions to recent silence on the topic are feminist moral philosophers. In particular, Robin Dillon has written extensively on arrogance as a moral vice (2004 and 2007). See also Tiberius and Walker (1998). The most extensive treatment of specifically intellectual arrogance has been offered by Roberts and Wood (2007, ch. 9) by way of contrast with intellectual humility.

⁶ Reasons of space prevent me from discussing the psychological underpinnings of the behaviours. In my view arrogance is a highly accessible attitude (in the social psychological sense of the word) that serves ego defensive functions and is characteristic of so-called defensive high self-esteem (Jordan et al., 2003).

⁷ This lacuna, however, is beginning to be filled. See for example Heather Battaly (2014).

⁸ The role of structures of domination and subordination in determining what counts as a virtue or vice in a given context and in aiding or preventing their development also needs to receive much more sustained

This paper consists of four sections. I begin by offering a characterization of intellectual arrogance. I distinguish two forms of arrogance. One has inter-personal nature; the other concerns a person's attitude toward his or her own intellectual character. I refer to the first kind of arrogance, which I discuss in section 1, as haughtiness (*superbia*). I reserve the label 'arrogance' for the second kind, which is the topic of section 2. In the final two sections of the paper I develop the connections between haughtiness, arrogance and ignorance. I argue in section 3 that haughtiness fosters intellectual timidity and servility in other agents and promotes ignorance via silencing them, whilst in section 4 I defend the claim that arrogance leads to delusions about the self.

I

Haughtiness (superbia). There is a form of arrogance which manifests itself through disdain for other people.⁹ I have already mentioned some of the behaviours which are characteristic of this psychological feature. They include talking over other people, interrupting them, putting them down in public, ignoring or rejecting without reasons what they may have said, and conveying to one's audience the impression that one thinks of oneself as cleverer, smarter or more quick witted than them. Arrogance of this kind is often identified with a feeling of superiority over others.

In this section after showing that haughtiness is not the same thing as thinking of oneself as intellectually superior to others, I propose that it is to be understood as a disrespectful attitude to others grounded in the presumption that one is exempt from the ordinary responsibilities of participants in conversations and especially in the practice of asserting. In order to explain what the haughty exempt themselves from I offer an account of the responsibilities associated with turn-taking, and with the making and hearing of an assertion. I show that haughtiness is characterised by the presumption that many rules of

attention than it has to date. For an exception in the case of ethical virtue theory, see Lisa Tessman (2005). Vice in particular needs to be understood in the context of the psychological damage caused by structural injustice in individual members of subordinating and subordinated groups. I lack the space to develop these issues here.

⁹ For some accounts of this kind of arrogance see Tiberius and Walker (1998), Roberts and Wood (2007), Medina (2013). To my knowledge only Dillon (2004, 2007) distinguishes in the moral case this form of arrogance from another deeper form.

turn-taking do not apply to one, that one's assertions are authoritative (and therefore not answerable to challenges), and consequently that one is entitled to ignore or dismiss any purported assertion that contradicts one's view. I conclude the section by showing that the arrogation of these presumed exemptions by the haughty is disrespectful to other speakers. Hence, haughty behaviour is morally harmful and a wrong. In section 3 of the paper, I aim to show that this behaviour is also epistemically harmful to all agents since it poses an obstacle in the way of the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. In these ways haughtiness promotes ignorance.

Feeling Superior. Thinking of oneself as intellectually superior to others is not always a symptom of arrogance.¹⁰ There are circumstances in which one may think, without arrogance, that one is the best person for the task at hand. We might be rightly suspicious of an individual who always thinks of himself as superior, and that no matter what the task may be, provided it is not menial, believes that he is the most qualified to carry it out. Nevertheless, thinking of oneself as superior in these ways is not sufficient for arrogance. It may be thought that the difference between a sense of superiority which is arrogant and one which is not depends on whether one is warranted in believing oneself to be superior. This is not so. An individual may be accurate about his superior knowledge and expertise over all other members of the research team and still exhibit his superiority in an arrogant manner. He may, for example, show impatience when someone disagrees with his views or he may rudely dismiss suggestions. Conversely, an individual may falsely think of himself as superior to his team members without being arrogant. The individual in question may be making a honest (non culpable) mistake on these points.¹¹

Thus, believing that one is intellectually superior to others may be necessary for arrogance of this kind but it is not sufficient. In addition, the inaccuracy of the belief about one's alleged superiority is neither sufficient nor necessary for arrogance. What matters instead is that the arrogant presume that their alleged or genuine superior intellectual

¹⁰ It seems plausible to believe that there is a scalar notion of intellectual worth based on the quantity and quality of epistemic goods possessed by an individual. Those to whom more or better goods are attributable are superior to others on this scale. For a similar conception of personal intellectual worth, see Jason Baehr (2011). The range and quality of goods that one possesses could be in part a matter of sheer luck and of other circumstances beyond one's control.

