

# On Pride

*The morality  
and politics  
of an emotion*

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# Over trots

De moraliteit en politiek van een emotie

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# Unapologetic

## Introduction

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UTØYA, JULY 22

“The objective was not to kill 69 people at Utøya. The objective was to kill all of them” (Pidd 2012b). Anders Behring Breivik looks calm and well-groomed on the fourth day of his trial at the Oslo courthouse. About one year before uttering these chilling words, Breivik killed 77 people in two separate terror attacks. On July 22, 2011 he parked a white van in the heart of the government quarter of Norway’s capital. He left the car and walked away, leaving a note behind the windshield to apologize for any foul-smelling odors. Sewage works, he wrote down as the reason. In truth, the chemical smell of the fertilizer Breivik had used to concoct a home-made bomb had proven hard to conceal. Nine minutes after Breivik left the car it exploded, killing eight people. Meanwhile, Breivik had stepped into another, smaller car that he had parked around the corner. He drove it some 32 kilometers northwest of Oslo, towards the island of Utøya, where hundreds of teenagers had assembled for the summer gathering of the ruling Labor Party’s youth wing. Breivik had called ahead to inform the camp leaders about the Oslo bombing, and said that the police had sent him to reassure the teenagers on the island. He identified himself as a police officer, and was dressed the part. Breivik had bought a police uniform online and used fake police identification. When the camp leaders sent a ferry over to fetch him, there was no way for them to tell that Breivik was not intent on reassuring them at all. As soon as he set foot on the island, he opened fire on the campers. Breivik went about shooting undisturbed for a harrowing 72 minutes, until police finally arrived at the remote island. By then, he had killed another 69 people, most of them teenagers.

Anders Behring Breivik is a tall white Norwegian man with bright blonde, nearly white hair. His acts were those of a militant nationalist ‘pro-

tecting' the Norwegian people against the Islamization of Europe, as Breivik explains in the 1518-page manifesto he uploaded to the internet before the attacks. During his trial, Breivik explained why he targeted the gathering on Utøya. At the site some of the most promising and dedicated young progressivists were gathered, a group of teenagers voluntarily spending some time of their summers thinking and talking about political ideas. Breivik considered them "not innocent but legitimate targets because they were representatives of a "multiculturalist" regime he claims is deconstructing Norway's national identity by allowing immigration," as an article in the *Guardian* puts it (Pidd 2012a). While explaining his motives in the manifesto, Breivik claims that cultural conservatives are harassed and discriminated against. He writes about "the rape of Europe," (2011, 706) referring to the continent as "Eurabia" (739) and writing about the "warfare against whites," (350) among other things. He suggests that Muslims in Norway should either convert to Christianity and change their names to Christians ones, or be deported or executed. Islamic art in Europe should be destroyed and languages like Arabic, Urdu, Persian, and Somali banned (Seierstad 2019).

The days after his trial first started, newspapers all over the world displayed a picture of the blonde Norwegian, escorted by police officers, waving a clenched fist. Before taking seat in the defendant's chair, Breivik had greeted the audience and the judges with a raised fist. The sign was widely interpreted as Breivik showing that he had no remorse. A raised fist often carries a meaning of strength, perseverance, and victory. It calls to mind the 1968 protest at the Olympics, where two Black<sup>1</sup> athletes Tom-

1. I will consistently capitalize Black throughout this thesis, in compliance with the reasoning behind recent decisions of major institutions like the New York Times and Associated Press. In citations, I will adopt the original spelling of the author. The capitalization of Black aims to better reflect elements of shared history and cultural identity. This linguistic statement is specifically relevant in contexts like the U.S.A., where Black people share the common history of slavery, and are often unaware of specific roots in an African country. More on the reasoning behind this can be found in statements issued by the aforementioned news outlets. In Europe, it could be said that such an acknowledgment of a shared cultural identity (reflected in the capital B) is less urgent or less fitting, for the African Diaspora in Europe is a more recent phenomenon, and European Blacks might therefore be more inclined to identify as Ghanaian, Gambian, Senegalese, Congolese, or other, rather than as Black. I choose here, for matters of consistency, to also capitalize

mie Smith and John Carlos iconically raised their fists and bowed their heads on the stage to address discrimination of the Black population in the United States. Though for a wholly different purpose, Breivik, Smith, and Carlos raised their fists with a common message: we are proud, we are strong, and we will not be oppressed. During the trial, Breivik kept up this attitude, never once repenting what he did, and seizing any opportunity to emphasize that what he did was right and needed to be done. He was eager to explain himself, even right after the attack had ended, said a police spokesperson (Beaumont 2011).

A Guardian journalist writes that “Breivik boasted that his was the most ‘spectacular and sophisticated’ attack by a nationalist militant since the second world war” (Pidd 2012a). During the five-year period that he spent plotting the attack, mostly on a farm two hours northeast of Oslo, his cause had become all-consuming. His country and his people needed protection from the threat of Islam, and it was all too important that he should spread the word by having his words read and his actions seen. He called the attacks the “book-launch” of his manifesto (Seierstad 2019). Breivik was later diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder by court psychiatrists. When doing research for a book about Breivik, the journalist Åsne Seierstad sent Breivik questions by mail, which he answered from prison. Seierstad writes that in his attempt to paint a portrait of Breivik, he found “a life full of shame, failures, abuse and rejections. A boy who never got the attention or care a child deserves; a rejected, uncool teenager; a man who in his late 20s moved in with his mother and mostly played video games. Isolated and angry, but with newfound friends on the dark web, he decided how he would be seen, heard, recognized and feared. He plotted his attack with an audience in mind” (2019). Breivik wanted recognition, for him and for his people, and for the threat he claimed to see to both.

Black when referring to the Diaspora, if not to acknowledge a shared culture, then at least to reflect a shared (though not homogenous) experience of being an ‘other’ in a predominantly and normatively white context.

## BAKER, MILK, AND THE STONEWALL GIRLS

Now consider a second story.

Gilbert Baker was, apart from a gay rights activist, a self-taught seamster. In 1978 his friend Harvey Milk asked him to design a symbol for the gay community to flaunt at the upcoming Gay Freedom Day Parade in San Francisco. The only relevant symbol for the gay community up until then had been an upside-down pink triangle, used by Nazis to stigmatize and visibly identify gay people (Waxman 2018). There was a need for a new symbol designed by someone from within the community. The new symbol needed to be an inclusive symbol of pride, not one used to confer stigma. It had to be something visual that gay people could choose to positively identify with, not an enforced symbol meant to categorize and ‘other’ the gay community.

What Baker came up with will not surprise the reader. He lined up strips of colored fabric and arranged them like a rainbow, each color representing a specific value within the gay community. The rainbow flag is now widely recognized as either symbolizing gay pride, or public appreciation and support of the gay community. Its vivid colors show up everywhere – from bumper stickers to rainbow crossroads (Belga 2017). The U.S. White House was lit in the iconic rainbow in June 2015, following the Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-sex marriage (Mindock 2017). Harvey Milk and Gilbert Baker gave a visual meaning to a movement that was bound to emerge, given the growing gay rights movements and activism. Now gay people had a flag they could waive, something to unite them intersectionally (or at least, this was the idea). The gay pride was born.

The history of the gay pride starts well before the universally acknowledged symbol came into play, though. Katharine McFarland Bruce delved into this history and describes how the now famous parades have a little-known precursor in the U.S.: The Annual Reminder. The participants in these protests followed a very different strategy from what we are used to seeing nowadays in the flamboyant and cheerful pride parades. Each fourth of July between 1965 and 1969, a group of business-like dressed people would gather in silence in front of the Philadelphia city hall. They held up signs that read: “homosexuals should be judged as individuals.”

To gain support for gay rights, the protestors sought to distance themselves as far as possible from the images they were made out to be, those of dangerous freaks, perverts, or the mentally ill. A gay person is just like a straight person and therefore deserves the same rights, that was the message. As Bruce puts it: “Rather than challenging the heteronormative cultural code of meaning, with its binary gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality, homophile activists stressed that being gay did not mean breaking with traditional femininity or masculinity” (2016, 34-35).

But that strategy soon changed. While the protests went on, new U.S. laws were introduced that made gay sex illegal in most states, and prohibited congregation of gays in bars (38). For many gay rights activists, the sense of urgency felt ever more pressing. Then, on June 28, 1969, New York police raided a bar supposedly because it served alcohol without a license – the real reason was that they served alcohol to gays, and such bars were never granted licenses by the New York alcohol commission. The patrons of the Stonewall Inn fought back. They barricaded the doors, trapping the police inside. The word of the raid spread like wildfire, and soon both police back-up and more gay protestors gathered at the scene. The full-blown riot looked nothing like the Annual Reminder. A formation of predominantly Black trans women facing uniformed policemen chanted: “We are the Stonewall girls. We wear our hair in curls. We wear no underwear. We show our pubic hair. We wear our dungarees. Above our nelly knees!” (40). Feminine and extravagant-looking gay men stood side to side with less marginalized members of the gay community.

Importantly, the latter group did not distance themselves from the first. Instead, they contributed by spreading the story of the riots in more mainstream media, to which the more marginalized gay community had little influential access. The strategy of the Annual Reminder had been to act ‘as normal people do.’ But at the Stonewall riots, the gay community used another argument to show that they too deserve equal treatment: their sexual orientation is nothing to apologize for. Cross-gender dressing, flaunting femininity as a man and vice versa, or identifying as anything else than cisgender, is not a moral flaw. Instead of downplaying this part of their identities, the gay community would now celebrate it and demand nothing less than full acceptance. The gay pride as we know it today still embodies this idea of celebration, of making the gay identity public and

with it the many rainbow-colored shades sexual orientation and gender identity can have.

## TWO TALES OF PRIDE

Though the first and the second story are worlds apart, they have at least one thing in common. Both make an appeal to the same core emotion: pride. The gay pride does so quite explicitly by taking the emotion as its very name. It takes only a visit to a pride parade to know that variations on “proud to be queer” or “out and proud” are the most common slogans at the gay pride. Bruce describes the new course of the gay rights movement after the Stonewall riots as being “unapologetic”. The movement encourages LGBTQ+ people to embrace their sexual orientation and identity, and refuse any label of shame that they are too often made to feel.

Breivik claims to come from a place of pride as well. In his internet manifesto, the words pride and proud are amply used, in sentences like: “pain is temporary, after all, while pride is eternal,” (2011, 1016) and “be proud of your ethnic group – be proud of belonging to the Nordic tribe” (1228). Breivik, too, claims to be part of a group which has been denied a sense of pride. He writes: “we need to reclaim pride in our heritage, which has been systematically taken away from us” (708). He argues that Europeans are taught “self-loathing” and wonders whether there is still some “Western pride and resistance left in Europe” (739). He justifies his racist convictions as the logical consequence of national pride. But his pride is narcissistic, and reflects misplaced entitlement, arrogance, and megalomania, whereas the gay pride is usually thought of as empowering and liberating.

What is behind this Janus-faced nature of pride? Historically the appreciation of pride has fluctuated more than that of any other emotion.<sup>2</sup> In ancient Greece, pride was generally regarded as a virtue. Under the influence of Christianity, pride then became the deadliest of sins. Pride has started wars, but could likewise be a motivation to cease fire. Malcolm X urged black people to be proud, but just as often we hear not to let pride

2. See chapter one for a history of pride and its fluctuating evaluations.

get in the way. We tend to disagree in our evaluations on personal pride, too. Even though evolutionary psychologists explain pride as a possible tactic of intimidation (Cheng, Tracy, and Henrich 2010), we rarely think very highly of someone who is overtly proud, and appreciate humility instead. Yet pride can be a motivator to achieve our goals, to be ambitious, and to aim high. Why are some instances of pride evaluated negatively and others positively, and why do we find it so hard to explain what sets those apart?

Breivik's story is rightfully depicted as an act of terror, not in the least because he committed violent crimes, killing 77 people. But if Breivik had opted to organize a march with a flag representing white or European pride, would we be equally able to explain why we find his message appalling? He makes a common argument that, when pushed, turns out to be quite a philosophical curveball. The argument boils down to this: why would another group be allowed to form allegiance, carry their pride outwards, and even be protective of it, whereas my group is not? Breivik writes in his manifesto:

I don't see why we shouldn't actively strive for the establishment of a Nordic League propagating Nordic interests, following the design of the Arab League. After all, why shouldn't we, Scandinavians, Nordics, Germans and to a large degree Brits, Americans, Polish, Czechs, Swiss, people from Benelux and Balticum be allowed to feel pride in our ethnic heritage and fight for our ethnic interests? Shouldn't WE have the EQUAL right to actively pursue and protect our interest based on ethnic origin when Arabs, Pashtuns, Africans, Kurds, Tibetans, Aborigines, Native Americans, Rom/Gypsies (sic) are allowed to? Why are we labeled as Nazi monsters when we do and they are tolerated, encouraged and even supported financially? (2011, 1158)

Breivik's train of thought is not unusual. The appeal for equality is a common argument made by groups who feel underrecognized because another group is gaining ground, or as it is often experienced, stepping on the first group's turf.<sup>3</sup> Francis Fukuyama describes how the swing to the right

3. I take this way of putting it from Virginia Woolf who describes how she, as a woman in Oxford, was perceived to be *stepping on men's turf*. The phrasing was brought to my attention by Kate Manne's *Down Girl* (2017).



in the U.S. is in part due to a feeling of misrecognition of small-town middle-class America (2018). He discusses how, by the presidential election in 2016, a large but relatively silent group had come to feel marginalized twice-over: once by the coming of new, young, immigrant groups on their turf, and secondly by the intellectual elite living in the urban areas. In *Strangers in Their own Land*, Arlie Russell Hochschild asks us to imagine a line of people waiting to pass through a big door marked 'The American Dream.' Suddenly, those people notice others cutting in line: black people, women, gay people, immigrants. And the cutters are helped by the elites that are already inside, or at the very front of the line. Hochschild describes the distress of those people who feel like they are patiently waiting their turn as a feeling of misrecognition (2016, 127). Fukuyama and Hochschild are not alone in stressing that the resentment that fed into the vote for Trump had more to do with misrecognition than with economic fairness or distribution of goods. Michael Sandel argues that the loss of social esteem and the corrosion of the dignity of work is at the heart of the populist backlash in Europe and the U.S. in recent years (2020). The pull of populist parties plays into feelings of misrecognition, of being unfairly passed by, cut off, humiliated or forgotten. Feelings of hurt pride, in other words.

In 2014 the 'menimist' hashtag went viral on twitter. It was coined to bundle statements coming from men directed at feminists that supposedly ignore that men are discriminated against, too, often told to shut up or assumed to be sexist, and asked to distance themselves from their stained male identity. If women should celebrate their womanhood, then why is it so misplaced for men to do the same, the common argument went. More recently, a group affiliated with the alt-right organized a Straight Pride Parade in Boston, along the same route as the annual Boston Gay Pride. The organizers, who went by the name 'Super Fun Happy America,' claimed that straights are an oppressed minority, and said that "if gays can be proud, so can straights." According to one of the organizers, straight people are unfairly treated, among other things because the mayor refused to hang the straight pride flag next to the already in-place rainbow flag at city hall (Dekeyser 2019).

We are eager to encourage women or gay people or other historically marginalized and socially salient groups to take pride in their identities, but

we do the opposite when it comes to privileged groups. It seems true that this same emotion can be corrupt in one case, and wholesome in another. But why is that the case? What mechanisms are at play when it comes to feeling proud? Is pride in itself an emotion we should distrust, or can it have a valuable place in our moral lives? And if so, why does the moral value of pride seem to depend on *who* is experiencing the emotion?

### THE FAT RELENTLESS EGO

The emotion of pride of course extends well beyond the pictures of pride I have painted above. And its other forms are at least as timely. Anders Breivik turns out to be helpful to paint a picture of multiple forms of pride: he is proud of his group, yes, but both the court psychologists and his biographer agree that Breivik's deeds revolved mainly about a single thing: Anders Behring Breivik himself (Seierstad, 2019). A Guardian article from 2015 points out that narcissistic tendencies are the common trait between many so-called 'lone wolf' mass-killers (Manne 2015). "Delusions of grandeur, a fear of failure, and a need for admiration" turn up as a common denominator in the life stories of terrorists. They seek, quite literally, to go out with a bang.

Narcissism isn't synonymous with pride, but it is quite often used as at least a close sibling of pride, together with words like vanity, grandiosity, or arrogance. What binds these attitudes together is an obsessive involvement with the self. According to several testimonies, Breivik is extremely concerned with his appearance. He was mocked for wearing make-up, had cosmetic surgery done on his nose, after supposedly being teased for his 'Arab nose' (Wright 2013, 159), and he refused to have his mugshots taken, urging the police to use a photoshopped version that he had attached to his online manifesto instead (Seierstad 2015). Breivik likes to be in control of how others view him, his appearance, and his message. Seierstad writes that the Norwegian saw the trial as a "stage on which to perform." In his manifesto, Breivik presents himself as "knight justiciar grand master" of the order of the Knights Templar, an anti-Muslim militant group. But apart from Breivik's manifesto, there is no proof for its existence. When greeting the court psychiatrists during his trial, the first thing Breivik said

to them was that surely “every forensic psychiatrist in the world probably envied them the task of assessing him.” On July 22, 2011, Anders Behring Breivik went from an anonymous Norwegian to a world-famous terrorist, his name and face now impossible to wipe from history.

“In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego,” the philosopher Iris Murdoch warns us (1970, 64). The reason why people struggle to be moral is because they are often driven by egocentric mechanics that obstruct their vision from seeing what lies beyond the confines of the self, her argument goes. The self is greedy, and prone to fill the world with grandiose fantasies of the self that lead us away from the good. The direction of attention should be outwards to be moral, not inwards, Murdoch argues. The egoistic self is similarly portrayed as the antagonist of morality in Bernard Williams’s famous essay bundle *Problems of the Self* (1973). The principle where one acts only in self-interest, a principle which Williams calls ‘ethical egoism’, stands in stark contrast to morality. Altruism, or the general disposition to regard the interests of others, is the moral principle. Williams’ and Murdoch’s views align with an intuitive idea of morality: being good is not done by stomping your elbows, but rather by extending your hands.

Martha Nussbaum sees a tight-knit relation between the obsession with the self and anger, an emotion she calls morally untrustworthy. She explains how anger can be the result of “being wrapped up in the narcissistic wounds of the ego” (2016, 52) and might reveal a protective concern for rank or status, rather than a true concern for justice.<sup>4</sup> A proneness to

4. Nussbaum’s stronger claim that all anger should be morally distrustful is not uncontroversial. Critics argue, rightly so in my opinion, that anger can indeed be apt in an unjust world, and that denying that aptness results in further oppression of those for whom anger is an apt response to their social situation. Some notable philosophers who have made a version of this argument include Amia Srinivasan (2018), Soraya Chemaly (2018), Alison Bailey (2018), Audre Lorde (1984), and Marilyn Frye (1983). In the conclusion of this thesis, I come back to these discussions in the context of pride and affective injustice. For now, it suffices to understand that at least in some cases, anger can result from a dented ego, a claim even Nussbaum’s critics would probably not deny. Such anger might be inapt, in Srinivasan’s vocabulary, or normatively problematic, as Nussbaum describes it, but the ego can be a source of anger nonetheless.

violence is often connected to a concern with status, specifically to the loss of it (Gilligan 1996). Those who attach an inordinate amount of value to their status, material, social, or otherwise, might lash out in violence when they see this status threatened, to retaliate or in an attempt to restore the lost rank. Kate Manne shows this phenomenon at work in the gruesome case of family annihilation, the rare but recurrent phenomenon where (predominantly) men mass-murder their closest family (2017, 124). She describes the story of Chris Foster, a man who had ‘made it’ according to the prevalent norms of success. He had made a large amount of money with the invention of a safety valve for oil rig drilling. He had a wife, a daughter, several mistresses, a fleet of cars, and a mansion to house them all (except maybe the mistresses). One day, he shot both his unsuspecting wife and daughter in the head, before committing suicide. Manne points out the reason: he had gone bankrupt and was about to lose everything. The loss of status seemed too unbearable for Foster, so he’d rather leave the world and take his loved ones with him.

## SOCIAL ‘ME’-DIA

What philosophers have had to say about egoism and the concern with status is reminiscent of a more widespread discourse today. Popular media articles that paint a picture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century zeitgeist not rarely mention narcissism and self-involvement as a defining characteristic of our times. “How self-love got out of control,” declares the title of a recent article in *The Guardian* (Hinsliff 2018). The author describes narcissism as a “buzzword,” and writes that our current culture “risks creating a generation excessively wrapped up in itself.” Being focused on the self cuts us off from others, leaving us feeling isolated and alone. That in turn reinforces narcissism and pride, which have become “a psychic necessity” in the “modern lonely age,” Stanford Lyman argues (1978, 157). In the subtitle of the *Guardian* article, the author mentions what she takes to be the three main culprits: social media, reality TV, and politics.

Modern technology allows us to share thoughts, achievements, and photographs that feed live into the world, uncensored. Facebook urges us to do so by greeting us with the message “what are you doing?”. We have

an audience at our disposal at all times. The internet makes us possible contesters in the attention economy, a term that extends far beyond its original usage as the “new currency of business” (Davenport and Beck 2001). The attention of others is a scarce and finite good, and those who present themselves on the internet enter into competition for this finite resource. Social media algorithms reinforce the competition: if your ‘stories’ are rarely watched on Instagram, you literally move to the back of the line. The algorithm of the photo-sharing app works in such a way that updates from the accounts that you follow are not chronologically shown, but they appear on your feed in order of how much attention you have given them in the past (McGoogan 2016). In reaction to that, accounts started asking their followers to ‘turn the notifications on’ on them, to avoid falling behind in the competition for attention.

While asking us to present ourselves, the internet at the same time gives us a glimpse of what is possible by showing others: we see them building lives that we may have dreamt up for ourselves, or exploring options that we might now want to consider. We are unmistakably aware of our place in the world, because we know about the place of others. The internet is a double-edged sword: it both shows us what is possible for us, and how little of it we have done. Even if we focus on others and their achievements, we are still comparing it to the self, often worrying about our own achievements and status. It seems like there is no way to get out from under the diagnosis of being self-absorbed. Either viewing or being viewed, the diagnosis is clear: social media and the internet feed people’s self-centeredness.

One way to counter this diagnosis is by pointing out the fact that the so-called Generation Z (those born between 1996 and 2010) are quitting social media in large numbers. A recent study shows that 34% of the Gen Z social media users have quit social media entirely, and 64% have taken a break from one or more platforms (Origin 2019). But, the sceptic might say that the move away from social media need not indicate that generation Z is also moving away from a focus on the self. The subjects in the study reported that the platforms made them anxious, stressed or depressed, and 24% said social media had made them feel bad about themselves. Quitting social media is a part of that other growing trend: self-care. The self-care industry has boomed over the past years. A google search offers

life advice focusing on such self-care as buying a scented candle, avoiding screens in bed and moisturizing the skin. Critics see this trend as a feeding ground for ‘entitled snowflakes’ that are repeatedly told how special they are. The navel-gazing that is called characteristic of our times hasn’t stopped, because young people are moving away from self-representation and towards self-care. In both cases, the focus remains the self.

But self-appreciation need not be morality’s enemy. The many different ways in which a positive view of the self can go awry need our attention, especially when it leads to a misplaced sense of entitlement, to narcissism, to arrogance, to being forgetful of others, and in the worst cases to Breivik’s pride and megalomania. What is wrong with these attitudes is not that they are about pride, but that they have a different idea of what it means to be proud.

## OVERVIEW

Pride is about appreciating the self, but there are many ways of doing so. The Stonewall girls were appreciating themselves by insisting on their equal treatment. Anders Behring Breivik was appreciating ‘his’ people by insisting on their independence. A person who is proud of winning an award is appreciating herself, and a proud mother is appreciating *her* offspring. All these forms of pride seem intuitively different, and carry moral weight to different extents. Yet we call all of these attitudes pride. Why does pride have such different moral faces, and how do we know which of its faces are good? In order to answer that, we have to know what people are getting at when they use the word pride. Then, we can start to figure out which uses of pride point to desirable or valuable emotions, and which do not. Ultimately, we can use the conceptual tools to understand and evaluate some of the most blatant examples of pride in contemporary society.

The main argument of this thesis is that pride can be understood as an umbrella emotion warranted by three different attitudes: self-esteem, self-respect, and self-love. The chapters reflect these three attitudes, as each of the three main chapters (chapters two to four) thematizes one of them. The structure of the chapters is such that each focuses on one or several real-life cases and the role pride plays in these cases. The chapters

are written in such a way that they can be read somewhat independently from one another, though they of course complement and refer to each other. If you are most interested in self-love, for example, the final chapter could also be read in isolation, or you could start by reading the chapter on self-love and work your way through the thesis backwards.

In chapter one, I set the scene by discussing some historic accounts of pride and by drawing some lines of thought in current philosophy on the topic. I distinguish between descriptive accounts of pride and the normative evaluation of pride, and between fittingness of pride and all-things-considered appropriateness of pride. I then contend and explain that one reason that normative evaluations of pride have differed is because of differing descriptive accounts of pride. I go on to argue that pride might be understood to accompany three different attitudes, and that each of these have a different moral grammar. We cannot, therefore, develop a single account of pride evaluating it as either a good or a bad moral emotion, but rather should look carefully at what the attitude underlying a certain case of pride is. Depending on what we find, I then argue that different standards of moral scrutiny apply for the different attitudes underlying pride. One of the problems with pride is, I contend, that we fail to distinguish the different attitudes that pride can reveal, but rather conflate and confuse them.

In chapter two I focus on the ways in which pride can be warranted by self-esteem. Pride in its paradigm form is often the kind of pride warranted by increases in (or the fear of decrease of) self-esteem: winning a competition, developing a skill, achieving something, and so on. I discuss this form of pride as a valuable form of motivation, though one with important disclaimers. I paint six pitfalls, ways in which self-esteem can go wrong, including the unfittingness of pride, the excessive focus on getting esteem rather than being worthy of esteem, the confusion of self-centeredness with pride, the conception of esteem as competition-based and its problems, the wrongful conclusion of overall superiority based on excellence in one trait, and the circumstantial inappropriateness of self-esteem pride. I discuss a fundamental objection to pride as a moral motivator, and argue that self-esteem pride can be read as a second-best motivator if true moral motivation is absent. The good outcome is thus overdetermined by both self-esteem pride and moral motivation. I end the

chapter with some recommendations to prevent or mitigate these pitfalls. I transition into chapter three by holding on to the problem of superiority that was sketched as one of the pitfalls of pride. Self-esteem pride might, I argue, feed into wrongful conclusions of overall superiority. The mistake here is that the hierarchical logic of self-esteem is confused with the egalitarian logic of self-respect.

In chapter three I develop a notion of self-respect and its relation to pride. I deploy the case of Black Lives Matter (BLM) as an illustration of pride that is used to protest unequal treatment. I present self-respect as the idea that one is deserving of treatment appropriate to one's personhood, to the same extent that any other human being is deserving of such treatment. This treatment includes but is not restricted to basic rights and non-humiliation. The pride that can be warranted by self-respect takes on the form of protest against ill-treatment. I distinguish the logic of self-respect from that of self-esteem by arguing that whereas self-esteem is governed by ideas of ranking and hierarchy, self-respect is characterized precisely by ideas of equality. Furthermore, inherent to respect is the notion of entitlement: respect is something that can rightfully be claimed if it is lacking, for every human has a right to it. Esteem, on the other hand, is not something we can claim, but rather should be given on a voluntary basis. I then use the Anders Breivik case to explain how the logic of (self-)esteem is wrongfully applied to (self-)respect, leading to harmful claims of superiority under the banner of equality.

In the final chapter before the conclusion, chapter four, I develop an account of self-love. I end chapter three by pointing to a gap unfulfilled by self-esteem pride and self-respect pride. Some instances of pride can neither be explained by an increase in self-esteem, nor by self-respect, but reflect a different attitude of self-valuing. I propose that this gap can be filled in by self-love, and I develop an account of self-love as really looking at the self. Iris Murdoch plays a prominent role in the development of this account of self-love, as I argue that her theory of love not only leaves room for such an account, but also provides the very tools to develop it. In the development of this novel understanding of self-love, I debunk the two common ideas that self-love makes the self both uncritical and unable to look outside of the self. Instead, I show that self-love requires us to look at the self critically, and is conducive to loving others. Self-love



therefore presents itself as a fundamental ally to social progress. I argue that self-love requires that we see past the fantasies we have of ourselves and try to see the self for what it really is. Such self-love prevents the self both from looming too large and from looming too small. It can debunk images of the self as grand and almighty as well as images of the self as small and unworthy, and instead encourages us to see ourselves as floating somewhere in between big and small, as vulnerable and dependent animals that are nonetheless infinitely precious.

In the conclusion, finally, I consider whether pride presents us with a case of affective injustice. I explore whether the case can be made that pride is discouraged and punished in some harsher than in others, simply due to its logic of taking and claiming space. I draw some parallels with recent philosophical work on anger, and suggest that for pride, too, we should consider whether our gendered or racialized or other expectations interfere with how we perceive pride. I then conclude that evaluating pride, as has been the main goal of my research, requires us to understand the emotion within its context. The three main chapters of this thesis give us some conceptual tools to consider who gets to be proud in the *normative* sense: who deserves, all-things-considered, to be proud, and for whom is it good to be proud? In the final pages of this thesis, I suggest that we should consider who gets to be proud in the *factual* sense as well. Who is allowed, even encouraged, to be proud, and who suffers social reprimands? If it is true, as I argue in the body of the thesis, that pride can in particular cases be an ally to social justice, then we need to guard that we follow through on the theory in practice.

The working title of this dissertation was ‘Birds of a feather.’ For months during the final stages of writing this title headed my document. For the sake of clarity, I swapped it at the very end for the current title. The saying from which I drew that initial title, ‘birds of a feather flock together’, indicates that people who share a certain trait, like an interest or a preference, are naturally drawn to one another and inclined to form groups. In one sense that could refer to group pride – groups who share a trait take pride in this trait – but there are more layers to this alternative title. The main point of the thesis is to show that even if self-esteem, self-respect, and self-love similarly warrant pride, they are different nonetheless. They flock together, like the birds in the title, under the banner

of pride, for they appear alike, but they require us to take quite different moral stances.

If there is one takeaway throughout the thesis, it is that we as humans struggle to reconcile two sides of our self-understanding. On the one hand, we are precious and elevated as humans with dignity who strive for independence, completeness and self-realization. We are full of capabilities and are uniquely and incomparably valuable. Yet we also live in the full realization that we are ‘mere’ animals. We are dependent and vulnerable in all our preciousness. Pride can be a way in which we deny this dichotomy in the self. We overestimate ourselves in pride, we deny our vulnerability when we are too proud, pride gets in the way when we fail to admit to our own fallibility. But pride, as I argue in the final chapter, can also be precisely what enables us to really look at ourselves and come to terms with our dichotomous existence. Self-love pride allows us to see ourselves beyond the dichotomy, not as inhabiting two opposing selves but rather as embodying both at once. As the working title went, *as birds*, we are feathered in unique patterns.

Feathers generally call to mind visions of pride. Think of the peacock spreading its colored tail, or the saying that a prideworthy achievement is ‘a feather in one’s cap’. In my mother tongue, we give metaphorical feathers (*pluimen*) when we congratulate someone on an achievement.<sup>5</sup> We are indeed mere animals, like birds. But just look at all those feathers!

5. In Dutch, the word ‘feather’ can be translated as either ‘*veer*’ or ‘*pluim*’. ‘*Pluim*’ is the translation that is used in the context of pride, and *pluimen* can be given metaphorically to congratulate someone.



# 1

## The forbidden fruit

### Setting the scene

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Historically, two different sets of questions have played center stage in the philosophical literature on pride. The conceptual questions ponder what pride *is*. What are we getting at when we use the word? How does pride relate to other attitudes or emotions like self-centeredness, vanity, narcissism, self-love, and so on? What kind of a thing is pride? Is it an emotion? An attitude? A belief about the self? What is the structure of pride? Are there any necessary or sufficient conditions to feel pride? Can we determine certain specific behaviors that are linked to pride, like an inflated chest or a tall posture? These questions are descriptive, and their answers do not require us to take a moral stance on pride just yet. The latter happens only when we ask further normative questions: is pride good? Where does pride fit into our idea of morality? Why is pride either good or bad? If it is bad, is it a vice, and if it is good, a virtue? Can we delineate circumstances under which pride is either morally good or bad, and what are they?

Of course what we think pride is will have an effect on the place in morality we ascribe to it. The descriptive and the normative questions are good to disentangle in principle, but often hard to distinguish in practice. Philosophers have disagreed on both questions related to pride, but perhaps more than with any other emotion on the normative question. The place pride can have in morality has been evaluated in ways ranging from complete condemnations of the emotion, to defenses of pride that call the emotion the crown of all virtues or a useful tool for social empowerment. The main reason for this discrepancy of value ascribed to pride, I believe, can be traced back to the descriptive question. Philosophers have

placed quite different attitudes or emotions under the ‘pride’ umbrella.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRIDE

A short historical detour illustrates how philosophers have answered the descriptive question differently. I will use pride’s history to show that oppositions on the normative front can often be rephrased as disagreements on what pride is. I highlight some historical conceptions of pride without pretending to paint a comprehensive picture of all philosophical thought on pride. In the next few pages, I aim to briefly explore the possibility that the discussion between philosophers on pride could be clarified by focusing on their conceptual definitions of pride. The historical conceptions of pride that still resonate in our current ideas about the emotion are tripartite: pride is understood as the emotion that can accompany either attitudes of self-esteem, self-respect, or self-love.

Aristotle writes about *megalopsychia*, often translated as pride. But just as often, the translation reads ‘magnanimity’ or ‘greatness of soul.’ Under his understanding of the concept, *megalopsychia* is the golden and virtuous mean between the vices of *pusillanimity*, living under one’s full potential, and *vanity*. The proud person (proud man, in Aristotle’s days) is he who believes he is worthy of great things, while also in fact being worthy of these things. To Aristotle, the realization that one is indeed virtuous and good, is “the crown of all virtues” (2011, IV.3), the icing on the virtue-cake, so to say. *Megalopsychia* is the “self-consciousness of virtue that involves self-knowledge, accurate judgment, correct values, and an appropriate concern for these things” (Dillon 1995a, 8). To know that one is good is better than not knowing, since knowledge of the self is preferable over ignorance, Aristotle holds. Those who are good, but do not know it, are unduly humble. And those who are not good, can consequently not be truly proud. They must defer to *vanity*, the unjustified belief that one is worthy of great things.

Aristotle’s idea of pride is a very demanding one. Only the truly virtuous person can be properly proud. But virtue is in Aristotle’s philosophy a goal that most regular people never obtain. Aristotle’s theory of virtue is a perfectionist one: we can strive to come as close to the good as we can, but it remains a goal on the horizon that we may never fully reach (Miller

2007, 18). Aristotle's theory of pride should therefore not be read as an encouragement to be proud, but rather an encouragement to keep striving for virtue, since unless one is truly and overall virtuous, pride can never be proper. Pride is a reward worth striving for, but not easily granted.

Aristotle mentions honor as well, as distinct from pride. It is something the proud man welcomes only on the condition that the honor is given by the right people and for the right reasons, not "from casual people on trifling grounds" (2011, IV.3). We value the regard of someone we esteem more than someone we find reprehensible. The truly proud person does not merely welcome any sort of admiration or praise. She is skeptical when it comes from a vicious person. Aristotle taps into a strong intuition: the praise of my mother, who I find both virtuous and knowledgeable, is more important to me than the praise of a follower on Facebook who I know to endorse racist and misogynistic views, for instance. Even stronger, I would grow skeptical of myself and the views I have defended that made him applaud me. *Who* praises us matters.

The praise of others is not the first source of pride, as Aristotle mentions, but can be a test for what we think to be true about ourselves. The goods of fortune, like wealth or class, can contribute to megalopsychia, through the honorable regard that they can bring about, but they are not good reasons for honor. Aristotle argues that only the morally good man can be truly proud. The proud person also wishes to be superior, according to Aristotle, in the sense that he feels wary of asking for services or help. He refuses to be servile.

Roughly a millennium after Aristotle wrote about megalopsychia in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Gregory the Great, the 64<sup>th</sup> pope of the Catholic Church, formulated a classification of Christian sins and virtues. At the top of his list of so-called capital vices is precisely that attitude that Aristotle dubbed 'the crown of all virtues': pride (*superbia*). Pride is the forbidden fruit: its sweet taste may be appealing, those who give into it commit the greatest of sins. Saint Augustine calls pride a "love misdirected at oneself instead of God" (Chuang 2017, 125). Pride mistakes the self for the ultimate object of love, and places the self above God in that sense. If we can disregard God in such a way, we may as well throw all regard for him out the window. This is why pride is the deadliest of all sins: it opens the doors for all the other sins. What inhibits us from being

greedy, lustful, or envious, when we have already deemed ourselves more valuable than God? Thomas Aquinas condemns pride as the mother of all sins, because the proud man “aims higher than he is,” (Timpe and Tognazini 2017, 221). The moral danger of pride lies in the fact that it can be built on a distorted belief about reality. The proud man is he who wants to overstep who he is. Pride is especially vicious, according to Aquinas, because it is inordinate, not proportionate, excessive. But an appreciation of the self is not entirely condemned in Christian thought. Self-love has a leading role to play in the Bible’s second commandment “Love thy neighbor as thyself”. The self-love Augustine condemns is a very specific form of self-love, that which “aspires to imitate God’s power” (Chuang 2017, 125). But other forms of self-love he calls “intrinsically benign” (125).

What the Christian tradition describes as the capital sin sounds a lot like the vice that Aristotle also condemns: that of vanity. A distorted view of the self is precisely what Aristotle thinks stands in the way of proper pride. “He who thinks himself worthy of great things, being unworthy of them, is vain,” Aristotle writes. Much like Aquinas condemns overestimation of the self, Aristotle thinks excess with regard to one’s own merits is typical of the vain man. The proud person, as depicted by Augustine, might for instance rejoice and take pride in his wealth (Chuang 2017, 127), a source of pride Aristotle thinks improper as well. Perhaps then it is not the moral evaluation of pride that has changed from Aristotle to the Christian fathers, but what is meant with pride. Perhaps both megalomania and superbia are traits that we now call pride, but point to quite different attitudes.

David Hume, in the 18th century, gives us yet another picture of pride. He distinguishes between the object of pride and the cause of pride. The object of pride is the same for everyone: the self. The cause, however, can be a variety of things, on the condition that it brings about a pleasurable feeling. A pleasurable feeling becomes pride when the cause of that pleasure is relevantly linked to the self (Hume 2009, 395). Imagine that you read a paragraph in a novel that you enjoy. It is funny, and well-formulated. Reading the paragraph is pleasurable in itself. Now you find out that it is a piece taken from your own book, that you had not previously recognized. The sum of your pleasurable experience and the knowledge that you were the one who brought this pleasure about is what

triggers pride, in Hume's theory. A relevant personal connection to the cause of pride does not have to be one of causality, though. Hume thinks we can feel pride about anything that brings about a pleasurable feeling, as long as we can relate it to ourselves. Causality is one possible relation of the cause of pride to the self, but according to Hume, ownership can just as well cause pride. If a house is found pleasurable to look at, or to reside in, then owning the house can be a source of pride. Natural pride, the feeling as it simply overcomes us, is the sense of satisfaction with oneself, whatever the cause.

For Hume, the moral value of pride is not given in the emotion itself. Natural pride is "indifferent, and may be either good or bad, according as it is well or ill founded" (1988, 314). Pride becomes moralized only in a second step, when the feeling is informed by social opinions on what is pleasurable. The social realm, Hume maintains, is eventually the domain of the moral (Dillon 1995b, 12). Our natural inclination to embrace the opinion of others turns our natural pride into moral pride (11). We let ourselves be informed on what is pleasurable, what is an appropriate cause of pride, by our social surroundings. We move from speaking about the pleasurable and the unpleasurable to the virtuous and the vicious when we adjust our own perspective to that of humanity (12). I feel natural pride when reading that funny, well-formulated passage in my own novel. But whether my pride is also moral depends in great part on the social evaluation of the morality of the passage. Say I wrote an important analysis on climate change, then my pride is not merely the result of reading a pleasurable text. It is also informed by the social relevance and appreciation of my work, and the moral message it conveys.

Well-founded pride, when moralized and scrutinized by the opinions of others, is a strong moral motivator according to Hume. It is the virtuous consciousness of our virtues (11). This is reminiscent of Aristotle's view, though not entirely equivalent. Aristotle believes that what is virtuous, and thus a good reason for pride, can be objectively determined by reason alone, and refers to an ontological truth. Hume on the other hand emphasizes the importance of the social dimension to establish what is virtuous, which refers to an intersubjective truth at most. But for Hume, much like for Aristotle, pride's moral value hinges on the validity of its foundation, and can be an indicator of concern with moral virtue.



Thomas Hobbes, in the 17th century, defines pride rather in comparative terms (1986). Pride is the breach of the ninth law of nature which states the equality of every person. It is the human desire to be superior, and needs to be overcome in order to achieve peace (Chuang 2017, 123). Hobbes is not the only philosopher that has placed the comparison with others at the heart of pride. The Christian fathers condemned pride because it meant mistakenly placing the self *above* God. For Aristotle and Hume, the comparative dimension is not as central, even though both recognize the social dimension of pride. Being good in their theories is not relative per se to the virtue of another, but requires us to meet a shared standard of what it means to be good. Being good is an absolute state, not a comparative one. Aristotle thought we could know what is good by finding the golden mean, and by developing the practical wisdom to apply this theory to real life. For Hume the standard of goodness is at least intersubjectively defined in the social realm. Both philosophers do not include comparison with others as a necessary feature for or consequence of pride.

Though Hobbes does not give us much to work with in his short discussion of pride, he does reveal that to him, pride is about relative status. The comparison with others takes on the specific form of feeling superior to others, on Hobbes' account. And this poses a threat to morality. The 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau describes *amour propre*, the counterpart of *amour de soi*, as a kind of self-love that concerns how one compares to others. Though it does not fully grasp the meaning of *amour propre*, obvious candidates for its translation into English are 'vanity', 'vainglory', or 'pride' (Rousseau 2019, li). *Amour de soi* lacks the social concern of *amour propre*, and designates our innate preoccupation with well-being and survival, our instinct for self-conservation (Rousseau and Foxley 2009, 173). *Amour de soi* is fueled by an absolute desire, like one for health or survival. The health of another does not make me more or less healthy. *Amour propre* on the other hand is comparative, and whether or not it is satisfied depends on the actual conditions of others.

Rousseau's *amour propre* sounds a lot like Hobbes' concept of pride. Rousseau warns that *amour propre*, "which is always comparing self with others, is never satisfied and never can be" (174). *Amour propre* can be "a desire to have, and to be evaluated by all others as having, a certain value

in comparison with all others, including at least ever greater moral superiority” (Kolodny 2010, 170). If this is *amour propre*, commentators generally argue, then it makes us wicked, and the way to be good is to rid ourselves of *amour propre*.

But Niko Kolodny argues that Rousseau could not have meant that *amour propre* in itself makes us wicked. The self-love that Hobbes and Rousseau develop is one shape for comparative self-love to take. But *amour propre* only develops as a concern for superiority when it is inflamed (Kolodny 2010, 166). The comparison with others is not wicked per se. Healthy *amour propre* draws from the comparison with others a concern with moral equality, rather than superiority. Healthy *amour propre* is then even incompatible with the inflamed version. Kolodny links the desire for equality with the realization that one is equally entitled to respect (170). The conception of pride as either linked with being entitled to respect, or having self-respect, is an idea that has gained following in discussions about emancipation and empowerment. Pride in this sense is often recognized as a tool for empowerment for historically oppressed groups (Neu 1998, Vice 2017).

But is that pride the same as the picture of pride that Hume, Aristotle, Hobbes, or the Christian fathers paint? Pride glides along the lines of three other concepts that are often tied with it: self-esteem, self-respect, and self-love. Philosophical attempts to clarify the moral meaning of pride have often tied it to either self-esteem or self-respect, or to a self-centered form of self-love, as I will go on to illustrate later, but they have left out a concept of self-love that is crucial to understand pride as a motor for empowerment. Pride, in one form, can designate self-love as an attentive interest in the self in all its specificity. Before developing that account of pride as self-love, I turn to other strategies that philosophers have followed to unify the dissonant forms of pride. The distinctions philosophers have made to answer ethical questions about pride are relevant, but I aim to show that they should be applied only against the background of a basic threefold distinction. It seems to me that pride can refer to three different attitudes: self-esteem, self-respect, and self-love. I present pride over the next few chapters as the emotion that can be warranted by (but need not arise per se) by any of these stances. Such conceptual analysis has moral relevance, because it reveals that these three attitudes each require

fundamentally different normative stances to evaluate their moral quality.

#### FITTINGNESS OF PRIDE

1. You are not to think you are anything special.
2. You are not to think you are as good as we are.
3. You are not to think you are smarter than we are.
4. You are not to convince yourself that you are better than we are.
5. You are not to think you know more than we do.
6. You are not to think you are more important than we are.
7. You are not to think you are good at anything.
8. You are not to laugh at us.
9. You are not to think anyone cares about you.
10. You are not to think you can teach us anything.

These ten commandments structure the fictional town called Jante in a satire written by Danish-Norwegian writer Aksel Sandemose (1933). The story is meant to capture a general Nordic mentality of humility and conformity (Partanen 2016, 307). Imagine a person who disobeys all Jante's laws: we would surely find such a person utterly annoying. The breaker of Jante's law thinks she is special, that she is better and more important than the rest, and she laughs at us. These seem negative aspects of pride, and encourage us to practice their counterparts. But the breaker of Jante's law would also think she is our equal, that she is good at some things, she believes some people care about her, and she thinks she can teach us something, precisely because she knows she is good at them. These all seem quite healthy traits and beliefs that we might appreciate in a person, or wish upon her.

The contemporary philosophical debate has mainly focused on distinguishing between the instances of pride we find morally harmful, and those we find harmless or even good and necessary. Moral philosophers have tried to narrow down a single criterion to evaluate the moral value of pride. Some have focused on the fittingness and appropriateness conditions of pride. Others have made distinctions between pride as a character trait and as an episodic emotion. Some philosophers think that pride, in order to be good, should be non-comparative. Others think it should be felt about achievements, and not about what is fortunate. And psycholo-

gists have distinguished between authentic and hubristic pride, to highlight the difference between good and bad pride.

When asking whether pride in a specific instance is appropriate, we might mean one of two things. We can wonder whether the pride is *fitting*, or whether it is *all-things-considered appropriate* (D'Arms and Jacobsen 2000). The answers to these questions sometimes differ. The first question is about whether the emotion *gets things right*, whereas the second wonders whether *it is right to feel it*. It might be fitting to feel an emotion, yet nonetheless not appropriate when we consider prudential or moral reasons. This subtle nuance is a distinction often overlooked by philosophers of emotion, and conflating them is what D'Arms and Jacobsen call "the moralistic fallacy" (2000).

Fittingness is about whether the emotion in question represents its object well. When Aristotle condemns pride that is not based on true beliefs, like that of a vain person, he is talking about the fittingness of pride. The pride of a vain person does not reflect its object well, as the vain person has a wrong or inflated belief about his own qualities. But even if an emotion is fitting, it might still not be all-things-considered appropriate. Roman Polanski might be a fitting object of admiration in the sense that he is successful, made lauded movies and won prizes. Yet, it might not be all-things-considered appropriate to admire him, given that he was indicted of six counts of criminal behavior, including rape and sexual intercourse with a minor (Archer and Matheson 2019).

What are the fittingness conditions of pride? In other words, what objects are fitting for pride to be felt about? Intuitively, there are cases where pride is entirely unfitting. We would think oddly of a friend who claims to be proud of the president of Kazakhstan. We would find it equally strange to take pride in failing an exam. And if a friend were to come up to us and proudly state: "Look! I have tied my shoelaces!" we would likely think she is mocking us. In the first case, we find her pride odd because to our knowledge our friend has no connection to Kazakhstan at all. In the second case, we think failure is a negative experience, not suitable for pride. And to our friend who is a proud lacer of shoes, we would say that everyone knows how to tie shoelaces at his age, and that we are not impressed.

It's not that 'the president of Kazakhstan' or 'failing exams' or 'tying

shoelaces' are never fitting objects of pride. It's just that we are lacking some conditions that many philosophers have presented as fundamental for us to find pride fitting. Suppose our friend reveals that the president of Kazakhstan is her great-uncle. Or the person who failed his exams tells us that her class was protesting standardized testing by handing in blank exams. And our shoe-lacing friend informs us that she spent years in recovery for a motoric problem with hand-movements after an injury, and is finally able to do small motoric tasks again. Suddenly their pride makes more sense to us.

The elements of fitting pride that become clear in these examples are central (but not uncontentious) in many mainstream definitions of pride: we find pride fitting when we stand in some meaningful relation with the object, and when the object is deemed positive or valuable (Taylor 1985, 32). But this basic definition of pride is still open for interpretation, as I will go on to explain.

#### THE AGENCY ACCOUNT OF PRIDE

Some have argued that a relation is only meaningful if we are responsible for bringing about the object of pride (Solomon 1976, 345). We are only fittingly proud of things that are brought about at least partly through our own effort and skill, and the object of pride must be challenging to bring about (Kauppinen 2017, 170). This idea that "the self and the object of pride are suitably related just in case one is morally responsible for the existence or excellence of the object of one's pride" (Fischer 2017, 376) has been called the agency account of pride. Pride, according to this theory, is only fitting when we made a demonstrable contribution to bringing about the object of pride. The object is thought of as an achievement. The agency account gets the example of the shoe-lacer right: we find her pride fitting because even though tying laces is not an achievement for most adults, we find it understandable that it is an achievement for our friend. She had to practice and work to regain a relatively mundane skill after the accident. She was responsible for completing this challenging task. The agency account can even explain cases where the contribution is rather small, like taking pride in your soccer team's victory. Even in this

case, we expect some kind of contribution to the team's victory (Kristjánsson 2002, 125). A fan buys tickets, cheers for the team even in losing times, and so on. During the 2020 outbreak of the coronavirus in the U.S., basketball player LeBron James declared he would not be playing without fans in the stands. "We play games without the fans? Nah. Impossible," he said (Ganguli 2020). However small the contribution, the agency account can explain the sports fan's pride.

The focus on responsibility as a fittingness condition for pride is also appealing because it allows us to discard some forms of pride that we find irksome as simply unfitting. We find a person who takes great pride in giving a presentation while having contributed nothing to the preparations highly annoying. And many soccer fans roll their eyes at someone who has shown no prior interest or investment in soccer but suddenly calls herself a proud fan only when the team is successful.

However, the agency account stumbles upon several problems. First off, it proves quite hard to delineate what counts as an achievement. Defenders of a version of the agency theory have distinguished between authentic and hubristic pride on the grounds of achievement. For pride to be authentic, it needs to be attributed to "internal but unstable, specific, and controllable causes, such as effort ("I won because I practiced")." Hubristic pride, on the other hand, results from attributions to "internal but stable, global, and uncontrollable causes, such as ability ("I won because I'm great")" (Tracy and Cheng 2010, 166). Authentic pride is achievement-oriented and productive, whereas hubristic pride is focused on the goods of fortune that Aristotle already condemned as an improper source of pride.

But how does one draw the line? Even in cases of great effort, luck and talent play a role. When Florence Griffith-Joyner set the record for the fastest woman running 100 meters in 1988, she undoubtedly did this through intense training and determination of her own. But more than likely, she was also born into a strong body, and given the opportunity to develop and train it. If I obtain my PhD, I will have done so by spending long hours fighting procrastination and distraction and bringing myself to think through complex problems. But being able to go through these motions I largely thank to a supportive environment, good education, and opportunities. A child of two professional writers, I received extensive

feedback on my writing, and I was challenged in critical thinking by brothers who start analyzing each other's arguments half-awake over breakfast. When is an achievement really mine to claim? The agency account of pride needs an account of achievement, but risks thereby either excluding many of the instances we call pride if it is too stringent, or including examples of unfitting pride if it is too loose.

Besides, the achievement account would require us to call many instances of pride hubristic or unfitting. We call parents proud of their children when they achieve something through their own efforts. Arguably, the parents are responsible for bringing the child into the world and raising it, but we generally find it fitting as well to be proud of a grandparent for something they did long before we were born. The agency account would have to call these feelings unfitting. And what about people taking pride in their skin color, sexual orientation, or appearance? It might be an achievement to navigate the world while having a certain skin color, but the physical trait itself arguably is not.

These examples leave the agential theorist with two options. Either the people in the examples above mistakenly thought they were responsible for bringing about the object of pride, or they are not really proud. Both options seem implausible (Fischer 2017). It is highly uncharitable to ascribe to a Black person celebrating Black pride that she believes she was responsible for bringing about her Blackness. The first option would thus entail ascribing extremely poor judgment to large groups of people, and especially to vulnerable groups already suffering epistemic injustices. Precisely the groups that can benefit from pride as a tool of empowerment are dismissed as mistaken and holding wrong beliefs.

So what if the agential theorist claims that these people did not hold false beliefs about their own agency? If responsibility or agency is necessary for pride, then the agential theorist is forced to say that these people do not feel pride, but wrongfully mistake joy or gratitude for pride. That might be an acceptable conclusion for some. But the experience of pride in innate and coincidental traits is not an exception. Are we willing to revise our idea of pride so drastically that a large extent of the term is simply discarded as a different emotion? "A core constraint on any account of an emotion is to save the phenomena of our mental life and of our ways of talking about that life," (Fischer 2017, 187). We want an account of pride

to grasp at least the majority of those emotions we have dubbed pride, not require us to deny a significant chunk of them.

Jeremy Fischer therefore offers an alternative for the agency account. The meaningful relation between the object of pride and the proud person is that the object is seen as relevant to one's identity, and fitting into one's personal narrative. Fitting objects of pride must be "tokens that indicate that one's life accords with personal values that are central to one's identity" (2017, 192). Fischer can explain the fittingness of Black pride, gay pride, and other pride that is felt about traits that we are not agentially responsible for. My pride of my womanhood is fitting if I see my womanhood as relevant to my practical identity and personal ideals. I can be proud of my late grandmother if I see her as somehow relevant and valuable to my story. Fischer allows for a broader spectrum of fitting pride, while still allowing us to find some pride unfitting.

We can still call pride unfitting in different ways, when following the narrative account. Adding to Fischer's story, first, we can think the pride is *unintelligible*. The pride simply does not fit the requirement we have set for it, like when the pride is about an object that has nothing to do with our personal story. We would still find it odd if our friend is proud of the president of Kazakhstan, if she has no relation to him whatsoever, or if someone claimed to be proud of the fish in the sea. Second, we can think pride gets its object *wrong*, and is based on a false belief about the world and one's place in it. This is what happens when we find the pride of our classmate unfitting when she is gladly receiving the applause for a presentation she did no work for. And thirdly, we can dispute whether the object is really a thing that merits pride. Even if our classmate did contribute to the presentation, we might still find her pride unfitting if we thought the presentation went quite poorly. The latter question is the most complicated of the three. The reason why it has been so difficult to answer that last question is because pride is one emotion, but it can refer to three attitudes: self-esteem, self-respect, or self-love. Depending on what attitude pride is about, the evaluation of whether some object is a fitting object for pride adheres to different standards of scrutiny. I will come back to this later.

These are the ways in which pride can be unfitting. But many criticisms of pride have focused not on the representation of the object of pride, as the fittingness question does, but on other moral and prudential



reasons to condemn pride. We might, for instance, find white pride petty because of the history of oppressed groups and ruling power imbalances. But the fittingness question does not lead us there.<sup>6</sup> To take into account these other reasons to warn against a certain instance of pride is to ask the question whether pride is all-things-considered appropriate. This second question is the one I am most interested in, but in order to move to it, we have to get clear on the fittingness conditions of pride first.

#### PRIDE THE EMOTION, PRIDE THE CHARACTER TRAIT

Some of the instances of pride that Fischer wants to defend as fitting, like Black pride or gay pride, call for a distinction within the emotion. The fittingness conditions of pride do not entail that one *should* feel pride when it would be fitting to. It is very well possible that someone is simply less prone to feel pride, even when all the fittingness conditions are fulfilled. Like most other emotions, pride can either be an episodic emotion that is clearly delineated in time, or a general character trait or disposition (Taylor 1985, 35, Kristjánsson 2002, 9, Carter and Gordon 2017, 2). When we attribute emotions to people's character, for example when we call someone 'a loving person', 'an angry man', or 'a cheerful woman', it differs from saying that someone is, in a particular instance, loving, angry, or cheerful. An episodic emotional state, as the name has it, is a momentous reaction to a specific situation. Though the emotion might linger for a while, it generally disappears or weakens when the situation changes. A disposition, on the other hand, refers to a strong tendency to feel a certain way, as when we say in folk-psychological terms that a person is angry or cheerful 'by nature', or has a kind or loving 'soul'. The same goes for pride. One can be proud of a particular event or trait, but one can also simply be a proud person. The emotion is ingrained in her character, and rather a general trait than a passing state.

6. D'Arms and Jacobsen use the example of envy, and write, in parallel to what I argue here for pride: "certain tempting criticisms of such envy, such as that it would be petty of her to envy you for this when she has so much more, do not speak to whether the circumstance is even slightly bad for her; hence they are irrelevant to whether her envy is fitting," (2000, 74).

Kristján Kristjánsson has dubbed the character trait of pride ‘pridefulness,’ and contrasts it with simple pride, the episodic state of self-satisfaction (Kristjánsson 2002). The prideful person is “deeply concerned about his opportunities for simple pride,” and is remarkably disposed to feel pride. David Sachs distinguishes between *having* pride and *taking* pride (Sachs 1981). We can imagine different combinations of having pride and taking pride: a person can have pride yet take no pride in a specific moment, and even feel shame. According to Kristjánsson it is a condition for a person to feel shame to be at least somewhat prideful, as the truly proud person will find it even more painful to stroke against the grain of her own ideals. A prideful person is simply more sensitive to both sides of the coin. We can likewise imagine a person to take pride in a specific moment, yet not generally be a very proud person.

#### SELF-RESPECT AND SELF-ESTEEM

The distinction between pride as a character trait and pride as an emotion is often tied to the difference between self-respect and self-esteem (Sachs 1981, Taylor 1995, Neu 1998, Kristjánsson 2002). Both esteem and respect are about the recognition of value in a person, but they highlight different aspects of what we can find valuable. Esteem is the recognition of a praiseworthy trait, a merit, or achievement (Neu 1998, 244, Kristjánsson 2002, 94). Esteem is discriminatory and conditional: we only esteem those who we think show skill or effort, or have an extraordinary or unique trait (Honneth 1995, xvi, Laitinen 2012). Since such features can exist in greater and lesser forms of excellence, esteem comes in gradations. I esteem Stieg Larsson for writing the Millennium Trilogy, but I esteem Toni Morrison even more for her stories, the twists of her sentences, the rhythm in her paragraphs. The idea of esteem is often tied up with an understanding of valuing as ranking, with competing participants in different degrees of excellence. We can hold someone, with regard to a particular skill, to greater esteem than another. Because esteem comes in gradations, and is given to someone on the basis of how valuable a certain trait is deemed, there can be discussion about the appropriateness of esteem. I can consider it inappropriate to esteem the Dutch politician Thierry Baudet for his views, and disagree with those who do esteem him. Conversely, I can think some-

one is esteemed too little, like a housewife performing care tasks without getting financial and social rewards for such valuable work.

Respect, when applied to persons, is the recognition one gets simply for being a person. Though colloquially esteem and respect are often used interchangeably, respect has a history of denoting the attitude that recognizes the equal status of persons rather than their differences (Thomas 1995, Neu 1998). If esteem is about where people stand out and excel, respect is about where they are the same *as persons*, even if they excel in different ways, or not at all. Stephen Darwall has referred to this attitude as recognition respect, the propensity to treat someone in ways that give appropriate weight to some fact about them (1977). According to Darwall, personhood is one of those facts that command a certain regard, just like 'doctorhood', or 'professorhood' do. If we give recognition respect to a doctor, we behave in ways that are appropriate to her status as a doctor. We defer to her medical opinion, we let her pass when she is in a rush on her way to see a patient, we willfully breathe in and out when she holds the stethoscope to our chest. Just like the fact that she is a doctor warrants a certain behavior from our side, the fact that someone is a person does too.

Of course we can think some doctor is higher qualified than another, or some person is more admirable than another, and praise one more than the other, or choose one doctor's opinion over another. Darwall calls this appraisal respect, rather than recognition respect. I have called it esteem here. The point of recognition respect is that for everyone for whom the same fact is true, the same set of respectful ways to behave towards them counts, regardless of their excellency or praiseworthiness. Anyone who is a doctor, no matter how skilled they are, commands our behavior in certain ways. And anyone who is a person, no matter how admirable or despicable, also warrants the same set of behaviors that make up recognition respect for persons.

The appropriate weight given to personhood is the same for anyone who is a person, regardless of their status in other domains. As a person, they are equally deserving of a certain treatment that could involve non-humiliation, freedoms to a certain extent, privacy, rights, and so on. As far as people are persons, they all deserve this treatment to the same extent, and granting this kind of respect to a person is always equally appropriate.

Respect and esteem are embodied in different attitudes. Esteem can be expressed in praise, laudations, applause or cheers, but it doesn't need to be. Esteem does not demand a certain act, since simply esteeming someone is enough to really have the attitude. We can esteem another, without having a particular conception of what behavior would be required from us to do so. The esteem consists in the positive appraisal in itself (Darwall 1977, 39). That is not the case with respect. Respect does require us to act a certain way or, more often, to refrain from acting in certain ways. Respecting another puts constraints on what we can do, it restricts our course of actions (40). With respect, the proof of the pudding is necessarily in the eating: you cannot claim to respect a person if you do not refrain from infringing on her rights, if you humiliate her or invade her privacy, and so on.<sup>7</sup> It does not require us to actively enhance another's well-being or promote her interests, but rather not to stand them in the way. The positive attitudes that we sometimes do associate with respect, like admiration or attentiveness, I will argue later on, are either forms of esteem or love.

These attitudes of respect and esteem can be turned on the self as well. Self-esteem is about recognizing a skill or trait in the self that is praiseworthy, because it took effort and hard work, or because it is exceptional in some sense. A person with high self-esteem is someone who has the character trait of self-esteem, who is prone to think well of herself and her abilities. To have self-esteem requires no act on our part, but simply the beliefs that there are things about the self that are worthy of praise (which does not have to entail that the self-esteeming person also demands the esteem from others, or think they *ought* to esteem her).

Self-respect is about the recognition of one's personhood and giving this status appropriate weight. With self-respect comes the acknowledg-

7. As a reader pointed out to me, we might think that esteeming someone also restricts our actions. We are not expected to boo an artist that we esteem. But the point is, as Darwall also states, that esteem (or in his terms, appraisal respect) "does not essentially involve any conception of how one's behavior towards that person is appropriately restricted," (Darwall 1977, 41). Even if we boo someone off stage, it is conceivable that we still esteem them, but are booing them because of social pressure, for instance. With respect, such a thing is harder to imagine. We cannot humiliate someone out of social pressure, and claim we still respect them, precisely because the (dis)respect lies in the conduct, not in some appraisal or belief.

ment that one is just as worthy of respect as any other person. Self-respect constrains our acts, but in quite a different way from the way respect for others constrains our acts. If respect for others entails granting them certain freedoms and refraining from denigrating them, then self-respect means that you do not allow denigration or infringements on freedoms and rights to happen to *you*. Self-respect thus becomes an important tool for empowerment and protest, as it rouses objection when one's personhood is not given appropriate weight.

### WHY KEEP PRIDE?

I will return at length to the different implications of self-respect and self-esteem, but for now it is important to note that pride has been used to designate both self-respect and self-esteem. Pride is sometimes used as a synonym of self-respect in so far as it is concerned with one's worth as a person (Telfer 1995, Taylor 1995, 159, Dyson 2006), or as self-esteem, when it concerns an appraisal of the self (Taylor 1985, 138, Chakrabarti 1992, McLatchie and Piazza 2017). Is pride perhaps simply synonymous with these attitudes? In some forms, we might think, pride simply *is* self-respect, and in others, it is equal to self-esteem. If this is the case, then pride becomes superfluous, and adds nothing to what we can also express by referring to self-esteem or self-respect.

But pride is an emotion, and self-esteem or self-respect are attitudes toward the self that are based on beliefs. Those can and should be pulled apart. Emotions are not synonymous to the beliefs that bring them about, even though beliefs are central to their existence. An emotion is affective, can punch you in the stomach or give you butterflies in ways that a belief alone cannot. Furthermore, we can imagine someone having all the relevant beliefs to warrant pride, yet not feel proud. It seems possible to be self-respecting yet not be inclined to feel pride (Morton 2017), or to have self-esteem without feeling proud, just as much as it is possible to believe an injustice has been done to you without feeling angry. Self-respect and self-esteem simply warrant pride, just like the injustice warrants anger. I understand pride as the emotion that can (but importantly need not) arise with certain belief-constituted attitudes one has towards the self. In the three main chapters of this thesis, I do not understand pride as synony-

mous to the attitudes that warrant pride, but rather look at these attitudes through the lens of pride. To put it another way: when pride is affectively present, at least one of these three sets of beliefs must be too, but not necessarily vice versa. From this vantage point I engage with the attitudes that warrant pride, sometimes regardless of whether they factually spark the affectual state we usually associate with pride.

From this point on, I will say that pride is warranted by, sprouts from, supervenes on, or can accompany attitudes towards the self, which in turn hinge on certain beliefs about the self. I will use these phrasings interchangeably to indicate an internal *logic* of pride. “Warranted by” thus does not mean that pride is also all-things-considered appropriate, or even that it is based on a true belief or a justified attitude. It simply means that it is logical for pride to come about if one has a certain combination of attitudes and beliefs, justified or not. For pride to be warranted by these attitudes and beliefs means as much as that it can be expected, that it should come as no surprise, for someone in this position to feel proud, just as it comes as no surprise for someone who believes injustice has been done to feel anger, regardless of whether her belief is correct or justified.

If pride is an emotion that supervenes on self-esteem and self-respect, rather than simply a synonym for these attitudes, we can understand why the emotion can accompany both attitudes: the same emotion can be sparked by at least these two different sets of beliefs about the value of the self: self-esteem and self-respect. The agency accounts of pride, which focus on achievement or responsibility as a necessary condition for fitting pride, refer to an emotion felt with the increase of self-esteem. They place at the heart of pride a positive appraisal of some skill, some achievement, gained through one’s own effort or to which one has made at least some contribution, real or imagined. The value in ourselves that the emotion responds to is one that people can have to greater or lesser extents. We take this pride in traits that we would find admirable if we were to see them in somebody else, like finishing a dissertation or breaking the speed record for the 100-meter run. We can take pride as well if we succeed in doing something that is an achievement *for us*, even if it is not generally considered praiseworthy, like our friend who is proud of tying her shoes. That she tied her shoes after being motorically challenged, *against the odds*, is praiseworthy in itself. All these instances of pride are underpinned by

beliefs about self-esteem: we view ourselves positively, and praise certain facts about ourselves.

Both Aristotle and Hume share these conceptions of pride as related to self-esteem. They present pride as the acknowledgment of value that one can have to a greater or lesser extent. For Aristotle, being morally good is an achievement, reached by cultivation of the self and practical knowledge. Pride is the final virtue, the insight into one's own virtuosity (2011, IV.3). Proper pride is not for everyone, only those who merit it on the ground of being fully virtuous, something most people are not. For Hume, a requirement for an object to be the cause of pride is that it produces active pleasure. A beautiful house brings pleasure to the observer, so when the house is one that I built, it is a cause for pride. Hume focuses on positive appraisals as the source of pride, such that his idea of pride also hinges on self-esteem (Taylor 1985, 27). It is telling that Hume contrasts pride with a specific concept of humility, which he defines as the idea that a cause of displeasure is linked to the self (Hume 2009, 393). Such a conception of humility sounds a lot like a negative appraisal of (something about) the self. Both Hume's concept of pride and humility hinge on self-esteem: we either praise or dispraise something about the self.

The Christian conception of pride hinges on self-esteem as well. The proud person thinks too highly of himself, praises himself so much, to the extent that he believes he can disregard God. The Christians, Aristotle, and Hume all addressed excess and wrong beliefs as the major pitfalls of pride. Such flaws are typical of self-esteem, yet not of self-respect. An excess in self-respect is hard to imagine, and respect for persons in the sense painted above is equally warranted for everyone on the ground that they are persons (Sachs 1981). But it is easy to conceive of someone with unwarranted or excessive self-esteem. The classmate who beams with pride for the presentation she has not contributed to. The employee who belittles his colleagues after a recent promotion. We call those who flaunt excessive or unwarranted self-esteem cocky, smug, or arrogant.

The pride as embodied in the proud Black person, or the gay pride, standing up for their rights, is a matter of self-respect rather than self-esteem. The demand is one for equal recognition of personhood, regardless of their specific qualities. When Rosa Parks refused to give up her front seat in the bus in 1955 Alabama, she was brave, tired of being treated as

a second-class citizen, probably a little nervous or scared, yet strong, angry perhaps. But above all, it seems appropriate to call her proud. Park's act of pride on this green and yellow Montgomery bus was not a call for applause or praise. Rosa Parks was claiming the basic treatment she took her personhood to warrant. Respect was the recognition she was after, not esteem. Parks said the most important thing she learned during her education was "that I was a person with dignity and self-respect, and I should not set my sights lower than anybody else just because I was black" (Woo 2005).

Kirstján Kirstjánsson ties pride, or what he calls the virtue of pridefulness, to self-respect. He argues that a certain kind of pride is "morally necessary for a self-respectful person," and that pridefulness is concerned with one's "own worthiness of respect" (2002, 1, 101). According to Jerome Neu, the point of movements claiming 'pride', like the Black or gay pride, is usually "not to say black is better than white, or gay is better than straight, [...] but simply to deny the denigration of the minority position. The point is to demand political equality, equal concern and respect" (Neu 1998, 13). Pride signifies here a refusal to be treated below what is the appropriate way to treat persons. The global wave of women's marches in 2017, the Black Lives Matter movement and the gay pride are all cases of such a call for respect, and they rightfully associate with pride. The demand is not for praise, but for the recognition that being gay, Black or female should not in any way weigh in on the respect one is given.

#### THE GAP OF SELF-LOVE

By now, we have seen two attitudes at play in our concept of pride. Both self-esteem and self-respect can warrant pride. When a person has self-esteem, she typically bestows a positive evaluation upon her achievement, she might celebrate and rejoice, she embraces her achievement and identifies with it. Respect is characterized by the different attitude of acknowledgment of equal personhood. There is no recognition of positive or unique traits at play in self-respect in the typical conception of it. On the contrary, it is usually emphasized that everyone is deserving of respect regardless of their specific traits.



There is an important variety of pride not grasped however by either self-respect or self-esteem. What is the pride of the woman on the subway platform that Ifemelu, the main character of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*, observes? She writes:

Sticky heath sat on her skin. There were people thrice her size on the Trenton platform and she looked admiringly at one of them, a woman in a very short skirt. She thought nothing of slender legs shown off in miniskirts – it was safe and easy, after all, to display legs of which the world approved – but the fat woman's act was about the quiet conviction that one shared only with oneself, a sense of rightness that others failed to see. (2014, 8)

We can imagine the woman on the subway platform being proud, having put on a short skirt even if her body is not generally found praiseworthy or admirable by the ruling standards of beauty. Her pride could be one of self-esteem, we might think, because she esteems her body: even if no one else does, she thinks it is praiseworthy. But the flaunting of her body is not self-esteem in at least two senses: her body is arguably not an achievement that she set out to accomplish, through hard work or effort, but rather the shape her life happened to take on, for whatever reason. And secondly, it is unlikely that the woman on the platform thinks she is particularly good or unique at being fat. She probably does not think that, as a fat woman, she is more worthy of praise than anyone else in the way that she carries her body.

Her pride also exceeds the narrow requirements of respect. She is not merely resisting humiliation and denigration, or claiming her equal rights to other persons. She is emphasizing and flaunting her traits. She has the positive celebratory attitude of esteem, but not the convictions that usually go with self-esteem. And she has the recognition of herself as a person deserving respect despite her appearance, but not the focus on equality and minimization of difference that is characteristic of respect. She seems interested in the cultivation and celebration of herself, in which acceptance is central. We can imagine she has attention to even the smallest dimples in her legs, and is interested in knowing about them, rather than denying them or wishing them away. This kind of pride is tied up with a specific notion of self-love, rather than self-esteem or self-respect.

With these three attitudes (and the intricate combinations of them), we can now grasp all things we call pride, with one notable exception which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. We often say we feel proud of somebody else: a friend, a daughter, our late grandfather. These are hard cases because, as appealing as it might be to explain this pride as an indirect increase in *self*-esteem, that does not always seem to be the case. Surely, the parent who beams with pride and smugly goes around telling everyone “that is *my* daughter” feels self-esteem pride. The parent feels that the accomplishments of her daughter also increase her own praiseworthiness. But not all cases of feeling proud of another have this structure. If I am proud of a friend for successfully fighting an alcohol addiction, I hardly mean that my own self-esteem has increased because I am her friend. A highly depressed person can still genuinely feel proud of another person, even while her own self-esteem is in shatters. Should we bite the bullet and say that even in these cases, the attitude that warrants pride is a felt increase in self-esteem? I come back to these hard examples in the next chapter, in which I examine the moral and conceptual grammar of esteem.

The question whether pride is *all-things-considered appropriate* as opposed to merely *fitting* will require a different strategy when it comes to pride relating to self-esteem, self-respect, or self-love. The three attitudes raise different moral issues and play a different role in our emotional households. They each have a different moral grammar. The harm that is done when either self-esteem, self-respect, or self-love is discouraged or harmed will especially show us their respective moral qualities. These three attitudes are not mere psychological phenomena, but have long entered the political arena. Whether a person is proud is not merely a private affair, but is determined in large part through the political and social allowance of *who gets to be proud*. To entangle the moral knots surrounding pride we will eventually have to look at power and privilege, but the entanglement will work differently for the three primary attitudes.

An account of self-esteem pride, as I develop in chapter two, has to deal with questions relating to the value and perils of competition, status, social hierarchies, and so on. To what extent is esteem a zero-sum game, in which one only goes up if the other goes down? When does self-esteem

become arrogance, smugness? In what cases is self-esteem good? And does that mean that the pride it warrants is good as well? What does it mean to have low self-esteem? How do others play a role in self-esteem pride? Does a proud person desire to be esteemed by others as well, and what does that imply for the morality of this pride?

An account of self-respect pride, the focus of chapter three, has to be concerned with issues about rights and the basic conditions for living a dignified life. What role does the pride that accompanies self-respect play in empowering oppressed groups to demand certain rights and treatment? What if a historically privileged group lays claim to the same pride? Do we need the respect of another to respect ourselves, and can we imagine a self-respecting person who does not audibly object when she is denigrated or denied her rights? How do we determine what it means to respect another? And when does self-respect crumble? Can a person ever lack all self-respect? What social structures encourage or discourage the cultivation of self-respect?

In chapter four I lay out an account of self-love pride. This attitude is most often left out of the pride literature, especially in the sense of self-love that I develop. If pride is linked to self-love, it is mostly colloquially defined as a near-synonym for self-centeredness or arrogance. We say: “oh, he loves himself very much” in a derogatory way, meaning usually that this person is self-centered, vain, or annoyingly boastful. But that conception of self-love does not align with how we love others. Love for others is attentive and forgiving, yet critical when necessary. It means seeing the other for what she really is (Murdoch 1970). Starting from the idea of love that Iris Murdoch develops, I will argue for a self-love that is an attentive interest in the self, as opposed to merely being self-interested. Self-love means taking the time and space to attentively figure out our own specific place in the world, and the way that we instantiate the abstract personhood that warrants self-respect. If self-respect means we know *that* we can demand a certain treatment, self-love means being interested in *what specific person* we demand this treatment for. This self-love warrants a certain kind of pride that has an important role to play in our moral lives, and is especially harmful if it is absent.





# 2

## Before the fall

On self-esteem pride

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Writing a novel on the French Revolution is a mad enterprise that Hilary Mantel would advise no one to undertake. So why, then, when she was 40 years old, did Hilary Mantel undertake the task herself?

In her twenties, the Canadian writer discovered that the pain she was suffering was caused by endometriosis, a condition in which uterus tissue grows outside of the womb, causing pelvic pain and infertility. She travelled from her temporary residence in Botswana to England hoping to seek treatment as well as a publisher for her first novel, which she had finished in Africa. The draft was rejected, and her ovaries and womb removed. “On the surface my life was completely in pieces. It was so awful, it was almost comic – it was like something I had arranged for a character in one of my novels,” Mantel recalls (Jeffries 2012). Yet Mantel kept writing, even if she found the task hard and torturous. Why would she do this? Why do people choose hard paths with insecure pay-off and put tremendous effort into possibly futile work?

### THE CARROT AND THE STICK

Psychologist Jessica Tracy has one possible explanation (2016). We seek paths that we find meaningful and worthwhile, and take on tasks that give meaning to our lives, rather than simply bring pleasure or ease. We hunger for accomplishment beyond the ordinary, and we seek the feeling that we are building something important. We yearn to know that we are doing something we find meaningful. Susan Wolf describes what meaningful-

ness entails for us.<sup>8</sup> We experience an activity or choice as meaningful when personal affinity and objective worth meet. “Meaning in life arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness, when one finds oneself able to love what is worth loving, and able, further, to do something with or about it – to contribute to or promote or preserve or give honor and appreciation to what one loves,” (2002, 237). A meaningful life is dedicated to something that others can conceive of as meaningful as well. In other words: we want to live a life that we find at least intelligible as a reason for esteem.

That is why Tracy describes pride as the motor propelling us forward to develop our ambitions and promoting innovation. Pride, she argues, is the reason people work hard to create, precisely because it arises from this interplay between personal affinity and objective worth. It’s the reason we take on challenging tasks, with the insecure possibility of great outcomes. Tracy argues that it is pride that makes scientists curious for the next discovery, the next innovation, and makes them want to put in long hours and hard work. Hilary Mantel called the path to publication torturous, but once she did publish the 912 page novel about the French Revolution, she was finally able to “shake hands with her 22 year-old self,” the version of herself that ambitiously started the book (2011).

Pride is “the carrot that motivates people to seek accomplishments” (Tracy 2016, 131). As studies have shown pride can play a critical motivational role specifically in the form of an absence of pride (131). Pride can motivate us in two senses: we can do something because we desire to feel pride, or we can be moved by the feeling itself. When we win a competition, pride can make us want to do a victory dance and waive our hands in the air, but the desire to feel pride can make us want to remain calm and gracefully share the limelight. In the case of pride, the desire to feel it is a particularly strong incentive, Tracy holds (xii). The propelling force of pride that Tracy describes comes from a desire to feel it, rather than from the feeling itself. Pride is the future reward, the upcoming satisfaction for having done something worth doing.

8. The discussion on meaningfulness comprises a rich literature that goes beyond my objectives here, but is well worth mentioning. I especially find Wolf’s works on meaningfulness convincing, and when I use the concept it should be read with her ideas of pluralistic meaningfulness in mind, see for instance: Wolf (1997, 2002, 2007).

To Tracy, pride is almost synonymous with self-esteem. She writes about pride as a feeling we wish to achieve through our endeavors and achievements (157) and has named pride the affective core of self-esteem (Tracy et al. 2009). She distinguishes between authentic and hubristic pride, of which only the former is the motivating and positive kind. This proper kind of pride can only come about when we attribute a certain achievement to our own work and effort, rather than to accidental causes or luck (2016, 57). Her version of the agency account of pride depicts people as hungry for esteem on the basis of what they have accomplished. Though esteem from others is a nice side-effect, according to Tracy the authentically proud person is not after this *per se*. She wants to be able to esteem *herself* primarily (x).

But of course social approval can reinforce the idea that what we are doing is worthwhile, and in this way the esteem that we get from others also plays a central role in self-esteem pride. It seems quite impossible for us to form ideas about what is worthwhile in a vacuum without social context, and without the ability to broaden our gaze to include the perspective of others. By acknowledging the social viewpoint we recognize that we are not the only ones that have authority about the quality of our actions (Thomason 2018, 12, 55). The esteem of the peer groups that we trust and think well of can affirm to us that we, too, are living well.

Evolutionary psychologists emphasize another dimension of pride. Pride displays have the adaptive function of communicating and assuring the status hierarchy within a group (Tracy 2016, 129, Williams and Davis 2017, 46). The universally recognized pride displays like expanding the posture and standing tall (Tracy and Robins 2004, 2008) send a signal to the other group members that there must be a reason for this prideful stance, and that they make the right choice when deferring to the proud person. It is rather likely that the proud person is indeed wise, competent, strong, and so on. Even faking pride by displaying the appropriate expressions makes people more likely to ascribe high status to that person (Tracy 2016, 105). Pride signals status, and has evolved to communicate information about one's competence to the group. Furthermore, the pleasure of pride serves as a reward for achieving goals, and impels one to keep working on them (L. A. Williams & Davis, 2017, p. 46). Participants in an experiment were willing to spend more time on a tedious task when



they had received esteem for a prior task than test subjects who were not encouraged to feel pride after the first round (L. A. Williams & DeSteno 2008). The pleasurable feeling of self-satisfaction leads us to seek out those traits that elicit pride, like unique skills or praiseworthy behavior.

However, it's an easy mistake to think that, because pride is hardwired in our nature, it is also good. That pride has an evolutionary function actually tells us very little about whether pride is morally good. The idea that *natural* equals *good* is an erring of logic known as the naturalistic fallacy (Moore and Baldwin 1993). We often conflate the natural with the good, just think of food brands prizing their products for their 'natural flavors' or the success of 'natural' cosmetics. But clearly not all that is natural is good. Cancer is natural, so is aggression, but we would arguably be better off without either. Just because pride has an evolutionary function, does not mean that we should encourage or even condone it in all its forms.

The desire to be worthy of esteem as Tracy depicts it sounds lovely, but as she warns us as well, the authentic type of this desire is often hard to distinguish from hubristic forms of overestimation. And even if someone is authentically proud, it is not always appropriate to display it. When a colleague gets a well-deserved promotion, for instance, we would find it inconsiderate of her to flaunt her pride in front of those who did not get promoted. Another problem with self-esteem pride is that we often disagree on what is worthy of esteem. Material objects, for instance, are often considered as proxies for status, because of their link with wealth and success. But should we esteem cars, an on-brand computer or an expensive T-shirt, and should our self-esteem depend on whether we own these? Esteem is often tied to an idea of competition with others. The quest for esteem is not unlikely to take on the form of social ranking, in which one can only go up if the other goes down. Our hunger for esteem can take on ugly forms which I will explore later in this chapter. First, some examples of self-esteem pride.

#### SOME PARADIGM CASES OF SELF-ESTEEM PRIDE

– After struggling through art school an artist opens up a first solo show

in a local gallery. Her friends and family gather to toast to her achievement. The exposition gets picked up in the local newspaper and the artist sells some prints. Even her grandmother, who she expected not to care for the abstract art, gazes at one of the framed prints in awe. Her former art teacher congratulates her. The artist feels proud.

– When studying abroad, the knob on the radiator of a student's rented apartment breaks. It is winter and cold out. The student, who does not consider himself to be a handy person, decides to figure out how to repair it. He goes out to the foreign hardware store and buys a new knob. Internet videos guide him through the process of repair. An afternoon later, the radiator is up and running again. With no one around to look, the student beams with pride.

– A group of high school students is divided into teams for a basketball competition during gym class. None of the students is particularly good at playing, and the teams are equally strong on the field. Yet whenever someone scores, their teammates cheer and make faces at the other team in disdain. The next day, the same groups are reused in a math practicum. The winners of the basketball competition assure the other group that they better prepare to lose at math, too.

– Two childhood friends grow up to excel in separate fields. They lose touch. One of them becomes a very successful TV personality and is so well-known that she has to shield herself from paparazzi. After all these years, the old friend suddenly reaches out to her again. At every occasion she gets, she reminds her new friends that she 'is actually great friends' with the celebrity. She takes pride in the friendship, even though it has perished over the years.

– A man in a small and shabby rental apartment inherits a brownstone house from a great-aunt who had no children of her own. He hosts parties in his house and invites friends and friends of friends. He cannot hide his pride when he gives each of them elaborate tours around the house.

– A woman in a small and shabby rental apartment inherits a brownstone house from a great-aunt who had no children of her own. She sells the house and never tells her friends about it. She does not want them to think she got anything 'for free.' She puts the money aside in her bank account, and does not use it to upgrade her current living situation. She considers herself a self-made woman, and to get ahead because of the inheritance

would be an affront to her.

– A new dad is suffering from lack of sleep and exhaustion. He juggles his career and the care for his newborn. Financially, he can barely make ends meet. Yet at get-togethers with friends, he never mentions his struggles. His friends see him as a successful father and do not notice that his career is slacking. The new father yearns for help and relief, but he is too proud to admit it.

– The parents of a young swimmer sit in the stands at her latest competition to cheer her on. When she wins the game, the parents applaud in unison and one of them yells: “that’s *my* daughter!” They instantly upload a picture of her on the stage to Facebook, accompanied by an emoji of a gold medal. The photographer who is sent to take the winner’s picture has to urge the parents to please step out of the frame.

In all these cases, the pride is warranted by an increase (or the fear of a decrease) of self-esteem. The people in these examples feel pride because they believe they are praiseworthy for some fact about them, whether that is an inherited house or their very own art show. The objects of pride are all about traits or accomplishments that can make a person worthy of esteem, that make them more accomplished than they were before acquiring or achieving it. Still, these examples show a great variety in what we can understand under an increase of self-esteem. Some, like the man who inherits a house, regards esteem of others as an important factor for self-esteem, and attaches value to material status, whether or not it was achieved through one’s own means. The woman who inherited the house but sells it gets her self-esteem from what she has made for herself, and finds pride in being self-made. The new father, unwilling to admit his need of help, fears losing face in front of his friends. The student basketball players feel an increase in self-esteem by being on the winning team, and the increase reflects itself in a feeling of superiority in other fields as well.

## PROUD OF YOU

There is one example that I purposely did not include in the list. There are cases where pride is about esteem, yet not about *self*-esteem per se. In the

swimmer's case, the parents feel an increase in self-esteem through their daughter's accomplishments. But we can very well conceive of a different case, where a proud parent does not think her own praiseworthiness has increased because of her child's achievement. When seeing her child become an accomplished human being, she may think "*I have done well*," but it seems odd to think that this is the core of her pride. In the first place, the proud parent thinks *her child* did well. To cast away any instance of pride of another as a primarily self-oriented emotion does no justice to the genuine concern and love for another that an expression of pride can entail. A severely depressed person, to give another example, can still genuinely experience pride of a dear friend, without therefore feeling like her own self-esteem has increased. Being proud of another does not have to indicate an increase in self-esteem.

So what is happening when we are proud of another? What we mean here, is not to say that our own self-esteem has increased, but that we think our friend or child has reasons to be proud of herself. I hold that our pride is in these cases an empathetic feeling, just like we cringe when we think someone else has reasons to cringe, or we may become angry when we think our friend has good reasons to be angry. Empathy and taking the perspective of another can be antecedents for feeling vicarious pride (Williams and Davis 2017, 52-53). The link with the self remains crucial for this vicarious pride, though. We have knowledge of what would be prideworthy for our friends and family, but most importantly, we know the hurdles they overcame, we know their motivation and struggles, and we care about the journey it took for them to achieve their goals, and about their happiness with the result. It seems unfitting to declare your pride of the beautiful soprano you heard at a concert. But the friends and family of the soprano might be proud, because they know her intimately, and are able to empathize with her reasons for pride.