¹¹ But even if the person is epistemically at fault for the error because he should have taken more care in reaching his conclusion, it still seems possible that such individual is misguided rather than arrogant.

authority entitles them to a range of privileges which they deny to others.¹² In what follows I argue that these alleged privileges can be understood as putative exemptions from the ordinary responsibilities pertaining to epistemic agents. I limit my discussion to the norms of two important epistemic practices: turn-taking and asserting.

Turn-taking. Expectations concerning the taking of turn vary from culture to culture and context to context. Nevertheless, there are some commonalities. Participants are expected to avoid talking at the same time as each other. Thus, listeners are expected not to interrupt but to wait until the speaker has finished. At least in Britain, speakers are also expected not to take up an unfair share of the available time. The point of these mutual expectations is to organise conversations so that they do not descend into chaos (Sacks et al, 1974).

These expectations, since they are common knowledge, make individuals accountable to each other and, hence, give rise to epistemic and ethical responsibilities.¹³ Each participant in the conversation owes to others not to interrupt, to give them a chance to speak if they so wish, not to impede their speech by talking at the same time. Intuitively there are cases where one may interrupt or talk over someone else without being censored as a result. For instance when the interrupting speech is not a deliberate vocalization (as in a cry of surprise for example), when one did not realise someone else had not finished, or when an emergency warrants the interruption. But, barring these exculpations, excuses or justifications, whenever a speaker violates these mutual expectations, he is held morally responsible for harming the other participants in the conversation.¹⁴

The harms caused by culpably breaking the norms of turn-taking are multiple; their nature and seriousness may depend from case to case. Even when the harm is small, if it is inflicted on a daily basis it can over periods of time do significant damage.¹⁵ But what is common to all cases is that they are also slights which harm the dignity of the recipient.

¹² This point is made by Roberts and Wood (2007, ch. 9). They, however, do not specify the nature of this authority or of the epistemic privileges it is taken to license.

¹³ I presume here that if you expect me to ϕ , and I know that you expect me to ϕ , and you know that I know this, then you are entitled to hold me responsible for ϕ -ing or for disabusing you of the expectation. In this way mutual expectations create relations of accountability which in turn generates responsibilities.

¹⁴ Very roughly, justifications are circumstances that warrant the breaking of the norm, excuses are circumstances which mitigate the breaking of the norm (such as that it was unintentional or an accident), and exculpations are circumstances in which contrary to appearances the norm is not broken because the behaviour in question was not subject to it.

¹⁵ See Samantha Brennan (2009) on micro-inequalities.

That is to say, when one culpably fails to give other conversants what they are owed, one shows disrespect toward them. So that one wrongs them, as well as harming them.

This lack of respect is manifested in at least two ways. Firstly, one disrespects the other person in the evaluative sense of not treating her in a manner that accords with her intellectual worth, and secondly in the recognition sense of not treating her in a manner that accords with what is due to any agent *qua* agent.¹⁶ Such failure of respect consists in acting in a way that prevents the other person from exercising fully her capacities as conversational partner. Hence, the wrong done has a distinctively epistemic dimension since it concerns individuals' ability fully to function as epistemic agents.¹⁷ I shall return to the issue in section 3 where I argue that locutionary silencing, which occurs when people are literally made to be silent, if continually repeated is likely to cause the silenced to become intellectually timid. That is to say, one of the wrongs done by silencing is that of increasing the likelihood that the harmed individuals will develop intellectually vicious traits.

Asserting. When making an assertion, an asserter undertakes two related but distinct commitments.¹⁸ The primary commitment is an accountability commitment; the second is an answerability commitment.¹⁹ The first commitment makes the speaker accountable for her assertion. The second commitment makes the speaker answerable for her assertion.²⁰

In making the first commitment, the speaker vouchsafes for the propriety of her assertion, and, thereby, entitles others to hold her to account if they rely on her assertion and something goes wrong as a result. Roughly speaking, we can think of this commitment

¹⁶ I use 'evaluative respect' to mean respect based on an evaluation of someone's admirable features. I use 'recognition respect' to mean respect based on the recognition that the object of respect is an agent. This usage may not correspond to how the terms are used by others. For example, my notion of evaluative respect is different from Dillon's (2004, p. 203)

¹⁷ This is a form of epistemic injustice but it is not one of the two kinds (testimonial and hermeneutical) discussed by Fricker (2007).