The difference with the swimmer's parents is clear: the enthusiastic couple in the stands takes the accomplishments of their daughter to reflect well on *them*. They "bask in reflected glory", a term that was coined to indicate the reflected pride one feels by associating with successful people or brands (Cialdini et al. 1976). The same goes for the celebrity's childhood friend who suddenly reestablishes contact and broadcasts her connection to the celebrity. The pride of both the childhood friend and

the swimmer's parents is warranted by a perceived increase in reputation by proxy. That is not necessarily the case when a parent is proud of a child who is successfully battling anxiety issues, for instance, or for a friend who is proud of her friend for finally leaving an abusive partner. Or for the other parents in the stands by the swimming pool, who are proud of their children for doing well in the competition, or for dealing well with their loss, without reading these achievements as an increase in their own status.

#### SIX PITFALLS OF PRIDE

The examples I gave above hint at possible problems with pride. All the pitfalls of self-esteem pride should be taken into account to consider whether it is all-things-considered appropriate. I sketch six points at which self-esteem pride is likely to err or pose a threat to morality. When we find self-esteem pride condemnable, it is likely due to one or more of these hazards.

Most obviously, some self-esteem pride might simply be unfitting, in the form of false beliefs about one's own abilities or an overestimation of those, or disagreement about what merits esteem. Secondly, the relation between self-esteem and other-esteem can be skewed, and the proud person might focus excessively on getting esteem, rather than critically reflecting on what she is esteemed for. Thirdly, we often confuse self-centeredness with pride. There is a discordance between the expression of pride and the experience of an increase in self-esteem, which makes pride expressions unreliable and causes some to overcompensate feelings of low self-esteem with extreme prideful behavior. The fourth pitfall of pride lies in the conception of esteem as competition-based. Competition is not necessarily harmful, but it often can be, and it encourages the proud person to esteem the self only in light of the relative failure of others. A fifth problem with self-esteem pride is the contagious character of self-esteem. The halo-effect explains how self-esteem in one trait can lead to positive evaluations of unrelated traits, or even to feelings of general superiority. Sixth, the expression of pride can, depending on the context, easily be inconsiderate or petty, even if it is warranted.

## ONE: UNFITTING PRIDE

The most obvious way in which pride can be wrong is because we simply don't find that the emotion represents its object well. Pride is unfitting when it is based on a false belief, for instance, or when it is disproportionate. Overestimation fits into this category, as does the Greek idea of hubris, often translated as pride. This is what we mean when we say that pride comes before the fall. The gym class victors might be so confident that they neglect to train or think about tactics for the next match, and thereby break their winning streak. The confidence in their abilities is disproportionate. The classmate who takes visible pride in giving a good group presentation, while she had no input in putting it together, simply has no good reasons for esteeming herself, and consequently for taking pride. Or perhaps she did make some contribution, but it was so small that we still find her pride is unwarranted. Her pride is not proportionate to the reasons she has for taking pride. A third way self-esteem pride can be unfitting, besides being based on false beliefs and being disproportionate, is that we disagree on whether the object of pride really deserves merit, whether it is really something to be esteemed. It is not false that the young man who inherited the brownstone owns the house, but we can still find a house that one has gained through an inheritance a bad reason for esteem.

In her standard work on emotions of self-assessment, one of the three ways in which Gabriele Taylor deems pride faulty is when the positive view of the self is based on ill-supported grounds (1985, 47). But what are these ill-supported grounds? How do we know when an object is not a good reason for esteem, and therefore also not for pride?

In a rare philosophical monograph on self-esteem, Richard Keshen develops criteria for what he calls 'reasonable self-esteem' (2017). He develops six guidelines in total to determine whether self-esteem is reasonable. The *adequacy and truthfulness guideline* prescribes that a reasonable person is truthful and critical about what she esteems about herself (9). She is not guilty of wishful thinking, bias, or lazy self-ascriptions. She follows the canons of sound and inductive reasoning to determine her reasons for self-esteem. The *weighting guideline* then prescribes that the reasonable person gives her esteemed traits appropriate weight (8). To determine what that means exactly is more a matter of a gradient scale than of hard-cut

tipping points. The difference becomes clearer in the extremes: though successfully making an omelet can, in some circumstances, be a good reason for increased self-esteem, in ordinary circumstances, it is not a trait that warrants the same increase in self-esteem as, say, successfully opening a breakfast restaurant. The third and fourth guidelines prescribe that the reasonable person be *consistent* in what they esteem, and *sincerely assent* to the worth of the traits they esteem in themselves (11-12). In the *harmonization guideline*, Keshen emphasizes that the values of the reasonable person must be congruent with her reasons for self-esteem (14).

Lastly, the *universalizability guideline* says that the reasonable person should esteem in others what she esteems in herself (12). The artist who gains self-esteem from her first solo art show must recognize that another artist like her who does the same, also deserves merit. Otherwise, her pride would be unreasonable, Keshen argues. That does not mean we are always willing to admit that the other deserves esteem. It is sometimes hardest to grant compliments to those who are most like you. But such animosity is often rooted in jealousy. And jealousy is precisely the recognition of a desirable trait in another. That is to say, an artist who is jealous and therefore unwilling to compliment another artist, esteems in the other what she would esteem in herself.

On Keshen's account, the artist who is unwilling to compliment another is not unreasonable. She is reasonable in her pride, because she applies her standards of esteem evenly, even if she fails to make her esteem of another public. But if the artist does not publicly grant the same esteem to another as to herself by withholding compliments, her pride still seems hypocrite and morally questionable. That shows that reasonability is not the only parameter to evaluate pride. Keshen's guidelines give a good minimal baseline for self-esteem pride to be fitting. But it takes much more to know whether pride is also all-things-considered appropriate, as explained in chapter 1. The fittingness of pride is not enough to vouch for its moral status.

## TWO: WHOSE EYES?

Pride is a social emotion. It assumes awareness of other people. Emotions of self-assessment, like pride, shame or guilt, have a complex relation with

the eyes of other people. On the one hand, the possibility of being seen and esteemed by another often seems central to pride (Kristjánsson 2002, 112). The most famous formulation of the effect of the others' eyes is Sartre's description of "the look." Even if the other is not physically present, the imagined eyes, an internalized other, suffices for us to feel emotions like pride and shame. Sartre writes: "what most often manifests a look is the convergence of two ocular globes in my direction. But the look will be given just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement of a curtain" (1956, 257).

Self-esteem is intertwined with the esteem of others. Praise of others or acceptance by peers can contribute highly to our sense of self-esteem. But other-esteem does not guarantee self-esteem at all. The recently much-studied imposter syndrome illustrates a possible discrepancy. Many high functioning people suffer from the feeling that the praise they get for their work is not legitimate. They report feeling like they have been 'faking' to be good at what they do rather than actually being good, that they are a fraud, and that they will soon be found out by everyone (Clance and Imes 1978). Even after writing eleven books, Maya Angelou said: "I've run a game on everybody, and they're going to find me out," (Richards 2015). The esteem people with this imposter syndrome give themselves does not align with the esteem they get from others. They feel a schism between their self-esteem and the esteem they get from others. They feel unworthy of the praise they get.

In order for self-esteem to be reasonable, it is in the first place vital that a person deserves esteem *in her own eyes* (Keshen 2017, 25). Self-esteem is not acquired by simply being esteemed by others, but by feeling worthy of that esteem. The artist opening her solo show perhaps welcomes the praise of the gallery guests, but the reason for her pride is probably that she did something successful in *her own* opinion. The importance of feeling worthy of esteem, rather than simply getting esteemed, explains why we usually value the esteem of well-informed like-minded peers over that of someone we find unknowledgeable or morally fraudulent. Keshen argues that the other is simply the middleman on our way to self-esteem. If the young artist is praised, she has what Keshen calls 'reflected reasons' for self-esteem. But if the artist is reasonable, she will only welcome this



praise as an increase to her self-esteem if she finds that the guests have good reasons to esteem her. The reasons for others to praise her are the same as her own reasons for self-esteem, and the “reference to the evaluator drops out of her rationalization” (2017, 23).

Is the other unnecessary for our reasons for self-esteem, as Keshen seems to imply? I focus on three arguments that suggest otherwise. The first argues that dismissing the eyes of others is undesirable, the second that it is hardly possible, and the third that it is empirically simply not the case that we disregard others’ eyes. We should not, we cannot, and we don’t.

A first line of argument stresses that others grant us insights into ourselves that we cannot reach alone. To dismiss these insights by considering the eyes of others irrelevant for self-esteem is undesirable because it leaves us with an incomplete view of ourselves. Both Hans Maes and Krista Thomason develop a version of this idea. Maes argues that there is an asymmetry to what we can say or think about ourselves, and what others can say or think about us (2004). He uses the analogy of gift-giving to illustrate our inevitable dependency on others to gain insight in how well we are doing. Giving a present is optional, something a person may as well not give. A genuine present is a spontaneous token of personal appreciation, and not asked for. People “expect it to come unexpected” (2005, 144, my translation). A present is not transactional, the giver expects nothing in return.

The same counts for esteem. When someone praises you, or compliments you, they are *giving* you something. As soon as you demand a present from someone else, the present is no longer really a present. The receiver of the present, like the receiver of esteem, is not *entitled* to it. Esteem needs to be given voluntarily. It seems inappropriate to claim the right to a present, even if you are well-deserving of one. Maes uses the example of a person doing a neighbor a favor by babysitting his children (2004, 492). At the end of the night, the babysitter says to her neighbor that he should give her a present for her kindness. Even if such a token of appreciation may well be in place here, it is not the babysitter’s place to claim it. The same goes for esteem: even if one is worthy of esteem, it is presumptuous to expect it.

The spontaneous and unrequested esteem by another is a source of

insight into the self that cannot be replaced by one's own judgment. Not only is it inappropriate to claim esteem from others, it is also impossible (Maes 2005, 195). The viewpoint of another is often simply inaccessible to us. That, however, does not mean that it is unimportant to our self-esteem. On the contrary, it is constitutive of how we view ourselves.

Krista Thomason argues that the sensitivity to the judgment of another is fundamental and valuable to come to a well-rounded image of the self (2018). We are simply not the only ones who determine who or what we are, she argues, and it is necessary that we complete the image that we have of ourselves with how others perceive us. Our identities extend beyond how we see ourselves (93). Believing you are not racist, for example, does not entail that you actually *are* not racist, as the plethora of "I'm not racist but..." internet memes have picked up on. Being sensitive to other's judgments means that "we do not take our own self-conception as the final authority on the kinds of people we are" (12). That realization makes us think about ourselves in ways that we would otherwise not, and it compels us to revise and adjust what we do and who we are (99-100). The other is crucial for our self-esteem, because the absence or dismissal of that other renders our self-image necessarily incomplete.

A second argument for the importance of other eyes focuses on the near impossibility to conceive of self-esteem without a social context in which there are shared ideas of what is worthy of esteem. We determine together with peers, whether it concerns a smaller group of like-minded people or a larger community like a country or culture, what we find valuable and what counts as a token of that value. I do not mean that values are entirely socially constructed, because to some extent we can reason about what is good, and come closer to a true and objective meaning of the good. But even then, a certain level of social agreement is indispensable. Even if there is objective value in art, for instance, we learn what art is by seeing examples of previous artists. How do we know what good piano-playing is, or what a fashionable appearance is, if we do not count ourselves as members of a society in which playing Mozart is considered more praiseworthy than playing the tunes of happy birthday, and in which Dries Van Noten shoes look nicer than Crocs? There are tacit agreements on what it means to be an artist, and what separates art from amateurism, or so-

phistication from banality, and we learn those by looking around us and learning from others.

The way that our surroundings influence how we interpret certain values, like independence or success, is illustrated nicely in a passage from the Finnish journalist Anu Partanen. Having experienced both the Finnish and the American culture up close, she makes poignant observations:

When I was ten years old, my family lived deep in the woods. Like most young kids in Finland, my brother and I were left to our own devices to trek the mile or so to school and back every day. Often we rode our bikes, and sometimes we walked, but during the long winters when the snow piled up too high, there were days when we were supposed to ski to school. I hated skiing, so mostly I insisted on walking anyway. One evening after I'd returned home, my mother asked offhandedly how the walk to school had been that day.

I explained that at first the going had been a bit tricky, since with every step I had sunk into the snow all the way up to my hips. But I'd discovered that if I crawled on all fours I wouldn't fall through. After that the going was easy, I said, so I proceeded to crawl on all fours for much of the mile to school.

To my proud parents that was a sign that their daughter had *sisu* [best translated as something like "grit"]. I could imagine the different story that a proud American would tell about their child: The kid gets out of the snow immediately, flags down a passing car, and deploys prodigious charm to negotiate not only a ride but an entrepreneurial arrangement that leads to the kid becoming the CEO of a million-dollar snow-shoveling business by the age of sixteen, featured on the cover of *Fortune*. (2016, 17)

We share a horizon of significance, as Charles Taylor has called it, in which some things are worthwhile and others are not (1992, 38). We care about others' eyes because oftentimes we share a lot of their values and opinions. If they remark something about us, it might be worthwhile to take this judgment to heart. The more we share with the other, the more their judgment matters to us, because it is likely that they have reasons for their judgements that I could agree with.

A very trivial example of this happened to me when I was living in Chicago, away from my hometown of Antwerp, Belgium. After a year

of living in my usual uniform of dark-colored and minimalistic clothes, two close American friends mentioned in passing that in their circles (“in North-America” were their specific words, but that seemed like quite a generalization to me), it is uncommon to wear the same outfit two days in a row. I remember looking at my well-worn jeans and sweater, and giggling along with my friends. I have a habit of wearing my clothes until they need washing, and then moving to the next set of sweater and pants. My friends said they are used to having a couple of sets on rotation, but they are careful not to wear the same combination two days in a row. “Do people really notice if I wear the same multiple days in a row?” I asked. They both nodded firmly. I laughed, because I had been blissfully unaware of all the judgment passed on me by American eyes throughout the year. But I wasn’t ashamed or inclined to change anything about my habits. The reasons to change outfits everyday simply aren’t compelling to me. I grew up in a surrounding where durability and sturdiness of clothing is valued, and to have very few and basic but high-quality clothes is even a token of standing. That is the horizon of significance that I share.

My example is about the triviality of clothing, but these shared values are often of broader significance. Again, I gratefully and elaborately quote Anu Partanen to make this point. She writes about the changing horizon of values over time in Finland, with respect to fatherhood:

For my male friends in Finland, posting updates and photos on Facebook that depict them caring for their infants or toddlers is something to “humblebrag” about, to the extent that it’s become a point of pride and a kind of competition. “It’s almost like you’re not a real man anymore if you haven’t done your share of diaper duty,” a Finnish father told me (...) While two decades ago a father might have been embarrassed to stay home, now Finnish fathers are more likely to be ashamed if they don’t take time off, and many feel a responsibility to be involved in most aspects of their children’s lives, whether doctor’s appointments, day care, or school field trips. (2016, 92, 95)

Whether a certain path of life is worthwhile depends among other things on whether we have the semantic resources available to think of these paths as true and good options for us. Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth argue that we only regard certain paths as true options for us, if we are

able to see a possibility for social recognition in them (2004, 136). The notion of “being a stay-at-home dad” is framed by a whole range of evaluative ways of talking, and as long as these are predominantly negative, the prospect of becoming such a father ceases to be a real option. That prospect is not accompanied by a sense of meaning and significance. But as soon as we have the semantic tools to speak of “being a stay-at-home dad” as a goal that is worthy of esteem, associated with responsibility, dedication, care, ‘real manhood’, and so on, then this path becomes available and worthwhile for fathers. We define ourselves through frameworks that provide us with orientation in the world (Taylor 1989, 89). The semantic framework that defines worthwhile options is part of that horizon that we share. As Partanen’s example shows, it is one that we can mold and shape as we go.

The other is necessary for our self-esteem, because the worthwhile options for us are always informed and structured through shared frameworks of meaning. It seems impossible to conceive of self-esteem without the other, because esteeming anything at all, including the self, presupposes that horizon of significance.

The hypothesis that the eyes of others are a vital ingredient of self-esteem is supported by empirical evidence as well. The observed correlation between other-esteem and self-esteem is in itself not enough of an argument for the importance of the former for the latter. That other-esteem and self-esteem are de facto often connected in psychological experiments does not mean that they *should* be, as the naturalistic fallacy explains. But empirical evidence of a link between the two can support other arguments, in the sense that the empirical data agree with the hypothesis. What we see in the world at least doesn’t disprove the idea that the eyes of others play a significant part in how we esteem ourselves. Even if we wanted to, it turns out to be quite hard to ignore these other eyes.

Reflected appraisals, the esteem we get from others, is considered one of the most important psychological sources of self-esteem (Cooley 1902, Mead and Morris 1934, Yanal 1987, 368). Some even place it before other important sources of self-esteem, like our own perception of competence, or social comparison (Schwalbe and Staples 1991). Experiments have shown repeatedly that peer approval generally increases self-esteem

(Thomaes et al. 2010, Gruenenfelder-Steiger, Harris, and Fend 2016). Those who are told that they are strong, intelligent and capable, are more likely to believe that they actually are, and more willing to tackle hard tasks (Williams and DeSteno 2008).

The effect of other eyes is especially striking when their look is one of rejection or disapproval. Negative esteem by others fuels low self-esteem. Such a correlation is often seen in minorities who internalize the social stereotypes associated with their group. Stigmatized individuals absorb negative stereotypes into their self-concept, and often experience lower self-esteem than control groups (Rivera and Paredes 2014). In the now-famous ‘doll-test’, psychologists Mamie and Kenneth Clark asked children to ascribe qualities to two different dolls, identical except for their skin color (1950). Both white and Black children preferred the white doll over the Black one, and ascribed positive qualities to the white doll. The Black doll was described with negative characteristics, by both Black and white children. The Clark couple concluded from the experiment that negative stereotyping under racial segregation had seriously damaged the self-esteem of the Black children.

The experiment has been replicated in numerous different settings. In 2005, film school student Kiri Davis blew new life into the experiment for her short documentary *A Girl Like Me* (2005). The respondents repeated the answers from fifty-five years earlier almost word by word. Sunny Bergman sat down with Dutch 8-year-olds for her 2016 documentary *Wit is ook een kleur* (2016). She handed them images of white, brown, and Black children and asked questions about their intelligence, popularity, leadership, behavior and appearance. The children’s responses confirm what the Clarks established in 1950: the white child is called nice, beautiful and popular, while the Black child is associated with naughtiness, a lack of intelligence and anger.

Women are more likely than men to underestimate their capacities, several studies have shown (Travis 1988, Ehrlinger and Dunning 2003, Madrazo et al. 2018). Women with traditionally feminine gender identification are more likely than men to suffer low self-esteem (Travis 1988). It is plausible that gender stereotypes, social expectations, and social disapproval of trespassing these traditional gender roles are among the reasons for this gendered confidence gap (Dillon 1997, 236). We tend to underes-

timate women, especially in historically masculine-coded domains (Manne 2017, 250). A study showed that men are judged to be more competent than women when competing for the same position, even if their files show no significant difference in competence (Heilman et al. 2004, Manne 2017, 252). A woman who competes for a powerful position in politics, traditionally a male field, is judged more harshly than her male counterparts (Manne 2017, 249). It is unlikely for these judgments not to fuel self-doubt and undermine her self-esteem.

This leaves us with a tension that can be difficult to navigate. On the one hand, granting the other some authority over how we are doing seems good, as Thomason and Maes showed. On the other hand, the judgments of others can stereotype, stigmatize, and restrict us. “We are faced with the problem of trying to live in a social world where others interact with us in racist, sexist, classist, or phobic ways,” Krista Thomason writes (2018, 98). Especially marginalized groups face this difficulty in constructing an identity and self-image. But also more generally, the thought ‘what will they think of me’ has more than once stood in the way of innovation and justice. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, I kept shaking people’s hands for longer than was good, because I feared others would find me odd or foolish if I refused to do so. In the Swiss comedy-drama film *Die göttliche Ordnung*, the husband of the female lead Nora withholds public support of her campaign for the women’s right to vote, despite doing so in private (Volpe 2017). The film makes his reasons clear: he is afraid of becoming the conservative town’s laughing stock. Nora struggles to get other women on board for the same reason. “The eyes of others our prisons, their thoughts our cages,” Virginia Woolf once wrote (2004, 39).

But the other extreme is to be avoided as well. We should to some extent cultivate that we care about the opinions of others, because without it we live in a world “in which neglect and self-indulgence risk the future of nature itself” (Morgan 2008, 33). When pride is self-indulgent, we mean that the proud person disregards other eyes in favor of her own. When pride is mostly about visible elements of status and ‘showing off’, we think she does the opposite, and cares too much about reflected appraisal. All-things-considered appropriate pride hits the sweet spot be-

tween these two. How we do that is a subtle game to play, to borrow Maes' words (2005, 202). We should base our self-esteem on our own judgment of our qualities, while still being responsive to reasonable criticism and perspectives other than our own. Both the esteemer and the esteemed have a responsibility to be critical and reasonable, and to continuously reconsider and discuss the reasons for esteem. Still, that is easier said than done. For this reason, the amount of weight we attach to other people's eyes is a great liability of self-esteem pride. Either too much or too little and pride turns bitter.

### THREE: ON BLUFF AND SELF-CENTEREDNESS

One of the main reasons pride is often thought of negatively is because of its focus on the self. The proud person is self-centered and self-involved. From the three main ways of pride to go wrong, Gabriele Taylor indicates the disproportionate amount of thinking about the self as the second way (1985, 47). The first entailed thinking well of the self on ill-supported grounds, which was discussed earlier in this section. The self-centeredness that Taylor condemns is not a necessary condition for pride, nor is the self-centered person always proud (Maes 2005). One of the reasons self-centeredness and pride are often conflated is because in pride, displays of the emotion do not always reflect an experience of pride. In other words: pride is not rarely bluff.

Surely, a self-centered person can have high self-esteem, and feel pride because of it. In such cases, pride does go together with an excessive focus on the self. I will come back to these cases later. But a lot of times, explicit displays of pride are not the outward advertisements of high self-esteem, but rather of the opposite. Many psychologists have argued that emphasizing one's greatness can actually be a sign of an insecure sense of self and low self-esteem. The more fragile one's sense of self, the greater the need to see it confirmed through other eyes. In his authoritative philosophical article on self-esteem, Robert Yanal writes: "the temptation is to say that someone who continually relies on the evaluations by others of his excellences and accomplishments lacks good self-esteem" (1987).

One common explanation for narcissism dating back to Freud's psychoanalysis is that narcissism is a defensive mechanism to counter insecur-



rity, rather than high self-esteem (Tracy 2016, 41). Low self-esteem solicits aggression and anger under the guise of high self-esteem. One study found that narcissists tend to score highly on explicit self-esteem, but low on implicit self-esteem (Jordan et al. 2003). When asked blatantly how positively they thought about themselves, the test subjects would answer in superlatives. In a second part of the experiment, subjects were tested on their associations between personal pronouns like ‘me’ and ‘myself’, and base words like ‘vomit’ or ‘cockroach’. It turned out that the more positive the subjects were about themselves explicitly, the more negative they were implicitly. Outward demonstrations of pride, like self-praise, an inflated chest and the demonstration of high-status goods, are used to deny an insecure sense of self, rather than to affirm a secure one.

Anders Breivik, the Norwegian terrorist who took the stage in the introduction, is a prime example of this Freudian hypothesis. His biographer describes him as deeply concerned with his appearance (Seierstad 2015). He saved up for a nose job because he disliked his nose so much. He made a scene when his mugshot was not to his liking and was vigilant of any image that appeared of him. Does this strike us as someone who felt secure and prosperous? Or is Breivik so protective of his public image out of fear for what might be shown otherwise? An ugly nose? A life full of shame, failures, abuse and rejections? An analyst of narcissism in terrorists writes: “Their grandiose self-beliefs are built on foundations as solid as quicksand, hence the need for constant admiration and attention, shoring up their unstable sense of self” (Manne 2015). Breivik hangs somewhere between finding himself immensely great and indivisibly small.

People with a healthy sense of self and good self-esteem have less need for outward displays of pride, Martha Nussbaum argues (2016). People who feel prosperous or successful are less inclined to get angry and defensive when experiencing a setback (54, 154). Nussbaum describes status-protective anger as a consequence of “being wrapped up in the narcissistic wounds of the ego” (52). The convulsive preoccupation with outward status and admiration is more often than not a guise for low self-esteem. I cannot help but think of the old joke that men with big cars must be compensating for a lack elsewhere.

There is a discordance between the outward displays of pride, the chest-thumping search for admiration, and the self-esteem that usually

warrants pride. It is self-centeredness, not self-esteem pride, that occupies the narcissist. But because the narcissist appears in the costume of pride in the hopes of living up to what he claims to be, we tend to conflate one with the other. What is harmful in these cases is not pride but self-centeredness. In the self-centered person, the self looms too large (Lippitt 2009, 128). The self-centered person focuses on the self disproportionately, and is unable to pay sufficient attention to her surroundings, other people, and their interests. She has a perverse interest in her own role (Adams 1998, 508). Self-centeredness is what Iris Murdoch warns against, when she calls the big fat ego the enemy of morality (1970, 51). This should be something we take into account when scrutinizing self-esteem pride. But self-centeredness is not a necessary feature of pride, and not all self-centeredness is pride. The reason the two often seem to appear together is not that most pride is self-centered, but that a lot of *displays* of pride are. But pride isn't always what it pretends to be.

#### FOUR: A ZERO SUM GAME

The Italian town of San Gimignano stands out in the hilly landscape of Tuscany. From afar, fourteen medieval skyscrapers catch the eye. In its prime, the town had as much as seventy-two of these towers. Unlike modern-day high-rises, the towers were not built to be lived in. They are narrow and dark, with only a small window here and there. The towers served a different purpose. Aristocratic families constructed the high-rises to demonstrate wealth and status (Vatiero 2011). The higher the tower, the more affluent a family was considered to be. With the material to build the towers being quite pricey, a high tower meant that one could afford the expense. At the time when there were over seventy towers, some stood so close to each other that a person could not even pass through the narrow alley between them. Yet families purposely left a gap between towers. Sharing a wall would have reduced the construction cost, but that would defy the purpose of the towers, which was precisely to show that one could afford that cost. This building strategy excluded poorer families from building a tower by sharing in costs with neighbors. Building the entire edifice was a rare good, and derives its value precisely from the lack of opportunity for poorer families to build one. If every family of San Gimi-

gnano could build a tower, having a high tower would lose its significance.

The dynamic of rivalry and status through the San Gimignano towers is a prime example of a positional good at work (Hirsch 1976, Vatierto 2011). Positional goods derive their value from how they are distributed, rather than from an intrinsic value. Positional goods are scarce, not everyone can have them, and having more of them is therefore a token of higher status or achievement. The value of a positional good is not in having the good *per se*, but in the fact that others have less of it. What counts as a positional good is highly dependent on cultural norms. Building tall windowless brick buildings has now been replaced by owning real estate, diamonds, or rare and expensive models of cars. Still, some goods are considered desirable tokens of status because they are possessed by relatively few. Compare these goods to access to drinking water, human rights, or health care. In most modern-day Western societies, these goods are non-positional. Everyone has equal access to them, they are not scarce, and they are intrinsically desirable. A decrease in access to drinking water, human rights, or health care for another does not make me better off or increase my relative status. The access to these goods is part of a non-zero-sum or positive-sum game. The towers in San Gimignano, on the other hand, are part of a zero-sum game. In game theory, a zero-sum game indicates that for some to win, others must lose. The value of a tower is defined in relation to the relative disvalue of another. One tower's tallness necessarily comes at the cost of another tower's shortness.

The philosopher Robert Nozick argues that self-esteem is, in a sense, much like a positional good. We evaluate how well we do something by comparing to others, and "there is no standard of doing something well, independent of how it is or can be done by others" (1974, 241). Like the towers in San Gimignano, self-esteem is intrinsically competitive and comparative, Nozick argues, and can only come about when we think we do something well relative to how others do it. When teaching a child how to swim, I might feel relatively good about my own swimming capacities. But if Michael Phelps dives into the lane next to me, my self-esteem about my swimming skills likely plunges. Nozick conceives of the traits that warrant self-esteem much like goods in a zero-sum game. One can only be good at something if another is relatively worse at it.

The Easterlin paradox describes the odd phenomenon that an in-

crease in GDP does not result in an increase of overall happiness (East-erlin 1974, 1995). We would expect everyone to be better off with a general increase of purchasing power, yet studies show that if everyone gains purchase power with the exact same amount, self-ascribed feelings of well-being do not climb accordingly. If every medieval citizen of San Gimignano was given bricks and tools to add one flight to their tower, no one would have felt an increase in status.

One explanation for this phenomenon is that we value what we have relative to others (Clark, Frijters, and Shields 2008). Relative status seems just as (if not more) important to our self-image as absolute status. In one experiment, respondents were asked to choose between a world in which they have more of a good than others, and one where everyone's endowment is higher in absolute numbers, but the respondent has less than others (Solnick and Hemenway 1998). If the good was money, the answers seemed clear. At least half of the respondents preferred to have 50% less real income but high relative income. When the goods in the questionnaire were swapped for non-monetary goods like attractiveness, approval from a supervisor, or intelligence, the concern for relative endowment was still strong. These traits are precisely the kinds of traits that are grounds for self-esteem, and we seem to value them relatively to the degree in which others possess them. As the anthropologist Malinowski writes: "luck, possessions, even health, are matters of degree and comparison, and if your neighbor owns more cattle, more wives, more health and more power than yourself, you are dwarfed in all you own and all you are" (1948, 65).

We can ask Nozick two questions about his initial claim. First, is it true that self-esteem pride is necessarily comparative and competitive? And second, if self-esteem pride is indeed comparative and competitive (which in many cases it undoubtedly is), what does that mean for the moral evaluation of self-esteem pride?

Do we necessarily compare ourselves to others in order to esteem ourselves? Often it does seem like we gain self-esteem because we possess some trait in greater quantities than others. In a sports competition, for instance, it benefits the winning team that the other teams did slightly worse. An acceptance letter from a highly competitive college feels more rewarding than one for a college with high admission rates. But we can

also evaluate ourselves positively according to a non-comparative standard of what it means to do something well (Mason 1990, 92). For an artist to be successful at painting, for instance, might mean two things. A successful artist might be outstanding, noticeable above all the others, more special or talented than other artists. But an artist can also succeed when she does what art is supposed to do: to move people, or to make someone see something in a different light, to capture someone's attention. The comparison to other artists is irrelevant when success is defined in that way.

Anthony Skillen asks: what does it mean to be successful at building a boat (1977, 49)? The question at stake is not: is the boat on the better side of the spectrum of boats, but rather: does the boat float? If the boat floats, the builder has objectively succeeded at building a boat. Sure, the boat-builder can want more than simply build a boat. He might want the boat to be aesthetically impressive, made out of the highest quality wood, and painted colors that make it most visible at sea. Mason distinguishes between doing something *successfully* and doing something *well* (1990, 92). If we want to do something well, we might want to look at others for comparison. But doing something successfully only requires that we meet some objective standard of what it entails to do that thing, like building a boat. Meeting the standards of building a boat successfully can provide the builder with a non-comparative sense of self-assessment.

Some traits are intrinsically comparative. You can only call yourself tall if your height is above average. It indicates that other people are relatively short. The meaning of tall can only be derived from its exceptionality compared to the average height, and its relative rarity. Keshen calls this a proportionate comparison, and it is much like a positional good (2017, 36). Tall people are on the rarer end of the spectrum, compared to the proportion of people who do not have this trait. Keshen distinguishes this from a direct comparison, when we take a hit to our self-esteem because of a specific person that is doing better than us (36). You know, that one person we can't help but follow from behind our computers, whom we feel is doing just one step better than ourselves at the things that we aspire to. *She* got published. *She* is creative. Things go smoothly *for her*.

Proportionate and direct comparisons constitute the competitive reasons for self-esteem (36). But then there are traits that can be reasons for self-esteem that are not comparative. Being a doctor, for instance,

simply means that one has studied for several years, finished exams successfully, and practices medicine under the oath of Hippocrates (47). Of course, a doctor can be better or worse, more or less careful, empathetic, or cautious. But all doctors who meet the initial criteria should at a basic level already be good doctors.

It seems untrue that a person can only gain self-esteem when she believes that she is comparatively well at something. People can be perfectly satisfied with their accomplishments, knowing very well that others are better at them (Mason 1990, 93). The student abroad fixing his radiator handle on his own does not presume he is as good as or better at plumbing than a professional handyman. He knows that the handyman would have done a better and faster job. But the student is proud precisely because *he* fixed it according to the best of his abilities, even if those are relatively low when it comes to plumbing. He can accept that he is relatively bad at a task, yet still gain self-esteem from completing it.

Even though self-esteem can be comparative and competitive, it doesn't seem like that is necessarily the case. There does not need to be conflict over scarce resources in order for someone to come to a positive self-assessment. Esteem is not necessarily a zero-sum game, but can very well be a positive-sum game. If a boat-builder cares about making a floating boat, then no amount of other floating boats will diminish his accomplishment if he succeeds. He is proud because *he* built a boat to the best of *his* abilities. Sometimes we assess our abilities according to non-comparative standards of success. And we can be proud while knowing that we do not excel at that which we are proud of. In both these cases, the reasons for self-esteem are not comparative or competitive.

But in many cases however, pride is indisputably comparative and subscribes to the rules of a zero-sum game. Could the solution to the main question of this dissertation be as simple as this: when pride is competitive, it is bad, and when it's not, it is good? Christopher Morgan-Knapp has argued that comparative pride is always unwarranted (2018). How well one did relative to others, he argues, adds nothing to the intrinsic value of the success. To claim that it does reveals the unwarranted belief that one is somehow responsible for the relative lack of others. "Winning is a matter of one's rivals lacking the competence, opportunity, effort or

luck to succeed. But out-performing others for these reasons fails to add anything of value to the world above and beyond the non-comparative attributes of that performance” (326). Pride after winning a competition for instance, Morgan-Knapp argues, is only warranted if it purports to the value of the achievement itself, rather than to the relative value compared to other contestants.

Apart from being unwarranted in Morgan-Knapp’s sense, comparative grounds for self-esteem pride are harmful in many ways. The concern for relative status reveals a preoccupation with social standing, which upholds social hierarchies like class and rank. These hierarchies are not only archaic, they are the source of real injustices. In his book “Somebodies and Nobodies. The Abuse of Rank,” Robert W. Fuller coins the word ‘rankism’ for the discriminatory effects of social rankings. “Rankism erodes the will to learn, distorts personal relationships, taxes economic productivity, and stokes ethnic hatred. It is the cause of dysfunctionality, and sometimes even violence, in families, schools, and the workplace. Like racism and sexism, rankism must be named and identified and then negotiated out of all our social institutions” (2003, 413). The focus on relative status polices social boundaries and deepens the divisions between social groups.

The mechanism that keeps these social divisions in place is precisely the belief that esteem is part of a zero-sum game. The belief that esteem is scarcely divided and highly sought after makes it directly beneficial that others have less of it. Brennan and Pettit call this game “the economy of esteem,” and suggest that it lies hidden in the whirl of our social lives (2000, 97). Esteem in this economy can be earned by doing intrinsically good things. But when esteem is comparative, as Brennan and Pettit suggest it is, there is more than one way to obtain it. We can seek status by distinguishing ourselves positively, or by making others look comparatively worse (McAdams 2018, 379). Esteem as a comparative good thus becomes a hotbed for envy and the desire for others to fail. Martha Nussbaum warns that the obsession with relative status directly leads to practices of humiliation (2016, 93, 197). The road of status is normatively defective because it gives us an incentive to drag others through the mud. A society with an emphasis on social mobility “opens the door to envy for the prosperity of others” (339). The other is made into an obstacle, rather

than a companion in the search of a good life. Self-esteem is bound to make us anxious when the other is both the enemy in the race for it, and the eye that confirms it.

One of the reasons this status-driven envy is so harmful is because it thwarts solidarity both within and between groups. Naomi Wolf describes such an example in her best-selling *The Beauty Myth* (1991). Even as women's socio-economic possibilities have increased, she argues, the idea of beauty as a recipe for success still befalls them disproportionately. Not only do unrealistic standards of beauty reflect in worldly successes like status and wealth, beauty has even become an ethical ideal (Widdows 2018), the search for perfection permeating our every move. Wolf writes:

The myth does not only isolate women generationally, but because it encourages women's wariness of one another on the basis of their appearance, it tries to isolate them from all women they do not know and like personally. Though women have networks of intimate friends, the myth, and women's conditions until recently, have kept women from learning how to do something that makes all male social change possible: How to identify with unknown other women in a way that is not personal (1991, 75).

The quest for esteem through beauty turns women into enemies. If the beauty of another is a relative threat to mine, solidarity is a far cry. In a recent book by Dutch journalists Milou Deelen and Daan Borrel, the phenomenon in which women seek out each other as enemies and engage in competition in domains beyond beauty alone is referred to as "scratching" (2020). Deelen recounts how she was shamed for her sexual liberty in her student days. She was surprised to find that the shaming came mostly from other women. In the book, they address and explore how women are encouraged to turn against each other, and find ways to stand out at the cost of others, and describe this phenomenon as harmful. "I'm not like other girls," is a way of saying: "they are not my allies."

Competitive grounds for self-esteem feed envy and the wish for the misfortune of others. It blocks the solidarity and care for others on which morality is built. I come back to this in the next chapter. The picture of



competition painted here is bleak, and there seems to be very little reason to defend competitive self-esteem pride. Overall, these competitive reasons for pride are the result of harmful ideas about esteem in which one can go up only if the other goes down.

But measuring ourselves to others and engaging in competitions with them does add some things of value, even if they fade in comparison to the harms. Literal competitions, like a sports game or an essay contest, can encourage us to develop talents and work on skills, in the sense that these competitions can give us a goal to work towards (Keshen 2017, 48). Perhaps we would not start that essay if we did not have the goal of submitting it somewhere where its quality would be assessed. And we would not train intensively to leisurely play soccer in the park with our friends. It can be motivating to enter into games with people who have developed a skill to a similar extent as you, and to feel neither unimpressed nor overwhelmed, but challenged by them just the right amount.

The value of competition (and whether it has any added value at all) is discussed in philosophical literature (Cawston 2016, Hussain 2018, Cox 2019). Some deny that competition is needed to gain the benefits painted above, arguing that they can be gained without competition as well (Kohn 1992). Many agree that competition is problematic if it is not at least supported by intrinsic motivation (MacIntyre 1981, Kohn 1992, Cox 2019). The joy and ambition to play soccer, for instance, should precede the competition if we want to avoid the envy and spite that competition can foster. As the platitude goes: taking part is more important than winning. The competition can provide a framework through which we can finetune our talents and skills. It can add an extra layer to the experience of sports or writing, but should not be the main goal. If winning is not the main goal, then the competition can be left behind on the field, while the soccer players return to their practices. The competition can help to clarify the relevant standards for what it means to play soccer well (Keshen 2017, 48), but then the regard in which the results of the game matter is because they testify (if all goes well) to the quality of the soccer game itself: the skill of the players, the level of fair play, the strategy of the trainer.

The problem is that it proves quite hard for people to keep competitive spheres confined to soccer games or essay contests. The class team from the example at the beginning of this chapter continued the compe-

tition from gym in math class. The rules of a zero-sum ball game are mistakenly transferred to areas where these rules do not and should not apply. The value of a human being, for instance, can be mistakenly conceived as something that is to be competed about, which directly encourages humiliation and denigration of others. This is the topic of the next liability of self-esteem pride, but it touches on the main issues of the next chapter as well. There is great harm when we confuse the mechanisms of self-respect with those of self-esteem, for they require a very different stance. Where competition can have a very minimal value in self-esteem pride, it is entirely out of place in self-respect pride.

#### FIVE: INFECTIOUS SUPERIORITY

The third way Gabriele Taylor describes for pride to be excessive is when pride issues a mistaken take of superiority (1985, 45). The arrogant person is guilty of this charge. Arrogance means making a claim of superiority in two senses: first, as we have seen before, there is the problem of entitlement. Feeling pride about a success or a desirable trait is easily confused with the belief that one is also entitled to the admiration of others. Such a claim to others' praise holds no ground, as Maes' analogy of gift-giving showed earlier in this chapter (2004). Even if we deserve praise, we can never claim it, for the demand itself would defeat the essence of praise.

A different problematic quality of the arrogant person is that she allows her reasonable self-esteem pride about one trait to spread like a wet ink stain. Just like admiration for another, pride has a permeating quality (Archer and Matheson 2019, 4). When we come to feel pride about an achievement, it is tempting to subsequently feel an increase in self-esteem in domains unrelated to the original achievement. Pride, even if it pertains to one trait, tends to color our overall self-evaluation. One explanation for this spreading tendency is that it is a self-oriented form of the halo effect, the tendency to let positive impressions about a person influence further evaluations of that person (Archer and Matheson 2019, 4). One well-known example of the halo effect is the cognitive bias teachers are shown to have when grading students (Malouff et al. 2014). If a student is known to be helpful, active in class, or even simply good-looking, teachers are more likely to interpret their exam answers generously.

The halo effect also suggests that we are more likely to forgive missteps of people we previously evaluated positively. This effect, together with a well-studied bias that favors men's testimonies over women's, has played a prominent role in celebrity accountability under #metoo allegations (Manne 2017, Nussbaum 2017, Archer and Matheson 2019). Many people are reluctant to believe or take seriously the allegations against Woody Allen, for example, and are more prone to excuse him because of his excellence as a film director. Men like Woody Allen, Bill Cosby, or Roman Polanski are "shielded by glamor [and] public trust" (Nussbaum 2017). The 'golden boy' phenomenon is an example of similar harms of the halo-effect in everyday life. In trials or informal allegations of sexual assault against young men, it is striking how often the qualities of the perpetrators are brought in by the defense, as mitigating circumstances for the crime they committed. Kate Manne aligns some of these testimonies and paints a convincing picture that the good qualities of these accused men are often brought up either as mitigating circumstances or as outright proof that the accused *could simply not have* committed the crime (2017, 198).

I propose that a similar halo effect can pertain to the self. Students high in self-esteem, one study found, evaluate their own performance and the teacher's feedback more favorably than students with low or average self-esteem (Jussim, Coleman, and Nassau 1987). Research on 'moral licensing' suggests that the reflection on one's moral achievements can serve as a justification for future misconduct (Effron and Conway 2015). Self-esteem pride can both encourage us to evaluate our other traits more positively, and to be more forgiving towards flaws and effectively make us less self-critical. It's a common phenomenon: the winning team derives a general superiority from a victory in gym class. But also: the girl who got admitted to a prestigious university suddenly feels 'too good' for her childhood friends. There is a sense in which self-esteem pride can feed into a general feeling of superiority, usually associated with arrogance or smugness, and this is explained if self-esteem pride shares this permeating quality with the admiration for others. The arrogant person comes to believe not only that she has achieved something valuable in a certain domain, but that this makes her superior either in other domains, or overall.

The conclusion that she is superior in other domains, where she has

not yet proven her worth, is harmful simply because it is unwarranted. It is erroneous to derive from an accomplishment in sports that one will also do well in mathematics, or vice versa. The conclusion that she is superior overall is more complex. As we will see in the next chapter, it means that she confuses the rules of self-respect with those of self-esteem. She derives from an accomplishment for which she can be considered ‘better’ than others, that she is ‘better’ than others, period. Subsequently, she can come to believe that she is entitled not only to praise and laudations (which is in itself already problematic, as Maes showed (2004)), but that she is entitled to more rights than others, and that she can get away with more than others can. Such conclusions of superiority are harmful, because they encourage the belittling and humiliation of others. Superiority follows the rules of a zero-sum game: feeling superior inevitably comes at the cost of other’s inferiority.

Though I save the full discussion of these examples for later, racism and nationalism provide examples of this mistaken claim to superiority. If all we see is white people’s success, we might mistakenly come to see a pattern in that success: their whiteness. “The solidarity that a group achieves in producing status for itself may motivate beliefs in its natural superiority and other group’s inferiority,” Richard McAdams writes (2018, 389). Yet reasons for Black underrepresentation are not inferiority but rather historical oppression, lack of chances and other social disadvantages.