¹⁸ There is a burgeoning literature on the epistemic and ethical responsibilities of asserting and of telling. My discussion here is indebted to Gary Watson (2004), Edward Hinchman (2005) and Sandy Goldberg (2014 and 2015). The view expressed here has similarities and differences with all of these. For reasons of space, I do not address these disagreements.

¹⁹ These are common to sincere and insincere assertion. Sincerity will involve a further commitment.

²⁰ I take ordinary assertion to be an illocutionary speech act in which the asserter intends to defeasibly entitle others to the content of their assertion purely in virtue of their recognition of her intention. I take it that to have this intention is to undertake the first commitment mentioned in the text. The second commitment is a requirement for the speech act to be a happy one. If the second commitment is not undertaken, one has still succeeded in asserting but one's assertion in ordinary circumstances is in Austin's terminology an abuse. A possible exception to this situation would be an assertion which is authoritative in the sense discussed below. For a related point about abuses in telling see Hinchman (2005, p. 568).

as a way of giving of one's word that one is entitled to one's assertion (because one has the required epistemic standing vis a vis its content).²¹ In this manner the speaker acquires the responsibility that her assertion is proper given the norm governing assertion.²² In other words, she becomes responsible for having the required epistemic standing toward the proposition that is represented in her assertion.

This primary commitment licenses the hearer to expect that the assertion is proper, and, thus, to hold the speaker fully to account if it is not, provided that there are no extenuating or justifying circumstances. A speaker whose assertion is not proper may be blameless for the failure if she has a justification (such that she was economical with the truth out of kindness) or an excuse (such as that she was let down by a normally reliable source). Barring these special cases if the speaker has not fulfilled her commitment she is morally responsible for her failure.²³

In making the secondary commitment, the speaker makes herself answerable to (appropriate) queries and challenges raised by others. She conveys the assurance that, if others do not simply take her word (provided their attitude is appropriate given the circumstances), she is prepared to provide reasons, supply evidence, that speak for her assertion. Roughly speaking, we can think of this as making oneself available to engage in rational debate were a disagreement to emerge. This secondary commitment licenses the hearer to hold the speaker to account if she is not prepared to answer appropriate challenges to her assertion.

It might be thought that the secondary commitment is a mere part of what the first involves since being prepared to answer queries is one of the things which one must do if one is to ensure the propriety of one's assertions. This is not quite right. The first commitment licenses the hearer to expect that the assertion is properly made and to sanction the speaker if she is at fault when things go wrong. Such commitments do not license the hearer to expect that evidence be supplied for the truth of the asserted content. One way to think of the notion of epistemic authority is to think of it as legitimising the undertaking of the first commitment without the second. Authoritative assertion would be

²¹ This is not dissimilar from what Hinchman (2005) has called 'an invitation to trust'.

²² Whatever that norm turns out to be: truth, knowledge, or warrant.

²³ A speaker may also not be held responsible because it turns out that she had not made the commitment in the first place. She may for example have intended to "stick her neck out" but not to assert. In this case she would be exculpated.

assertion when the speaker is accountable for the propriety of the assertion without being answerable to queries about its truth.²⁴ A papal *ex cathedra* pronouncement would be a putative example of authoritative assertion. The pope is accountable for the propriety of the claim but is not answerable to any challenges.

It is hard to define exactly which challenges, in ordinary circumstances, should count as appropriate and require a response. Further, this notion of propriety may well depend on the context. Nonetheless, there undoubtedly are challenges, when it is appropriate for the speaker, to challenge the challenge rather than to attempt to answer it. Such an approach may be the right one, especially for cases where the challenge consists in presenting evidence against the truth of the asserter's claim. In these cases, as opposed to bare challenges, which simply query the asserter's knowledge of what she has claimed, the asserter may wish to deny the truth of the claim presented as a challenge to her. In addition, there are examples of vexatious or malicious challenges. In these instances, the speaker is entitled simply to shrug since vexatious challenges are no more challenges than fake guns are guns.

I now turn to the responsibilities that members of an audience have toward an asserter. These are the responsibilities of listeners and challengers toward speakers. What these responsibilities may hinge on what speakers can legitimately expect of hearers as a response to the commitments that the speakers have made by way of engaging in asserting. I shall approach the topic by looking first at obligations which are not incurred in order to home onto the more minimal responsibilities which are acquired just by being a member of the audience of an assertion.