In a special quarantine edition of *The Point Magazine* during the 2020 corona crisis, a Swedish contributor describes the sense of pride that befalls her when she thinks about how Sweden responded to the crisis (Bäckström 2020). In the spring of 2020, while other Western countries opted almost without exception for a ‘lockdown’ (which includes the closure of schools, bars and restaurants, non-essential shops, and the prohibition of social gatherings with people other than housemates), Sweden remained relatively open and unregulated. Other countries almost seemed to be “rooting for Sweden’s strategy to fail,” as the writer puts it, because there was a sense in which, if Sweden did well, all other countries would have endured imprisonment for nothing. But Sweden’s strategy initially seemed to work. Despite not being in full lockdown, death tolls and hospitalizations for a while did not exceed those of other countries. The Swedish writer, in correspondence with a friend in Auburn, Alabama, describes

a tricky sense of pride that arose in her during these times:

Talking to my friend, what was odd was how naturally it came to me to think in terms of a *we* that was responding to this crisis. An “us Swedes” kind of we. The “we” that emerged when I talked to my friend is a fragile one. It is currently being boosted by uncouth boasting. Swedes show solidarity! Swedes trust the government! Our government trusts the bureaucrats! We trust science! And here comes the worst one I’ve seen so far: Swedes can think! A great confluence of circumstances is, in this time of fear, understood as revelatory of great national character. It is, frankly, scary. To find it working in me, to find myself clinging to this *we* even more than to the words of our high priest, the state epidemiologist, is confusing. (2020)

The initial relative success of the Swedish strategy (which, as the national Swedish epidemiologist emphasized, was an experiment just as much as other strategies were) makes the Swedes infer other positive traits about their country, the author learns from her own sense of pride. Though confused by her pride, the halo effect of pride explains how such an inference easily comes about. And from a thought like “the Swedes can think!” it is but one step to “non-Swedes really can’t.”

#### SIX: IMPRUDENTIAL PRIDE

The ‘uncouth boasting’ of which the Swedish author writes indicates another way in which pride can be objectionable. Oftentimes, it’s not the feeling of pride itself that is problematic, but rather the expression of it. The appropriateness of expressing pride cannot be evaluated *an sich*, but depends highly on the context in which the pride is expressed. One and the same act of pride can be harmless in one context but reprehensible in another. There are not only moral and epistemological reasons not to express pride in some cases, but also important prudential reasons not to. There is a relevant difference between feeling self-esteem pride, and rubbing it in.

Imagine that a hard-working employee is up for promotion. She has been at the very bottom of the professional ladder in her company for years now, proving her worth. Her employers decide it is time for her to

take on larger tasks with more responsibility. When she hears the news, she cannot hide her joy and pride. She shares her excitement with her colleagues, who are mostly happy for her. Now compare this with another situation in which not one, but two employees are up for the promotion. Only one of them can make the pick. It may be fitting for the ‘winning’ candidate to feel pride – after all, she has worked hard and achieved a goal that she finds valuable. Her reasons to feel pride have not changed compared to the first case, where she was the only candidate. In some sense, she even has *more* reasons to feel pride now, as she is now the best out of two candidates. But the fact that there was a second candidate, an equally hard-working and capable colleague and perhaps a friend that had hoped for the promotion but didn’t make the cut, changes her reasons to *express* that pride, at least in the vicinity of the other candidate. She now has prudential reasons not to express her pride.

In this example, the employee’s reasons not to express pride can range from the consideration that she should avoid unnecessarily causing hurt in someone, and taking the potential hit to the self-esteem of another into account, to wanting to avoid negative evaluations for herself. There is evidence that expressing pride can result in negative outcomes for the self, such as being envied and negatively evaluated (van Osch et al. 2019). But the negative outcomes for another are equally valuable reasons to withhold the self-applause. Will the display of pride, even if the pride is warranted and the promotion deserved, be worth the additional disappointment in another? The facts are already in favor of the winner, and likely to cause disappointment in the employee who didn’t make it. Broadcasting the win will most likely remind the colleague who lost out that she experienced a loss which possibly shook her self-esteem.

Pride is not only a reaction to an event in the world. The expression of it can in turn have an effect in the world. This expression of pride is part of what is bothersome about arrogance, boastfulness or smugness. We dislike boastfulness not primarily because the boastful person makes an epistemic mistake (like overestimation), but rather because of the fact that a boastful person ignores the contextual and prudential reasons to refrain from expressing pride. The boastful person prioritizes her chance for the spotlight over the potentially harmful effect that it has on others. This while, if the boastful person is right about her qualities, she is often

already in a better position than her audience. Depending on the context, expressing self-esteem can be – in lack of another word – simply quite petty.

The deliberate absence of the pride expression, even when pride would be warranted, is one definition of humility or modesty, often named as opposites of pride (Lewis 1964, 121, Hume 1969, 278, Hazlett 2017). Humility and modesty are not about downplaying one's own capabilities, or being mistaken about them, but rather about knowing what it is right to say and claim about oneself (Maes 2004). It is worth noting that defining humility is in itself a robust philosophical task. Apart from knowing that one cannot claim esteem, humility might be owning one's limitations (Whitcomb et al. 2017) or valuing oneself as one ought (Church and Samuelson 2017). For my account of pride, it does not matter what these philosophers eventually agree on. Humility is opposed to certain forms of erring pride: the boastful person and the arrogant person are the opposite of humble. But humility is not the opposite of proper self-esteem pride. It is rather an attitude that can accompany it, as is in line with the general agreement of philosophers in this debate (Isenberg 1949, Taylor 1985, Roberts and West 2017). My depiction of pride explains why that is the case. The opposite of self-esteem pride as I have depicted it is the feeling that one's traits or abilities are worthy of disesteem, rather than esteem. The person who lacks self-esteem pride feels that one has little or no traits or achievements worthy of esteem. Such low self-esteem is not the same as humility. To be humble, one does not need to think very little of one's own abilities. Likewise, a person with low self-esteem can be very unhumble, like the narcissist described earlier in this chapter.

I summarize. Self-esteem pride is not straightforwardly good as it has the tendency to morph into an ugly beast. Recommendations for its value as a motivator are most often made with caution, and for good reasons. First off, self-esteem pride might simply be unfitting, in the form of false beliefs about one's own abilities or an overestimation of those, or disagreement about what merits esteem. Secondly, the relation between self-esteem and other-esteem can be skewed, and the proud person might focus excessively on getting esteem, rather than critically reflecting on what she is esteemed for. Thirdly, we often confuse self-centeredness with pride.

There is a discordance between the expression of pride and the experience of an increase in self-esteem, which makes pride expressions unreliable and causes some to overcompensate feelings of low self-esteem with extreme but unwarranted prideful behavior. The fourth pitfall of pride lies in the conception of esteem as competition-based. Competition is not necessarily harmful, but it often can be, and it encourages the proud person to esteem the self only in light of the relative failure of others. A fifth problem with self-esteem pride is the contagious character of self-esteem. The halo-effect explains how self-esteem in one trait can lead to positive evaluations of unrelated traits, or even to feelings of general superiority. Sixth, the expression of pride can, depending on the context, easily be inconsiderate or petty, even if it is warranted. When we call self-esteem pride bad, it is because we have an inkling that the pride at hand tilts over to the wrong side of these considerations. Before exploring some recommendations to prevent these six pitfalls, I need to address another, perhaps more fundamental question about the morality of pride.

#### PRIDE AS A SECOND-BEST MORAL MOTIVATOR

So far, we have seen ways in which self-esteem pride can go wrong. But the initial presupposition to all these pitfalls, that there is a form of self-esteem pride that is a good motivator, can in itself also be questioned. Pride can motivate us, sometimes to do good things, but is pride the right kind of motivation? There is a strong intuition in morality, advocated by both virtue ethicists and deontologists, that not only the outcome of a deed, but also (and perhaps primarily) the motivation is crucial to determine its moral value. If someone offers us their help, for example, we think it matters whether they do so because they sincerely care about our well-being, or because they expect some favor in return. As Vanessa Carbonell describes, moral motivation comes from a commitment to moral causes *for their own sake*, not for some external reward (2009, 391). We expect moral motivation to be intrinsic motivation for the good of one's acts, not for rewards like money, favors, status, or indeed esteem.

If self-esteem motivates us to do good things, we might question the moral worth of self-esteem as a motivation on the basis of the concern



for intrinsic motivation. Self-esteem pride can encourage us to do valuable things, but only because we long to be worthy of esteem, not because we genuinely care about the good in what we do.

This critique rings true to some extent. When a friend posts about his volunteer work on Facebook, the likes he generates are at least dubious. The work he does is surely helpful, but from his post we get a sense that he is at least partly motivated by the esteem volunteer work gets him. We might judge him to lack true moral motivation, in the sense that we expect from moral motivation that it is intrinsic motivation. Would our friend still find volunteering valuable if it could not generate little blue thumbs up? Esteem as a motivator seems too fickle to guarantee a moral concern. Also, the preoccupation with esteem reveals a possibly perverse focus on the self: how am *I* doing? What do people think of *me*? It lacks the concern for others and the world and the capacity to transcend the self which is so crucial to morality.

A first answer to this critique is straightforward, and one that I have discussed earlier. It is true that a preoccupation with *getting* esteem is morally problematic as a motivation. But we have already sidelined this form of pride earlier in this chapter. Productive self-esteem is about being *worthy* of esteem, not merely about receiving it. The critique that merely a desire for esteem and applause is not properly moral is correct, but it is not evident that the same critique holds for the kind of self-esteem grounded in well-considered reasons and considerations about what is valuable.

It is tempting to say now that wanting to be worthy of esteem simply *is* the desire to be good. That a concern with pride is nothing else than a concern with the good. But making this concession would be problematic, because it denies the importance of esteem in human lives *alongside* moral concerns. The realm of esteem expands beyond morality in the strict sense. Wanting to be worthy of esteem can in some cases overlap with a desire to be good, but it comprises a much larger array of desires than the strictly moral ones. Being recognized for added value, for a worthwhile achievement, for the fruits of our capabilities, gives gratification and fulfilment in life that is separate from living virtuously. It is important to stress that the desire to be worthy of esteem is different from the desire to be good, because it allows us to see how some have less access to certain realms of accomplishment and recognition than others, even if they do

have access to morally good lives. And by this, they are harmfully deprived of a whole array of human fulfilment.

An example makes this point clearer. A housewife may well be the archetype of care and virtue: she nurses her children selflessly, she provides emotional support for her family, does not complain, and places others' needs before her own. If the desire for self-esteem is merely a concern with the good, her life would be fulfilled. For some, that might be the case. Some housewives do indeed derive self-esteem from their activities in the home. But we can also easily imagine that a housewife, even if she feels like a good person and is the cornerstone of her family, might not feel especially worthy of esteem.

There can be both social and personal reasons for this. As discussed earlier, whether a certain lifepath is considered worthy of esteem depends on whether we have the semantic resources to understand it as such (Anderson and Honneth 2004, 136). These semantics are shaped socially, by the meanings and associations we connect to that specific lifepath. The enhanced opportunities for women over the last couple of decades have had an influence on how we evaluate the role of a housewife. The possibility for women to choose careers and self-development through creative ambitions has reflected on the semantics of the stay-at-home mom, in the sense that, though a legit and virtuous choice, especially young people and working women do not associate this lifepath with great esteem compared to other professions (Nilson 1978). Where fifty years ago, women were stigmatized for wanting to work, they are now more and more called old-fashioned for staying in the home. In Norway, the Housewives' Association changed its name to the Women and Family Association back in 2010, after seeing its memberships plummet from 60.000 to 5.000. "The reference to housewife was just too embarrassing," Charlotte Koren, an economist and former member of the association explains after her own departure (Bennhold 2010).

Another reason why the housewife might struggle to find herself very worthy of esteem, despite being good, is grief about certain capabilities that go unexplored. She might want to cultivate talents outside of the family home that help her build something, a legacy that goes beyond the family. She might want to explore her talents or see what brings her joy. Perhaps she has faint goals which she left unaccomplished to be a stay-at-

home mother. Seeking to be worthy of esteem might motivate people to choose different paths in life than merely the desire to be a good person. But that does not necessarily imply that self-esteem as a motivator steers us away from the good. Rather, in the array of possible good lives, the desire for esteem can give us direction and help decide which of these paths are right for us.

Where does this bring us with regard to the question whether self-esteem pride is a moral motivator? The point of my detour is that self-esteem reaches beyond the moral landscape, and where it is concerned with domains other than morality, the core of the motivation does not need to be moral, as long as it doesn't conflict with moral concerns. Back to the example of the housewife. When she decides to discuss with her husband a fair schedule for childcare in order to explore her own ambitions and talents outside of the home, she does not do this primarily out of a concern for morality. She is motivated by another desire: to cultivate herself, to find out what capabilities she left unexplored, and to find a path she considers worthy of esteem. In these cases, motivation extends well beyond the domain of morality.

But we are not completely out of the woods yet. What if we do something that is considered morally good, because we want to be worthy of esteem, rather than because we want the good thing to be done? In this case, assuming we are not hard-core consequentialists, the moral quality of the motivation does matter. The first question is then: is a desire to be worthy of esteem less moral than a concern for the good itself? The answer to this question is not straightforward, precisely because we desire to be *worthy* of esteem. The fact that we want to be worthy of esteem indicates a preoccupation with the good as well. We don't simply want esteem, we want to be the kind of person that deserves it, by doing what we believe is good.

But granted, the question then remains: what does the desire to be worthy of esteem add in these cases? Is this concern not, as Bernard Williams put it, the infamous thought too many (1981)? An adapted version of Williams' thought experiment could look like this: imagine that you walk past a dock in the harbor, and you are startled by a cry for help. You look over to the dark water and see tumultuous splashes seconds before you can distinguish a boy drowning. The thought experiment is supposed

to make clear that the true moral incentive to jump in the water is the thought ‘the boy is drowning’, not ‘the boy is drowning, a person worthy of esteem would save him, and I wish to be such a person.’ The last part of that sentence is a detour, and not the kind of motivation we would consider very noble. So, the desire to be worthy of esteem is not the true moral motivation.

Does this mean that we should get rid of the motivation we draw from the quest for esteem? No. In the words of Jessica Moss, self-esteem pride can be a second-best motivator (2005). If we were all moral saints, perhaps we wouldn’t need this emotional motivation to behave morally, but we’re not (and even moral saints, I reckon, feel good about what they do to some extent). Vanessa Carbonell writes that “the problem with treating an ideal moral agent as an ideal moral reason-responder is that it treats moral motivation as if it were an isolable, removable part of human psychology. But a moral saint is a person, not just a deliberative faculty.” (2009, 396). The good path is overdetermined by both moral considerations and emotional motivations. Many emotions are second-best motivators, but that doesn’t mean they are not extremely valuable. Anger, for instance, is according to some philosophers not the most moral motivator to reach change or restoration of a harm (Nussbaum 2016). The true moral motivation to combat wrongdoing, or change malicious practices, is a concern for justice and fairness. Anger, like self-esteem pride, needs the detour of making the wrongdoing personal, of presenting it as something done to me, to ignite action. But that ‘thought too many’ doesn’t exclude that anger can play an important role in bringing the desired change about, as many others have emphasized (most notably Lorde 1984, for an overview see Cherry and Flanagan 2017). Anger can still be useful as a signal that wrongdoing has taken place, a source of motivation to address it, and as a deterrent to others, discouraging their aggression (Nussbaum 2016, 6).

The same holds for self-esteem pride. When the saved boy catches his breath on the dockside, and he asks you why you jumped in to save him, he probably doesn’t want to hear that you did it because you thought a person worthy of esteem would. The desire to feel pride is perhaps not the truest moral motivator, but it is at least second-best. Just like anger, it has a useful function as a motivator to pursue morally good actions, as a

signal that something of value is at stake in the choice at hand, and as a deterrent in the sense that a life in its absence can be experienced as painful or flat. That is, as long as pride is informed by a well-considered picture of what is good or worthy of esteem, and if it avoids the pitfalls painted earlier in this chapter.

#### PREVENTING THE PITFALLS: SIX RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion of this chapter, I formulate six recommendations with regard to self-esteem pride, based on its pitfalls. They are meant to raise promising directions for further research, rather than presented as a finished product. These suggestions, based on conceptual analysis, are likely to help with keeping self-esteem pride at bay, though they should be further corroborated by empirical research.

The benefits of self-esteem for self-realization and overall well-being have been amply shown in the literature. The desire for self-esteem, and the pride felt alongside it, promotes innovation and creation (Tracy 2016). Self-esteem gives us the sense that what we are doing is meaningful and significant (Anderson and Honneth 2004). Robust self-esteem is associated with well-being, achievement and laudable interpersonal behavior, while low self-esteem is consistently associated with hostility, aggression, delinquency, and mental health problems (Greenberg 2008, 53, Morgan 2008, 38). A lack in self-esteem can be responsible for self-destructive behavior as well (Bortolan 2018, 56). Low self-esteem can hinder autonomy because it obstructs a critical examination of other people's perspectives, as Anna Bortolan has argued, and thereby shapes the ethical demands and obligations to which both the self and others are considered to be subjected in ways that render ascribing responsibility to others difficult (Bortolan 2018, 56). The positive effects of the nurturance and maintenance of self-esteem in both our personal and interpersonal lives seem significant enough to convince any society to foster the conditions under which people can pursue it. But the possible pitfalls of self-esteem as painted above, and their morally reprehensible outcomes, are equally significant for any society to seriously take into account when creating the circumstances for self-esteem.

A first task at hand to prevent pride's pitfalls is to examine the semantic frameworks by which we grant certain life paths greater or lesser esteem. As Honneth and Anderson argue, it becomes hard to see certain paths as worthwhile when the shared evaluative connotations of that path are predominantly negative (2004, 136). If 'housewife' becomes a euphemism for 'conservative' or 'anti-feminist', the choice for this path becomes either effectively excluded from possible options, or comes at the cost of making it much harder to think of oneself as pursuing a worthwhile lifepath. The semantic frameworks in place put the burden of having to shield oneself from negative evaluations not only on certain life choices like professions or subcultures, but also on certain unchosen aspects of identity such as generation, race, sexual preference, and gender. The booming branch of research on (the harmful effects of) stereotypes and implicit and explicit biases is extremely valuable to reconsider these semantic frameworks, and the creation of self-esteem conditions is only one of the reasons this field is an urgent and timely philosophical topic in the pursuit of social justice and optimal human flourishing.

But of course, not all pursuits in life should uncritically be bestowed with positive connotations. Here lies a second task with regard to self-esteem pride. Sometimes, paths that seem objectively harmful and destructive are sources of esteem within a certain community. Members of the white supremacist umbrella group Blood & Honour might have the semantic resources, as Anderson and Honneth would say, to choose paths of violent racism and hatred, because violence against non-whites is esteemed among their peers. Having the semantic resources for self-esteem does not mean that one also has good moral reasons to pursue a given life path. We should constantly be rethinking the moral foundations that underlie which life paths should indeed be a source of self-esteem, and which should not. If we want that both being a housewife and being a lawyer should warrant self-esteem, but being a bank robber or a racist gang member should not, then there are normative intuitions that underlie our moral distinction between these life paths. The principles according to which we evaluate moral situations, like principles of fairness or the principle of no-harm, or even more substantial principles, should be explicated, and we should debate their meaning in real-life contexts. Why do we denounce the path

of a bank robber? Can there be mitigating circumstances, like when Robin Hood stole to give to the poor, or should we denounce robbery altogether? We need to seriously consider these moral questions through public debate and continued argument if we want to shape the semantic frameworks for self-esteem. This constant examination will help with regard to unfitting pride, the first pitfall I discussed.

One of the most harmful pitfalls of pride, its entanglement with a competitive concept of status, can be translated into a third recommendation. We saw that this side of pride is characterized by a concept of the other as a competitor, or an enemy. To discourage the kind of pride that feasts on the failures of others, it can be helpful to de-emphasize the existence and importance of in- and out-groups. Deeply-rooted divides between ‘us’ and ‘them’ make it easier for pride to fester in this unforgiving way. This strategy would also help to keep feelings of superiority, another liability of self-esteem pride, at bay. It seems key to focus on solidarity within and between social groups, in order to avert harmful versions of pride.

We can look to theories on solidarity and competition to inform which strategies could work to achieve this goal. Waheed Hussain argues, for instance, that certain competitive institutions inhibit the relation of mutual affirmation that is fundamental for solidarity (2018, 2020). Such institutions pit people against each other and create severe obstacles to wishing others well and hoping for the best outcome for another. If fundamental institutions like health care or labor division are predominantly competitive, people have strong reasons to distance themselves from others. These institutions set the stage for “man’s alienation from his fellow man” (2020, 89) which in turn creates obstacles for the solidarity and mutual affirmation that underlies the relevant connectedness in a liberal democracy. Looking at the organization of certain important goods could thus be a good place to start fostering solidarity. A non-competitive organization of these goods can guarantee us that the success of others will not effectively mean our loss, and as such de-incentivize us to wish bad outcomes upon others.

Additionally, we can look at narratives about groups and examine the demarcations between them, as does for instance Anthony Kwame Appiah (2018). If we come to understand that these are often made by chance or

historical coincidences, the divisions between in- and out-groups become less self-evident. Martha Nussbaum argues in favor of making world citizenship and not national citizenship the focus of our civic education, with a focus on the common humanity of all (1996, 11). I have argued elsewhere that political speech can play a role in fostering solidarity (Claeys 2019). All these strategies are ways to be explored, and they are relevant for avoiding the pitfalls of self-esteem pride, because they embed in us the idea that the other is not one to be fought or competed against.

A fourth way to prevent pride from tilting over to feelings of superiority and self-overestimation is to cultivate the realization that we are not the sole locus of our accomplishments. If we acknowledge that factors of luck and accidents of birth play a great role in what we can get done, there is less reason to be overly impressed with our own success or that of others. Self-esteem pride can still be a rewarding feeling, but it becomes less all-encompassing when it comes with the side note that equal effort does not always result in equal outcomes. It is evident that a child growing up in a poor neighborhood has more hurdles to overcome to achieve the same results than a child growing up considerably wealthy, especially in societies where there is little social redistribution of means, and where the school fees indicate the quality of the schools, as is the case in the modern-day U.S.A. (Partanen 2016).

In modern meritocratic societies, factors of luck and accident for success are often downplayed or entirely forgotten. Stories about super-achievers or from-rags-to-riches narratives are imbued with the idea that success is made by individual effort. But this hyper-agency, a term borrowed from Michael Sandel (2020, 47), has an undesirable downside. If our success is in our own hands, then failure, too, is perceived as a personal fault rather than a structural misfortune. Such a world view makes hierarchical structures based on status and merit sound like the righteous order of the world: the idea is that the place on the social ladder one inhabits is a proper reflection of one's efforts. The recognition that this is not the case, that people are almost never entirely responsible for their fates, but benefit from, or are disadvantaged by their contexts, should make us less comfortable with these hierarchical structures. Status, especially that gained by worldly success, amasses less weight under this realization. The



self-esteem pride that comes with achievement or success becomes easier to put in perspective. Self-esteem pride is tempered by the reminder that, though a certain achievement can certainly be valuable, reading these achievements as proof of a real difference in worth compared to others reveals a distorted idea about success and merit.

To avoid the dangers of self-centeredness that were central in the third pitfall, we can turn to a fifth recommendation. The fragility of the ego that leads to an excessive focus on the self can be countered by cultivating the ability to laugh at oneself. Taking the self less seriously to some extent is a great antidote to self-centeredness. This can be done by emphasizing the importance of play during childhood development and beyond, as Martha Nussbaum does (2016, 54). Play can be a way to cope with our desire to be in control. The ego lashes out in refusal of its vulnerability, when it discovers that it is not as autonomous and in control as it desires to be, Nussbaum argues. Precisely this is what happened with Anders Breivik as well, as discussed above. Pride displays compensate for feelings of threat, loss, and insecurity. According to Nussbaum, we can look in the direction of playfulness and laughter in order to come to terms with our vulnerability. If we are able to see ourselves as what we are, as quirkily human and vulnerable, then we are less prone to feel threatened or fear a loss of control. The ego is less compelled to be in a constant protective mode. Besides self-laughter, or perhaps as a form of it, play can discourage this protective attitude as well. The person at play is relaxed in the world, and able to allow other people to exist as who they are. Nussbaum emphasizes the feeling of being satisfied and confident to provoke a diminished emphasis on narcissistic self-centeredness. That satisfaction can be achieved through play and laughter, because it entails not a vision of the self as godlike but rather as human with both limitations and unique talents. This vision of the self is the topic of chapter 4 on self-love, where I propose that self-love is actually necessary to debunk grandiose visions of the self.

Another strategy to take the self less seriously, besides laughter and play, is to take things outside oneself seriously: a beautiful landscape, a musical piece, a social issue, another human being. Iris Murdoch sees in love the cure for the relentless ego. She calls love “the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real” (1959, 51). Practicing

careful attention for something outside the self enables and encourages us to take the importance of the self with a grain of salt. I come back to Murdoch's philosophy in chapter four, when I discuss self-love. For now, I leave it as a brief steppingstone alongside Nussbaum's recommendation for what we can do to turn away from the ego in such a way that we feel no need to be defensive, feel attacked, or lash out.

One of the greatest harms of self-esteem pride lies in its contagious character and its flirtatious relationship with feelings of superiority, as discussed in the fifth pitfall. That brings me to formulate a sixth and final recommendation, though many can be added to this non-exhaustive list. One antidote against this is to come to grips with the conceptual differences between price and worth, as Immanuel Kant depicted it centuries ago. In philosophical thought, the distinction is common, yet feelings of superiority show that this distinction has not found its way into all public discourse and is often mixed up. Put simply, Kant argued that a good can have value in two senses: either it has an exchange value, meaning it can be worth more or less than a comparable good, or it has a value that is not up for economic translation. According to Kant, all humans have this latter value in the form of dignity, which entitles all to an equal set of rights and basic respect, and which grounds self-respect.

But the value that gives reasons for self-esteem, as we have seen, is rather of the price-kind. It's not that what underlies self-esteem can or should be economized and priced, but self-esteem as I have depicted is about gradual values, being better or worse at something. Whether we feel like we merit esteem or not is dependent on the ways in which we behave, and not necessarily implied by them. We can have less or more self-esteem, corresponding to what we feel we have achieved.

Self-respect, on the other hand, is warranted by this universal value that Kant calls dignity. As I will argue in the next chapter, respect in this sense is not merited less or more based on life choices, achievements, or traits. The conflation of price and worth, and the corresponding confusion of self-esteem and self-respect is what makes it possible for some to move from a belief that they merit more esteem than others, to the belief that they merit more respect. Superiority is the belief that one is worth more than someone else, which conflates the gradual and comparable val-

ue that warrants self-esteem with the universal and absolute value that warrants self-respect. Superiority claims that one or one's group merits more respect than another, in the form of rights, entitlements, space, or even plain livelihood, while these distinctions in merit are only appropriate when it comes to issues of self-esteem, in the form of prizes, laudations, applause, distinctions, or other merit-based tokens of appreciation. By disentangling self-respect from self-esteem in the next chapter, I hope to contribute to the conceptual task of drawing apart the different moral grammars of these attitudes.

This chapter started by painting a picture of self-esteem pride, helped by Jessica Tracy's account of pride as the ultimate motivator for innovation and creation. I listed some paradigm cases of pride that is warranted by self-esteem, and explored the ways in which such pride can turn bitter. I ended by looking forward: how do these pitfalls of pride translate into recommendations for our lives? In what direction could we find promising paths to prevent these bitter forms of pride? My focus on self-esteem pride in this chapter should make one thing especially clear: both the benefits and pitfalls apply for the pride we can feel when we accomplish something and feel worthy of praise. But there are other attitudes that warrant pride, and they have pitfalls of their own.

The unapologetic gay person marching in the gay pride, the protestor who stands up against belittlement, the Black person carrying her heritage with pride,... There is a different kind of value at stake in these examples. That pride is not about praise and esteem, but rather about respect or love. The problem is that we often confuse the grammar of self-esteem pride with that of these other kinds of pride. We allow the rules of the former to apply to the latter. But self-esteem, self-respect and self-love have a very different internal logic. For starters, the grammar of self-respect presupposes the recognition of a value that is inherent to all people to the same extent, and that grants them certain rights or warrants a specific treatment. Self-esteem, as depicted in this chapter, presupposes an entirely contradictory recognition of values that people possess in different degrees and different domains, and precisely the uneven distribution of them makes self-esteem meaningful.

But because we call all these emotions pride, it can become hard

to get clear on which attitude underlies it, and which moral rules consequently apply. It can be extremely harmful when we take the logic of self-esteem and apply it to self-respect or self-love. The value at stake that earns us certain rights or a certain treatment then becomes something that should be earned like esteem, rather than granted without question. If someone lays claim to pride as self-respect, while they are really after a vile form self-esteem, they thereby undermine real self-respect pride and the legitimate protest it can ignite. The next chapter will focus on the moral grammar of self-respect, its empowering capacities as a motor for protest, and its possible abuses.



# 3

## A line in de sand

On self-respect pride

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An officer's knee pressed on the back of his neck killed George Floyd. The Black American man couldn't breathe under the weight of three police officers pinning him down on the streets of Minneapolis. Though Floyd's death happened in the spring of 2020, the scene sounds painfully familiar. The list of Black and brown people who lost their lives in the hands of police officers operating in white-dominated systems is long. Black people are disproportionately targeted and victimized by the justice system, Black incarceration rates are equally disproportionate, and an encounter with the police is more likely to end in violence or even death for a Black person. Black people in the U.S. are more likely to be convicted for crimes they did not commit, and get harsher punishments than white people for similar indictments.<sup>9</sup> The killing of George Floyd did not come as a surprise in that sense, but the fact that his murder was filmed by bystanders and showed him pleading for his life triggered international outrage. Floyd is seen face-down on the ground, repeating over and over that he cannot breathe. Three officers kneel down on him, one with a knee on his neck. Floyd does not resist by any means other than words. Any doubts that could have previously been used to downplay or deny systemic racism are obliterated by the smartphone videos of Floyd's last minutes.

After similar incidents in 2012, the streets were flooded by protestors united under the slogan 'Black Lives Matter'. In that year, the 17-year-old

9. See for instance Chokshi (2017), Schmitt, Reedt, and Blackwell (2017), Meyer (2020), and [mappingpoliceviolence.org](https://mappingpoliceviolence.org) (2020)

Trayvon Martin had been shot and killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer while walking home in the streets of Florida after buying iced tea and a bag of Skittles. He was unarmed. Though the murder of Martin in itself was a testimony of racist prejudice against young Black men, the protest didn't really take off until months after his death. Alicia Garza, one of the founders of the BLM movement, describes in an article for *The Guardian* how the movement started. She had been following the trial against George Zimmerman, the man who fatally shot Martin, when after a 16-hour deliberation she learned the verdict from Facebook: not guilty of second-degree murder and acquitted of manslaughter. Sitting in a bar while reading about the verdict, she describes what happened next:

Everything went quiet, everything and everyone (...) And then people started to leave en masse. The one thing I remember from that evening, other than crying myself to sleep that night, was the way in which as a black person, I felt incredibly vulnerable, incredibly exposed and incredibly enraged. Seeing these black people leaving the bar, and it was like we couldn't look at each other. We were carrying this burden around with us every day: of racism and white supremacy. It was a verdict that said: black people are not safe in America. (Day 2015)

About a year after Zimmerman walked free, the unarmed 18-year old Michael Brown was shot in Ferguson, Missouri, by a white officer who fired 12 rounds at him. The Black Lives Matter movement caught wind and became the national banner under which protests against racist police brutality and oppression of Black people were held. What started with a hashtag quickly grew into a worldwide civil rights movement often named a modern-time continuation of the American Civil Rights Movement and The Black Power Movement.

After the murder on George Floyd, advocates of racial equality around the world addressed systemic racism as a global issue. Though the precise details and histories of racism differ geographically, the core of the injustices are the same: Black and brown people face racism in white-dominated societies, ranging from micro-aggressions to systemic disadvantages. Anti-racism advocates globally unite under the same slogan: Black Lives Matter. A common sight at the protests is the image of Black and brown people raising a fist. The symbol is part of our collective

memory ever since the 1968 protest at the Olympics, where two Black athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos iconically raised their fists and bowed their heads on the stage to address discrimination of the Black population in the United States. It is generally taken to indicate Black Pride, a movement that originated in the U.S. and encouraged Black people to embrace their heritage and resist racist humiliation and the denial of basic equality (Tyson 2001, 209). The global protests organized mostly by young Black people share this particular sentiment: pride.

In the previous chapter I discussed pride as the emotion that can accompany rises in self-esteem. If the Black Lives Matter movement claims pride, that definition of pride would entail that the proud Black person feels a rise in self-esteem, and by her protest she wants that esteem to be acknowledged by others. It would mean that the protesters feel worthy of esteem, and are under the impression that they did something rather well, better than others perhaps even. That seems wrong to say about the pride of the BLM movement. Sure, the protest itself is in many ways an act worthy of esteem. The achievement of regaining a sense of self and standing your ground in an environment that is hostile takes hard work (Vice 2017, 196) and is often difficult and dangerous (Appiah 2010, 204). But that source of pride is merely accidental to the protest, a side-effect rather than the motor behind it. The pride that funnels these protests is warranted by the recognition that one is worthy of respect, rather than esteem.

Black pride does not mean that Black is better or more deserving of praise than white, but that Black people are equally entitled to fair treatment, a safe environment, non-humiliation, and livelihood, as white people. The conviction that underlies this claim is self-respect: a belief that one is entitled to a certain treatment that corresponds to a fact about oneself (Darwall 1977). I return later to what that means exactly. First, it is important to see that Black pride is about a form of recognition more basic than esteem. Black protesters are not convinced that they earn a special status, but rather that their livelihoods are as valued as white's. The complaint is that Black lives are seen as less valuable than white lives. Black people are killed by police more often, their voice is considered less credible, violence against them is considered less worthy of media-attention than violence against white people, they are more prone to end up in poverty, and so on (Gruenewald, Pizarro, and Chermak 2009, Winship,



Reeves, and Guyot 2018). On the intersection of race and gender, more particular injustices emerge (Crenshaw 1989). Black transgender people are an especially vulnerable population for homicide (Dinno 2017), and the oppression of Black women has its own specific denigrating mechanisms (King 1975, Bailey 2010, Bailey and Trudy 2018).

To ask for these inequalities to be restored is not special interest pleading, and it is not an entitled claim to praise, but rather expresses the recognition that racial identity should not be the basis for denial of opportunity, health, or livelihood (Dyson 2006, 54). Where pride was precisely warranted by inequality in the case of self-esteem (being particularly good at something, for instance), the pride discussed in this chapter is warranted by a sense of equality.

#### SAME SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

How can two such radically different ideas of recognition both warrant pride? Do we have to choose between self-esteem and self-respect as proper attitudes to warrant pride? Most theorists agree that we don't (Taylor 1985, Taylor 1995, Kristjánsson 2002, Maes 2005). There are several arguments to link pride to both attitudes. First of all, an account of pride as *either* tied to self-esteem *or* tied to self-respect would be exclusionary of attitudes that we do generally (and not by exception) call pride. It seems implausible to reduce Black or gay pride to mere self-esteem pride. Nor does it seem morally neutral to call the pride of oppressed groups mistaken, for denying them authority over their own experiences might precisely be a symptom of their oppression (Fricker 2007, Thomason 2018, 37-38). On the other hand, in the previous chapter it became clear that perhaps the most archetypal forms of pride are driven by increases in self-esteem. Dismissing all feelings of pride relating to self-esteem as improper pride seems implausible as well.

But more importantly, the explanation of pride as tied to self-esteem or self-respect poses only an apparent contradiction. Though these two foundations of pride seem irreconcilable on the surface, one about inequality and the other about equality, they have a common denominator. Both self-respect and self-esteem indicate the recognition of some value

within a person. As explained earlier with the theory of Immanuel Kant, people can recognize at least two different kinds of value in themselves (or in others). In one sense, we are valuable when we excel or show perseverance and achievement, like an employee who is extremely valuable at her work or a human rights advocate who is valuable to the cause. In another sense, we are valuable simply as humans, regardless of the successes we amass.

Both these forms of recognition are meaningful for humans to flourish. On the one hand, the basic recognition that one is equal to others, and equally deserving of a certain humane treatment in the form of rights or opportunities is necessary to avoid harmful denigration and discrimination, and to make one feel entitled to humane treatment. On the other hand, the recognition of special skills or effort can add meaning to our lives, as discussed in the previous chapter. Philosophers have amply distinguished and described the roles these two forms of recognition play in our lives.

Francis Fukuyama, for instance, distinguishes these two forms of recognition by building on a concept used by Plato (2018). In an early attempt at moral psychology, Plato developed a picture of the soul as having three parts: the appetites, responsible for our natural drive for food, drink, lust and so on; reason, home of deliberation and calculation; and finally spirit or *thymos*, the part of the soul that seeks recognition (2006). Plato's concept of the soul may be over two thousand years old, the idea that people are motivated by more than merely natural drives or rational deliberation is still relevant to understand human behavior. Fukuyama elaborates on the ancient concept by distinguishing *megalothymia* from *isothymia*. Megalothymia, the desire to excel or be great at something, finds its expression in self-esteem pride. Isothymia on the other hand, the desire to be recognized as equal to others, is the locus of self-respect pride.

Along with Fukuyama, there is a tradition of philosophers who have increasingly placed issues of recognition at the heart of social struggles, rather than the economic principle of the distribution of goods. Elizabeth Anderson argues that "democratic equality" should integrate principles of distribution with the expressive demands of equal respect (1999, 289). Arlie Russell Hochschild emphasizes the role of feelings of misrecognition in the rise and success of right-wing populism in the U.S. (2016).

Axel Honneth and Joel Anderson criticize liberalism for underestimating our dependence on relations of respect, care, and esteem, and propose a recognitional account instead (2004, 1995). In an influential essay, Charles Taylor notes that the modern individualized notion of identity has increasingly made philosophers interested in the topic of recognition (1994). Important to my pursuit here is that these philosophers distinguish between forms of recognition that relate to different kinds of value in human beings. Such distinction can explain why the emotion of pride is both fitting for the winner of a competition who is in a sense *celebrating* unequal bestowments of value, and for the Black person *protesting* being treated on the basis of unequal valuations. In the first case, the difference in value is a true reflection of reality: one has performed well at something, overcome a hurdle of some kind, or exceeded expectations. In the second, there is no true difference in value, as dignity is inalienable and universal, yet one is treated wrongfully as if there is such a difference. If pride is about the recognition of value in oneself, then it is consistent that it takes on at least two different forms, as there are at least two different kinds of value to be recognized.

#### THE MEANING OF SELF-RESPECT

In light of the above, the question what self-respect is falls apart into two further questions. Firstly, what is the value that we recognize with self-respect (in the way that self-esteem recognizes excellence or achievement)? Secondly, what attitudes must constitute self-respect such that it is a proper reflection of this recognition?

Stephen Darwall describes how these two questions are intertwined in his idea of recognition respect (1977). Darwall's theory concerns respect in general, but there is no reason to think it doesn't concern the self-reflexive form as well. Darwall distinguishes between appraisal respect and recognition respect. Appraisal respect is the positive appraisal of one feature, akin to what I have called esteem. It corresponds to the more colloquial sense of respect we use to express admiration. "I have such respect for female referees" in this sense means that I think highly of them, knowing for instance how hard it must be to navigate the male-dominated world of soccer. But "I have respect for referees" can also mean that I

acknowledge the referee's authority by pausing the game when they whistle, by accepting their red cards, and trusting their judgment. This second stance is what Darwall calls recognition respect. Recognition respect is "the disposition to weigh appropriately in one's deliberations some feature of the thing in question and to act accordingly" (38).

When we step out of the way for a doctor in a hurry, we respect her *as a doctor*. When we obey the referee during a soccer match, we respect her *as a referee*. Doctorhood commands our behavior in a specific way, as does refereehood. There is a set of behaviors that goes with the acknowledgment of these features. Yet often, we simply say we respect someone, without referring to their jobs or skills. The relevant feature that commands our respect when we don't specify it is often personhood. We respect someone *as a person*. And there is a set of behaviors that goes with the recognition of personhood in another, even if we cannot specify them exactly or write up an exhaustive list. This is the sense in which I will use respect for the rest of the chapter.

Self-respect then means giving appropriate weight to the fact that one is a person. However tautologous this statement may sound, it touches on some of the most fundamental topics of moral psychology and philosophy in general, for it urges us to ask: what is a person, and how should we minimally treat one? I intentionally choose personhood as the relevant fact that commands respectful treatment, for efforts to hammer down a single capacity or functionality to warrant respect for people *as* people, as opposed to respect for people *as* doctors or referees, have proven problematic. As opposed to the relatively straightforward qualification of doctorhood as constituted by a specific education, diploma, and practice, it proves quite a challenge to delineate what constitutes a person. Whenever a single relevant fact is specified, it proves either too inclusive or too exclusive. Kant, for instance, thought that rational capacity and autonomy makes one deserving of respect (2002). But this reasoning notoriously gave Kant a free pass to exclude certain people, like young children, the disabled, or whomever he does not grant full rational capacity (like women or slaves) from the circle of concern (Kain 2009, Mills 2017, Kleingeld 2019). Most theories that try to pin down one human functionality as warranting respect, be it agency, autonomy, rationality, or anything else, run into the problem of exclusivity. The threshold for respectful treatment is

either too high or too low.

Many philosophers have therefore resorted to the concept of ‘dignity’ to specify which fact commands respect. But that term has its own obstacles. Dignity has the connotation and history of being a rather pompous term without a really solid foundation, precisely because attempts to narrow down what dignity means run into the problems mentioned before (Rosen 2012, Debes 2018). Dignity has historically had quite different connotations, and was long used to indicate a kind of grace, standing, or nobility. These prior meanings of dignity can muddle the waters a bit when we refer to it as a moral status that we all share. The moralized version of dignity as an inalienable value is often ascribed to Kant, but the link to the Latin root *dignitas* was never specified by Kant himself. It is more likely that translators saw ‘dignity’ as an attractive choice for the translation of the German *Würde* in light of its moralized usage in more recent history (Debes 2017, 6). According to Remy Debes, we have begun to understand dignity as the inherent worth of all humans only about two centuries ago, the central reference to dignity in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights being the paradigm example of this understanding. But dignity has never entirely shaken its prior meaning.

Personhood, though perhaps equally unspecified, has the advantage of having a less laden connotation. Referring to ‘personhood’ as the relevant fact to warrant respect allows for a combination of traits and functionalities to constitute it. A person could be someone who has (some of) the traits in a non-exhaustive list, without one of them being a necessary condition for personhood. The capacity to feel emotion, to deliberate rationally, to form intimate bonds, to engage meaningfully with a project, to be creative, to experience beauty, might all be sufficient to be considered a person. For my purposes, the full extent of such a list does not really matter, but the possibility of such a theory of personhood motivates my choice for understanding self-respect as giving appropriate weight to the fact that one is a person.

So far for the first question of this section. The value we recognize when we respect another or ourselves is personhood. Then for the second question: what attitudes correspond with that recognition of personhood? To know what it means to respect a referee as referee is relatively simple: we can find out what a referee does, and there are set ways to behave in

accordance with the recognition of refereehood. But ‘personhood’ hardly has the same clear description, let alone offers clearly defined norms for respectful behavior. Respect (for personhood, but I will leave that specification out from now on) is often correlated with a set of fundamental rights that every person is entitled to (Sachs 1981, 353, Taylor 1989, 15, Honneth 1995, 2, Hill 1995b, Boxill 1995, Neu 1998, 18, Rosen 2012, 54). The most famous formulation of these inalienable rights is found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enlists the rights all persons have a claim to. These include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more (U.N. 2020). These are the most basic ways to behave with respect for a person, and they give us a lawful basis to enforce them. But to act with respect for a person extends beyond the legal formulation of these basic rights.

Not all forms of humiliation and discrimination, for instance, are prohibited by these basic human rights. Many non-penalized forms of discrimination like hatred or epistemic injustices like gaslighting and mechanisms of silencing fall through the cracks of what we can legally prosecute. A woman cannot straightforwardly go to court to declare a human rights violation when she is catcalled and objectified in the streets, for example. But these behaviors are undoubtedly not respectful of the personhood in another. To respect the personhood in another should therefore be understood more broadly as the refusal to belittle, contempt, degrade, or dehumanize a person (Taylor 2011, 273). The perks of this definition, as opposed to the framing of respect in terms of rights, is that it allows us to understand respect as a day-to-day practice, rather than a legal matter. It enables us to understand that disregard for personhood occurs in our daily interactions, even if active infringements of basic human rights are absent. Belittlement, through micro-aggressions or non-consensual objectification for instance, misrecognizes the equal status of another, even if no physical harm or legal harm was done. Disrespect need not even be tangible to the disrespected. Peter Strawson describes in a famous essay how even certain feelings can signal disrespect or objectification (1974). The feeling of contempt for another, for instance, might reveal an attitude of disrespect because it misrecognizes the capacity of that other to engage in moral reasoning, or be held responsible for her deeds.