An asserter is not entitled to expect that his audience will believe the content of his assertion. Thus, *contra* Anscombe (1979, p. 150) it is not always disrespectful not to believe an asserter. In making the assertion the speaker vouchsafes for its propriety and offers to others an entitlement to repeat the assertion without taking on the epistemic labour which would otherwise be associated with having the epistemic standing toward a proposition that would make its assertion proper. Hearers, however, are perfectly within their rights to decline the offer.

²⁴ For a defence of a notion of epistemic authority in this neighbourhood see Zagzebski (2012). I shall not attempt to address the question here as to whether epistemic authority of this kind exists. If it does not, any assertion that purports to be authoritative is to be interpreted as an abuse in the Austinian sense of a speech act which is not happy because although it is achieved, it is not consummated (1976, p. 16).

An asserter is also not entitled to expect that his audience will believe the content of his assertion if they have not challenged it. So he is not entitled to presume that silence means assent. In making the assertion a speaker makes himself available to supply evidence if he is properly challenged, and thus offers to provide answers. However, hearers are perfectly within their rights to decline this offer also. Arguably, they do not need any justification or excuse for why they may decline it. For example, one may not believe a speaker but decide not to challenge her because one has no interest in the subject matter. The uninterested listener has not done anything wrong and her lack of interest does not seem to function as an excuse (it is not an accident or unintentional) nor a justification.²⁵

The responsibilities of hearers are more minimal. They are not required to accept any of the offers made by asserters by means of their primary and secondary commitments but they are required to acknowledge that the offers were made. In other words, hearers have no responsibility to avail themselves of the entitlements that the speakers attempt to provide; they have, however, a responsibility to acknowledge that the speaker has made commitments to provide them with these entitlements.

A hearer acknowledges a speaker's primary commitment by holding the speaker accountable for the propriety of the assertion. Such an acknowledgement essentially involves accepting that the assertion has been made, and that this fact cannot be ignored in the continuing exchange.²⁶ A hearer acknowledges a speaker's secondary commitment by taking the speaker to be answerable for her claims. This acknowledgement requires that one accepts that the offer to give answers has been made. The offer would be ignored rather than acknowledged, for example, if the hearer proceeded to wonder aloud in front of the speaker whether the assertion is true without asking the speaker for her reasons. It would also be ignored if the hearer asked a third party if they thought the assertion were true without first asking the speaker to defend her claims.

Whenever a hearer fails to acknowledge that the speaker has made these two offers, the hearer harms the speaker. This harm is a slight or an insult; as such it is a wrong because it shows disrespect toward the speaker. In these cases the hearer fails to show respect to the speaker in the evaluative sense of treating her in accordance with her intellectual worth

²⁵ Matters would be different if she made a show of her boredom.

²⁶ The fact would be ignored if, for instance, a claim in direct contradiction to the assertion were made without any defence why this claim, and not the original assertion, is correct.

and in the recognition sense of treating her in a manner that accords with treating an agent *qua* agent. More specifically, the speaker is prevented from exercising fully her capacities as informant, that is to say, as someone capable of providing others with information. Hence, the wrong done has a distinctively epistemic dimension since it concerns individuals' ability fully to function as epistemic agents. I shall return to the issue in section 3 where I argue that illocutionary silencing, which occurs when speaker's intentions to make assertions are not recognised, can be humiliating and contribute to foster intellectual servility in those that are repeatedly subjected to it.

The wrongs caused by haughty behaviours. I began this section listing a range of behaviours characteristic of haughtiness. It should by now be clear that many of these exemplify precisely the sort of disrespectful behaviour which results from culpably breaking the norms of turn-taking. In this section I focus my attention on the practice of assertion to show why haughtiness is disrespectful to others both as speakers and as listeners.

One of the characteristic behaviours of those who are haughty is an unwillingness to treat the challenges made by others with the consideration that they are due. Thus the haughty tend not to listen to objections or not to take them as seriously as they deserve to be taken. The belief that others are intellectually inferior to them is one of the causes of this behaviour. It seems legitimate to take into account the knowledgeability of the challenger when deciding how seriously to take a challenge. For instance, one may take seriously a seemingly left of field challenge because it was issued by someone whom one holds in high regard. Because the haughty think that others are inferior, they end up giving less weight to their challenges. Usually, this belief that others are intellectually inferior is false, and the haughty should have known that it is false; therefore, they are epistemically at fault for giving to others less credibility than they deserve.

But there is another kind of reaction to challenges which is exhibited by the haughty and which the false belief explanation does not capture. Often the haughty interpret challenges to their assertions as affronts and insults and react angrily to them. They react to many challenges as if they were disrespectful. This behaviour could seem puzzling but it makes sense if haughty individuals are those who arrogate for themselves an exemption from the secondary commitment of assertion.

Haughty individuals are those who think of themselves as entitling others to believe what they say (and thus take themselves to be accountable for their assertions) but do not accept that they are answerable for their claims. In short the haughty think of themselves as authoritative asserters.²⁷ They perceive challenges to be insults because they interpret them as disrespectful in the evaluative sense of not treating them in accordance with their intellectual worth as authoritative informants. Because haughty individuals react angrily and refuse to answer proper challenges they harm their hearers who are entitled to ask questions. They may, in addition, wrong them if the angry response is belittling the questioner or demeaning her.

Haughtiness is also characteristic of a range of behaviours which are insulting and disrespectful to speakers. These involve ignoring or dismissing either their offer to be accountable or their offer to be answerable for their assertions. A range of behaviours typify these attitudes. They include: unwarranted scepticism often directed at the sanity of the speaker (which is frequently expressed by feigning surprise accompanied by an exclamation such as 'really!?'), use of sarcasm or other means to indicate to all present that someone's assertion is not to be taken seriously, wilful misunderstanding or obtusiveness, as well as vocal dismissal or ostentatious ignoring of somebody else's assertion.

II

Arrogance. There are, however, examples of arrogance that do not fit well the interpersonal characterisation presented above because they do not concern an agent's relation to other epistemic agents.²⁸ A scientist may be arrogant in the way in which he conducts his inquiry even when this is carried out by himself alone. He may, for instance, be unwilling to contemplate that he has made a mistake when an experiment produces results that are not credible. He may be stuck in his ways and be unwilling to consider adopting a new technique. All of these behaviours are signs of intellectual arrogance. None of these necessarily involve a sense of superiority or disrespect for other epistemic agents. It would seem possible to stand in perfect isolation, absolutely indifferent to the behaviours of

²⁷ Or at least they do when they manifest their haughtiness.

²⁸ This point is well made by Dillon (2004) to whose account of arrogance mine is greatly indebted.

others, and yet be arrogant. Arrogance, therefore, cannot consist merely in how one relates to others.

Overestimate of one's abilities. As in the interpersonal cases, intra-personal arrogance is not the same as over-estimating the worth of one's own abilities, skills, talents and achievements. Unless the arrogant individual is hubristic in his arrogance and claims for himself perfection, he may even have an accurate picture of his intellectual worth if he has much to be proud about. Conversely, it would seem possible to be mistaken about one's achievements or skills without being arrogant. Arrogance does not result from one's faulty or accurate estimate of one's own intellectual worth; rather, it is determined by the manner in which, and the reasons why, one cares about one's abilities, talents, faculties, skills and successes.

Arrogance as unaccountability. Arrogant individuals do not undertake the commitment to be accountable to others for their putative assertions. In what follows I first explain what is entailed by this failure to commit before providing some considerations for the claim that arrogance exhibits absence of accountability.

The accountability commitment of assertion is an acceptance that one is to blame if things go wrong because the assertion was not proper and one has no exemption, or excuse, or justification. By making the commitment one also conveys assurance to others that one has the required epistemic standing vis a vis the asserted content. This commitment is necessary if one's speech act is an assertion. But there are other ways of putting a propositional content forward as true. One can make a guess, a bet, or stick one's neck out. In none of these cases, one makes oneself accountable for having a required epistemic status toward the content. In these cases, however, one also does not take oneself to have given to others any defeasible reason to believe the content put forward as true.

The failure to commit that I have in mind is exemplified by a speech act that purports to put forward a propositional content as true and to have thereby given others some defeasible entitlement to believe the content without thinking of oneself as accountable to them for the propriety of the assertion. This speech act appears to be a kind of verdictive

since it has a content which purports to be true or false whilst possessing executive force, but in reality is an exercitive that masquerades as a verdict.²⁹

Imagine a person who is so full of self-confidence that he thinks that something must be true just because he thought of it. Hence, whenever a thought presents itself to him, if it grips him strongly enough, its sheer 'mine-ness' is sufficient in his mind to reassure him that he has the epistemic standing to its content which is required for assertion. I am not suggesting that this person consciously infers from mere the fact that he has a belief, that it must be correct in the way that would license asserting its content. Rather, I propose that because of one's immense self-confidence all of one's beliefs simply strike one as being such that one could assert their contents. One can imagine such an individual answering a query about the truth of one's claim by pointing out that it is *him* who has made it.

This person would behave like an umpire in a game of cricket, who pronounces that a player was out because *he* (the umpire) said that he was out. This umpire may not be implying that his mere saying-so makes it so, that is, he might not take his call to be a pure exercise of power. Instead, he may be pointing out that he is not accountable to anyone else for the correctness of the call.³⁰ He may do so without wishing to claim infallibility about the relevant facts; he is simply drawing attention to the executive function of his words.