Disrespect need not always disrupt different persons to the same extent. Clearly to be murdered or raped is much more harmful than to be objectified while walking down the street, or to be denied a living unit based on one's skin color. It is also open for discussion when an act is disrespectful. Is it, for instance, always disrespectful to objectify another (Nussbaum 1995)? Do we respect a person when we incarcerate her for a crime (by holding her accountable and facilitating rehabilitation) or do we disrespect her (by inhibiting her freedom of movement)? What binds these discussions, though, is that they are related to how a person should be treated with regard to her personhood. There is much more to be said here, but for my purposes it suffices to have a clear concept of the mechanisms of respect, even if the precise extent of respect is up for discussion. That mechanism, to which I come back later, is that respect assumes an equal entitlement of each person to a certain treatment.

What does such a concept of respect mean when it comes to the self? Many philosophers have given descriptions of self-respect, ranging from "taking one's worth for granted" (Neu 18) over "a way of being whose core is a deep appreciation of one's morally significant worth" (Dillon 1997, 228), to "the attitude that she has equal moral status to any other person" (Keshen 2017, 91) or even simply "the feeling of being an individual" (Keshen 2017, 144). Alternatively, having self-respect is often associated with upholding certain standards, drawing a line in the sand that one does not cross (Tefler 1995, Hill 1995a, Debes 2017, 1). A person who respects herself might, for instance, decline a well-paid job to which she has moral objections out of self-respect, or block the phone number of an abusive partner out of self-respect. These are forms of self-respect because taking the job or not blocking the phone number induce situations that are belittling or could solicit contempt. Upholding minimal standards of behavior is therefore compatible with the idea of self-respect as giving appropriate weight to one's own personhood.

Self-respect is not primarily about being treated with the appropriate respectful attitudes by others, nor even about treating the self with these attitudes, but rather about the belief that one is entitled to such treatment. What is relevant to claims of self-respect is not whether one has certain rights or is treated a certain way, but whether one believes to have those rights and deserve such treatment (Boxill, 103). However, the lack of ex-

ternal respect can pose grave difficulties in holding on to those beliefs, as I will argue later. First, some notes on why self-respect is important, and its maintenance a desirable goal.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-RESPECT

Self-respect is often considered a fundamental part of living a dignified life that should be cherished and nourished. In the list of what governments should protect at all costs, Martha Nussbaum includes the capability to have “the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation” (2004, 283). John Rawls enlists self-respect as a primary good that every rational person would want to see protected regardless of where and when one is born (1999, 178-82, 155-59). When we say someone lacks self-respect, we usually express regret at that fact. We experience the lack of self-respect as a mournful loss. We generally regard self-respect as a good quality, something we appreciate in others and wish upon them. A self-respecting person is one who does not behave in base ways and cares about how she is treated. She cares when she is harmed or belittled, and considers herself a worthy subject of equal consideration. Axel Honneth argues that self-respect is fundamental to an agent’s authority to raise and defend claims as a person with equal standing, and contends that a threat to self-respect is a threat to autonomy (2004).

Kristján Kristjánsson’s overview of the different values of self-respect is helpful here. He distinguishes four ways in which self-respect is valuable (2002). Self-respect has an uncontroversial *psychological value*. Kristjánsson writes that self-respect imparts in us “the zest necessary to pursue our life plans” (97). Self-respect makes us feel like our lives are worth living, regardless of how they take shape. Without it, nothing may seem worth doing. To have healthy self-respect can motivate us to seek out lives in which we flourish, rather than lives of servility or submission. Self-respect has for its psychological value been named both a source and a condition of happiness (Scarre 1992). Self-respect also has a *moral value* as a guardian of other virtues. It encourages us to seek out how a self-respecting person would behave, and to avoid disrespecting the self and others. Self-respect both draws and guards the lines in the sand we do not



wish to cross. Self-respect has *educational value*, in the sense that it urges the keeper of it to protest unfair treatment and resist discrimination. And lastly, self-respect has *pragmatic value* because it guards a certain stability and reliability in a person. A self-respecting person is more prone to be liked by her peers, and taken seriously as a person. Though, as we will see, having self-respect is not enough to receive it from others, nor is it at all simple to maintain a healthy self-respect without receiving it from others.

#### PRIDE AND SELF-RESPECT

Similar to self-esteem pride, I propose that self-respect can be accompanied by, and warrant, the emotion of pride. Self-respect is not synonymous with pride, and need not give rise to it per se. It is possible to be self-respecting and yet to feel no particular feelings of pride. Eating well and nourishing one's body can be an act of self-respect that need not be accompanied by pride per se. Self-respect can be forgotten when it is not threatened. At many moments in our lives, self-respect provides an implicit framework within which we act. It is only when we rub against the outer borders of that framework that we feel its presence. As long as we are lucky enough to live within a world where these borders are guarded for us, we need not worry about self-respect and can take the defense against its violation for granted.<sup>10</sup> We rely on the fact that we are shielded from true infringements of our personhood by law and institutions on the one hand, and by communal outcries and support on the other.

It is when this support and protection are lacking, and when someone's personhood is not given the same consideration as another's, that our self-respect becomes suddenly tangible, and is often accompanied by a form of pride. Dormant self-respect is awakened when its self-evidence is questioned, for instance by injustices. The solidity of self-respect is measured under pressure, like a home weathering a storm. A person who has no self-respect whatsoever experiences no trouble with being belittled and

10. Though of course we can also pose a threat to our own self-respect, even if our rights and external regard are intact. For some thoughtful points on the susceptibility of self-respect to internal problems (such as self-deception, weakness of will, and muddled value judgments) see: Dillon (1992a).

is not averse to submit to anything on the ground that it is degrading (except when she explicitly agrees to be degraded and gives her consent for these practices limited in time and space, like in BDSM, that need not indicate a lack of self-respect). She accepts fully her wishes being ignored without good reasons and would not protest when her rights are flouted (Sachs 1981, 352). She does not object precisely because she believes she is not worthy of these considerations. It is hard to imagine a person lacking self-respect entirely, for most people do care about how they are treated, and feel resistance in the face of unequal treatment. This spark of resistance, I think, is the feeling of pride prominent in the pride of movements like Black Lives Matter.

It is the feeling of pride of the Stonewall Girls from the introduction, too. And of the women marching the streets worldwide to protest that their bodies are subject to other people's choices, that 'grabbing them by the pussy' does not spark the outrage it should.<sup>11</sup> Pride is an emotion of protest and resistance. Self-respect entails that one at least resolves to treat the self in a certain way, because one considers oneself worthy of that treatment. The conviction underlying self-respect pride is that one is right in claiming this same treatment from others.

The connection between pride, self-respect and protest against humiliation, discrimination, or the infringement of rights is well accepted (Sachs 1981, Boxill 1995, Taylor 2011, 273). The notion of protest should be read, however, as the spark of resistance, regardless of whether one expresses it or not. The self-respecting person can choose not to resist ostensibly or be on the barricades of the protest. Sometimes it is a matter of self-respect *not* to protest. OluTimehin Adegbeye, a queer writer from Nigeria, points out that being loudly queer in a country hostile to queerness is challenging at best, dangerous at worst. She founded the project 'Quietly Queer' to encourage those who "love loudly and in private" to send in their stories anonymously, identified by initials, or whichever way they prefer (2020b). To refrain from loud protest is a legitimate choice that need not indicate a lack of self-respect (Thomas 1995, 262). The inner

11. The 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump, was caught on tape saying "I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. ... Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything." One month after the tape leaked, he was elected president.

feeling of resistance is enough to indicate self-respect, and the pride that may come with it. The Nigerian queer can be quietly proud, as Adegbeye puts it: “we’re not defined by the ability to come out – of our homes, or the closet” (2020a).

## TWO GAMES, TWO SETS OF RULES

Self-respect is never unwarranted, David Sachs argues (1981). The different moral grammar of self-respect pride and self-esteem pride hinges on this point. Self-esteem, as discussed in the previous chapter, can in fact be unwarranted, and is subject to many parameters for its appropriateness. Self-respect on the other hand is about the recognition of personhood that everyone possesses to the same extent. There are no characteristics or deeds that one can commit that would make someone an inappropriate object of respect. That is different in the case of esteem, where the appropriateness precisely depends on the evaluation of traits or deeds. It follows that one cannot be unjustified or arrogant in demanding respect where it is truly lacking. As opposed to esteem, which cannot be asked for, but should be given voluntarily and genuinely, respect can be claimed. It is generally not arrogant to claim respectful treatment, because there is no question about whether one merits it.

Respect and esteem differ in more ways than the different grammar that I have painted above. It seems likely that we embody these appraisals in different attitudes, for instance, and an argument can probably be made that one or the other is more fundamental (Sachs 1981). It also seems plausible that esteem is more gradual and sensitive to change, whereas respect is more robust. For my purposes however, I focus the comparison of respect and esteem on their radically different logic. Insight into these different mechanisms suffices to see what precisely goes wrong in harmful pride. Because even though self-esteem and self-respect have this very different logic to them, we tend to conflate the two, especially when talking about the pride both self-respect and self-esteem can warrant. We simply call pride ‘pride’, whether it pertains to self-respect or self-esteem. Because that distinction is lacking in ordinary language, it proves quite difficult not to conflate the logic of how both forms of pride work, and what they represent. I see two principal ways to conflate self-esteem pride

and self-respect pride: the logic of merit can equivocally be taken as applying to self-respect pride, and the logic of absolute claims and entitlement in turn as applying to self-esteem pride. These transgressions are a great source of concern when it comes to pride, specifically because we have little ways of addressing them with words. The internal logic of respect and esteem dictates that we *earn* esteem and are *entitled* to respect. Unfortunately, we often think respect is a thing to earn, and esteem something we can claim. We protest disesteem and internalize disrespect, instead of the other way around.

### EARNING RESPECT

A queer person in Nigeria will need a strong sense of self-respect to maintain her quiet pride in an environment that is hostile to this part of her. Respect, in the way I used it, is not merit-based, and should be granted to anyone regardless of their particularities. It can by definition not be unwarranted. What a Nigerian queer person finds, however, is that her environment does regard her particularities as reason to warrant less respect in the form of rights, recognition, or treatment. Respect, in other words, is treated along the same lines as esteem, as something that can both be warranted or unwarranted. Being persistently degraded can convince the degraded person that this esteem-logic indeed applies to respect, and that certain of her qualities make her less deserving of respect, including of her own self-respect. Societal forces like oppression, systemic discrimination, and exploitation challenge greatly the ability to judge oneself, and muddle the view of the self as worthy of respect to the same extent as another (Dillon 1992a, 125).

Michele Moody-Adams writes about the effects of racist fictions on the self-respect of non-whites in the U.S. (1993). There is no reason to assume that her conclusions are not universal conclusions about pressures to self-respect. Moody-Adams describes how societies include a set of tacitly accepted mechanisms that affirm self-respect. These consist of a set of social, economical, political, or institutional practices. Because self-respect is socially constructed along these lines, “one’s access to mechanisms for the constructive affirmations of self-respect can be artificially

limited,” Moody-Adams argues. “For instance, societies with a tradition of discrimination (*de jure* or *de facto*) against some groups of people may effectively exclude those people from the typical mechanisms for affirming self-respect” (255). The real threats to self-respect are structural, she proposes, not a matter of isolated incidents of humiliation or discrimination. Self-respect is resilient to the extent that an isolated event is unlikely to undermine it. But when discrimination is rooted in a network of dehumanizing fictions and expectations, the idea that one is indeed of equal worth to other humans becomes hard to maintain. We come to recognize these fictions not as fictions but as reality, and interpret them as if they matter to our evaluations of worthiness of respect.

Moody-Adams recounts an anecdote by a high school teacher. The teacher asked a ten-year-old child to explain his disruptive behavior in class. Both the student and his classmates were Black. When the teacher pointed out to the student that his behavior was keeping the other students from learning, the boy replied that it didn’t matter, because they were “nothing” anyway. After the student was cautioned that he was disrupting his own education as well, he replied that he, too, was “nothing,” and added “my mother told me I ain’t nothing” (251). The Clarkes’ doll test as discussed in the previous chapter showed how self-esteem is shaped in part by positive or negative images and associations linked to characteristics considered relevant to the identity of a person, like skin color. That is not to say that these characteristics should, have always been, or will always be relevant. But skin color is undeniably a socially salient feature in today’s world, as it is a very real source of discrimination (that is in essence why ‘I don’t see color’ is a harmful statement, because it denies the real harms done on the basis of skin color in today’s world (Mills 1998, 41, Garza 2014, Bonilla-Silva 2018)). What is happening in the example of the Black boy convinced that he is “nothing” goes one step further. When (ungrounded and unjust) negative esteem evaluations are internalized and become part of one’s self-conception, this poses a very real threat to self-respect. Heaped-up negative esteem evaluations are taken as a reason for diminished self-respect. If you are met with expectations of failure time after time, it becomes hard to fight off the idea that you are less deserving not only of esteem, but also of goods and treatments associated with respect.

There is real damage in applying the meritocratic logic of esteem to

respect. It is a powerful tool that structurally fosters oppression and safeguards power structures. Historic deprivation places disadvantaged groups at the bottom of the social ladder, and the meritocratic idea of respect convinces them that they belong there. Their self-respect is tampered with by the belief that they actually deserve less, which serves as a way to make the oppressed police their own oppression. Beliefs of inferiority are passed on between generations, and linger long after discriminating laws have been abolished (Moody-Adams 1993, 259). “White pride is most effective when it finds expression in black voices,” writes Michael Eric Dyson (2006, 54). Though the struggles that misogyny and racism call for are not in every sense comparable, the way in which the mechanisms of policing work might be comparable to some extent. Kate Manne writes about misogyny as a mechanism kept in place by both women and men. Women, she writes, penalize other women for taking on masculine-codes roles, and punish the ones who overstep even more harshly than their male counterparts (2017, 263). One of Manne’s points is that not only men, but women, too, police the borders of womanhood among themselves.

Moody-Adams recounts that a similar policing-mechanism is in place among Black people, where certain forms of success are associated with whiteness, and successful Black people in traditionally white fields are considered traitors who are “trying to be white” (1993, 262), and derogatively called slurs like “Uncle Tom,” “coconut,” or “bounty” (Riaz 2013). The London-based rapper Zuby explains how this mechanism works and why it has such a strong effect: “Every black person is aware of the power and pain of being considered an ‘outsider’ within one’s own ‘race’. This form of ostracization (...) to be considered ‘not black’ is like being an outcast of a community that already feels alienated” (2020). Traditionally white success and respect is kept white by self-regulating mechanisms of policing from within and without, and the threat of loss of community and sense of identity entailed in overstepping. I come back to this topic in the next chapter in the discussion of self-love and its object, which can also be shared traits, such as skin color.

The most effective way to keep oppression in place is to have the oppressed defend it and uphold it among themselves. Ideas of inferiority and meritocratic notions of respect are the fuel of oppression’s self-sustaining *perpetuum mobile*. One important reason for this is the absence of

protest that a lack of self-respect entails. Self-respect as the idea that one is entitled to recognition as a person is necessary for protest when such recognition is actively denied or infringed upon. The lack of self-respect undermines the reasons for a person to protest against her mistreatment. Self-respect is more fundamental than self-esteem, it provides the basis for any positive appreciation of the self. Its loss is scarring, because it allows oneself to be humiliated or mistreated, and to deny oneself basic rights and dignity. The loss of self-respect both flows from, and sustains, discrimination.

That is not to say that maintaining self-respect is entirely impossible without the approving eye of others. To make this claim would mean that oppressed groups depend – again – on the goodwill of their oppressors. Such a conclusion would not only be undesirable, it would also be untrue. There are ample examples of people maintaining self-respect and protesting their unrightful treatment, even if they inhabit a world that does not respect them. Think of Martin Luther King’s activism in a time when Black Americans were not even respected equally under the law, let alone in daily interactions. Think of Harriet Tubman, a woman born into slavery, who escaped her captors, returned to rescue about seventy other enslaved people, and became an activist for abolition. Or think of Primo Levi’s struggle to hold on to a sense of humanity in the face of humiliating and dehumanizing treatment in Auschwitz. Or the Nigerian queer from the beginning of this section, who maintains her self-respect even if she chooses not to protest out of self-preservation. What we do say about these examples, however, is that these people maintain their self-respect *against the odds*. To be self-respecting is not impossible when others do not reflect it, but it is rendered more difficult. It takes more strength and energy to maintain self-respect when one is asked to doubt that one deserves it. Even if one succeeds in maintaining self-respect in the face of adversity, as Honneth and Anderson aptly put it, “the question of justice is whether the burden is fair” (2004, 131).

#### ENTITLED TO ESTEEM

It is often said that many wars have been fought over pride, or rather, hurt pride. Someone feels disrespected, and lets that logic ignite protest, as is

indeed appropriate for respect. But upon closer look, the reason for protest is not really disregard for personhood, nor the infringement of basic rights, but the perceived humiliation of a dented ego. It is self-esteem pride acting under the logic of self-respect pride. The reaction to disesteem becomes one only warranted by disrespect. The feelings of protest, the resistance against being messed with, is appropriate and important when there is a genuine infringement of respect. But in conflicts big and small throughout history, such combativeness often followed from self-esteem pride, which does not warrant taking matters into one's own hands in the same way.

One example of a pride-instilled war is famously recounted by Homer (1975). The legend behind the conflict – it is still disputed whether the war refers to a historical event or is rather a fusion of tales – gives insight into individual human motivations and emotions that might too play a role in the lead-up to conflict. It is easy to imagine a version of these events mirrored in conflicts between friends, arguments at the dinner table, or political disagreements. But a mundane dinner table argument provides a less exciting read than a story including toga-clad goddesses and an enormous wooden horse, so I will stick to the latter.

The myth immediately kicks off with hurt pride when Eris, the goddess of strife and discord, is insulted over not being invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. Spitefully she throws an apple at the wedding guests carved with the words 'for the fairest'. As intended, the apple injects the joyful event with argument and discordance. Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, three of the wedding guests, each claim the apple. Because the ladies cannot come to an agreement, Zeus leaves the decision to the mortal Trojan Paris. Each goddess effortfully tries to convince Paris to give her the apple: one promises him political power in return, another incredible wealth. But it is Aphrodite's offer that tempts Paris the most: in return for the apple, Aphrodite promises to give Paris great love. The goddess will make Helena of Sparta, the most beautiful woman on earth, fall in love with him. Helena, however, is already set to marry the Greek king Menelaus.

Aphrodite holds promise. Paris sails to Greece to abduct Helena, and she in turn falls madly in love with him. Menelaus, who by then had married Helena, is of course furious. And so he prepares the ships for combat to fetch Helena and ruin the people who took her. The rest of



the story is well-known: it ends with an ingenious list cooked up by the Greeks and bloodshed in the streets of Troy. After losing too many men in battle, the Greek men present the Trojans with a token of surrender: a wooden horse the size of a small house. The Trojans victoriously reel the horse into their fortified city and feast on drink and food. After dusk, Greek men climb from the hollow belly of the horse and slaughter every man and woman in town.

If we imagine anachronistically that Menelaus was a king in our days, and the war set in modern-day Europe, we would probably not think very highly of him. The war, it seems, is fought over little else than pride. Menelaus seeks to show that he will not simply undergo this perceived injustice. If he does nothing in response to Paris stealing away his wife, it might be thought that he can be messed with, that he and his kingdom are small and negligible. Such is the logic of self-respect pride: it warrants protest against real infringements of a person. But if we look at the lead-up of the war, it is hard to find the infringement against which he is protesting. The one whose respect has truly been compromised is Helena's. She is manipulated by the gods to fall in love with Paris, and her will and her authority over her own emotions are overturned. But as noble as we may desire Menelaus to be, his concern for Helena's person is not what drives his fury. If anything, Menelaus' war compromises Helena's person even further, as he aims to grab her for a second time from her current love, and regards her as an object that needs paternal rescuing. Infringements of Helena's person are the least of our modern-day Menelaus' concerns.

Is it then disrespect against Menelaus' person that drives him? It is hard to find a true infringement of Menelaus' rights or personhood. His rights were not taken away, he was not held captive or discriminated against, he was not treated lower than any other person (again, these are all things we could say about Helena, but that did not concern Menelaus as much as the perceived harm to himself). Menelaus suffers a humiliation that speaks of a dented ego, rather than a truly disrespected person. His wife loves another. That alone, of course, can be detrimental to self-esteem. Menelaus might come to doubt his capacities as a lover, feel less handsome or funny or intelligent than Paris, and overall take a hit to his self-esteem. The threat to self-esteem, however, is perceived as a threat to self-respect, and therefore taken to warrant the self-respect reaction: to

protest and claim it back.

The crux of the mix-up between self-esteem pride and self-respect pride is to disentangle which threats are truly infringements of a person, and which are not. When is some perceived injustice really a disrespect that rightfully ignites protest? And when are we looking at unwarranted entitlement disguising as self-respect pride? In the clear cases, we have little problem with that. When a child who has plenty of toys at home does not get what she wants in a toy store, she is not disrespected, and though she may try to reason with her parents to get what she wants, she is not deprived of anything she is owed. Yet her tantrum gives the impression that a real injustice was done to her, and her protest justified. Menelaus may try to reason with Helena to come back, but if she is no longer in love with him and prefers Paris, she is not Menelaus' to claim. Menelaus is not entitled to her, and her departure is not an infringement of his personhood. In caricatural examples, we see the misplaced entitlement clearly.

#### ILLEGITIMATE ENTITLEMENT

That it is not so strange for Menelaus to experience the kidnapping of Helena as a grave injustice, is explained by Kate Manne in a striking analogy capturing the logic of entitlement. Imagine, she asks us, a scene at a restaurant in which a customer expects to be treated differentially and to be cared for by the waiting staff (2017, 50). He expects the waiting staff to be at his service, attentive to his needs, and all this with a friendly smile. Now imagine that the staff does not meet his expectations, either by being rude, ignoring him while attending to other customers, or simply lounging around lazily. "It is easy to imagine this person becoming confused, then resentful," Manne writes. "It is easy to imagine him banging his spoon on the table. It is easy to imagine him exploding in frustration" (50). When an encounter is governed by certain expectations, the defiance of those can feel like a refusal to give what is owed. If Menelaus felt entitled to Helena, or to her love and care, it seems only natural to him that she is his to take back violently.

Sometimes of course, we are right in banging our metaphorical spoons on the table. When we are harmed or ignored, when we are be-

littled or treated unequally, we are truly not given what we are owed: the equal consideration of our interests. This is what Manne calls “genuine entitlement” (2020, 12). In the context of pride, we could say that everyone is genuinely entitled to respect, and banging spoons has a legitimate ground if there is genuine disrespect. Entitlement, though often tied to smugness or arrogance, is in itself a neutral term. We are very often genuinely entitled to things: a fair paycheck for our work, a good explanation when a friend broke her promise, or rest when we need it are all things that are in some sense owed to us. If our boss withholds our paycheck for delivered work, we are on solid ground when we protest, for we are indeed entitled to fair compensation. In recent years, there has been increased attention for the so-called ‘gender pay gap’, indicating the gendered difference in pay for similar labor. It is widely recognized that women still on average earn less than men per hour of labor, with a difference of 16% in 2019 in Europe (EC 2019). If women demand equal payment, they are indeed demanding what they are owed. If they feel entitled to this remaining 16% pay, then their entitlement is genuine.

Manne concludes her book by wishing upon her newborn daughter the knowledge that she is indeed entitled to feel pain, to cry out for help, and that she is worthy of care. She wants her daughter to know that she is entitled to bodily autonomy, to say no. That her presumed gender is just that, a presumption, about which she is entitled to tell her parents they’ve been wrong (2020, 188). She wants her daughter to know that she is entitled to use and enjoy her body: to play, dance, swim, express joy, fear, or sheer silliness (189). She is entitled to eat heartily and take up space, to be loud. She is entitled to speak her mind and to let her mind be informed by a broad array of emotions. She is entitled to be powerful and knowledgeable, to win, and to occupy a position of authority or expertise (191). Women, as Manne argues in her book, are socialized to feel less entitled to these goods, often as a consequence of the undue entitlement of others. Though Manne hopes her daughter is knowledgeable about her entitlements, she also wishes her daughter knows what she is not entitled to, and that she grows up to be aware of where her entitlement is due, and where it ends (188).

Manne distinguishes genuine entitlement from illegitimate entitlement, which is often tied to arrogance and smugness. According to the

Cambridge Dictionary, “entitled” means “feeling that you have the right to do or have what you want without having to work for it or deserve it, just because of who you are” (2020a). This is more akin to the sense of illegitimate entitlement that Manne describes in her book, which focuses on male entitlement to goods like admiration, sex, attention, power, and the female body. Manne explains how our interactions under patriarchy are governed by these ideas of entitlement and the expectations of (female) giving that go with these. These illegitimate feelings of entitlement are so deeply ingrained in our society that any refusal to adhere to them is perceived as an injustice, and like with the restaurant guest, resentment and reprimands are to be expected.

Though Manne explains her notion of entitlement in the context of misogyny, her analysis is useful beyond that domain. It shows that illegitimate entitlement can nonetheless *feel* very just for the person experiencing it, especially when the surroundings reinforce the sense that what one claims is what one is legitimately owed. Put simply, if Menelaus lives in a society in which female services like care and attention are *owed* to men, then her departure feels not only painful or sad, but also like outright betrayal or desertion.

Illegitimate entitlement is not only harmful because it presents a situation as an injustice when it is not, it also deflects the attention of genuine claims of entitlement, Manne argues (2020, 12). Illegitimate entitlement often has the effect of depriving others of goods to which they are truly entitled. To stick with the example of Menelaus: if Menelaus claims Helena back because she owes him attention and care, she in turn is expected to minimize her own ambition, to forgo the pleasure of her own lust with Paris, and generally to accept her not being able to lay claim on traditionally masculine-coded goods. The illegitimate entitlement of one and the deprivation of the genuine entitlement of another are often two sides of the same coin, as will become clearer later in this chapter.

## REAL FICTIONS

It is often said that pride is only tolerable in adversity, as a strong motor for protest (Blackburn 2014, 10). But not all adversity grants equally good

reasons for protest. Some adversities are good grounds for claim-making, while others are not. Group pride is an especially interesting case here. Group pride, like personal pride, can take the form of self-esteem derived from a relevant association with a group. Self-respect pride, because it is not warranted by this or that trait but rather by personhood, is not derived from associating with a group, but a group can unite in solidarity over a common threat to that respect. Self-respect group pride is the pride that propels communal protest. Self-respect pride forces association precisely because some common denominator has been the source of discrimination, disadvantage, or the maintenance of inferior status.

If a person is treated as less than a person on the grounds that she is Black, then her pride and protest is intimately tied to all who are treated in the same way on the same grounds. Association in protest is a powerful sentiment. It is often argued that by focusing on group identity, the division of society into groups and the legitimization of different treatment is reinforced, rather than mitigated (Fukuyama 2018). Some of these arguments are made against group pride as well: by taking pride in one's identity, this identity is presented as an ontological category and the focus is on difference rather than a common humanity (Claeys 2019). I believe this reasoning to be unsound for many reasons. That group pride *can* tilt over to divisive reasoning does not mean it logically *has* to. Group association and self-respect pride can be helpful and empowering, and the acknowledgment of the group identity as a source of unequal treatment is fundamental in order to mitigate that unequal treatment. That is, importantly, if there is real inequality at play.

There is a strange tension in our identities. In one sense, we fail to delineate social groups neatly, and categorization always either misses fundamental parts of us, or lumps together very different people as sharing one common essence. That 'essence' is one we cannot establish ontologically. There is no specific 'Black experience' or a common feature all women share. "Black is not monolithic," Austin Channing Brown writes in her memoirs, repeating a point made earlier by black feminists like Audre Lorde (Brown 2018, Lorde 1984). Each narrative to define a category of humans crumbles when we seek an underlying essence behind these identities.

In his book *The Lies that Bind*, Anthony Kwame Appiah calls the es-

sences we assume behind identities rigid fictions (2018). For five common identity groups, Appiah shows the difficulties in pinning down an essence. Creed, country, color, class, and culture divide people into groups that, upon further investigation, are bound by narratives, rather than a common and stable essence. But as the title of his book summarizes, these *lies* do *bind* us. Though perhaps not ontologically, these categories are very real when they shape our experiences of life in the way they do. These non-existent essences become especially relevant when they are used to legitimize different treatment. Even though 'Blackness' or 'womanhood' have no essence, there is one thing that does bind people in these groups: they are subject to different treatment because they are perceived as belonging to a specific group. That is what makes these identifiers salient.

Sally Haslanger introduced a famous version of this argument in her definition of a woman (2012, 234). Womanhood, she argues, is not to be located in a biological feature like having double X chromosomes or having certain external body parts, nor in patterns of preferences or behavior. What all women have in common, she argues, is the subordinate social position that follows the perception of these externalities and certain patterns of behavior. Womanhood as we know it today is created by discursive construction, as Haslanger calls it. "Something is discursively constructed just in case it is (to a significant extent) the way it is because of what is attributed to it or how it is classified" (1995, 99). Discursive construction draws attention to the power that our attributions to a group have to create and sustain it. By assuming there is an essence to some group, we reinforce groupings that come to fit that essence, and subsequently read them as proof that the ontological category exists.

Why do I need this detour to eventually come back to group pride? Group pride, it could be thought, appeals to the same essence that Appiah (and Haslanger) call fictional or discursive. Should not the point be to de-emphasize these identities and instead argue for equal treatment of human beings in general? I agree that this is the eventual point. But identifying as a group is sometimes a necessary step along the way precisely because, as Haslanger argues, these groups *are* socially relevant as long as they are used to justify different treatment. In that sense, these social groups are real, not because they share a common essence, outlook, opinion, or experience, but because their members share a disadvantaged so-

cial position based on and justified by the false belief that there is indeed a common essence to that group. When it is a response to unfair treatment, group pride can be seen as what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls “strategic essentialism” (1988). The term, originating in postcolonial studies, is widely used when a common identity is temporarily accepted to obtain political ends or address discriminating practices. The group “essentializes” strategically, even though there may exist great differences between group members. There need be no acceptance of the essence as real if the goal is to address wrongs done on the basis of a perceived essence.

#### ADVANTAGES OF GROUP IDENTIFICATION

Group identification has several advantages when protesting harms. First, there is the *practical advantage of the fact that demands are bundled* rather than scattered. Instead of individual claims against mistreatment, the infringements can be seen as a pattern, and efficiently addressed as one recurrent phenomenon, instead of isolated accidents, or exceptions, examples of people that slid through the cracks.

Over the course of fourteen years (from 2005 to 2019) several women came forward to accuse the New York financier Jeffrey Epstein of sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and the manipulation of underage girls. Epstein frequently invited young girls into his Florida residence and paid them for massages. Upon entering the massage room, the girls, some of them as young as fourteen, were asked to undress or perform sexual acts. Epstein victimized dozens of girls in these or similar ways, yet for a long time the abuse remained under the radar. It is not that no one came forward, in fact the allegations against Epstein started in 2005 already, but the trial did not really catch speed until more women started to come forward with testimonies. It didn’t end with the testimonies against Epstein alone. Victims of sexual abuse by powerful men in all sectors, ranging from the entertainment business to athletics and broadcasting networks, took their stories public. As it turned out, many women shared similar stories which they had kept to themselves.

The momentum that led to the accusations of these powerful men is best captured under the hashtag #metoo. These words were used to

express recognition and solidarity among victims of sexual harassment big or small. The demands of these women were no longer merely to get Epstein convicted or to receive compensation, as it might have been the case if no group association had taken place. Rather, the bundled demand was to address the reasons why Epstein got away with the abuse for so long, and why abuse of women is too often normalized or excused (Donegan 2019). With the lawsuits, the victims sought not only to indict Epstein, but to also build momentum for changing the statute of limitations in New York and elsewhere for civil claims stemming from sex crimes (Mckinley 2019). A bundled demand rings louder and clearer than a collection of individual demands.

That brings me to a second reason why protest in the name of a shared identity can be important. As happened with the #metoo movement, association under a shared identity can *reveal structural problems* rather than individual ones. The recognition of what happened to the Epstein victims was substantial among women. Though men can of course be victims of sexual abuse, it is striking that women are so disproportionately (and trans women even more so). Recognizing that womanhood effectively makes one more vulnerable to sexual abuse reveals a structural problem, and gives us the beginning of a sense of where we should look if we want to restore this balance. If #metoo was meant to address sexual abuse in general, the responses would forgo any structural solutions and fight symptoms rather than causes. Even if womanhood is not an identity we want to take into account in how we navigate the world, cases like Epstein's show that we do. The self-respect underlying these kinds of protest is not merely a reaction to individual harm, but to harm done to anyone who shares in the characteristic implicitly or explicitly used to justify different treatment.

The association of protesters brings *legitimacy to the claim* as well. Strength is not always in numbers, but the chance that people are telling the truth in general becomes higher as the testimonies increase. One claim is easier to disregard, as has been done all too often, but dozens of testimonies make it harder to excuse the accused. And when the internet explodes with testimonies of powerful men abusing their status in sexually inappropriate ways, it becomes a stretch to dismiss these as untrue, exaggerated, or exceptional, including by the victims themselves. It is not



uncommon for victims of sexual abuse to be manipulated into doubting or minimizing their experiences, which has been described as an additional form of abuse called gaslighting (Abramson 2014). The shared testimony of the victims gives them epistemological legitimacy in their understanding of what has happened to them *as* abuse rather than as something else.

A fourth reason that protest in the name of identity can be important pertains directly to the emotion of pride. Feeling emotions in group, any emotion, can make us feel connected and *bring the strength and courage* it takes to stay on the barricades, or keep up the protest in any other way. One survivor in the Epstein case said she hoped their testimonies would signal support to girls living through the same experiences. “They need to know it’s okay to tell their stories,” she told a journalist (Herald 2020). Shared emotions, knowing that one is not alone, can fuel strength and perseverance.

The question is then: to what use is this strength put, and what forms does it take on? Strength and perseverance are not unequivocally positive. The sociologist Emile Durkheim calls the heightened emotional state that comes from sharing them with a group “collective effervescence” (Durkheim 1915). Pride is a good candidate for a socially shared emotion in protest, as is anger or combativeness. Of course, this heightened emotional state is not inherently good or bad. The collective effervescence of pride is just as much the experience of peaceful protesters standing up for their equal treatment as it is of soccer fans who trash a stadium and beat up fans of the other team under the banner of team pride. “You get enough people together, you’re not just a person in the crowd, you are the crowd. You’re invincible.” Richard Keshen quotes a gang member explaining the phenomenon of “swarming” innocent pedestrians (2017, 59), echoing some of the topics thematized in Elias Canetti’s famous *Crowds and Power* (1960). Pooled emotions, as Keshen calls the collective experience of an emotion, can strengthen and give courage, but they are just as likely to compel ruthless and mindless behavior, overconfidence, and abuse of power.

Shared emotions under the banner of identity can give rise to war language especially in wounded communities. Whether the perceived threat is real or not, such divisive language is prone to create barriers between groups that facilitate violence and a bloodthirst for revenge. Amin

Maalouf paints a picture:

In the midst of any community that has been wounded, agitators naturally arise. Whether they are hot-heads or cool schemers, their intransigent speeches act as balm to their audience's wounds. They say one shouldn't beg others for respect: respect is a due and must be forced from those who would withhold it. They promise victory or vengeance, they inflame men's minds, sometimes they use extreme methods that some of their brothers may merely have dreamed of in secret. The scene is now set and the war can begin. Whatever happens "the others" will have deserved it. "We" can remember quite clearly "all they have made us suffer" since time immemorial: all the crimes, all the extortion, all the humiliations and fears, complete with names and dates and statistics. (2001, 26-27)

Respect is indeed not something one should have to beg for, since by definition all persons are entitled to a treatment that accords with it. But a thirst for retaliation, the desire to 'make them pay' is irrational whether one has actually been harmed or not. The idea that other's suffering will diminish one's own suffering is a form of fruitless magical thinking that Nussbaum has called the 'road of payback' (2016, 24). It is unproductive in restoring injustices and nourishing a future in which further harms are prevented. The combativeness stimulated by identity-allegiances is not without risks, as it is prone to take on forms of violence, polarized thinking, and retaliation. Yet in the case of the social justice protester, the shared identity and the pride she gains from it does take on productive and energizing forms. What sets her pride apart from the hooligan's, or from the wounded community lashing out violently and speaking of war?

#### DIFFERENT PRIDES

How are we to distinguish between these two pooled emotions: the pride of the social justice activist and that of the soccer fan trashing a stadium? In the first case, pride gives much-needed courage and ensures perseverance, in the second case collective pride triggers destruction and overconfidence. These models of pride differ in more than one way. Most obviously, one aspect we can use to evaluate them is how the collective pride is materialized. How do the proud groups express their pride? For

the matter of clarity, we imagine the social justice protest to be peaceful. It doesn't therefore have to be quiet, the protesters might give speeches in a combative tone, or shout slogans. But no property is damaged, there is no physical attack or violence. The soccer fan case does involve vandalism and violence, an embodiment of pride we can condemn without much discussion.

The second difference pertains to the purpose the emotion serves. When is the proud crowd satisfied? There is a difference in aim: either for equality, or for inequality. In the protester's case, the desired outcome is one where a social inequality is acknowledged and remedied. The protester does not seek preferential treatment, or the recognition of superiority. She will protest until she is considered an equal under the law and in everyday interactions. Applause and social esteem will not satisfy her. She has no incentive to wish malaise or hardship upon others, as this will not translate into her equal treatment *per se*. The soccer fan's case is quite the opposite. She longs to overpower her competitor, and rejoices when the other team suffers. The desired outcome is one where the other team performs poorly, or at least, poorer than her own team. She has strong incentives to wish failure upon her rivals. She desires to win, and get more acknowledgment than the losing team: a prize, applause, high reflected status. She will riot to force the others on their knees, and rub in their status as losers.

But the most important difference pertains to the emotion of pride itself. Not merely the goal or the chosen expression of pride, but the emotion itself is different for the protester and the soccer fan. The protester's case is a clear example of the self-respect pride of a group of people who share a characteristic that has been used to justify discrimination. As it is fitting for self-respect pride, the protesters make a claim to the equal regard they are entitled to, yet have been denied. The hooligan, however, mixes up feelings of self-esteem pride and the entitled claim that is only fitting for self-respect pride. She feels proud of an achievement, of the quality of her team as opposed to other teams, which is a prime example of self-esteem pride (even if we can dispute whether such vicarious pride is appropriate, see the discussion in the previous chapter). Yet she makes at least one significant mistake: she *claims* her regard as if it were a matter of self-respect. She applies the entitlement that goes with self-respect to self-esteem.

## WHAT MAKES BREIVIK'S PRIDE WRONG?

I turn to a different example now, one that we have encountered before. Anders Breivik, the Norwegian who killed 69 people in resistance to the ethnic diversification of Norway, claims to act from pride in his ethnic heritage. As with the previous examples, we can evaluate at least three aspects of his pride: the expression, the aim, and the foundations of the emotion itself. The expression is clearly abhorrent. His pride found its way into violence and the brutal annihilation of the perceived enemy, an extreme version of the hooligan's fistfights. His work and even writings are those of a psychologically disturbed person, one might say uncontroversially. But Breivik is an extreme symbol of a deeper cultural phenomenon in which people lash out when they feel disregarded and, especially, when they feel they have not been given what they think becomes them. The trait of entitlement with regard to immigrants is one Breivik shares with way less disturbed and even reasonable others. Others who commit more mundane acts of xenophobia and racism are on the very same continuum, but often slip under the radar.

That Breivik's intentions reflect thoughts more mainstream than we might suspect becomes clear when we scrutinize Breivik's aim. What does Breivik aim to achieve, and when would he believe to have achieved it? Breivik protests under the banner of equality. As he perceives it, white Norwegians like himself are treated unequally, and the hearing of his demands would restore this inequality. Breivik feels disrespected: humiliated, forgotten, belittled. To him, his protest probably feels like he is claiming back what is rightfully his, as predicted by Manne's restaurant-analogy (2018, 50). He feels treated unequally and discriminated against, as he explains in his manifesto:

I don't see why we shouldn't actively strive for the establishment of a Nordic League propagating Nordic interests, following the design of the Arab League. After all, why shouldn't we, Scandinavians, Nordics, Germans and to a large degree Brits, Americans, Polish, Czechs, Swiss, people from Benelux and Balticum be allowed to feel pride in our ethnic heritage and fight for our ethnic interests? Shouldn't WE have the EQUAL right to actively pursue and protect our interest based on ethnic origin when Arabs, Pashtuns, Africans, Kurds, Tibetans, Aborigines, Native

Americans, Rom/Gypsies (sic) are allowed to? Why are we labeled as Nazi monsters when we do and they are tolerated, encouraged and even supported financially? (2011, 1158)

Others are given priority and advantages over him and his kind, he writes. He appeals to the idea of equality, central to the language of respect, and claims that it has been denied to him. Anders Breivik essentially claims the same group pride as the social justice protester. If that is correct, then he is on equally solid grounds as the protester in his claims (though not in his expression). But I believe he is not. Breivik's pride stems from distorted notions of disrespect and ultimately aims to uphold superiority rather than mitigate inequality.

The way to renounce Breivik's appeal to self-respect pride, and the entitlement that goes with it, is to show first that the group he identifies with has in fact not been disrespected or discriminated against unfairly on the basis of their belonging to this group, and second that his protest would effectively result in more inequality rather than equality. If so, then Breivik makes the same mistake as our modern-day interpretation of Menelaus: he mistakenly recognizes an ego-threat as genuine disrespect.

#### BREIVIK'S CLAIM TO DISRESPECT

Are Breivik's complaints legitimate? Is the Nordic identity truly under threat of oppression and systematic disrespect? Iris Marion Young identifies the five faces of oppression as follows: marginalization, powerlessness, violence, exploitation, and cultural imperialism (Young 1990). Has whiteness, the identity Breivik claims alongside the Nordic identity, been the cause of any of these things? Whiteness has historically not been a ground for unequal treatment in these forms, quite the opposite. If we look at marginalization as a numerical matter, we find no reason to call whiteness marginalized. The part of the Norwegian population with a history of migration was 18.2% in 2020 (ssb.no 2020). That number goes down to 10.8% when excluding immigrants from the EEA, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Of this number, only about a third are Muslim, which brings the perceived "threat of islamization" to make up only a little over 3% of the entire population (ssb.no 2019).

But marginalization is not only or even primarily a numerical matter. According to Iris Marion Young marginals are those “expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (1990, 18). A numerically large group of people, even a majority, can still be marginalized in this sense. Is that the case then for white Norwegians? Even regardless of the numbers, the Nordics rather than the immigrants hold the dominant position. People seeking Norwegian residency are submitted to often humiliating questionnaires and a ‘citizen test’ to apply for a permit (UDI 2020). As for the division of power, the roles in the highest social regard, such as leadership positions, are still predominantly white. In a list of CEOs of the 100 largest companies in Norway, only five have backgrounds in non-western countries (Grundekjøn 2020). Immigrants, even generations after the original migration, fill in the poorest-paid jobs that are lowest in social regard but arguably highest in labor and in social revenue, like care, construction and maintenance work (Skjerdal 2017). Who exactly can claim exploitation if this is the case?