Yet, when an umpire says: 'He was out because *I* said that he was out', we often suspect that something else is also afoot. We suspect that the umpire is in the grip of a delusion. We interpret him as saying that the fact that the verdict is his, makes the verdict correct. But if this is what he says, he must be deluded because verdicts are correct only if they get the facts right. Hence, the only way in which his making the verdict could make the verdict correct is if his saying that something is so, makes the facts so, so that his verdict based on the facts must be true.

The speech act I have in mind is an attempt to achieve this same impossible trick in ordinary conversation where no individual is an official authority. The speaker is attempting to vouchsafe for the propriety of his purported assertions, merely on the grounds that they

²⁹ A verdictive is the issuing of a verdict by an authority. It is intended as responsive to the facts, but has executive function. It is exemplified by a jury's pronouncement that a defendant is guilty or by an umpire's call that a player is out. It is different from an exercitive which is a decision resulting from an exercise of power. Exercitives are exemplified by a judge's sentence following the jury's verdict or by a referee's decision to award a penalty (Austin, 1976, pp. 153-7).

³⁰ As a matter of fact, cricket umpires these days are accountable since their calls can be reversed if they are shown to be false by means of technology. However, before the introduction of these devices, umpires were not accountable. They were not liable to any sanction or blame if their call turned out to be false.

are his claims, without taking himself to be accountable to anyone else. The speaker does not wish to imply that his mere saying-so makes the content of the assertion true, but he is convinced that the mere fact that the assertion is *his* somehow secures its correctness. However, unless one takes oneself to be infallible, the only way in which an assertion could be guaranteed to be correct simply because one has made it is if one delusively (and usually non-consciously) believes that one asserting that things are so, makes them so.³¹

Intuitively, the umpire's behaviour is best described as arrogant but it is not a kind of arrogance that involves disrespect toward anybody else. What we have here therefore is a different sort of arrogant behaviour. It consists in the attempt to pull off an impossible feat: unaccountable asserting.

The wrongs of caused by arrogant behaviour. The person who is arrogant by failing to acknowledge that he is accountable to others is likely to do them harm. He may also wrong them if he treats them with disrespect when they try to call him to account. Although these are likely consequences of arrogance, they are not an essential part of it, since an arrogant individual can become so aloof that he refrains from engaging with others.

There is a different wrong which is a necessary consequence of arrogance. By being arrogant, the arrogant shows recognition disrespect toward himself. I have described what the arrogant attempts to achieve as an impossible feat; because it is impossible, the arrogant is doomed to failure. The arrogant, because of his arrogance, is unable to make assertions. He thus denies to himself the possibility to exercise fully his capacities as informant. That is, to say he harms his own ability to function as an epistemic agent and as a result he shows disrespect toward himself.³²

Haughtiness and Arrogance. There is a difference between haughtiness and arrogance. The first is manifested as disrespect toward other speakers; the second is an unwillingness to submit oneself to the norms governing ordinary conversation and rational debate. Despite their different natures these putative vices are related and they often go hand in hand. I

³¹ Dillon finds the same diagnosis of the root cause of arrogance as a moral vice in Kant. In her view Kant thinks that '[o]ut of the desire to heighten or maintain his self-esteem, the arrogant person adjust the [moral] law and its standards to his actions so that he can think well of himself as doing his moral duty, no matter what in fact he does' (2004, p. 2008). See also, Marilyn Frye's discussion of the arrogant eye (1983, pp. 66-72).

³² For a similar diagnosis in the moral case, see Dillon's interpretation of Kant (2004, pp. 205-9).

suspect that haughty people will often manifest arrogant tendencies and vice versa. Nevertheless, it seems at least possible for someone to have become so arrogant that he does not relate to other epistemic agents at all, not even to show disdain towards them. Conversely, it also seems possible for someone to have nothing but contempt for all other epistemic agents without being so arrogant to presume that his saying-so makes it so.