Violence and hate-crimes against Norwegian whites are rather rare compared to the surges of violence against their non-white fellow citizens. In 2015, an incident of three men violently punching and kicking two Norwegian Kurds made the news. They were reportedly yelling “fucking Muslims, you don’t have anything to do here” and “go back, fucking terrorists” (Thjømøe 2015). In 2016 a white woman attempted to set fire to a mosque in downtown Oslo, after having been admitted entrance to use the mosque’s restroom (Johnsen 2016). In 2019 a young white man killed his adopted step sister, who was of Chinese descent, before opening fire on a mosque in the municipality of Bærum (Burke 2019). The shooter expressed praise for other racist terrorists on the social medium 4chan. The newspaper *Aftenposten* recently reported that hate crimes on Muslims have doubled since 2016 (Berglund 2020). Examples of violence against Muslims in Norway are not hard to find, even discounting the everyday microaggressions and non-physical violence Muslims face. Examples of the opposite exist too, but in a list of terrorist attacks on Norwegian soil since 1965, of the eight attacks suspected to be linked with Islamic organizations, none were lethal and in total only one person was injured (2020b). In a recent report, 14% of Norwegian Muslims say they have been directly

subjected to harassment (Døving 2018). In 2016, the Oslo Hate Crimes unit registered 175 cases, ethnicity being the most common cause. People of color, the report states, are predominantly exposed.

Finally, the Nordic culture does not seem threatened by cultural imperialism. Immigrants are required to learn about topics like the welfare state, democracy, equal opportunity and marriage rights in the process of applying for citizenship (Samfunnskunnskap.no 2020). The Norwegian history, traditions and religions are equally part of the required 50-hour course. I am not arguing that Norwegians are imperialistic per se in demanding that newcomers take this test. It might be defensible to require such studies from new citizens. But to speak of imperialism in the other direction simply rings absurd in this context.

The sole “threat” to white Nordics is the possibility of having to share in opportunities, wealth, and land with those born in less fortunate regions. But that is far from disrespect for the personhood of people like Breivik, and far from a structural disadvantage for white Nordics. In this process, Breivik will not lose rights or respect but rather share in them with others. White people, Breivik claims, are labeled ‘nazi monsters’. Is that not a disregard of their personhood? It would be, if it were truly the case that all white people are regarded as evil, if no word from their mouths is considered legitimate, if they are met with torches at all times, and if they are expected to be wrong before they are even heard. But this is not really the case, even if it is a beloved argument of majority groups alleging ‘reversed discrimination’.

The discourse on racism has increasingly shifted from treating racism as individual hatred for another to understanding it as a structural problem. The psychological notion of racism explains it as a personal dislike for people of color, whereas the structural notion explains racism as a system in which we participate, regardless of our explicit beliefs. It seems fair to say that the majority of anti-racist protesters share the structural concept of racism rather than the psychological one. Some examples of leading mainstream voices illustrate this point: OluTimehin Adegbeye writes that “racism exists to maintain a gross imbalance of power for white people by devaluing, dehumanizing and murdering people of African descent. It is inadequate – and, in fact, incorrect – to think that racism is merely about skin color, negative beliefs, or discriminatory at-

titudes” (2020c). Angela Davis links racism to the system of capitalism, claiming that “there is no capitalism without racism” (Mosley 2020). Olivia Rutazibwa argues that racism is not a matter of good and bad people, but of a historically grown structural injustice (2018). “I’m not interested in the question of guilt,” she says, “because racism has always been about structures.” It serves the purpose of allowing us to be comfortable with oppression (2020).

Meeting whiteness with personal scorn is a response to the psychological notion of racism: it considers people who participate in a racist system as evil beyond repair due to a wicked psychological fault of their own. I don’t believe this to be the general tendency of anti-racist protesters. On the contrary, anti-racism protesters insist on taking white people seriously and believing in their capability to critically engage with the system. White people are born into a system just as much as non-white people, but the difference is that for whites, their skin color provides them with a head start that is often invisible to them (McIntosh 1989). The Belgian journalist Sabine Ingabire recently caught wind for calling all white people racists in an interview (2020). Whether or not such claims are productive (and whether the journalist should have chosen to use precisely this statement as the head line, even after Ingabire laughingly asked not to “use this as a big header for the article”) is a different question, but at least it should be clear that activists like Ingabire seek to refer to structures that we currently embody through the organization of our society at large, rather than unshakeable psychological essences that we perform only in direct interaction with Black and brown people. Ingabire does not therefore call white people inherently evil, but asks us to consider our advantages and how the structures of society keep them in place. This way of regarding whiteness is not disrespectful in the least, it is rather evidence of respect to be taken seriously in this way.

#### SUSTAINING SUPERIORITY BY DEMANDING EQUALITY

It seems clear to me that Breivik was not actually disrespected. He and ‘his’ are not discriminated against, nor is whiteness met with the sure expectation of evil. But why should we also actively deny this pride, rather



than evaluating it as futile but harmless? By making a claim for respect where he did not lack it, I contend that Breivik aims for superiority, under the banner of equality. How so? First of all, screaming for respect gratuitously delegitimizes and mocks real demands for respect. Complaints like Breivik's cause an inflation of what respect and disrespect mean. Furthermore, by presenting his demand as one for equality he denies the real inequality at stake, the one that he accidentally benefits from. He interprets a situation of equality as one where he is treated unequally. What equality looks like to Breivik is a situation in which he has more. If one's current position feels fair, then being asked to reconsider that position logically feels like unfair treatment. The protest that stems from this feeling of disrespect is aimed at maintaining that status under the pretense that it is fair and earned, justified by the conviction that one is merely standing up for what belongs to them. In such a way, pride can feel like the defense of self-respect and equality, but maintain superiority nonetheless.

By reciprocating Black or gay pride with white or straight pride, the former are presented as the ones infringing on the latter's equal status. The ones addressing injustice are perceived as the ones creating a problem where there is none. Sara Ahmed describes how the one breaching an inconvenient topic is often received as the very source of that inconvenience. She ruins a perfectly nice situation, she is the troublemaker, the killjoy. "When you expose a problem you pose a problem," Ahmed writes (2017, 39). But according to Young's criteria of oppression, Muslims in Norway are right to see patterns in the disrespect against people with their shared characteristics. The Breiviks of this world, however, are not in a similar position that solicits group pride in reaction to disrespect. If they choose to claim that position anyway, they actively obstruct the road to equality.

Cake is usually a bad metaphor when discussing respect. Respect as I understand it here is not a finite good of which some can only have more if others have less. But cake does work as the metaphor for Breivik sustaining superiority under the pretense of equality. Imagine a birthday party with a generously frosted cake sprinkled with colorful decoration. Everyone at the party gets a piece, but one child, let's call him Anders, gets a noticeably bigger piece. Once divided, the other children notice how Anders' piece is bigger than theirs. There is still some cake left, so the cutter

proposes to give all the other children a small slice extra, to compensate for Anders' bigger piece. Anders objects: all the children will now get an extra slice, except for him. That seems like unequal treatment, preferential treatment of the others, even. Anders feels disadvantaged. Under the banner of equality, he resists being left out of a second serving, and thus effectively stands in the way of everybody getting the same amount of cake in the end. If Anders claims a second serving, too, because that seems fair to him, he eventually maintains a situation in which he has more cake.

I am not denying that Breivik genuinely feels like his personhood – and the personhood of those like him – is actually under threat. His pride, in that sense, probably feels similar to other social movements protesting under the banner of pride. Breivik appeals to group solidarity, but as Amia Srinivasan has aptly phrased it: “Not all forms of solidarity are equally just, and not all forms of emotional partiality of equal moral standing” (2018, 131). What sets them apart is that the premises that Breivik accepts are at best insensitive to other social realities, and at worst simply untrue and distorted. He perceives ego-threats (having to share or grant others their fair share) as threats to his personhood. Breivik experiences threats to his self-esteem as threats to his self-respect, and reacts with self-respect pride to what should at the most solicit self-esteem pride. Because the threats are perceived as disrespect, he applies the logic that is appropriate for self-respect pride: he claims, he protests, he feels entitled. These attitudes, however, are not warranted by the facts.

Breivik is like Menelaus starting a war over hurt feelings, even though he thinks he is closer to the situation of the Black student from the previous chapter being told he is nothing. In his manifesto, he contends that whites are encouraged into self-loathing (2011, 739). But in reality, they are merely asked to take a step back and engage critically with the systems that have worked in their favor, which is far from a disrespectful demand.

So how to scrutinize a person (or group) claiming self-respect pride? The first question we need to ask is whether there has really been a disregard of someone's personhood. For persons, we can use lists with fundamental rights as guidance, and consider whether they have in fact been harmed or are under threat. For groups to unite under identity pride and claim rightful treatment, there has to be a structural disregard of that group. We can evaluate that with theories like Young's five faces of op-

pression, or others that seem plausible. If a person or group protests in the name of self-respect pride, but we cannot establish a threat of true disrespect, we should be wary of what the person aims to achieve with her protest. We should wonder whether the demands of that person create situations in which there is more equality, or more inequality. For this purpose, we need to discuss what equality means. There is much involved in scrutinizing self-respect pride, and it touches on some of the most fundamental questions in philosophy: what is equality, what is justice, what is respect, what is oppression? I do not pertain to solve any of these questions in this thesis, but argue that we need to think hard about these questions to evaluate claims of pride. Besides thinking about these concepts, there are several other things we can do to safeguard self-respect and reduce possible threats to it. I end the chapter with giving some recommendations in this direction.

#### FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SELF-RESPECT PRIDE

We met two recommendations directly in the examples above. First: we need to be aware of self-esteem pride erroneously functioning like self-respect pride, and vice versa. The project of this dissertation is to contribute to this goal. Avoiding conflation and being able to point out mix-ups starts with the knowledge that what we call pride entails different attitudes in response to different kinds of worth. Once we see this, we can understand that what warrants pride also warrants only a specific set of behaviors. Self-esteem pride does not warrant protest or claims, as we are not entitled to esteem. Self-respect pride does warrant claims, but not those of hierarchical status. We can claim equal status, not all-around higher (or lower) status. Hierarchical status is the domain of self-esteem pride, and should be limited in scope: we can be remarkably good in this or that activity, but not better than other humans overall.

To know which instances of pride pertain to self-esteem and which to self-respect, we need to know what constitutes esteem and respect, both to be able to separate true infringements of respect from merely hurt esteem, and to derive what the self-reflexive form of these attitudes could

look like. To pose these questions in each practical case is my second recommendation. Especially respect needs more consideration, since according to the logic of respect, disrespect warrants protest. We want to be able to distinguish between legitimate uses of pride and pathetic or harmful uses. Finding out which treatments constitute respect and which threaten it seems vital to do that. It's not that philosophers have ignored the subject of respect, on the contrary, but we need to re-evaluate the concept in light of current issues, and we need to understand that disregard for personhood takes on many forms. Disregard for personhood is not confined to the horrid practices of genocides and blatant infringements on human rights, but rather a daily occurrence in less and more subtle forms. Research will need to be interdisciplinary and intersectional to evaluate practices of (dis)respect. It will not suffice to engage with the topic of respect *in abstracto*, nor to lose ourselves in particularities. The task for philosophy is precisely to see the patterns in the particular.

We have some questions at hand to expose these patterns. Is the demand one for equality or for inequality? Is the demanding group or person really not granted respect? How does the situation of the proud group relate to the five faces of oppression as painted by Young? Is the misrecognition really disrespect or is it merely a dent in the ego? Does the demand of respect from one group threaten the basis for (self-)respect for another group by diverting attention from their demands? The answers to these questions are essential to determine whose cries for respect should be heard.

A third recommendation pertains to society's responsibility for safeguarding self-respect. Because self-respect is fundamental to believing that one's life is worth living, Laurence Thomas argues that it is society's task to make sure that everyone has the means to feel justified in having self-respect. "The social institutions of society are fairly arranged if and only if they are conducive to every member of society having self-respect," he writes (1995, 264). That does not mean that society is responsible for everyone actually *having* self-respect. There are reasons outside of the responsibility of society for people losing their self-respect (Dillon 1992a). But if a subclass of the people lacking self-respect shows significant overlap with a group of people sharing some other characteristic, that pattern is something we can address. In other words, if people that share some charac-

teristic lack the belief that they merit respect on the basis of possessing that characteristic, we are dealing with a structural problem, rather than a personal one. In yet other words, I quote Thomas' rather complicated but striking summary: "If all the members of a heterogeneous class are justified in believing a proposition to be true, then, barring some special explanation, the class of persons who fail to believe the proposition to be true should not be identifiable on grounds other than that its members fail to believe that the proposition is true" (1995, 265). It is too optimistic to believe that we can fully eradicate the group of people believing they are not worthy of respect, but we can make sure that this group does not relevantly overlap with any other group of people.

A society can make sure there are no structural hindrances for a certain group or person to have self-respect. This approach to society's responsibilities is made famous by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Sen 1979, Nussbaum 2000). Their capability approach entails that governments and policy makers are responsible for creating a context in which humans can live out certain capabilities that are inherent to human life. Whether humans actually choose to cultivate these capabilities is irrelevant in this perspective. It matters whether they have the opportunity to do so. Not actual human functioning but rather the substantive freedom to function in the relevant ways is what matters, according to this approach. Nussbaum determines a list of ten capabilities that need safeguarding. She includes that all people should have the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation. If society systematically poses hurdles (or neglects to resolve them) for a group or person to have self-respect, it is depriving them of a fundamental human capability. Each human should be able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others, Nussbaum contends. She also answers the question how societies can make sure this demand is met: "this entails, at a minimum, protections against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, caste, ethnicity, or national origin" (2000, 79).

Policy makers can work on eliminating and actively opposing harmful stereotypes, underrepresentation, and systematic underappreciation of certain skills or identity traits. Destructive expectations about persons and their characteristics, including self-regarding expectations, have long supported unreformed social practices (Moody-Adams 1993, 252). When

a certain characteristic is perceived as warranting disrespect, affirmative action can be effective to remedy this (implicit or explicit) belief. Quota in hiring procedures, for instance, can encourage members of underrepresented groups to imagine themselves as persons worthy of respect.

Quota need not be disrespectful in their own right, as they sometimes turn out to be. In an online reader debate organized by The Atlantic one reader testifies: “I am very split about affirmative action. (...) I am never recognized for any of my accomplishments, never given the respect I feel is due because of affirmative action. (...) the same classmates I went to school with, spoke to, and beat in competitions grumbled behind my back: “It was affirmative action.” That cut me deeply in a way that I have never forgiven them” (Anonymous 2015).

Discussing the workings of affirmative action here will take us too far, but I have a suspicion that the lack of respect that is clearly happening in this reader’s example is not an intrinsic problem of affirmative action, but rather a result of how affirmative action is viewed: as a preferential treatment at the cost of quality. But affirmative action does not mean that some person is hired *only because* they have some characteristic. It rather reflects the recognition that there is talent and skill in historically underrepresented groups which has previously not been granted the opportunity for cultivation, and that fast-tracking that cultivation now is a necessary enrichment. Affirmative action benefits not only the direct receiver, but slowly contributes to the self-respect of those sharing in the relevant characteristic. Role models play an important role in seeing oneself as more than “nothing”. These are all steps we can and should consider as a society, both in policymaking and in the choices we make on a daily basis.

Tied in with the recommendation to distinguish between self-esteem pride and self-respect pride comes a fourth recommendation. We can mitigate the tendency to conflate them by discouraging the formation of hierarchies, especially in high-stakes domains. Self-respect is less likely to be mistakenly understood as a hierarchical notion if we are not encouraged to pit ourselves against others. And self-esteem is less prone to be interpreted as an evaluation that says something about one’s general worth compared to others if we are not used to seeing others as competitors.

Waheed Hussain argues that there should be limits to competitive

institutions in a liberal democracy (2018, 2020). His argument links back to the discussion of competition from the previous chapter, in which I discussed the spillover of a competitive spirit into domains where competition is not appropriate as one of the pitfalls of self-esteem pride. Hussain proposes that a liberal democracy is founded on the presumption of a specific form of connectedness: solidarity. The good workings of a liberal democracy are sustained by mutual affirmation: we wish each other well, we hope for the best outcome for others, and so on. Having these attitudes of mutual affirmation can only work if we have no strong incentives to want the opposite: to wish bad things for another, to hope for bad outcomes, and so on.

Social institutions, Hussain argues, should be consistent with mutual affirmation. Such an institution should not pose obstacles for people to act and think in the ways that mutual affirmation requires. An institution is less consistent with mutual affirmation if it presents strong reasons against acting and thinking in the relevant ways. Imagine a competitive baseball game. Because the good outcome of one depends on the loss of another, there are incentives for each team member to wish for bad outcomes for the other. Pursuing one's own aims thus means thwarting the aims of another. The competitive structure of baseball presents participants with obstacles for rooting for the other team's victory. But, importantly, the baseball game does not interfere with the mutual affirmation relevant for a liberal society. Off the field, players can still wish each other well and hope for good outcomes.

Now imagine that a social institution is arranged in this way. Imagine that the necessary side-effect of getting a job is that another person earns not only less, but not enough to get by. If this is the case, people are presented with very strong reasons to wish bad outcomes for another. Competitive social institutions "put people in circumstances where the only way for one person to secure an important good is by formulating and successfully carrying out a plan that will effectively interfere with some other person's formulating and successfully carrying out a plan to secure an important good" (Hussain 2018, 570). The interference with another person's good is in the case of a social institution not limited to the loss of a baseball game, but can result in the other sinking below the threshold of living a decent life. If the result of a competition is that it pits people

against each other in ways that inhibit mutual affirmation, competition should be kept out of that sphere, Hussain concludes.

I think that Hussain's recommendations should be taken at heart not only to ensure mutual affirmation, but also to discourage harmful confluences of pride. Self-esteem pride is what the baseball players on the field might feel. But it is important that they do not take their victory to mean that they moved up in the ranks of humanity, that they are superior to or more deserving than their competitors. By limiting competition to low-stakes friendly games, and fending it from high-stakes domains, we encourage respect for persons to be detached from esteem for persons. Where respect is at stake, competition should be actively opposed and mitigated if it finds its way in. Humans have a tendency to create hierarchies (Nussbaum 2013, 182). Knowing this, we can meet that expectation with an arrangement of society that does not encourage this tendency, or channels it into confined domains where it does not pose a threat to mutual affirmation. We can set up our institutions in such a way that people are not presented with strong reasons to wish bad outcomes for others. A good way to achieve that aim is to ensure a basic safety net in the form of guaranteed health care, income, and so on, so that losing a job to another candidate can never translate into the loss of these fundamental goods.<sup>12</sup> If people feel relatively safe in their livelihoods, they are no longer presented with strong reasons to wish poor outcomes for another.

Noticing how hierarchies are not welcome in just any sphere of life, and understanding the reasons why that is the case supports the relevance of distinguishing between self-esteem pride and self-respect pride. De-emphasizing hierarchies reduces the tendency to think of respect in terms of merit and of esteem in terms of entitlement. If competition finds its way into certain domains, we are prone to think of respect as a scarce good that one can ultimately lose access to altogether. Hierarchies when introduced into social institutions, as Hussain said, give us strong

12. Similar arguments are made in economic theories and in the philosophy of economy. It would be part of this recommendation to get familiar with the arguments they present and their suggested solutions. For scholars that have done important work arguing against the commodification of primary social goods, about the ethical limits of meritocracy and the dangers of the deeply entrenched hierarchical organization of our institutions see for instance Anderson (1990, 1999), Satz (2010), Ostrom (2010), Sandel (2020).



reasons to disregard another's personhood and see this as legitimate because to do otherwise renders the achievement of one's own goals difficult. Hierarchical structures and competition should not be the default but rather the exception for human interaction. If everything is a competition, then it is hard not to think of self-respect in the same way.

One particular form of hierarchy structures the modern western worldview: meritocracy. My fifth recommendation focuses on tempering the meritocratic worldview by recognizing spirals of (dis)opportunity to nourish one's talents and by making sure the minimal means to live a decent life are not dependent on merit. In the discussion of self-esteem, I gave one critique of meritocracy. The emphasis on merit downplays factors of luck, and ascribes accomplishments to others or the self without taking misfortune or privilege into account. This distorts both self-esteem and the esteem of others.

The discussion of self-respect here gives us another vantage point from which to criticize meritocracy. In a meritocratic worldview, there is a deep connection between accomplishment and desert or merit. If where you end up is believed to depend on your abilities, then the confidence of those achieving well thrives. They have, after all, earned their status: they have worked, have put in effort, and supposedly thank their status solely to their own abilities. The flipside of this coin is that those down on their luck are also believed to be deserving of their lower status: we come to suspect them not to have worked hard enough, not being talented enough, or lazy, and so on.

Thus far, it sounds like meritocracy is only reflected in perceptions of self-esteem. Those at the top feel like they have more reason to esteem themselves than they actually do, while those at the bottom believe they have more reasons to disesteem themselves than they actually do. But meritocratic ideas travel beyond mere self-esteem.

With his book *The Rise of Meritocracy* Michael Young did not mean to describe society at the time of writing (1958). Young wanted his book to be read as a dystopian novel that warned for the downsides of a promising system. A satire, he called it himself in more recent writings (2001). It has not been read that way. Young regrets that readers have focused on the benefits painted in the first half of the book, while waving away the

warnings to which the full second half is dedicated and for which the first, utopian part was merely a set-up. Indeed, meritocracy has its benefits. It allows us to do away with inequality as a result of inheritance or being in the right ‘networks.’ But meritocracy also deepens the cracks between social classes, by pretending that these cracks are justified. There is little reason to mitigate bad luck or historical disadvantages if those factors are simply not recognized as injustices. “It is good sense to appoint individual people to jobs on their merit. It is the opposite when those who are judged to have merit of a particular kind harden into a new social class without room in it for others,” Young writes a year before his passing (2001). Talent and ability are spread somewhat evenly over the population, but the opportunities to cultivate and nourish that talent are not. As a result, those with more means keep rising higher: they develop talents and land well-paying jobs that allow them to develop talents that land them even better-paying jobs and so on. The spiral down is equally self-sustaining.

The most important of Young’s warnings is that meritocracy results in a loss of self-respect for the poor. Not merely self-esteem, but also self-respect suffers from meritocracy. Young explains this conclusion: “If they have been labelled ‘dunce’ repeatedly they cannot any longer pretend; their image of themselves is more nearly a true, unflattering, reflection. Are they not bound to recognize that they have an inferior status – not as in the past because they were denied opportunity; but because they are inferior? For the first time in human history the inferior man has no ready buttress for his self-regard” (1958, 97). Like the Black boy earlier in this chapter, if self-esteem is systematically lowered by hitting walls and failing time and time again, it can translate into the acceptance of an inferior status. If no one but the self is to blame for one’s failures, one can indeed feel deserving of second-class treatment and being denied certain treatments. “We ain’t nothing” means “spending money on my education is a waste,” and “it is right to prioritize others over me.”

So what is the recommendation here exactly? If we want to value merit over inheritance or luck, as Young contends is a good thing in some cases, we need to make sure that our conception of merit is not in fact heavily determined by precisely luck and inheritance. Instead of believing that one’s advantages are mostly merited, we need to understand that one’s merits are often also the result of advantages. Meritocracy as conceived

today amplifies inequality by making it seem justified. The foundations of mutual respect, Hussain's mutual affirmation, is undermined by ideas of *deserved* inferiority. The idea that how goods are distributed reflects each person's true merits undermines the support for the redistribution of means, which is fundamental to create the level playing field on which people can properly cultivate their talents.

We need to make sure the parts of meritocracy we want to maintain do not threaten the bases for self-respect for those who meet occasional failure. An important tool for this purpose, as I argued above, is to make sure that everyone has access to the very basic elements to cultivate talents regardless of what they have achieved previously: for starters a living wage, secured free time, education, and so on. The solution will not start with a psychological make-over in which we rethink merit, as long as we simply cannot afford to rethink it. We cannot on the one hand preach that poverty or perceived failure is often partly due to bad luck and the spiral of poverty, and on the other hand neglect to make sure this realization is reflected in the treatment and opportunities of the poor. Again, Anu Partanen puts it bluntly:

The founder of the Huffington Post, Arianna Huffington, wrote in her recent book *Thrive* that Americans need a new definition of success. Rather than everyone working so hard, in Huffington's mind we should all strive for a healthier version of success that includes greater attention to our own personal well-being, the cultivation of wisdom, the ability to wonder, and giving back. When I heard this I cringed. Those are good goals for sure, and Huffington's heart seems to be in the right place. But the tools she is offering are not going to solve the problem. What Americans need, so that they can stop struggling so hard to be superachievers, is simple: affordable high-quality health care, day care, education, living wages, and paid vacations. Studies show that a majority of Americans would gladly work fewer hours than they do now, and only a minority would like to have a job with more responsibilities. It's not that Americans don't realize that they need to relax, as Arianna Huffington seems to think. It's that they can't afford to. (2016, 315-316)

The priority of merit will pose a threat to self-respect as long as failure results in the deprivation of the possibility to live a minimally decent life. There is no other option than to value merit if that is the sole key to have

a life that is worthy of a person. We cannot discredit merit as long as it is directly connected with (self-)respect. And that is the case when merit is the only route to the lives that give us a sense of fundamental worth and entitlement to basic goods and treatment. Having the bases for self-respect should not depend on the achievements one attains. Extreme forms of meritocracy jeopardize that solid belief.

## REGARDLESS

Self-respect as a due regard for one's own personhood can warrant pride. Sometimes, it warrants pride that is empowering and vital for social change. Sometimes, the claim for self-respect is out-of-place, when it is a reaction against perceived threats that do not in fact constitute disrespect. I discussed the importance of self-respect for each person, and gave some recommendations as to how and why we should safeguard the social bases for self-respect. But how empowering is self-respect really for those who claim their due in pride and protest? Is self-respect the final stop of empowerment, or is there more to be achieved?

The basic idea of respect as we have seen so far is that every person is entitled to a certain treatment *regardless* of their particularities. Whether the particular person is brown, white, male, female, young, old, a saint, a crook, a minimalist or an extravagant dresser, so the logic of respect goes, is not relevant to grant them respect. Respect, in a sense, places particularities between brackets. Robin S. Dillon critiques this notion of respect that emphasizes abstract personhood, which she calls the modern notion of respect (1992b). She agrees that political empowerment does indeed come from claiming one's intrinsic worth as a person, an idea that is also central to the modern notion of respect. But the worth that empowers, Dillon argues, is not impersonal and abstract, but rather embodied and specific. Respect, as it is defined in the modern notion, encourages alienation, "for it allows that I can respect myself without paying attention to who I am, without taking *me* seriously" (57).

In the introduction I recounted the beginning of the gay rights movement in the U.S. You might remember that the movement's strategy changed over time. In the early days, gay rights activists picketed in business attire. They tried first to bracket their particularities in order to

emphasize a common humanity. Regardless of who I love, they seemed to be saying, I am like you. But soon the strategy changed. The Stonewall uprising in 1969 was shouldered by people in drag, transgender people and gay people, a majority of whom was Black or brown. Two of the leading figures, Marsha P. Johnson and Silvia Rivera, were trans women of color.

When you look at pictures of Marsha P. Johnson, you can tell she was hardly a wallflower. In one picture she is adorned with her signatory flowers, in another she dresses boyishly, in yet other images she wears make-up and crowns made of everything ranging from little mirrors to Christmas lights. She smiles from ear to ear in every one of the pictures. Marsha P. Johnson was found dead in the Hudson River in 1992. In a documentary about her life and death, a friend describes Johnson's mission as giving license to the others that "you don't have to be dressed up in a suit. You can express yourself." Agosto Machado, performance artist and early-day activist, remembers her presence as the queen of Greenwich Village: "she became to me like a bodhisattva. A holy person who would wander the village in whatever adornment she wanted, being at peace" (France 2017). Another friend testifies: "Marsha always gave this blessed presence and encouragement to be who you wanted to be. Those who were a little too feminine were frowned upon, but Marsha and a few others would stand ramrod straight, shoulders back, head high, and present themselves" (Kasino 2012). Marsha P. Johnson was not one to bracket her particularities in the fight for her rights.

To really be empowered, it is not only important to have one's abstract personhood acknowledged regardless of one's particularities, but also to be acknowledged in and with those particularities. The point is not to value ourselves *in spite of* who we are, but *because of* who we are. The modern conception of self-respect, Robin Dillon argues, does not allow us to recognize both our share in the manifold of human commonalities *and* our distinctness. She proposes instead a feminist conception of self-respect that incorporates the recognition of individual "me-ness." But what Dillon suggests, it seems to me, is much less self-respect than it is self-love. The attitude towards the self that she describes involves "cherishing and treasuring" the self (1992b, 62), "paying attention to myself in the fullness of my specific detail, valuing myself in my concrete particularity." (60), looking at one's "very prosaic self" (60), and not hiding from

or refusing to acknowledge the reality of the self (62). What Dillon describes involves acceptance, patience and taking the self seriously instead of ignoring one's needs (62-63). It requires us to work sincerely towards honest and accurate self-understanding (64). These are attitudes of self-love rather than self-respect, as I will go on to explain in the next chapter. Self-love, it might come as no surprise, is the third and final attitude that warrants pride.



# 4

## A particular love

### On self-love pride

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“I feel like she smells like patchouli oil. Or weed.” Guiliana Rancic, a panelist on the American show *Fashion Police*, made headlines in 2015 with this reaction to actress Zendaya Coleman’s appearance at the Oscar awards (Phillip 2015). Zendaya, daughter to a Black father and a white mother, was photographed on the red carpet wearing a white Vivienne Westwood dress and, for the occasion, with her hair in dreadlocks. Rancic’s comment might have gone unnoticed had Zendaya not spoken out about the racist undertones of Rancic’s quick judgement. A statement on the actress’s social media read:

Someone said something about my hair at the Oscars that left me in awe (...) To say that an 18 year old young woman with locs must smell of patchouli oil or “weed” is not only a large stereotype but outrageously offensive. I don’t usually feel the need to respond to negative things but certain remarks cannot go unchecked. I’ll have you know my father, brother, best childhood friend and little cousins all have locs. (...) None of which smell of marijuana (sic). (...) My wearing my hair in locs on an Oscar red carpet was to showcase them in a positive light, to remind people of color that our hair is good enough. To me locs are a symbol of strength and beauty, almost like a lion’s mane. (2015)

Her reply in an Instagram post was widely shared and liked among others by Solange, Kerry Washington, Viola Davis and Whoopi Goldberg. Zendaya said in an interview that she was flooded with pictures of Black women proudly wearing their locks, and one young Black girl chose Zendaya’s red carpet look as a costume for Halloween. Zendaya found this



response “empowering (...) It became something very positive. It allowed us to talk about things that make us uncomfortable” (Toofab 2016). Following the attention and support about the incident, she actively spoke out about beauty ideals and role models for Black people, and collaborated with Mattel, the brand behind the famous Barbie doll, to bring a Black doll to the market – with, of course, long brown locks (Wilkins 2015).

The widely spread reaction following the incident fits into a worldwide movement closely related to the Black pride movement as discussed in the last chapter. Yet, the sentiment at the heart of this movement is not quite the same, though they often act in tandem. I am referring to the active endorsement and celebration of Black features in reaction to widespread white beauty standards, often captured under the slogan ‘Black is Beautiful’. Originally used as the poster slogan for a 1962 fashion show in a basement in Harlem that sought to promote African culture and fashion, the phrase quickly became a rallying cry (Laneri 2018). The show became iconic for featuring Black models only, showcasing their natural curls and Black skin. Kwame Brathwaite, a photographer whose work is still on exhibition today, and co-founder of the ‘Naturally ‘62’ fashion show, immortalized the movement through mesmerizing pictures of confidently trotting black women, his wife showcasing brightly colored African ornaments, or Black youth spending their afternoons in the Bronx (Steinhauer 2019). Brathwaite, whose images inspired magazines like *Ebony* and *Harper’s Bazaar* to hire darker-skinned models, said he sought to encourage Black people to “have pride in their natural beauty” (Laneri 2018).

The movement was brought into life to counteract the rigid idea that Black traits are ugly. In her debut novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison tells a story that captures this idea of beauty and the way it shapes the sense of self of young Black girls (1972). Pecola Breedlove, the young protagonist of the story, grows up as the daughter of a poor black family in 1941 Ohio. Life at the Breedlove home is rather difficult. Pecola’s father drinks heavily and is not hesitant to use violence on his wife. As a Black family emerging from the Great Depression, the Breedloves struggle to make ends meet. Throughout the book, Pecola repeatedly wishes to have blue eyes, believing firmly that this would finally make her loved and turn things around for her. She is constantly affirmed in the belief of her own ‘ugliness’, as she is ignored or mocked for her black skin.

Morrison's story gives the reader insight into principles of internalization of racist beauty standards in post-war Ohio. But these processes are not behind us, as recent scholars have amply shown (Cheng 2014, Harper and Choma 2018, Tate and Fink 2019). To name but a few illustrations of the white beauty standard: bleaching dark skin with harmful products in order to get paler, or straightening (and often damaging) Black natural hair to be more like Caucasian hair is not uncommon (Tate 2016). Advertisements often underrepresent or 'whitewash' dark skins. In one notable example, L'Oréal significantly lightened the skin of the singer Beyoncé Knowles in a beauty campaign, stirring outrage (Sweney 2008). The popular app Snapchat sparked controversy in 2016 for offering skin-lightening filters under the name "beautify" (Chang 2016). The Black is Beautiful movement aims to address the beauty standards that make Black people go to extreme lengths to make their bodies fit a one-sided idea of beauty, or otherwise be left despising their 'ugly' traits.

Zendaya and others trying to shift these standards to be inclusive of a whole range of bodies often refer to the emotion central to my research: pride. Zendaya carries her locks "like a lion's mane." Black is Beautiful encourages Black people to be proud of their features in a very distinct way, as I will go on to explain. A similar kind of pride can be found in the body positivity movement. Body positivity could in one interpretation be understood as conducive to self-esteem pride: if we expand the notion of what counts as beautiful, more people will be able to take pride in their beauty. But this conception of body positivity has been called harmful for keeping people attuned to the rigid idea that people should want to be beautiful. Céline Leboeuf has instead argued that body positivity entails not only to expand aesthetic standards, but also to "celebrate such aspects of embodiment as our capacity for bodily pleasure or our bodily abilities" (2019, 115). She calls this "the transition from limiting body shame to proper body pride" (115).

There are many other examples of the pride I want to address in this chapter. At first sight, they may appear different, but as I will explain later on, they share a core of being interested in really looking at the self and seeing what is there, without the desire to oppress or hide. In the movie *Billy Elliot*, a young blue-collar boy takes on dancing lessons and refuses to be discouraged in pursuing what he loves by stereotypes of manliness

(Daldry 2000). Or think of Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir, who became the first woman to wear a hijab while playing NCAA Division I basketball (Elassar 2020), and who said in the documentary *Life Without Basketball* that “we can’t be afraid to be proud of being Muslim” (O’Donnell and Mercer 2018). Or, as another example, we can think of the pride governing endeavors to cultivate and maintain one’s language, even if it is rarely spoken or overshadowed by a different *lingua franca*. In Belgium, for instance, Flemish used to be regarded as the language of farmers, spoken only by the uneducated underbelly of society, and all official communication, including the language of public institutions like universities, was in French. In what is now known as *‘de taalstrijd’* (the language struggle), catching speed in the 1830s and spanning the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century in Belgium, Flemish activists protested the domination of French in education. These activists finally obtained that Flemish Dutch became the official language for institutions in the Flanders region, as it remains today. Though Flemish pride nowadays has a different and complex connotation, during the *taalstrijd* it was a central emotion that sparked resistance to the domination of the French language and the subsequent impoverishment of Flemish, which was spoken only at home and not in the realm of universities and other institutions where it could be cultivated properly and recognized as a rich language. In one testimony, a Flemish author remembers a much sought-after collector’s piece in those times: a seal used by a Flemish activist and artist imprinted with the slogan *‘boudt u fier’* (stay proud) (Ureel 1984, 198). As a final example, and to end with a more trivial and everyday kind of pride, I think of my own beloved’s passion for bird watching. At a younger age, his hobby was a source of derision for his peers. He used to refrain from telling his friends that he spent the weekend skimming the Belgian coast for a specific bird, preferring to make up stories about uneventful days at home. Now, his passion has become his profession and a source of pride, and he carries his stories about rare sightings with pride and joy, even in the face of (frankly quite uninspired) bird-nerd-jokes.

What does pride mean here? It seems to me like neither self-esteem nor self-respect fully capture the implications and connotations of this kind of pride. Pride as it is used in these examples sheds light on yet a third attitude that can underlie it: self-love. What Zendaya (or, insert Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir, Billy Elliot, the Flemish activist during the *taalstrijd*,

my bird-watching partner) expressed is not that her locks (or, again, insert the hijab, ballet dancing, the Flemish language, an interest in birds) are particularly praiseworthy or a great achievement, as we would expect in self-esteem pride. She is not praising her locks as a self-standing admirable feature for which she worked hard. Rather, she seems to be saying that her locks are a source of pride precisely because they belong to her, a person with a Black father and a specific cultural ancestry. Her locks might even not be a source of pride in her eyes if flaunted by a person with a different cultural heritage, as white dreadlocks are often featured as examples of cultural appropriation (Lenard and Balint 2020). It is more crucial for this kind of pride that the celebrated feature is part of oneself, rather than it being good or praiseworthy in itself.

Is Zendaya then expressing something like self-respect pride? The Black Pride movement as discussed in the previous chapter entailed the claim that one is worthy of equal treatment regardless of the particularities of a person. But that is not (merely) what the people in my examples are expressing either: they do indeed highlight a very particular quality. They have in common not that they are asking to place their particularities between brackets, but rather they turn the spotlight on these particular qualities and cultivate them, like having dreadlocks, wearing a hijab, dancing ballet, speaking Flemish, or a passion for birds.

This subtle nuance is what makes theirs a different stance from the Black pride protesters from the last chapter. It is the same nuance that separates the pride of the Stonewall girls from the introduction, who celebrated their particularities, from the pride at the annual reminder, where the strategy was precisely to highlight similarity. Pride as taking ownership of one's particular qualities is an attitude that accompanies self-love, rather than self-respect or self-esteem, though in protest we often see them working in tandem. As with the previous chapters, I will focus on the attitude underlying pride. This chapter focuses on self-love, and the pride that can (but need not per se) be warranted by it, just like pride can be warranted by self-respect and self-esteem.

## WHAT IS SELF-LOVE?

The relative interest in the topic of self-love on Google has according to the web browser almost tripled worldwide since 2015 (GoogleTrends 2020), and it most likely owes its recent popularity partly to its usage in contexts of the growing self-improvement, self-care, and self-help literature. In the body positivity movement, for instance, self-love is a key concept and it denotes an attitude of self-acceptance or self-celebration. Self-love is also a popular tool of empowerment in the Black is Beautiful movement. Melissa Vivian Jefferson, better known under her artist name Lizzo and crowned the unofficial queen of self-love, is celebrated for her exemplary function for both Black and Big girls by embracing her selfhood in her lyrics and videoclips. In a famous speech, Malcolm X expressed regret at the lack of self-love in African Americans (1962). Black feminists like Audre Lorde and bell hooks frequently approach self-love (and self-care) as a radical and brave act of political warfare and self-preservation (Lorde 1988, hooks 2000).

On the other hand, the increased interest in self-love is likely also due to its usage as a characteristic of the so-called social media generation, and is in this sense mostly linked to self-centeredness, self-indulgence, the inability to look at oneself critically, appearance-centered shallowness, and narcissism. There's the marketization of self-love playing into trends of body positivity and self-care to sell objects not clearly linked to self-love or even actively harmful to the self, like expensive egg-shaped jade stones for "crystal healing" of the vagina "for ultimate self-love and well-being" (Belluz 2018). In a hilarious and often painfully accurate essay by the cultural critic Jia Tolentino, she calls these marketized practices of self-optimization masquerading as empowerment "a bottomless cornucopia of privatized nonsolutions" (2019c, 179).

Self-love appearing as self-care can reveal a deep self-centeredness at the bottom. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, navel-gazing sometimes hides behind the adagio of self-love as empowering attention to the self. As one journalist in an article on self-love in the New Yorker puts it:

Beneath the face masks and yoga asanas, many of the #selfcare posts sound strangely Trump-like. “Completely unconcerned with what’s not mine” is a common caption. So is “But first, YOU,” and the counterfactual “I can’t give you a cup to drink from if mine is empty.” I recently spotted another hashtag right next to #selfcare: #lookoutforNUMBERONE. The image was an illustration of a pale, thin girl with a tangle of wildflowers growing from the crown of her head, reaching up with a watering can in one hand to water her own flowers. (Kisner 2017)

The extension of self-love is all over the place, and what we mean by it is often contradictory: on the one hand, self-love is a celebrated form of empowerment. On the other, self-love is sometimes unmasked as a euphemism for individualism and narcissism, a means to get away with being selfish.

If we look at the popular discourse, these two connotations of self-love surface: self-love as uncritical self-absorption on the one hand, and as empowering soul-searching and self-acceptance on the other. The first, clearly, has a rather negative connotation whereas the second can be an emancipatory strategy to alleviate oppression. The first common notion of self-love characterizes it as an abundant focus on the self. As such, it is often named in one breath with narcissism, entitlement, egotism, and other self-oriented attitudes. Self-love, in this sense, is evaluated rather negatively and we are warned against its destructive, navel-gazing tendencies. An article in the *Guardian* uses the word in this sense when it describes how “self-love got out of control”, and subsequently uses self-love and narcissism interchangeably (Hinsliff 2018). The Canadian singer Justin Bieber sings: “if you like the way you look that much, you should go and love yourself,” implying that self-love effectively stands in the way of other-love (2015). Self-love is often equated with the uncritical worship of the self, an emotion akin to self-absorption. There are two components to this idea of self-love: self-love is uncritical and self-love is self-centered. In what follows, I will argue against this conception of self-love, for I take that it does not reflect what self-love is, and as such leaves us at loss for words when wanting to explore empowering notions of self-love.

## WHY SELF-LOVE IS NOT SELF-ABSORPTION

One plausible way to answer the question ‘what is self-love?’ is to understand it as a self-reflective form of love. The way we understand self-love then largely depends on what we take love to mean. The philosophy of love is a rich and ever-growing field in both theoretical and applied philosophy, with important overspills into moral philosophy, and my discussion of it here is bound to fall short. I will, for instance, leave the debates on reasons for loving one rather than another out of focus, and instead draw upon what philosophers have thought about the attitude of loving and its characteristics in general. We can distinguish several lines for the purpose of defining self-love.

Philosophers have long argued that love (for another) is not a matter of undisturbed focus on the other, nor of uncritical obsession. Though we often see love depicted as this kind of obsessive absorption in romantic movies and stories, there is general consensus among philosophers that this is not typical nor essential to mature and stable love, like the love between friends, parents and children, or long-term romantic partners. Troy Jollimore points to the difference between infatuation and love. “An infatuated person becomes blind to the attractions of everyone but his beloved” (2011, 42). It is characteristic of infatuation that the beloved tends to “fill the mind” of the lover, leaving no room whatsoever for meaningful attention to others (42). Harry Frankfurt writes that “it is important to avoid confusing love (...) with infatuation, lust, obsession, possessiveness, and dependency in their various forms” (2004, 43). Infatuation, *being in love* rather than loving, is what gives meaning to love being proverbially blind. Anyone who has been in love, ranging from romantic infatuation to the infatuation parents are said to feel about their babies, can likely recognize the all-encompassing presence of the other in one’s mind. Psychologists refer to this stage in a romantic partnership as ‘limerence’, an affective state which can last approximately three years, and is characterized by experiencing overwhelming attraction and having intrusive or obsessive thoughts about another (Tennov 1998).

It is often characteristic for the first stages of romantic love (1) to be quite uncritical of the beloved, and (2) to be consumed by the other

in the sense that the other plays an all-encompassing role in one's mind. It is not hard to think of illustrations of these characteristics, as they are omnipresent tropes in depictions of romantic love. Think of the high schooler so overwhelmingly infatuated with the popular jock that she fails to see how much of a jerk he is, and misses the genuinely good guy who was right beside her all along. Harmful though these tropes may be, there is something that rings true about them. Being in love can make us temporarily lose our minds, or as Karley Sciortino quotes a friend in a *Vogue* column: "Love gives you brain damage" (2018). Love, in this sense, feels like an unnerving drive that has control over us, rather than the other way around. David Velleman ascribes this view of love as a drive to Freud, and by extension to the consensus in analytic philosophy on love shared by Harry Frankfurt, Henry Sidgwick, and Gabriele Taylor, among others (1999, 351). Velleman ascribes to these philosophers that they conceive of love as having an aim in the manner of a Freudian drive, and argues that this conception of love has unfortunate implications. Velleman contends that Freud was indeed describing something akin to love, but it was not love itself. Freud confused the blindness of being in love, with mature and genuine love as it settles over time. It's not love itself that gives you brain damage. It's being in love.