III

*Haughtiness and Silencing.*³³ Haughty behaviour breaks the norms of turn-taking and of asserting. It also wrongs other agents by treating them with disrespect. In this section I argue that this behaviour causes further dysfunctions to epistemic practices and additional harms to other epistemic agents. First, I argue that culpable breaking of the norms of turn-taking locutionarily silences other conversants. I have claimed in section 1 that this behaviour is disrespectful; here I demonstrate that it causes a further harm by increasing the likelihood that those on the receiving hand of this behaviour develop the intellectual vice of timidity. Second, I show that some culpable breakings of the norms of asserting illocutionarily silence other informants. Whilst in section 1 I have explained why this behaviour is disrespectful, here I argue that it causes a further harm by making it likely that those who are the target of this treatment develop the intellectual vice of servility. Third, I make explicit an obvious consequence of these epistemic dysfunctions. They are obstacles to the generation and dissemination of knowledge.³⁴

Domination, subordination, and the cultivation of vice. The phenomena I discuss below are not merely the results of individual vicious psychologies. Their ultimate causes lie in social relations of domination and subordination which are systematic. Nevertheless, these social causes have effects on individual psychologies and contribute to shaping people's characters. My focus here is on these character traits and on how the intellectual vices of individuals distort epistemic practices so that (i) the dissemination of knowledge is impeded

³³ There is a large feminist literature on silencing. See for example Maitra (2009) and Fricker (2012).

³⁴ Haughtiness and arrogance also promote ignorance by causing individuals to deflate the credibility of informants.

and the preservation of ignorance is facilitated and (ii) other individuals are made to develop intellectually vicious character traits.

It is my contention, although for reasons of space, I cannot substantiate it here that relations of domination shape the psychology of members of dominant groups so that they are extremely likely to become haughty and arrogant. A particularly pernicious consequence of this state of affairs is that haughty and arrogant behaviour is most likely to be exhibited in interactions with members of subordinated groups since they are more likely to be judged as intellectually inferior, and are less likely to have the power required to put a stop to the inappropriate behaviour. Since such behaviour is often intimidating and humiliating, when it is encountered on a daily basis, it is likely to affect profoundly the psychology of those who are on its receiving hand. More specifically, it makes it more likely that they will develop the twin intellectual vices of intellectual timidity (as a result of intimidation) and servility (as a result of humiliation).

Locutionary silencing and intimidation. An individual is locutionarily silenced when she is literally prevented from speaking. Not all examples of such silencing are blameworthy. One may be exculpated; one may have an excuse or a justification. In other cases, however, the silence may be a response to an immediate threat, the result of violence, coercion, social pressure or manipulation. Sometimes it is a sort of adaptive preference due to 'life-long habituation' (Nussbaum 2001, p. 80). In this case, individuals 'choose' to remain silent, but their choice is not autonomous in so far as it is the result of coming to accept one's station, of making the best of a bad situation.

Many of the behaviours characteristic of haughtiness, described in section 1, coerce others into silence. When the haughty individual interrupts other speakers, arrogates the right to speak first, or occupies an unfair share of the available time for the conversation he directly prevents others from uttering their words. These actions are coercive because (i) they communicate to the other speakers that one would prefer that they would keep quiet (at least at that point), (ii) they indicate that if they do not keep quiet something unpleasant such as a shouting match would ensue, and (iii) the other speakers' silence is due to wanting to avoid the shouting match.³⁵

³⁵ For this analysis of coercion see Nozick (1969, pp. 441-5).

This kind of coercion does not involve physical violence or direct threats but in the long term it is very effective in changing speakers' preferences in favour of silence by increasing the burden associated with speaking out and by making the attempt to do so seem pointless. When one has always to struggle to get a word in edgeways, one may eventually give up in frustration. If the frustration is experienced on a regular basis, silence may soon become the best option. When this happens the person becomes habitually silent, but their silence is not freely chosen, it is the outcome of repeated unjust acts of locutionary silencing.

So understood locutionary silencing is a form of intimidation because it fosters intellectual timidity in its targets. Timidity is a form of resignation to being treated in less than respectful ways; it is manifested in a fear of speaking out to defend one's position; in a tendency to hide so that none notices one's presence or expects one to contribute to the conversation.³⁶ These behaviours are harmful to the individual who acquires them, because they eat at one sense of self-esteem, but are also harmful to the community of enquirers as they deny it of the contribution of some possible informants. Haughty behaviour when it locutionarily silences other people is one of the causes of these harms.

Illocutionary silencing and humiliation. An individual is illocutionarily silenced in her attempt to assert when one's purported assertion misfires due to lack of uptake.³⁷ These are cases where a speaker intends to make an assertion, but fails to do so because unless her intention is recognised no actual asserting has taken place. Given the account offered above of the commitments typical of asserting, we can say that a hearer fails to recognise that a speaker has made an assertion when she does not even acknowledge that a commitment to accountability has been made. Since accountability is a matter of being open to sanction by others if things go wrong, there is no accountability without recognition. If I intend to make myself accountable to others, but these others do not recognise my intention, then I simply cannot be accountable to them. Accountability requires mutual recognition. For this reason since to make an assertion is to make oneself accountable, failure to recognise this offer,

³⁶ An exploration of the complex relations between haughtiness, arrogance, timidity, vanity and servility as vices which are opposed to intellectual humility is beyond the scope of this paper.

³⁷ As with locutionary silencing, not all instances of illocutionary silencing are blameworthy.

makes the purported assertion null and void. The speech act has in Austin's terminology misfired.

An example of illocutionary silence would be when a woman's refusal to consent to sex is misunderstood as an expression of coyness (Langton, 1993, p. 321). Recently, a controversial politician claimed that, when he attempted to discuss macroeconomics in the context of negotiations with leaders of other countries, he was simply ignored. 'I might as well have sung the Swedish national anthem' he added in frustration. This episode captures well what is involved in illocutionarily silencing an asserter. In these cases the audience denies uptake so that the purported assertion, because of this lack, misfires. It might, as the politician said, as well have been a song.³⁸

In section 1 I have argued that haughty individuals are prone to dismiss or ignore the claims made by others. Whenever the dismissal is successfully, they manage illocutionarily to silence other individuals. Another arrogant way of achieving the same result is exemplified by the incident with which I begun this paper. This strategy is manifested in the patronising interjection "calm down, dear". The purpose of the interjection is to feign that the speaker is so emotional that her intentions cannot be recognised. In this manner the hearer is trying to gain legitimacy for an attempt to disable the speaker's speech and to reduce it to mere emoting.

Having one's claims ignored or dismissed, being made out to be so emotional that one's intentions cannot be even discerned, can be humiliating experiences. It is demeaning to be treated as incapable of engaging in rational argumentation, or as being unable to assume responsibility for one's claims. Over time, if one regularly faces these put downs, one will become increasingly discouraged from making future efforts. No one wants to be regularly humiliated and if one runs a high risk that this may happen whenever one tries to make a claim, one may well be inclined to prefer not to take a stand. In addition, the risk of put downs makes the burdens associated with the accountability and answerability commitments of assertion higher than they need to do be. These higher stakes may well convince one that the rational course of action is not to take the risk.

As a result illocutionary silencing may engender timidity in its targets but it may also cause them to become intellectually servile or obsequious. Servility is a form of excessive

³⁸ See <http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/07/exclusive-yanis-varoufakis-opens-about-his-five-month-battle-save-greece> [Accessed on 30 July 2015].

deference to the views held by other individuals. Those who are obsequious do not trust their own judgements but follow the views put forward by others. Whenever illocutionary silencing is deployed to prevent dissent, the silenced individuals will soon learn that it is less risky to share the views of those who are capable of silencing them. These individuals may bite their tongues, unless what they think coincides with powerful views. Over time, one may expect that because of cognitive dissonance such individuals may stop biting their tongues and simply defer to the opinions of others. When they do so, they have become servile.

Active Ignorance. The arguments above indicate that haughty behaviour is a cause of ignorance. It prevents people from speaking up and contributing whatever knowledge that they possess to the debate; it can cause their attempts to share knowledge by way of assertions to misfire. Less obviously, perhaps, haughtiness promotes ignorance in other ways. Because it fosters timidity and servility, usually in members of subordinated groups, haughtiness is one of the mechanism which keeps members of the less powerful groups in society ignorant and therefore at an epistemic disadvantage.

IV

Arrogance and Self-Delusion. In section 2 I have shown that arrogance is bounded up with delusional wishful thinking. If one acquires the frame of mind in which the “mine-ness” of a thought seems to guarantee its truth, one is likely to become prone to wishful thinking since one is attempting to carry out speech acts which are both decisions and verdicts. The desire that something is true, may lead one to decide that it is true, and to, therefore, to pronounce it to be true. As a result arrogance is likely to engender self-delusion, and consequently numerous false beliefs.

I conclude with a suggestion which, unfortunately, I cannot defend here. Arrogance and haughtiness, I contend, are responses to protect one self- esteem against other people’s real or imaginary challenges. Haughtiness is a way of dealing with inconvenient truths by ignoring and dismissing them. It is often adopted when one would rather not know that many of the achievements one takes credit for were in part made possible by one’s

unearned privileges. The strategies of ignoring and dismissing, however, have associated costs since it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that what the other person said but whose assertion one tried to prevent, was after, all true. Haughtiness, that is, helps one to ignore what one wants not to know, but it cannot help to address the fear that the ignored speech may have expressed a truth. Arrogance, I submit, is a more effective strategy. In its grip, one deludes oneself into believing that one saying-so makes it so. In this manner, inconvenient truths can be turned, in the eyes of the arrogant, into false accusations.

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