To characterize love as uncritical and all-encompassing is thus a misconception, caused by the confusion of love with infatuation. Love can indeed be critical. Especially in non-romantic relationships the possibility for criticism in love is clearly open. Kieran Setiya for instance points out that "parents can be unsparingly critical, and while that may not be for the best, it need not conflict with their claim to love" (2014, 255). Loving friends, too, can be critical of one another. It was found for example that friends actually express more criticism of their discussion partner when settling social conflict than non-friends (Nelson and Aboud 1985). And even in romantic relationships that have passed the stage of infatuation, criticism is very often part of the relationship, as the cartoonish image of a woman armed with a dough roller awaiting her intoxicated man plays into. Though this particular critical stance is far from constructive criticism, the ability to look critically at one's beloved might even seem to be part of one's duties as a loving parent or a loving friend, as a constant stream of reassurance or praise might arguably inhibit true growth for the



other person.

The second misconception, that the beloved necessarily inhabits all corners of the mind, thus leaving no room for the consideration of others, also seems implausible. First of all, love for one does not exclude or diminish our capacity to love others. An obvious example is love for children. Parents sometimes express worries during a second pregnancy after the overwhelming flow of self-evident love with their first child: will they ever be able to love the second child as much? Though the experience is not the same for every parent, some suffering post-natal depression or experiencing an inability to attach immediately, there are many testimonies of the equally overwhelming love for a second child, or a third or a fourth. Parents, though deeply loving one child, can take on the love for a second child without it diminishing in strength. Furthermore, parents can love others besides their children, like their romantic partners or their friends, without therefore having to love either sparingly. Even in romantic relationships, it is recently argued by feminist scholars that exclusivity does not necessarily make for richer love (Easton and Hardy 2009, Jenkins 2015, van Saarloos 2019). The beloved need not fill every corner of the mind for the love to count as 'real'. Indeed, as the growing literature on polyamory argues, what is scarce in loving relationships is time and attention, not the love itself. Loving one does not exclude or diminish the love for another *per se*.

Lastly, to argue against the conception that love is all-encompassing we can also establish how people in mature loving relationships, whether between parents and children, between friends, or between romantic lovers, are not zombies who get nothing done or are unable to focus on things other than the beloved. Though people in these relationships might be inclined to take the interest of the beloved into account, these interests can linger in the background, leaving room for other things to be weighed in. People in loving relationships still manage to write books, to genuinely care about global justice, to engage with the news, or to enjoy art and explore the imagination in ways that do not involve the beloved.

Before I elaborate on an account of love that can unify these phenomena, I circle back to self-love and its general reputation. Doing conceptual analysis at this point, I am assuming that self-love is at least in some relevant ways like other-love felt towards the self. If self-love is in-

deed parallel to other-love, then the idea that self-love is both (1) self-aggrandizing, making it impossible to engage with the self in a critical manner, and (2) self-absorbed, making it impossible to look beyond the self, is equally refutable. We can love ourselves while remaining self-critical, much like we can love another while still able to be critical about them. And self-love, if we follow the insights about love painted above, can indeed leave room for loving other people and engaging in other meaningful activities. The self is, in this sense, merely one of the objects of love among many. Self-regard can indeed be self-aggrandizing and self-absorbed, but in that case we might have encountered something more akin to self-infatuation, a phenomenon therefore not necessarily rarer than self-love.

What then, is self-love, if it is not the uncritical and self-absorbed self-infatuation? I turn again to the concept of love, for there is one theory of love that has particular appeal to apply to self-love. Iris Murdoch used the metaphor of vision to explain her account of love.<sup>13</sup> Love, she argued, involves *really looking* at the beloved (Murdoch 1970). Love requires an openness on the lover's part to the reality of the other, and some thinkers argue that love is therefore rather an active attitude than a passive emotion. Bell hooks, for instance, argues against a notion of love as a gratuitous appraisal of anything we feel some sort of affinity with, like food or sports or movie stars (2000, 4). She criticizes these uses of love that are, according to her, quite devoid of meaning, and proposes instead that we should understand love as a verb rather than a noun. In line with hooks, Lotte Spreeuwenberg argues that a Murdochian account of love encourages us to understand love as a practice of attending to another (forthcoming). Love requires us to be truly attentive to the other's reality. It therefore also involves paying special attention to the particularities of a person: their specific walk, the way their hair falls after a windy stroll, their opinions about important as well as trivial topics and their deepest interests.

Importantly though, love is according to Murdoch not really about these particulars. It's not that we love another because we find their walk

13. I thank my friend and colleague (in that order) Lotte Spreeuwenberg for introducing me to the depths of this philosopher and for convincing me that love should indeed be the center of morality. I am greatly indebted to her and our discussions for developing some of the core ideas of this chapter.

especially appealing or unique, or even agree much with their opinions. Rather, we find out something about their universal humanity by engaging attentively with the particular ways in which they embody that humanity. David Velleman, who repeatedly refers to Murdoch in his work on love, explores the balance between universality and particularity (Velleman 1999). Love, he claims, is about appreciating a common humanity in another precisely through their particularities. Velleman presents love as hinging on the same value as respect, namely the recognition of a common humanity, but calls its access point to this common value quite different. Though Murdoch would not share Velleman's Kantian understanding of humanity as rational nature, Velleman's argument to distinguish love from respect could arguably still hold on a Murdochian account. Whereas respect entails intellectually grasping another's personhood, love entails actually seeing the person that is in front of us. To borrow a term by Axel Honneth, in love the other appears as a 'concrete universal' (1995, 25).

I have now scratched the surface of a theory of love that I think holds great promise for an exploration of self-love. However, the application of Murdoch's theory to the self is not without obstacles. For starters, Murdoch designed her theory precisely to steer away from our undivided attention to ourselves. She calls "the fat relentless ego" the enemy of morality (1970, 51), and contends that the force of love lies precisely in the "extremely difficult realization that *something other than oneself* is real" (1959, 51, my italics). How then, if at all, is her theory applicable to self-love, if Murdoch seems to encourage us to steer away from the self, rather than turn toward it? These and other questions I will take on some paragraphs down, because a novel theory of self-love as really looking at the self can, as I will go on to argue, be a powerful tool for social progress.

#### THE STAKES OF UNDERSTANDING SELF-LOVE AS LOOKING AT THE SELF

Lotte Spreeuwenberg has argued that a Murdochian understanding of love allows us to love better, and this practice in turn allows for social progress (forthcoming). Analogously we can think there is social progress possible by loving *the self* better. In this section I argue in favor of a notion of self-love as being genuinely interested in the ways of the self by paying close

attention to that self, and as such being interested in developing a truthful understanding of the self, its natural ways, and its entanglements in social structures (whether one achieves this or not is a different question, as we will later see). This understanding needs a lot of unpacking, and I need to argue that it is a plausible way to understand self-love. Before doing that, I want to address why exactly we are in need of this account of self-love, and how the current conflicted understanding is falling short.

(1) First, to reiterate Spreeuwenberg about love, self-love understood as really looking at the self has great potential to enable social progress, and can be an ally to social justice movements like feminism and anti-racism. In the shape of self-absorption, it can in turn thwart much social progress. Therefore, it is fundamental that we are able to distinguish a productive interest in the self from self-absorption. The account of self-love that I present here should be conducive to that goal. If understood in the way I propose here, self-love can be an active stance towards the self which involves attention to one's own ways, as well as to the social relations one stands in. Self-love involves not necessarily self-knowledge, but it is the foundation of such knowledge, for it consists in the interest in the self which necessarily precedes self-knowledge, as I will argue later in this chapter. Self-love requires us to perceive ourselves truthfully, and part of this task involves poking at the images we have of ourselves in order to distinguish genuine images of the self from air-filled fantasies. Self-love can thus be a medicine against self-delusion in two ways: it fights harmful self-effacement, both a result and a maintainer of oppression, as well as self-aggrandizement, narcissism, or the ego looming too large, which is often convincingly named an antagonist of the moral stance (Murdoch 1970, Williams 1973, Nussbaum 2016). This conception of self-love and what we can do with it is conducive to the pursuit of social progress.

(2) The understanding of self-love as mere self-absorption leaves a possibly empowering and valuable stance without a name, thus rendering it harder to urge ourselves and others to inhabit this stance. The scattered understanding of self-love makes its extension so broad that we might be unable to see its value, as even the empowering meaning is rendered sticky by its association with the negative meaning. Self-love, in its empowering meaning, is used so gratuitously that any sincere use of it is read as too flimsy, as belonging on the self-help shelf of the library, as naïve pop-psy-

chology masking the true problems of the world behind soothing words. We should mourn a true loss here, for there is indeed a core of self-love that can reveal and address rather than mask some of these true problems. In the current climate around self-love, however, this dimension of the term is rendered inaccessible to those who would benefit from it, as well as to those who could benefit others with it, as I explain later on. Moreover, by defining self-love in the way that I propose, we gain the ability to address injustices regarding who has been allowed to take an interest in the self, and who historically has not. It also allows us to understand how even those who have been granted the opportunity to take an interest in the self, have often not taken this advantage to heart. The proposed understanding of self-love thus allows us to address the political dimensions of attending to the self.

(3) Finally, I think we have reason to understand self-love in my proposed way in order to distinguish this stance from the attitude depicted in the previous chapter: self-respect. There is a way of valuing the self that is unlike respect in the sense that it does require attention to the particular features of a person. Robin S. Dillon suggests that we should rethink self-respect so that it acknowledges these personal particularities (1992). Self-respect, she explains, is an abstract notion that fails to recognize the individual me-ness and situatedness of persons. It doesn't have room to allow for "valuing myself for being myself, nor for appreciating both my distinctness and my share in the manifold of human commonalities" (57).

Though I agree with many of Dillon's points, and the problematic lack of attention to the particular that she lays bare, I also think that there is something to be gained in maintaining respect as an abstract granter of rights, and ascribing the attention for the particular to a different attitude: self-love. Love requires time, attention, and the affective dimension of being struck. According to David Velleman, love and respect both have as their object the humanity or dignity in another human being, but our access point differs. "Grasping someone's personhood intellectually may be enough to make us respect him, but unless we actually see a person in the human being confronting us, we won't be moved to love," he writes (1999, 371). Where we lack time or energy to devote ourselves to a loving regard, respect functions as a placeholder that ensures our intellectual grasp of the humanity in front of us.

As is argued about love and respect, there are relevant differences between self-love and self-respect that involve the ways in which we grasp our selfhood, and the two stances serve different ends: self-respect means granting ourselves the bare minimum and requires mostly an intellectual grasp of our personhood. Self-love enables us to live flourishing lives building on that bare minimum. Self-love requires attention, time, confrontation, and continuous work in a way that self-respect does (and perhaps should) not. Self-respect is an invaluable placeholder to ensure a minimal appreciation of the self when we lack the time or resources to engage in the self-loving regard. Self-respect is independent of whether or not we have taken a loving interest in ourselves. Instead of transforming self-respect to include that attentive regard of the self, I propose we complement self-respect with self-love and regard them as two distinct attitudes that nonetheless build on each other and work in tandem.

#### WHAT SHOULD SELF-LOVE MEAN?

I build my notion of self-love on the theory of love by Iris Murdoch. Her account stands out from other discussions on love because it hinges on the idea that one can, in principle, not be *more* or *less* worthy of love. Everyone, so the argument goes, is loveable, and Murdoch thus renders the question of what one needs to live up to in order to be worthy of love obsolete. Murdoch moves the deciding factor for whether a relationship is love-filled away from the beloved, and towards the lover. In a now famous passage, Murdoch illustrates her theory of love by recounting a story of two women: a young woman and her mother-in-law (1970, 17-18). She describes how the mother-in-law saw her son's choice of partner at first as a girl lacking refinement, plain, rude, and juvenile. But through an effort of her own, the mother manages to come to a very different understanding of her daughter-in-law. Realizing that her evaluation might be unfair, she tells herself: "I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again" (17). Upon second look, her daughter-in-law appears as spontaneous and joyful, a breath of fresh air, rather than a naïve and vulgar girl. The point of the parable is that it's not the beloved that determines

whether she is loved, by having certain qualities, as is commonly defended in the quality view of love (Keller 2000). Rather, whether there is love depends on the attitude of the lover. Love consists in the ongoing practice of looking at another, and being truly attentive to their particular ways.

The shift of what determines whether there is love from the beloved to the lover has implications for our understanding of self-love as well. Self-love, if we follow Murdoch's account of love, does not spark from certain marvelous qualities of the self, but rather from the ongoing practice of paying attention to these (and other) qualities. One important consequence of such an account of self-love is that it excludes self-praise as its synonym. The idea of the self as great and marvelous reflects an understanding of self-love as warranted by properties: one needs marvelous properties to love oneself, and loving oneself can only be warranted when one indeed has these loveable properties. If we understand self-love through the Murdochian lense, this idea of self-love as self-praise can be replaced by an account according to which everyone is worthy of self-love, and self-love hinges on having a certain attitude towards the self.

The self-loving attitude, in analogy with the Murdochian account of love, does not consist in praise and celebration, though it does involve special attention to the self. David Velleman, highly inspired by Murdoch and Kant, writes about the paradoxicality of love (1999). In one sense, it seems like having one's properties valued is part of being loved. In another sense, however, Velleman points out that we would be unsatisfied if it turns out we are loved only *for* these unique properties. We want to be loved as persons, for ourselves alone. Velleman's solution is the following: we love when we see another's value as a person shimmering through her particular rendition of humanity. Love is thus an attitude that values someone in particular, precisely for the ways in which they are like everyone else. As Velleman puts it, the value that we recognize in love can be characterized in the following way: "your singular value as a person is not a value that you are singular in possessing; it's rather a value that entitles you to be appreciated singularly, in and by yourself" (1999, 370).

Turning this on the self again, self-love means gaining entry to one's value as a person through one's particularities. It means, in Zendaya's case, regarding her locks as a symbol of her value as a person, rather than as a hindrance to access this value. It means considering her particular ways

relevant to her value as a person, for these are the particular windows of her humanity to the world. It means not wanting to hide or minimize one's particularities to be deemed 'acceptable' or to answer to crooked standards of acceptability. Self-love also means being able to poke through the prejudices surrounding one's particularities, which can be hard in a world where these are prominent, and rather seeing them undone from their connotations and pre-shaped judgments. Projections of patchouli smell or weed smoking is not what Zendaya sees when she sees her hair, as her Instagram captions go to show. Her locks appear as what they truly are: an age-old response to the natural ways of black hair. Which brings me to the next point.

Another key aspect of the Murdochian account of love is that, though it is characterized as an active stance of really looking, love involves seeing the beloved *as they are*, not as we expect, imagine or want them to be. Murdoch's exemplary mother-in-law's idea of her son's lover was meddled with by her own prejudices, by self-serving fantasies of her ego (Spreeuwenberg forthcoming). Nancy Snow writes that the Murdochian mother-in-law views her daughter-in-law through the "distorted lens" of the ego (2005, 488). Expectations, projections prompted by one's own desires, and preformed opinions inhibit a real vision of another that is so central to love. The same is the case for looking at ourselves. In looking at ourselves, we inevitably meet with the images we hold of ourselves. Some are simply there to render our self-images coherent, and stem from earlier realizations about the self. I may approach myself with the pre-given idea that I am a woman, for instance. But other images that color the way we look at ourselves are harmful forms of self-delusion.

In an essay on her own appearance on reality TV long before she became a writer, Jia Tolentino reflects on the self-delusion that governed her participation. In one passage, she reconsiders a challenge in *Girls v. Boys*, the TV show she was a contestant on, in which she is made to speed-eat hot mayonnaise. Or at least, that's how she always recounted the episode. After watching herself appear on TV, however, Tolentino realizes that is not how the story went: "Before the challenge, I volunteer to eat the mayo. My dish was never actually covered. The mayo was not a surprise. The truth was that I had deliberately chosen the mayo; the story that I had been telling was that the mayo had *happened to me*" (2019b, 39). In the essay,



this passage is followed by the author's realization that she indeed often recounts events in this way, as if things *happen to her*, mostly because she likes the stories better that way. She zooms out to the story she told others (and herself) about her participation in this reality TV set-up that got her to speed-eat mayonnaise on national television in the first place. "If I ever talk about *Girls v. Boys*, I say that I ended up on the show by accident, that it was completely random, that I auditioned because I was an idiot killing time at the mall. I like this story better than the alternative, and equally accurate, one, which is that I've always felt that I was special and acted accordingly" (39).

The self-delusion Tolentino describes is multi-layered. First, there's the false stories she tells and believes about herself, that function as delusional self-soothing. "It wasn't my egotism that got me to the casting, I could tell myself," (39). Then, there's the egotism itself, which is in and of itself also a self-delusional misperception of the self, for it presents the self as overly important and extraordinary. "Reality TV enacts the various self-delusions of the emotionally immature," Tolentino writes about her teenage self, "the dream that you are being closely watched, assessed, and categorized; the dream that your life itself is movie material and that you deserve your own carefully soundtracked montage when you're walking down the streets" (44). The writer recounts how she was struck by her teen self when watching the show years later. Looking and really seeing her teen self, she thinks: "How boring, how embarrassing, it's me" (45).

The layers of self-delusion that Tolentino describes are not, according to the picture I paint here, self-love, but rather the opposite. Teenage Tolentino's problem is not that she loves herself too much, but rather too little. She has not taken the time to sit with herself and see through the stories she told herself, an endeavor mature Tolentino broadly makes up for in her self-reflexive writing. Teen Tolentino acts in a blur of self-importance, not really interested in her actual particularities but completely absorbed with the questions which particularities would make "the character of Jia" most interesting (45). Self-love means the exact opposite, namely, being attentive to the self and its ways, really looking at the self without pre-installed images or self-aggrandizing fantasies, but rather open to discover and be surprised.

In my understanding self-love means allowing the self to come in a myriad of ways, without harmful or narrowing preconceived images or expectations to be filled in. The pride that can accompany self-love finds its expression in “the willingness to be who I am openly,” a form of self-assertiveness described by bell hooks (2000, 58). This is also where pride is typically unapologetic. The refusal to apologize for, minimize or bracket parts of ourselves that we often associate with pride is not a matter of self-esteem, nor of self-respect. It is not self-esteem because the traits in question are not necessarily praiseworthy or commanding of applause in and of themselves. It is not self-respect either, because rather than claiming space regardless of one’s traits, being unapologetic entails filling that space with one’s particularities.

As with the other forms of pride, the expression is not a condition to experience it. One can be self-lovingly proud without being outspoken or openly so. Sometimes, being who you are openly presents a risk to your well-being or livelihood, as is tragically the case for Black trans women like Marsha P. Johnson, introduced in the previous chapter. Self-love pride is not amoral, as these examples go to show, but rather immensely intertwined with who we are and can be in the world. Loving the self comes easier when that self aligns broadly with what is commonly accepted, and does not rub against the grain of expectations. In the current context, there are less hurdles to overcome in loving the self for a young boy who happens to enjoy soccer, than for one who feels more for ballet. In fact, the latter might even never fully explore his own interests, for he might not consider ballet as a legitimate option for him to try out. When I was about eleven, I was cast for a part in a theatre piece. The crew of actors comprised four girls and one boy. The boy was a particularly promising actor. His play was moving and authentic. Yet, after having been selected and making it through the pains and nerves of several auditioning rounds, I vividly recall his announcement that he would withdraw from the piece. Somewhere along the way, I remember him alluding to why he quit: he was afraid other boys would laugh at him for having a girl’s hobby rather than playing it rough with the guys.

These stories are of moral relevance, for they reveal discrepancies

in human flourishing<sup>14</sup> as a result of how we (get to) look at ourselves. Before delving into the broad moral picture of self-love, there are some objections or worries that might arise based on this account of self-love. In answering these, the moral relevance of self-love will become increasingly clear. I have two salient objections in mind. (1) One obvious worry is that this concept of self-love involves approving of the *whole* self, and allowing *every* trait in, including the morally reprehensible ones. Self-love as an uncritical stance towards the self can hardly be morally valuable. I answer to this objection by arguing that self-love in my conception need not entail full approval of the self. On the contrary, looking at the self critically and aiming for improvement is part and parcel of this account of self-love. (2) A second obvious worry is one that folds back on Murdoch's picture of love. She argues in favor of love, but as readers of her know, she also claims that the ego is the enemy of morality. Doesn't self-love steer us away from what we need to be moral, which is precisely to transcend our selfish needs? What underlies this objection is the widespread idea that self-love inhibits a concern for others. I aim to show that this is not the case, and that in fact a deep interest in the self is conducive to genuine love of others.

14. By 'flourishing', elsewhere in this thesis also used in the conjunction 'flourishing lives', I mean not merely the affective state of happiness or hedonistic pleasure, but something more akin to what the Greeks called *eudaimonia*. The Aristotelian account of *eudaimonia* or the flourishing life has been recuperated and rekindled by contemporary virtue ethicists like Martha Nussbaum, and has proven especially useful to highlight and oppose certain forms of social inequality (2000, 2001, 32). *Eudaimonia* refers to a state of happiness that is best understood as having the sense that one's life is a *good* life (rather than, for instance, a merely pleasurable one). Cultivating one's capabilities, practicing virtue, experiencing life as meaningful, the fulfillment of one's unique human nature, caring for others, and being in harmony with oneself can all be understood as part of the state of *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* is inclusive of all to which someone ascribes inherent value and without which one's life would be experienced as incomplete or lacking in meaning, including perhaps pleasure, but also virtue, relationships with others, or self-cultivation. It is in this sense a state of well-being that is sufficiently open to personal interpretation, and allows various conceptions of what the good life entails exactly. Importantly though, such an understanding of well-being allows us to understand our own goals as intertwined with goals that transcend ourselves. Well-being, living a good life, or living a flourishing life are in this thesis used interchangeably and should be read as encompassing a good life in this broad sense, rather than as referring to hedonistic happiness.

## THE WHOLE SELF

“The chief point of happiness is to wish to be what you actually are,” writes Desiderius Erasmus in *In Praise of Folly* (1952, 46, my translation). In the satirical essay written in response to the excesses of the established religion, Erasmus writes with the voice of folly, praising itself and its faithful companions, including self-love. Does self-love indeed mean, as Erasmus depicts it, that we delight uncritically in any and all parts of ourselves? What if “what you are” is lazy, narcissistic, rude, selfish, racist, trigger-happy, greedy or in other minor and major ways vicious? Does self-love encourage us to be unapologetically ourselves in any and all respects? If so, then Donald Trump, the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, called “a bundle of sin and gore” who “never aspires to be anything more” by the popular philosopher Sam Harris in the wake of the 2020 elections, would be the textbook example of self-love. Harris’ analysis continues: Trump “offers what no priest can credibly offer: a total expiation of shame. His personal shamelessness is a kind of spiritual balm. Trump is fat-Jesus. He’s grab ’m by the pussy-Jesus, (...), he’s I’ll eat nothing but cheeseburgers if I want to-Jesus (...), he’s no apologies-Jesus” (Harris 2020). But this is not the kind of unapologetic self-view that my account of self-love encourages.

Self-love, as I have pictured it, is not what Erasmus suggests, but means primarily being interested in really looking at who one is. That does entail, initially, that one allows for vicious and embarrassing parts of the self to exist without denial or sugarcoating. Yet allowing a clear vision of these traits does not mean indulging in them, endorsing them, celebrating them, or resigning to them per se. Writing about other-love, Nancy Snow gives an interpretation of Murdoch’s mother-in-law example. She notes the possibility that, even after scrutinizing her own gaze and the prejudices or projections that might have meddled with it, the mother-in-law can still discern bad qualities in her daughter-in-law. The loving gaze, on Snow’s interpretation, is not about celebration or even about charitable beliefs, but rather “the value of a loving gaze relies in large part on its accuracy with respect to the facts” (2005, 493). She continues:

A loving gaze would allow the mother to see her daughter-in-law's whole personality for what it is, a complex constellation of good and bad qualities. It would allow the mother to recognize the flaws for what they are, *bona fide* characteristics of her daughter-in-law, instead of prejudiced distortions projected by the mother. (...) The mother need not ignore her daughter-in-law's negativities, nor overlook them in favor of a judgment based on speculation about her idealized potential. The mother could simply note that her daughter-in-law's overall blend of traits is bad or unhealthy, while acknowledging her good qualities. She could do this sympathetically, paying prudential attention to the circumstances and forces that make her daughter-in-law what she is, and with regret, since her daughter-in-law is, after all, an important figure in her life. The mother is not forced into the unpalatable position of ignoring, denying, or mistakenly affirming another's badness. The mother can also recognize that her daughter-in-law's personality could change and note with optimism that, with appropriate guidance, such change could be for the better. (495-496)

Gazing lovingly at ourselves similarly need not mean that we delight in our flaws, but rather entails that we see these for what they are, colored neither by self-celebration nor by self-flagellation. Furthermore, we could argue that working on flaws requires first a factual understanding of them as what they are, and this requires the kind of self-interested regard that I have called self-love. Really looking at the self can reveal discrepancies between how one is and how one would like to be. It can break fantasies of already being a certain aspired way, and reveal how far or close we really are to those aspirations. Additionally, self-love allows us to be fine to a certain extent with not living up to all our aspirations, and not beat ourselves up over minor shortcomings.

Kate Abramson and Adam Leite link self-love to self-acceptance<sup>15</sup>

15. It is interesting to note that Abramson and Leite do not in fact think that self-love is symmetrical with other-love, and hold a quality view of other-love, in which love is a response to a particular value or quality in the other, rather than the Murdochian attitude as it was presented here. But, as they remark in their paper on self-love "perhaps there are forms of love that are not responses to antecedent value at all, yet are ways of valuing the loved object. Our aim in this chapter is to explore this latter possibility in the case of self-love" (2014, 75).

and argue that the precise expression of self-love might differ depending on what we encounter in ourselves: “Sometimes self-acceptance will best be expressed in grieving one’s flaws and taking measures to improve; sometimes it will involve laughing at one’s minor flaws with rueful good humor” (2014, 89). What is crucial is that it takes an interest in exploring the self to encounter anything in the first place. One night, while watching an episode of *Queer Eye*, I scribbled down the ultimate summary of humorous self-love as this stance of critical acceptance, paradoxical as that may sound. The guest of the show, in which ‘ordinary’ people receive a full makeover, recounts how she and her sister single-handedly run a popular barbecue restaurant in Kansas City. “We’re very proud of everything we’ve accomplished,” she says to the camera, smiling generously. “Even the failures that we might have had along the way. Proud of them, too” (Collins 2019).

Evaluating the properties we encounter in ourselves is only in a second step part of self-love. In the first step, self-love enables us to simply encounter and establish these facts about ourselves, whatever they are. Self-love importantly does not turn our regard only to exceptional or exciting properties, but also to the banalities of ourselves, our vulnerabilities, our interdependency and neediness, the fact that we are animals that live, breathe, eat, bleed, and excrete. Martha Nussbaum has written extensively about our discomfort with our animal side (2004, 2001, 2018, 2016). She holds that many of the problems people face, from xenophobia and hatred to fear and polarization, can be brought back to our resistance to admit to vulnerabilities. In the introduction of *Hiding from Humanity*, she summarizes her project: “what I am calling for, in effect, is something that I do not expect we shall ever fully achieve: a society that acknowledges its own humanity, and neither hides us from it nor it from us; a society of citizens who admit that they are needy and vulnerable, and who discard the grandiose omnipotence and completeness that have been at the heart of so much human misery, both public and private” (2004, 17).

I think self-love could be what Nussbaum is aiming at in this passage: the ability to really look at ourselves and recognize ourselves for what we truly are. That means recognizing that we are *but* animals, but also, as Nussbaum repeatedly emphasizes in her oeuvre, *extraordinary* animals in the sense that all life is extraordinary, with dignity, the potential for

flourishing and full of capabilities (2000). Nussbaum rephrases an old sentiment about the human condition here, already written down centuries prior by Immanuel Kant. In the conclusion of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he summarizes the human condition as walking the tightrope between two equally true realizations: we must reconcile a vision of ourselves as “a mere speck in the universe” with that of creatures of elevated worth “reaching into the infinite” (1976). For Kant, however, these two aspects are in a sense antagonistic. The perspective in which we are infinitely elevated “reveals a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible worth,” as if only distancing ourselves from our vulnerabilities allows for the perspective of humans as incredibly valuable. With this message, Kant still encourages what Nussbaum so opposes: that we lash out because we cannot sit comfortably with our vulnerabilities. In the notion of self-love I have in mind in this chapter, we do not appreciate our worth *in spite of* our vulnerabilities, but rather *through and because of* them. People should not bracket their animality to understand themselves as “infinitely elevated”, but rather see that *as* a particular kind of vulnerable, intelligent, needy, resilient animal, they are infinitely elevated.

Nussbaum’s work and the citation above coincidentally make for a good illustration of the intricate ways in which different kinds of pride can be at work, sometimes on opposing sides. Nussbaum rejects narcissism in favor of a true insight into our own humanity. The “grandiose omnipotence” and the desire for “completeness” often return as the prime enemies of morality in Nussbaum’s work. In her work on anger, for instance, she explains how anger can be a normatively problematic response to the “narcissistic wounds of the ego” (2016, 52).<sup>16</sup> The solution she presents is that we accept our vulnerabilities. These two attitudes, the narcissistic one and the self-accepting one, *both* warrant pride in my understanding, and neatly reveal the tension inherent in pride that fueled this research in the first place. Pride can, under the banner of self-esteem, take on forms of

16. This statement deserves the same important footnote I gave it in the introduction. Critics have rightfully pointed out that not all anger is narcissistic, and that anger can be quite apt, especially in circumstances of systemic injustice, see for instance Lorde (1984), Srinivasan (2018), Bailey (2018), Chemaly (2018). That claim doesn’t stand in the way, however, of the idea that there are indeed some forms of anger that are problematically narcissistic.

self-aggrandizement and over-estimation, as we saw in chapter one. Under the banner of self-respect, pride can claim superiority as we saw in chapter two. And now, in this final chapter, we understand how pride can also be precisely the answer to its own malign forms, for pride as self-love encourages us to really and truthfully look at ourselves. The tensions between the ego and the true self are also the subject of the next section.

#### AND NOTHING BUT THE SELF

“The self is such a dazzling object that if one looks there one may see nothing else” (Murdoch 1970, 30). Murdoch encourages her readers to love others, but remains remarkably quiet about turning this loving gaze towards the self. If anything, Murdoch wants us to move away from the self. The “fat relentless ego” (51) is to her notoriously the enemy of morality, and Murdoch describes love as the “extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real” (1959, 51). The problem of our times, Murdoch says, is that the self looms too large, inhibiting us from truly loving another. When looking at the other, there is always this big self, projecting fantasies and desires upon the world, perceiving the world as it pleases rather than as it is, thus making true perceptions impossible. One central topic of Murdoch’s work is the call for “unselfing,” a process of moving away from the self (1970, 82). How then, does it make sense to use precisely Murdoch’s insights to develop a theory of self-love and defend that it is a morally valuable attitude? Would Murdoch not roll over in her grave reading an adaptation of her theory that promotes self-love?

Though I dare not speak for the deceased, I think Murdoch’s thoughts are not in principle incompatible with turning the loving gaze to the self. On the contrary, such an account of self-love can be defended with and within Murdoch’s very own ideas, making it an extension rather than a commentary of her work.

The crux here is that “unselfing” has been understood wrongfully as the complete erasure of the self, which of course would be entirely incompatible with self-love. This mistaken interpretation of “unselfing” comes to the fore in the most prominent feminist critiques on Murdoch. These critics are worried that what Murdoch instantiates is devoted to an ideology of subordination, as her call to move away from the self hinders



progress for groups whose oppression consists partly in the minimization of one's own needs and desires. Sabina Lovibond, for instance, argues that Murdoch's picture of unselfing as a virtue is antithetical to the kind of self-assertiveness required for political action against oppression (Lovibond 2011). Feminist critiques focus specifically on the case of women, who are often precisely expected to care, give, and nurture at their own cost (Manne 2017). Part of many feminist ideas is that women would benefit from (being allowed to) focus on their own needs, to take space, to *take* in general, and to aim for typically "unwomanly" goods like attention and prestige. For women, as perhaps also for other salient social groups, "unselfing" seems conducive to further oppression rather than to the moral goal of social justice.

Defenders of Murdoch point out that these critiques focus on an understanding of unselfing as self-erasure and self-annihilation that is not as such implied in Murdoch's writings. Nora Hämäläinen argues that Lovibond's critique of Murdoch is at least partly unfair, because "the 'self' that is exorcised in Murdoch's act of attention is a very specific entity: it is 'the fat, relentless ego,' which interferes with our capacity to see things and people as they really are. Anxieties, desires, wishful thoughts, hopes, fears, pride, and vanity are among the aspects of our ego that blind us from reality, and in order to see more accurately, we need to let these go. Unselfing is thus not to be understood as a wholesale self-denigration but rather a kind of deliberate purification of the self that we undergo in order to see more clearly" (2015, 747). Lotte Spreeuwenberg similarly argues that "worries of 'reducing ourselves to zero' or selfless sacrifice in caring, are aimed at complete self-effacement, which is not what Murdoch asks us to do. (...) The practice of loving attention that 'makes us good' is not asking of us to get rid of this firm sense of self, separate from others. It is asking us to look beyond our blinding desires and our comfortable ignorance" (manuscript, 19). Hilde Nelson, though remarking that Murdoch has perhaps not "devoted much thought to the political consequences for women of a morality that promotes receptivity and submission" (14), argues that an outward loving gaze does not inherently equal self-effacement. On the contrary, "if the gaze is just and loving, it will in its maturity come round to the self" (7).

Murdoch asks us to combat self-aggrandizing fantasies and resist the

blinding dazzle of the ego which might indeed prevent us from paying due attention to anything outside the self. But this call to action need not interfere with paying due attention to ourselves as well. Just like we can love different people without trade-offs in the quality of that love, nothing inhibits us from loving others while also loving the self. We can still be open to look carefully at others, while being attentive to the self as well. Some, as we will see later on, might even argue that such self-love is a requirement for loving others or loving altogether. That is, if the self is understood not as the fantasy-filled ego but rather as the factual and honest self that one might discover precisely by looking lovingly at oneself.

A better choice of word for Murdoch might perhaps have been ‘unself-centering’ instead of ‘unselfing’, though I understand it sounds not nearly as elegant. But what it lacks in elegance, it makes up for in precision. Murdoch writes: “The problem is to accommodate inside moral philosophy, and suggest methods of dealing with the fact that so much of human conduct is moved by mechanical energy of an egocentric kind. In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego. Moral philosophy is properly, and in the past has sometimes been, the discussion of this ego and of the techniques (if any) for its defeat” (1970, 51). Murdoch points her arrows at egocentrism, the centering of attention on the self. As we saw in chapter two, self-centeredness is a specific form of self-regard that is mistakenly conflated with any kind of focus on the self. Self-centeredness, as Robert Adams points out, is a *perverted* interest in the self (Adams 1998). The problem with self-centeredness is indeed that the attention lies entirely with the self, and not outside oneself. But there is no good reason to believe that any amount of attention to the self completely and utterly centers the self in one’s thoughts, pushing away any consideration of what exists outside of the self.

That self-love without the perils of self-centeredness is possible comes to the fore in the account of Jan Bransen. He develops the seemingly oxymoronic notion of “selfless self-love” (2006). Bransen introduces a way of looking at self-love that is helpful for self-love as I understand it, for he regards self-love as much more intertwined with what succeeds outside of the self than we might suspect. Selfless self-love, as he conceives it, consists of looking outside of the self and succeeding in folding what one sees there back onto the self. Self-love involves the realization that “there

is always a chance of having it wrong, and therefore one should always have an interest in anyone who might be able to provide you with evidence you could have overlooked” (7). Such self-love to Bransen is thus on the opposite end of self-centeredness, for it requires us precisely to care about being adequately attuned to our environments. Bransen describes self-love as an open attitude of reflexive rationality. “Being reflexively rational means taking responsibility for your mental states in the sense of (1) being aware of the fact that there might be a discrepancy between the state you are in and the state you should be in, and (2) being inclined to make efforts to remove discrepancies that show up” (5).

Harry Frankfurt blurs the neat borders between self-love and the world outside the self in a similar way. Loving the self, he argues, simply *is* loving things outside of oneself (2004). Being devoted to one’s interests and loved ones is what it means to love oneself, Frankfurt argues. My account of self-love is unlike Frankfurt’s in the sense that it takes a larger view of what there is to love in the self. Loving the self, on my account, is not restricted to loving what we love, but entails being attentive to *anything* that stirs within the self. My account also allows for loving complexities and contradictions in the self, and being attentive to our own ambivalences and the messiness of our will. It also involves looking at the self as an actor in relation to one’s normative context, and is in that sense broader than Frankfurt’s account. The reason for the discrepancy between our accounts lies broadly in our conception of love, I suspect, though a thorough comparison of our accounts would require more work. Loving, on Frankfurt’s account, is closer to positive endorsement than on my account. Self-love, on his account, is “a condition in which we willingly accept and endorse our own volitional identity” (97). On my understanding, loving is not an endorsement per se, nor is the object of self-love limited to our volitional identities. Self-love is instead presented in this chapter as an attitude of turning one’s gaze at the self and being interested in what one encounters there. To Frankfurt, loving is closely related to caring about, being devoted to, or finding important, and self-love is related to being satisfied with the self (99). To me, loving precedes such evaluations, and self-love is related more to looking truthfully and being interested in the self. But even despite these differences between our accounts, both Frankfurt’s and Bransen’s depictions of self-love are insightful in the sense

that they regard self-love as an attitude that does not stop at the borders of the self. Instead, self-love requires us to look at ourselves in relation to and as a part of what exists outside of ourselves.

Other-love might in this sense be part of self-love. But we could go even further. Frankfurt, for instance, claims that if we love anything at all, we necessarily love ourselves (2004, 85). Bell hooks has called self-love the foundation of our loving practice (2000, 67). On my account, too, self-love is conducive to other-love, perhaps even necessary for it, and benefits the way we love others. Plitudinal as it may sound, there is truth in the rhetorical question ‘how can you love another if you don’t love yourself?’. If not in the same conditional sense, self-love does plausibly foster other-love, for it allows us to poke through the ego-fantasies that Murdoch rightfully called the enemy of love. If we need to rid ourselves of our own projections, biases and fantasies about the self to truly love another, then loving anything other than the self starts by having attention for the ways in which the self is biased and how self-fantasies and desires color what we see. Lacking self-love might precisely inhibit seeing the other for who they are.<sup>17</sup> In a review of the popular HBO series *Girls*, I came across a passage illustrating nicely a kind of unfortunate attempt to love others without loving the self. The passage paints a picture of the friendship between the four twenty-something women that is central to the show’s story line:

Throughout the series, the four of them have fought in beach houses and in bathrooms, unable to let go of their obsessions with appearance and hierarchy, unable to understand why they aren’t actually friends. The answer is that, as a rule, they don’t know how to see other people as individuals, rather than as appendages of their own self-images. Even when Shoshanna, in the penultimate episode, tells the other three that she’s tired of their exhausting, narcissistic interplay—“I think we should all just agree to call it,” she says—she’s merely trading them in for people who might reflect on her better, girls with “jobs and purses and nice personalities.” But nothing is a direct reflection, other than a mirror. (Tolentino 2017)

17. Variations of this argument, that one needs a stable sense self in order to love another, or that autonomy and agency are preconditions for genuine care, are not uncommon. For an overview, see the first part of Blum et al. (1973).

The girls on the show are trying to forge a self-image through external attributes, and avoid the only direct reflection of who they really are: the mirror. The lack of really looking at the self, as the fragment shows, truly makes these girls worse friends, for they project on others what they cannot or dare not find in themselves, and expect others to fill in the predetermined roles cast by a fantasy of what they hope to be. The girls in *Girls* are not really open to see their friends for who they are, and the issue is exactly that they have not the faintest idea who they are themselves.

Nancy Snow argues in her analysis of Murdoch's mother-in-law example that Murdoch underemphasizes the important step of looking at the self in her account of the mother-in-law's change of heart. Though the object of love in Murdoch's example is the daughter-in-law, Snow points out that the mother needs to pass by herself first, in order to understand what about herself is interfering with her perspective on her daughter-in-law. To transition from a hostile view to a loving one, Snow argues, "the focus of the mother's attention should be herself, or more specifically, herself in relation to her daughter-in-law (...) the mother would have to recognize certain unpleasant facts about herself in order to make the transition. She would have to acknowledge her narrowness, conventionality, jealousy, and perhaps other negative qualities, such as pettiness and mean-spiritedness" (2005, 489). Whether we call it "careful soul-searching," as Snow puts it (492), or a long hard look in the mirror, as the cultural critic recommends for the girls on *Girls*, in order to love another well, we need to dedicate attention to ourselves as well.

This account of self-love does not only allow for a loving regard of what lies outside of oneself, it fosters it. As such, it withstands the critique that self-love leaves no room in the mind's eye for loving others. Self-centeredness is indeed an enemy of the moral regard for others, but self-love is not. On the contrary, self-love is an ally to that regard.

#### WHAT IS THE SELF (AND DOES IT MATTER)?

We have distinguished, along with Murdoch and her commentators, at least two ways to understand the concept of 'self'. One is the ego, the construct of fantasies and self-absorbed ideas. The other is the 'real' self, freed from the ego. It is tempting to derive from that distinction that we

should love that ‘real’ self, and refrain from loving the ego. And such a conclusion of course prompts questions as: what is the ‘real’ self? What belongs to it and what does not? Where does the ego end, and the self begin? Does the self have an ‘essence’ that we can discover, or is the self defined by nothing more than how it interacts with its environment, an unavoidably intentional subject defined by the things outside of itself? In how far is the self a social reality?<sup>18</sup>

I want to call these questions in the context of my account of self-love misguided. I do not take this stance simply to avoid engaging with the complex literature about selfhood, though that is undeniably a convenient side-effect. Understanding love (and self-love by extension) as an attitude that originates with the agent rather than in this or that quality of what is loved, renders it obsolete to define precisely what we are looking at. Once we define what precisely about the self should be loved, we imply that there are things about the self which should not be loved. But if we do that, we are understanding the love in self-love as some kind of appraisal: we say that *these* things about the self are to be loved, and *these others* not so much. Some interpretations of self-love indeed argue that self-love means loving those things about the self that are particularly valuable. Marcia L. Homiak, for instance, draws on Aristotle to argue that self-love is about loving our rational capacities, and enjoying those activities that allow us to fulfill these, like planning one’s life (1981, 1993).

To me, Homiak’s interpretation of self-love reads more like self-esteem as I painted it in the first chapter, for it entails praising or appreciating a certain attribute of the self, and ascribing competence to the self on that basis. Homiak even uses self-esteem and self-confidence as synonyms of self-love (1993, 10). But I have precisely drawn apart self-love from other attitudes like self-esteem by arguing that self-love is not about praising some particular attribute, but rather about taking up the attitude of really looking at the whole self. That entails that we do not distinguish

18. These questions take center stage in the rich discussions about self-knowledge, see for instance: Moran (2001). But, as I go on to explain, we do not need to determine the answer to these hard questions in order to defend the cultivation of a self-loving attitude as I depict it here. On the contrary, to ask and be interested in these questions at all requires the attitude of being attentive to the self, to what influences it, what motivates it, how it relates to the world, and so on, which I have called self-love.

between parts of the self to love, and others not to love.

Let me illustrate this point with a not entirely fictive situation (and absolutely what they call a first world problem, but as an illustration I think it works fine). When my partner and I watch movies in bed, the laptop on which we watch them shakes and wobbles on the duvet whenever one of us moves. After a particularly tense couple of days, in which none of us got much sleep and both were stressed from work, the wobbling laptop sparked our extreme agitation, and we ended up having an utterly childish fight. Some self-love on both sides could have diffused the situation, I think. But what does it entail us both looking at? If the answer is that we should look at our real selves, and not at our egos, then we do indeed need to define what 'real self' means. But what I am saying is that self-love entails looking at all the strings that are pulled by the situation of the wobbling laptop: that entails considering things like one's preferences and interests, but also considering the role of the self-interested ego that Murdoch warned against, and whether the escalation is right given the normative context of the situation. The fat relentless ego is as much part of the self as any other, and should be recognized as such if we want to unmask it. Self-love in the laptop situation means: considering whether perhaps a lack of sleep has something to do with the agitation, considering that we might be frustrated with a work-related issue, seeing how perhaps we are trying to make some point which, in all honesty, doesn't really hold up, wondering whether our partner is really the locus of our agitation, or simply the nearest target, and so on.

So what is the self that we are looking at? It is anything we might find when we really look. I realize that that is adequately vague, but defining it or narrowing it down is precisely opposed to what I take self-love to be, for it narrows again the possibilities of what we might be. It is up to us to consider, by really looking, what is at play. Defining the self in order to define self-love has the order backwards, which is why I think I can bite the bullet and not define the self.

Importantly, as said before, this loving attitude is not a free pass to accept anything within the self in the long run. I cannot entirely excuse myself for the agitation with my partner by referring to stress at work or a lack of sleep, or dwell with the idea that I am simply the kind of person to snap at her surroundings when she is tired. Or, in a more extreme exam-

ple, if I like to set things on fire, I should not therefore endorse that I am an arsonist and go around burning down houses. We do indeed need some standard to scrutinize the self, in order to figure out what we should work on or improve, and what we can cultivate. Jan Bransen argues that self-love means envisaging alternatives of oneself, and pondering which one is most in line with the self, or in other words, which alternative of the self one is able to love the most (2006). Though I think in some sense Bransen introduces again an appraisal view of self-love (it is not the current self that one loves, but rather future hypothetical selves, of which some are more loveable than others), I am particularly sympathetic to his recognition that self-love is one thing, but knowing what self-love tells you to do is another. He writes: “clarifying [a] predicament by recasting it in terms of alternatives of herself is one thing, but providing a procedure to overcome an ambivalent lover’s heart is quite another thing” (22). Self-love can clarify, but it doesn’t tell us what to do. Instead, self-love means trying to get a vision of what is at play. Bransen further argues that coming to that clear picture entails at least being attentive to one’s context, position, and the normatively significant features of one’s environment (2006, 2015, 317), a view I share with him. We should, for instance, let our decisions be guided by codes of moral respectability. To know how to act, we should probably make some sort weighing between our preferences and the moral context. But in order to do that, we need to have a vision of the self and its context, which only an attitude of self-love can provide in all honesty.

Let me give another example to illustrate how self-love does not straightforwardly tell us what to do, but instead allows us to see the situation in which we find ourselves more clearly. Imagine a fourteen-year-old girl who feels attracted to other girls. Her family is, however, quite conservative and has expressed negative opinions about homosexuality, casting gay people as either sick or ‘going through a phase’. Our fourteen-year-old might come to wonder: am I just going through a phase? Is this indeed a bad thing for my family? She then turns a loving gaze onto herself and becomes convinced that the normative context does not demand from her that she dates boys. She will not harm anyone with her love of girls. This is a form of being herself that does not cause harm or is morally disrespectful, as it would be, say, if she came out as a thief. But self-love also shows the fourteen-year-old that she is in a community that would make her life



hard if she indeed came out. Self-love shows her all these normative contexts, and allows her to see her preference not as a selfish ego-preference but as a genuine expression of who she is, but it does not make clear what she should do. Any of her choices might be understandable and respectable. She might wait to come out until her ultra-conservative grandma passes away, for instance. The standard of scrutiny, what of ourselves we should keep or cultivate and what we should not, comes only after the initial interested regard at the self. The self-loving regard precedes not only the decision about what to do, but also, as I will argue in the next section, it precedes any kind of self-knowledge.

#### SELF-LOVE AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Self-love, as I have presented it, involves trying to understand how certain facts about the self interfere with how one relates to the world and to others. It involves poking through fantasies about the self in favor of the real self. And it involves trying to see the real self and grasp the ways in which that self is expressed. But it is important to distinguish between self-knowledge and the conative attitude<sup>19</sup> of trying to grasp that self. Self-love is not a synonym to self-knowledge, but rather its precondition, an argument Bransen also makes (2015). Self-knowledge is a state in which we can succeed or fail: either we know things about ourselves that correspond with reality, or we do not. But self-love, as argued before, is a constantly open attitude of interest in the self. In this sense, it is the attitude we need to obtain self-knowledge (for how would we know things about ourselves if we were not keen on finding them out in the first place?). But it is not synonymous with the state of actually having obtained knowledge about the self. I might, for instance, know about myself that I am prone to get angry if I am hungry, which is self-knowledge. But to know this fact about myself, I need to be willing and interested in exploring my anger to notice

19. My use of this word here is not to be confused with the sense in which Velleman uses “the conative analysis of love” to describe and criticize those theories that depict love as “a motive toward a particular aim” (1999, 354). I use conative (from the Latin *conari*: ‘to try’) here not to describe love as a drive but rather to characterize self-love as an ever-continuing attitude that is characterized by the intention or the effort to complete an action rather than by the completion itself.

this pattern at all, which requires an attitude of self-love on my account.

Self-love as an emancipatory attitude is about the interest in mapping the self, rather than whether one succeeds in truly drawing an accurate map. Self-love does not depend on whether we obtain self-knowledge, because if that were the case, hardly anyone could ever truly claim self-love. People never know all there is to know about themselves. Scholars argue that such knowledge is not only practically difficult to obtain, but also theoretically impossible (Russell 2017). Not only is the self too complex to fully know in practice, the self is also an ever-changing and unstable object that we can by definition never grasp entirely. Self-love does not demand that we do the impossible, but simply asks us to look and see what's there. In self-love, we try to see the self as clearly as possible, without beating ourselves up over the contradictions we encounter, and the inevitably partial vision we have of ourselves.

Daring to look in the mirror is no guarantee that we will see our whole self. On the contrary, we complement our mirror-image all the time with second-hand reflections, descriptions and other inputs, knowing very well that these are coming from people who are equally unable to grasp their entire self, and therefore their descriptions of us are likely also distorted. Self-love simply means that one is interested in piecing these bits of ourselves together until we reach a somewhat full image, including glitches and uncertainties that we are willing to revise. "Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat," Audre Lorde said in an interview (1981). The philosopher Francey Russell even argues that self-opacity is a necessary and productive part of our moral lives that we need not aim to eradicate (Russell 2017). On the contrary, not knowing the self entirely is a productive feature of moral life that we need not just tolerate but can actually live well with, she argues.<sup>20</sup>

The conative characteristic of self-love is something that we see clearly reflected in Murdoch's work on love as well. Murdoch considered love to be the attitude of looking again and again. Loving is an "infinitely perfectible" process of progression (1970, 23), which is why Spreeuwenberg has argued that loving is an active practice, rather than a passive feeling

20. Russell has originally developed this idea in her dissertation, but is currently also working on a book tentatively entitled: *Opaque Animals: On Self-Opacity, Agency, and Experience*

(forthcoming). She thereby places herself in a tradition of philosophers who conceive of love as more than a passive affect, arguing instead that, for instance, love is an active attitude of the will, as Immanuel Kant holds in his notion of practical love (Kant 1996), or that love's goal is to provide benefits to the beloved and promote their well-being, as Harry Frankfurt holds (2004, 133), or that love requires us to engage in a relationship with another involving certain activities together, as Niko Kolodny argues (Kolodny 2003), and so on. For Spreeuwenberg, as for Murdoch, part of love's characteristic activity is given in the idea of perfectibility, which I have called the conative characteristic here. The work of love requires that we put in the effort to look, again and again. The conviction that we know the other, that we have looked hard enough and can at some point resign as passive lovers, is precisely what brings an end to loving, for fixing an image of the other in our minds convinces us that we need not be attentive to changes or new information about the beloved (I suspect that both Murdoch and Spreeuwenberg would find a 'passive lover' to be an oxymoron for this very reason). If knowledge is a goal of love, it is one we are never fully able to reach. Spreeuwenberg argues that there are two ways full knowledge of the other is unattainable (forthcoming). Firstly, it is part of our imperfect existence that we may never rid ourselves of partiality and the limits of our understanding, no matter how hard we try. Secondly, once we fix an image of the beloved in our minds, claiming to now *truly* know them, we disregard the possibility of future changes of the beloved that require us to keep looking at them.

Knowledge of the beloved should be conceived of as a horizon, and loving as moving towards it: we aim for the horizon, but we can never actually experience being on the horizon. Once we reach our original aiming point, the horizon appears again beyond our reach. This conative characteristic of love applies to self-love as I have described it as well: looking at ourselves is an ongoing process that is never truly settled, and settling for one fixed idea of the self undermines the ever curious self-loving gaze. Rather than aiming for the horizon, perhaps trying to catch our own shadow is a better image to depict the conative character of self-love. Every time we move closer, that self-shaped shadowy patch recoils from our reach.

## SELF-LOVE AND SELF-HATRED, PRIDE AND SHAME

It may seem odd that I have made it this far into a thesis about pride without mentioning shame. Shame is often intuitively named as an opposite of pride (Isenberg 1949, Walsh 1970, Taylor 1985, Dyson 2006, Nussbaum 2016, 101). The reason I have kept it for last is because I think shame links interestingly to the account of self-love in this chapter. Maggie Nelson writes in *The Argonauts*: “I told you I wanted to live in a world in which the antidote to shame is not honor, but honesty” (2015, 32). Shame, as I understand it here, is not the opposite of self-esteem pride nor of self-respect pride, but rather the opposite of being able to face the self in honesty. Shame in some significant forms is akin to active self-denial and wishing the self away. If pride is an emotion that can flare up because of self-love, shame is one that accompanies self-hatred. I present no comprehensive theory of shame nor of self-hatred, but my account of self-love and pride might have some interesting corollaries for how we look at self-hatred and shame. What follows are some possible directions in which my account may steer us.

If self-love means to take an interest in the self rather than admiring the self for certain specific features, self-hatred might similarly be conceived as a willful disinterest in the self, as actively looking away from the self, oppressing large parts of the self, and generally wishing not to be who one is. As we can hear Malcolm X say in a famous speech, self-hatred often goes hand in hand with the desire to be different, and the oppression of the hated trait. “Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? Who taught you to hate the color of your skin to such extent that you bleach to get like the white man? Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet? Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to, so much so that you don’t want to be around each other?” Malcolm X asks his Black audience (1962).

Self-hatred is not merely the lack of self-love, but its actual opposite. A person simply lacking self-love can be ignorant, self-deluded, yet feel no hatred towards the self. But a person embodying the opposite of self-love looks away from what she finds in herself, and actively wishes not to be

who she is. Put simpler: if self-love means wanting to be who you are, the lack of self-love is not wanting to be who you are (which could also mean: not thinking twice about who you are), and self-hatred is wanting *not* to be who you are. Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, hates her Black traits and wishes deeply to exchange them for other, whiter ones. She is not indifferent or self-delusional about her hated traits. She knows very well that she is Black, but rather than embracing her traits she denounces and refuses them. The upshot of the account of self-love as painted in this chapter is that we might get a deeper sense of what it means to hate the self as well.

Shame, I propose, can accompany self-hatred analogous to how pride can (but need not) accompany self-love. Emmanuel Levinas described shame as the sensation of “being riveted to oneself” (2003, 64). This feature is one that often recurs in theories about shame: shame both involves that one desires something about the self not to be real, while shame can only be painful in the way that it is precisely because the ashamed acknowledges that that which led to shame is intimately tied to the self. Shame is for this reason often distinguished from guilt. A person feels guilt about an isolated act or trait, like breaking a rule. In principle, the guilty can ‘make up’ for what they have done. A person who feels shame, however, has the feeling that they have failed as a person, with no clear road for redemption or restoration. This distinction of guilt as act-focused or local and shame as person-focused or global is quite commonly accepted among philosophers (Taylor 1985, 89, Williams 1993, 84, Morgan 2008, 14, Nussbaum 2016, 128). As a corollary of this distinction, it is sometimes argued that searching to alleviate one's guilt can and does lead to virtuous behavior, like the reparation of a committed wrong or the offering of help (Herdt 2016), and that guilt is therefore more prosocial.<sup>21</sup> Studies on behavioral outcomes of emotions have confirmed that guilt is indeed associated with reparative behaviors, while shame has been linked to escapist behavior (Tracy and Robins 2004). Phenomenologically, that correlates to how we experience these emotions. Feeling guilty about taking another person's wallet might be restored by giving the wallet back.

21. For an overview of this common evaluation of guilt, which Teroni and Bruun call a “broad tendency” in moral philosophy, see: Teroni and Bruun (2011).

But if we felt shame, would we be as likely to give it back, or rather seek to hide it and make it disappear? A confrontation with the wallet-owner is discouraged by shame, for it requires the wallet-thief to publicly admit his wrongs, which would invite more of the painful emotion. Shame has a tendency to avoid confrontation (Claeys 2020, 263). The way out of shame, for the shameful, is to hide, deny, forget, oppress, cover up and look away from the cause, to wish it away.

Shame is characterized by the realization that one is indeed what one wished not to be. Krista Thomason describes shame as the mismatch between one's self-conception and self-identity (2018, 11). Shame is the realization that we are not (merely) what we wish to be, she argues. However, this is not enough to characterize shame. We can realize that we do not live up to our aspirations without feeling shame *per se*. As we saw earlier, the constant re-evaluation of how we live up to our aspirations is even part of what it means to love ourselves. The typical face of shame, at least in the form presented here, lies in its inability to look beyond itself to possible ways out. To look beyond shame could include seeing that the shameful part of oneself is not in fact a good reason for shame, or realizing which ways one can go to repair an actual shortcoming. Shame means being so uneasy with what one encounters in the self that it becomes near-impossible to take steps forward.

Katrien Schaubroeck argues that there are feelings of shame in which we fail to some extent to take ourselves seriously as reasonable agents (2019). She introduces P.F. Strawson's notion of objective attitudes to explain how a certain form of shame indicates a withdrawal from the active engagement with ourselves that is so central to the account of self-love I have drawn here. Strawson divided our attitudes towards others into two groups (1974). Most often, we engage with others with reactive attitudes like blame or anger. With these attitudes we hold others accountable, and take them seriously as moral agents that can be reasoned with, that have room for growth, that should know better, and so on. We have a different set of attitudes when we respond to someone who we do not (yet) regard as a full moral agent. If a child says something hurtful, we might be sad or hurt, but we rarely feel anger or blame towards the child, because we do not expect them to know better. Strawson calls these attitudes objective, rather than reactive, because we regard our conversational partner in some

sense not as a serious moral antagonist. We might have the same kind of objective attitudes toward a racist uncle or virtual trolls on social media: in a sense, we have given up on reasoning with them and regard them as ‘beyond repair’.

Schaubroeck suggests in her essay that shame is an objective attitude towards the self: we regard the self as beyond repair, as not deserving further investigation or consideration. Strawson himself places shame on the side of self-reactive attitudes and it is therefore doubtful that he would agree with Schaubroeck’s hypothesis, although he does refer to shame as “the more complicated phenomenon” (1974, 16). Nevertheless, the mental exercise Schaubroeck presents is interesting: do we take ourselves seriously as moral agents when we feel shame, worthy of reasonable argument and open to improvement? Or do we see ourselves through the lens of shame as something to be “managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided” as Strawson describes the objective attitude (9). For some significant cases of shame, I agree with Schaubroeck that the latter attitude resonates the most. Shame is often characterized as involving a desire to disappear. Nussbaum links shame to a desire to hide (2004). Claudia Welz writes that “despite the devastating self-reflexivity, the ashamed self seeks to hide and to avoid the reflection that mirrors itself” (2011). Bernard Williams describes shame as “the desire to disappear, not to be here” (1993, 88). In psychological studies, relevant links between shame and escapist or hiding behaviors have been repeatedly shown (Tangney, Burggraf, and Wagner 1995).

The desire to hide fits nicely with Schaubroeck’s perspective on shame as an objective attitude, and my suggestion that shame links to self-hatred as the active disinterest in exploring the self. Shame makes us hammer down our shameful bits without looking twice at them, without regarding them as traits that deserve a closer look. Shame is self-sustaining in this way, because we never make it to the point where we see the traits for what they are: either not good reasons to feel adversity to the self at all (like the Black traits Malcolm X points to), or traits that do indeed need improvement (like Trump’s “sin and gore”, if he indeed were to feel shame about these). Either realization requires that we want to look at these traits in the first place, and take ourselves seriously as moral agents who are capable of improvement if necessary.

For now, these general ideas on self-hatred and shame suffice as to give them a place in this work on pride. I leave room for the possibility here that there are different kinds of shame, and that some forms of shame might indeed be conceived of as a reactive attitude that can be morally constructive, as many scholars also argue (Nussbaum 2004, 176, Morgan 2008, Appiah 2010, Jacquet 2015, Thomason 2018). But at least in one significant form, shame can be understood as the upshot of self-hatred, and is both caused by and maintains a lack of self-love. Pecola Breedlove might serve as a brief illustration of this mechanism, though I will zoom in on the moral dimensions of self-love and a lack thereof in the final part of this chapter. Pecola is not really encouraged to be interested in herself: she is met with hostility, she is ignored, or mocked because of her skin color. How can we expect a girl growing up with such hostility to want to find out more about herself and her natural ways? If Pecola is mocked and rejected for her Blackness, it makes sense for her to suppress and renounce these traits in favor of other, opposing ones. Pecola starts actively resenting herself and feels shame at not having blonde hair and blue eyes. Her appearance becomes the culprit of all her misery: her unhappy childhood, her aggressive father, her poverty, and so on. In a sense, of course, she is not wrong about this. Black families were, and still are, more likely to end up in poverty because of accumulative racial discrimination. But Pecola jumps to conclusions from what she sees around her: it must be because of her Blackness (rather than because of unfair discrimination) that she suffers. Her Blackness, rather than the unfair treatment, becomes to her mind what needs to be resolved.

The shame Pecola feels is an effect of lacking self-love, for Pecola does not get to be interested in herself in the way that white children are. She does not see herself represented by models in the department stores that match her shade, or see her mirror image in executive positions. But Pecola's shame equally thwarts any further possibility of self-love, because shame precisely encourages her to look away from and deny the self. Stuck in this cycle of shame, Pecola is not encouraged to distinguish her Black traits from actual malign traits, for her mind is now filled with the propensity to hammer her Blackness down, rather than to look at it more closely.



## THE POLITICS AND MORALITY OF SELF-LOVE

That self-love is valuable should be clear by now. Taking an interest in the self allows us to live our most flourishing lives. Billy Elliot, the boy who pursued ballet, is fulfilling more of his capacities than if he were stuck in the soccer team without being able to explore what he really enjoys. If living out one's capabilities is part of a flourishing life, as Martha Nussbaum convincingly argues, then being interested in exploring those capabilities is a fundamental part of human flourishing.

Self-love is also valuable from a moral perspective, as we have seen. Self-love is connected to how *good* a life we can lead, and is intimately tied to our own well-being. If it is a moral ideal to live authentic and fulfilling lives, then self-love contributes to this ideal. But more obvious even is the moral value of self-love with regard to our interpersonal lives. Self-love, as we saw, benefits how we behave towards our environments, for it encourages us to see ourselves in relation to that environment. Self-love thus asks us, as I argued along with Jan Bransen, to relate to our environments and the specific normative context we find ourselves in.

Self-love is also highly political, as I will discuss in this section. The possibility to love the self is more self-evident for some than for others, and where structural patterns of such unequal access to self-love can be discerned, the reason for this can often be brought back to governing norms of acceptability, as we saw amongst others in the Zendaya and the Billy Elliot case. I will argue in what follows that historically marginalized or oppressed groups have larger thresholds to overcome when it comes to loving the self,<sup>22</sup> and are often discouraged from doing so. However, I

22. And even, arguably, when it comes to loving others, a topic for instance explored by Karen Rice in her research on the effects of an oppressive context on formative relationships (work in progress). Given the relation between self-love and other-love that I have depicted above, it comes as no surprise that thresholds to loving the self would also, tragically, be reflected in one's capability to love others. I have discussed in this chapter the effect of oppression on self-love, but oppression's effect in the emotional realm is not limited to self-love. In relatively recent discussions, anger has been picked up as another example of the effects of oppression on one's capacity to experience, live out, and even recognize a certain emotion. I come back to the discussion on anger in the conclusion. I suspect, and fear, that many more questions and uncomfortable constataions about the re-

also contend that the privileged, even though the thresholds to loving the self are significantly lower, often lack self-love in our current society. The reason behind this might be traced back to what Nussbaum calls our discomfort with vulnerability. Starting to practice self-love can be an uncomfortable or even painful transition, governed by the fear of encountering something one would rather deny.

For those who hold privilege in one or another respect, self-love also means acknowledging that privilege, and therefore requires a certain humbleness about one's own doing. Self-love requires that one gives up the fantasy of control and independence to some extent, which, for people who are used to being in control, is a hard realization in the double sense of the word. It is in a first sense *affectively* difficult to admit to oneself that one is in fact in a significant sense vulnerable and dependent. It is also *effectively* hard to reach such a realization, because it is often invisible or hard to see oneself as this relational being when one is used to being the norm, a phenomenon often described in regard to privilege (McIntosh 1989, Mills 1997, 76, Mårtensson, Björklund, and Bäckström 2019).

Controversial as it may have sounded prior to understanding the account of self-love as depicted in this chapter, it may now sound very reasonable to argue that most people lack self-love, and we should aim to cultivate more of it across the board, rather than less. Lotte Spreeuwenberg writes: "What has so far been overlooked is the promise of 'loving attention' as a revolutionary companion" (manuscript). I think 'loving' can and should be understood in this rallying cry as to comprise self-love as well. Spreeuwenberg writes mostly about the moral benefits of placing other-love at the center of morality (forthcoming). But what good does truly seeing the other do if we do not fold their realities back onto ourselves and the space we take? I propose that self-love as it stands is greatly lacking, and social progress will entail cultivating and encouraging really looking at the self. Self-love enables us to intervene both when the self looms too large, *and* when it looms too small.

lation between oppression and the emotional experience of the oppressed lie ahead of us.

## THE SOIL IS BAD FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF FLOWERS

In the closing passage of *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison writes: “This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn’t matter. It’s too late” (1972, 206). Throughout the novel, Morrison thematizes how Black people in the U.S. find themselves in a society that is hostile to them. As a consequence, Black people like Pecola Breedlove find the reason for their failures within themselves, as if she indeed “had no right to live.” But it is not Pecola who is incapable of flourishing, Morrison shows. It is the soil that doesn’t nourish her and makes her wilt.

The flower metaphor goes a long way. Many great works of literature and art thematize situations in which a protagonist is kept from flourishing in a way that befits them, and instead we find them wilted, a shadow of what they could have been. Not rarely these tragic storylines end in the protagonist seeing no other way out of their conflicted desires – what they’re ‘supposed’ to want versus what they want – but to seek death: Esther from Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* is disillusioned and repulsed by the expectations of female conventionality, yet sees no clear way out. She envisages a future unroll before her of being a wife, “washing up even more dirty plates till I fell into bed, utterly exhausted. This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A’s” (2013, 80). Dissociated and discouraged, the book describes Esther struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts. Leo Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina is tragically split between her conventional yet unhappy marriage and an exciting affair (1998). Emma Bovary in the novel by Gustave Flaubert finds herself locked in a marriage without being able to conceive, in her nineteenth century society, a way out that is not punished harshly (1968). In these stories, visions of nonconventional kinds of flourishing are thwarted, hammered down, discouraged, or threatened with immense punishment: the loss of social support, financial stability, the threat of becoming a social pariah. In an essay on female heroines, Jia Tolentino summarizes their tragic predicaments as follows: “they live under conditions where ordinary desire makes them fatally monstrous” (2019a, 114). It is no wonder that, in the face of

aversive messages, it is sometimes easier to look away from the real wants of the self. Our female heroines, I want to say, are actively discouraged from taking a real interest in the self, from self-love, because what they might find there presents a threat to their nineteenth century context. Yet somewhere deep down, an unfulfilled hunger lingers in our heroines, for there is always the pull of a different life, a different soil.

Though that nineteenth century context is different from the present one, there are still intricate mechanisms at work that penalize people for taking an interest in the self and pursuing what they find there. The French documentary film *Petite Fille*, for example, follows the young trans girl Sasha, who, by the age of four expressed that “a girl” is what she would be when she grew up (Lifshitz 2020). Over a montage of Sasha twirling in dresses and in a pink bikini, Sasha’s mother recounts the disillusionment on her daughter’s face when she told Sascha that her biological make-up excluded her from ever being a girl. Realizing over time that Sasha’s desire was more than “simply wanting to be like mom,” Sasha’s mother reassured and supported her, but as she recounts with an audible quiver, “the damage had been done.” Sasha had received a message she would get many times over in the adult world: that she was wrong. “The children accept her,” Sasha’s mother says, it’s in the encounter with the adult context, with their fully formed expectations of gender and biology, that her daughter is discouraged.

Sasha is told that she is abnormal, sick even, and should work to combat her own self in order to comply with the categories the adults use to arrange the world. Homosexuality, as well as being a trans person, was considered a treatable illness not too long ago, and still today there are stories of attempted ‘conversions’ aimed at changing sexual orientation. Conversion therapy includes practices ranging from emotionally traumatic therapy sessions to physically damaging treatments with electroshocks or nauseating medication, with the aim of making the ‘patient’ associate these painful stimuli with their homosexual feelings (Haldeman 1994). These dangerous and unsupported practices do not date from a faraway history. In the U.S., conversion therapy for minors is legal in more than half of the states (lgbtqmap.org 2020). As recent as May 2020, Albania became only the third European country to legally ban such practices, following Germany and Malta (AFP 2020).

As with transgender people like Sasha, it is hard to imagine that such societal aversion has no effect on how one looks at the self. The self is rendered into an object that should be significantly altered, converted, or suppressed. Sasha receives a clear message: do not explore or express what you find in yourself. One significant moment we encounter Sasha laughing in discussion with an adult is when she is told that there are others like her. It communicates to her that she is not abnormal. But the way society discourages transgender people like herself from being who they are maintains the idea that being trans means being abnormal in both the normative and the statistical sense. If being trans is met with hostility, then more trans people are likely to oppress or deny significant parts of who they are, thus maintaining the idea that being trans is an anomaly that one better not follow through.

Sasha is both discouraged and actually inhibited to explore what she could be in a world that was welcoming to her, for from a very young age she both expects and receives hostility for who she is. Kate Manne describes a similar mechanism maintaining gender roles for cisgender people. Our social interactions are governed by gendered expectations, she contends, that can briefly be summarized as what she calls the give/take model (2017, 129). Manne describes how we expect women to give goods like attention, care, affection, sex, emotional and reproductive labor. Men, on the other hand, are expected to take and receive goods like status, power, attention, recognition, and wealth (130). These gendered expectations are maintained by a rigid and deeply ingrained system of punishment and reward that works both as a deterrent to trespass the expectations and as a motivation to enact them. If a woman aims for a high and powerful position in politics, for instance, Manne predicts that she will be met with greater hostility than a man in her place. But the same applies to men who cross the boundaries of 'normality'. If a man is openly emotional, or chooses to be a stay-at-home dad, he is often mocked or perceived as 'unmanly'. The counterpart of these social reprimands are the social rewards for affirming gendered patterns: a 'good' woman is praised for motherhood, for her nurturing capacities, and running a tight ship in the household. A 'good' man is praised for his ambition, his steadfastness, and his desire to win.

Manne's depiction of the logic of misogyny is relevant to my ac-

count of self-love especially because it shows the ingrained mechanisms in which expectations can govern social interactions and eventually, self-formation. No matter how one chooses to behave, it is always in relation to the expected pattern. Whether one diverts from it, or conforms to it, the eventual outcome is seen in light of the expectations. We call ambitious women claiming traditionally masculine-coded goods 'brave' or 'rebellious' or worse, 'ballsy'. Relating to these expectations, one is inescapably also determined by them. Self-love, as I argued earlier, is about authentically carving at the self without being governed by fantasies, expectations, or projections. The rigid expectations Manne depicts, but also those governing biological sex and gender like in Sascha's case, and the promise of reward and punishment when one respectively confirms or diverts from them, form a significant hurdle for really looking at the self in a way that is unhindered by preformed expectations.

Bell hooks also thematized the wounds struck in both men and women by the expectations governing their gender. Both men and women are encouraged very early on to oppress a certain part of themselves. Even if they seek restoration through authentic exploration of the self later on, the damage has already been done. A voice inside keeps calling: *this* part of yourself, you better not admit to. "The wounded child inside many males is a boy who, when he first spoke his truths, was silenced by paternal sadism, by a patriarchal world that did not want him to claim his true feelings. The wounded child inside many females is a girl who was taught from early childhood on that she must become something other than herself, deny her true feelings, in order to attract and please others" (2000, 49). How do we move forward from this situation?

Audre Lorde offers one solution. She argues, from her own experience, that self-definition can counter the fantasies and expectations that reign the self. "If I didn't define myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive," she testified in her address for the celebration of Malcolm X weekend at Harvard University (1984). What she is calling for is akin to self-love as I have defined it. To counter the images of 'who we should be', whether it pertains to gendered expectations, or racial stereotypes, we should simply be interested in ourselves and define what we are from within. But what we have come to now is a seemingly inescapable tragedy: on the one hand, the antidote to projected

fantasies and expectations is to define the self through an act of self-love. On the other, looking at the self without these expectations interfering is a near-impossible task. Jonathan P. Higgins, a Black queer professor, testifies, for example, in an essay on Audre Lorde that “toxic masculinity, patriarchy, and white supremacy never *allowed* me to see myself whole” (2018, my italics).

Taking on Lorde’s task of defining the self requires that one has the epistemological tools to do so, and as we can draw from Higgins’ testimony, the concepts to envisage the self as a whole and understand the self might themselves be lacking. If defining the self, as Lorde suggests, is conducive to one’s liberation, then having little or no access to the tools to do so can be understood as what Miranda Fricker calls hermeneutical injustice (2007). A hermeneutical injustice is a particular kind of epistemic injustice that occurs when people lack the conceptual resources to make sense of their experiences and interpret their lives, and it is an injustice especially if these resources would be conducive to their own liberation. The lack of tools of interpretation is the first hurdle someone like Higgins might face when attempting to fulfill Lorde’s task of self-definition. But it is not the last one.

Those who have succeeded to cultivate and define their true selves, against the odds, are often harshly punished for doing so, as we saw earlier. Marsha P. Johnson is a paradigm example of self-love: she knew who she was and favored vivid and vocal expression. She found the tools, conceptual and other, to define and understand herself. But Marsha P. Johnson was also likely murdered for this reason, as are disproportionately many trans women of color in predominantly white societies (Forestiere 2020, Ussher et al. 2020). A cry for more self-love is thus naïve and risks to blame the victim and condemn them to an isolated struggle if it does not also look at the other side, the forces that inhibit people like Marsha, Ruth, bell and Audre to actually inhabit the self-loving stance. What I want to argue in what follows however, is that projecting fantasies onto others, and punishing them for not adhering to them, is also to a large extent due to a lack of self-love. In that sense, a call for more self-love rings hopefully less naïve.

## COMFORTABLE FANTASIES

Lotte Spreeuwenberg makes the point that social intolerance, the hatred and aversion facing girls like Sascha for instance, are due to a lack of love. “When groups or human beings don’t understand, appreciate or accept each other, they are often keeping each other – or rather, one is keeping the other – at a distance: we don’t really want to see the other. Or putting it differently: we don’t really want to see each other’s reality, because we are too comfortable with our own” (forthcoming). Though this is a valuable perspective, I think it deserves some scrutiny. Can it also be the case that we react with intolerance because we are *not* comfortable *enough* with our own reality?

James Baldwin once blamed adversity and hatred on precisely the inability to look the self in the eye. In an interview with *The Village Voice*, he said:

I know from my own experience that the macho men – truck drivers, cops, football players – these people are far more complex than they want to realize. That’s why I call them infantile. They have needs which, for them, are literally inexpressible. They don’t dare look in the mirror. And that’s why they need faggxts. They’ve created faggxts in order to act out a sexual fantasy on the body of another man and not take any responsibility for it. Do you see what I mean? I think it’s very important for the male homosexual to recognize that he is a sexual target for other men, and that is why he is despised, and why he is called a faggxt. He is called a faggxt because other males need him. (Baldwin 1984)

Baldwin’s analysis traces back to the inability to face the self that we met earlier in the girls from *Girls*. Both Baldwin and the author of the *Girls* review link animosity towards others with a lack of being able to explore and reckon with the self. Though on a first reading Baldwin’s answer expresses contempt for these ‘macho men’, calling them infantile, it also expresses a sort of compassion. These men need out-groups to fill in a deep lack, the inability to face their own selves. This in turn ties into hooks’ idea about the wounds within young boys, which might explain the compassionate stance Baldwin takes. These men are unable to see themselves as a complex whole, as sensitive and vulnerable beings, for such does not befit



a ‘manly man’. They are at war with themselves, and as Hannah Arendt wrote, “what kind of dialogue can you conduct with yourself when your soul is not in harmony but at war with itself” (1981, 189). The substitute for inner dialogue thus becomes hatred and disgust of whoever inhabits those parts of the self they themselves wish to deny.

Martha Nussbaum theorizes about these mechanisms by drawing on psychoanalysis (2004). She argues that the discomfort with our own animality and vulnerability, as we saw earlier, leads to the creation and vilification of out-groups. These out-groups, the ‘other’, become the embodiment of everything we cannot come to terms with in ourselves. “We need a group of humans to bound ourselves against, who will come to exemplify the boundary line between the truly human and the basely animal,” Nussbaum writes. “If those quasi-animals stand between us and our own animality, then we are one step further away from being animal and mortal ourselves” (107). Homosexuals, women, Jews, untouchables, lower-class people have historically all been subject to what Nussbaum calls ‘projective disgust’ (108). In the current climate, we might want to suggest some additions to that list. People of color, people with disabilities,<sup>23</sup> refugees, Indigenous peoples like the native Americans in the U.S. or the Maori and Pasifika people in New Zealand, and oppressed minorities like the Uyghurs in China, have all in some sense been the target of such disgust and of association with the animal.

The love of another, which Spreeuwenberg puts forward as the antidote for hatred, is in this understanding precisely obstructed by a lack of self-love. Both the self and the other become caricatures that are not whole but flat and one-sided, predetermined tropes rather than full beings with complex subjectivity. The macho men that Baldwin refers to: manly, tough rather than sensitive, and definitely not experiencing any sexual feelings towards men. The out-group: immasculate, castrated, disgusting. The hateful not only denies the ‘other’ complex subjectivity, but also denies himself this by living out a neat *idea* of what he is, rather than the messy human he probably is in all fullness. In a sense Spreeuwenberg is thus right in placing the locus of hatred in comfort with the self, but the comfort

23. For a beautiful and rich description of the perceived relations between the animal and the disabled body, see: Taylor (2016).

she refers to must be comfort with an image of the self. There is comfort in adhering to a script, especially if it is one that benefits you. And such comfort can often only be sustained by resisting information about the self and one's place in the world that might threaten it.

In recent scholarship on racism, the resistance and subsequent failure to see the self in the bigger picture is often thematized and named as an important factor in the persistence of racism. We may regard racism as a case-study of a lack of self-love impeding social progress. Robin DiAngelo argues, for instance, that one of the key problems in doing diversity work is that white people are often convinced that *they* do not need to be educated (2011). White people, DiAngelo continues, do not usually deny the existence of racism, but they maintain that it exists only in the psychological attitude of racial hatred, rather than in widely disseminated societal structures and privileges that benefit them. The groups of people DiAngelo encounters almost without exception express attitudes that “they are beyond the need for engaging with the content because they “already had a class on this” or “already know this”” (55) or that racial diversity work is only relevant to people who deal directly with diversity. These groups are also, almost without exception, all-white.

Gloria Wekker refers to this idea of the self in the context of racism as a form of cognitive dissonance that she calls “white innocence” (2016). She uses the Dutch identity as a case study to shed light on a common position in the discourse on racism. The dominant Dutch self-narrative is that of a small but ethically just country that can be a guide to other peoples and nations (9). At the core of the Dutch identity, Wekker writes, lies a sense of exceptionalism (13). But this exceptionalism is founded on a bed of paradoxes, Wekker explains. The Dutch identity is presented as beyond racism and supposedly ‘color-blind’, yet race incites particularly passionate upheavals. There is but little identification with migrants, even if historically much of the Dutch population stems from migration. And finally, the longstanding relative absence of colonial history in the Dutch education system is highly paradoxical given the large Dutch imperial presence.<sup>24</sup> Wekker argues from these paradoxes that the Dutch maintain

24. It must be said that in recent years, the focus on colonial history in the Netherlands’ (and Belgium’s) education system as well as in the public sphere has noticeably

a self-narrative in which they can detach themselves from racism, rather than incorporate it as part of their identity. It is not that racism in the Netherlands is not studied or knowledge about the colonies is absent, but rather it is kept out of what Wekker calls, after Edward Said, “the cultural archive” (1993), thus maintaining what Charles Mills has called “white ignorance” (2007). In the context of my argument this ignorance could be read as the inability or refusal to really look at the self and its context, and instead maintain a story about the self as it has been replicated for decades.

This form of maintaining a certain story about the self has been thematized in domains outside racism scholarship as well. The existentialists famously wrote about *mauvaise foi*, or bad faith, indicating the inability to grasp one’s freedom and live authentically (Sartre 1956).<sup>25</sup> The relevance of this existentialist notion has not gone unnoticed by racism scholars, and has been used to thematize anti-Blackness by Lewis Gordon (1999). In feminist scholarship, Robin S. Dillon writes: “I think of myself in cer-

increased, though a long way remains ahead. A discussion about the history canon of the Netherlands has resulted in more inclusion of non-European history and attention for the ‘shadow sides’ of Dutch history (NOS 2019, Meijer 2020). The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, arguably the most important national museum of the Netherlands, ran an exhibition about slavery in the spring of 2021, and the museum’s app allows visitors to learn more about the colonial history of some important works in the permanent collection. But for many years prior, the history of colonization was not taught, or only superficially. In the public sphere, statues of glorified colonizers like Leopold II remain without annotation of the atrocities in the former colonies. Not rarely these colonizers are depicted alongside the kneeling colonized people, as if bringing peace and salvation. In the wake of George Floyd’s murder and the subsequent international protests, many of these statues became increasingly contested and some were indeed taken down under public pressure, see for instance: Pronczuk and Zaveri (2020).

25. *Mauvaise foi* or bad faith, in the form of acquiescing and excusing the self by referring to essentialist notions about the self (“that’s who I am, I can’t help it”) can be useful without having to agree with the Sartrean idea that the self is essentially empty, like a blank slate. Iris Murdoch has expressed insightful critique of the image that Sartre presents of people as empty voids with infinite choices and freedom (Murdoch 1953). I read the interpretation of bad faith in anti-racism scholarship not as a complete endorsement of Sartre’s depiction of the human condition, but as the acknowledgment that there is indeed something vile about acquiescing in an unscrutinized image of the self, without considering the option whether perhaps we can change or rethink what we believe to be true about ourselves.

tain ways, and at some level I know my self-image is not accurate. It incorporates distortions and stereotypes, half-truths and whole falsehoods; but it is handy, and it provides a lot of excuses for what I do and why I cannot change, at least not now” (1992, 64). To live in bad faith with the self, I hope to have shown, is not merely an injustice to the self but also incites the creation of out-groups, as Nussbaum contends, as well as inhibits the eradication of the hierarchies that exist between the in- and the out-group, as we saw in Wekker, DiAngelo and Mills.

Nearing the end of this chapter, I want to cite an op-ed piece published in the New York Times extensively, for it encompasses much of what I have been arguing here and it does no justice to the piece to pick out just a sentence here and there. After having conducted a series of 19 interviews with philosophers and public intellectuals on race, the interviewer and philosopher George Yancy delivers his own message in the form of a letter. It is a request in the context of race, but the message can be read as pertaining to other forms of aversion and hatred as well. In a part not included below, Yancy reflects on his own role in societal sexism, thus explicitly extending the message beyond racism. What follows is a significant excerpt from his letter:

Dear White America,

I have a weighty request. As you read this letter, I want you to listen with love, a sort of love that demands that you look at parts of yourself that might cause pain and terror, as James Baldwin would say. Did you hear that? You may have missed it. I repeat: *I want you to listen with love*. Well, at least try. (...) In this letter, I ask you to look deep, to look into your souls with silence, to quiet that voice that will speak to you of your white “innocence.” (...) Don’t tell me that you voted for Obama. Don’t tell me that you don’t see color. Don’t tell me that I’m blaming whites for everything. To do so is to hide yet again. (...) If you are white, and you are reading this letter, I ask that you don’t run to seek shelter from your own racism. Don’t hide from your responsibility. Rather, begin, right now, to practice being vulnerable. (...) I ask that you try to be “un-sutured.” If that term brings to mind a state of pain, open flesh, it is meant to do so. After all, it is painful to let go of your “white innocence,” to use this letter as a mirror, one that refuses to show you what you want to see, one that demands that you look at the lies that you tell yourself so

that you don't feel the weight of responsibility for those who live under the yoke of whiteness, your whiteness. (...) I'm asking for you to tarry, to linger, with the ways in which you perpetuate a racist society. (...) Perhaps the language of this letter will encourage a split — not a split between black and white, but a fissure in your understanding, a space for loving a Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Aiyana Jones, Sandra Bland, Laquan McDonald and others. I'm suggesting a form of love that enables you to see the role that you play (even despite your anti-racist actions) in a *system* that continues to value black lives on the cheap. (2015)

Yanci's letter captures many of the themes I have discussed here, and therefore offers a nice summary of the political possibilities and relevance of self-love. Yanci asks the reader to listen with love, and in the expansion of his request it becomes clear that the love Yanci speaks of should take on the form of looking at the self. Aware that love is often read as an outward-attitude, Yanci states that love can also enable us to see the role we play, and that we might have this understanding of love in its double meaning: a space for loving Black lives on the one hand, and a space for lovingly engaging with the self as a factor in a system keeping that first kind of love at bay.

Yanci describes the conative character of self-love as well, urging us to "at least try." He also links looking at the self to facing "white innocence" and other "lies you tell yourself," which I have more mildly referred to as fantasies about the self. We read in Yanci's letter an appeal not to hide, an image we discussed briefly as an opposite of self-love. Hiding means looking away and denying the real self, and Yanci discusses defensive responses as hiding "yet again," a failure to face the self. Instead of hiding, Yanci asks the reader to practice being vulnerable, a call we encountered in Nussbaum's argument that coming to terms with our vulnerability is fundamental for a society freed from hatred and intolerance. Lastly, Yanci calls for the reader "to tarry, to linger." Taking time to face the self is a fundamental part of self-love, even if it can sometimes be, as Yanci also emphasizes quite vividly, highly uncomfortable. The practice of self-love sometimes means being comfortable with the uncomfortable.

Simultaneously, it means being uncomfortable with the comfortable. Self-love asks us to question our comfort and move beyond it if it allows us to maintain harmful ignorance and inhibits us from seeing the injustices

at stake. Donna Haraway argues that facing complex issues oftentimes requires that we muster up the courage to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway 2016). I think that is precisely what self-love can enable us to do. Facing away from the trouble in favor of comfortable fantasies can hinder significant groups of people from envisaging and living out their optimal flourishing lives. The lack of self-love in one can stand in the way of self-love in the other. We cannot one-sidedly recommend self-love as an empowering tool in the oppressed, if at the same time they find themselves in a context in which their self-love is actively discouraged. There is an age-old Dutch saying that I am very fond of which recommends, in a literal translation, to put your hand into your own bosom. To do that in honesty, means looking with love as I have described it here. And that, alongside self-respect and self-esteem, is what can make for a proud person.

#### SELF-LOVE AS A RECOMMENDATION

While writing this, I have often tried to understand the intricate ways in which self-love is a chicken-and-egg problem. Self-love is an empowering tool resisting oppression, but at the same time oppression consists for a large part in denying self-love. I have come to understand it now as functioning much like the immune system. Ideally, we have immune systems that protect us from disease. But under certain circumstances, say a lack of sleep due to exhausting work hours, the immune system falters. Once immunity is low, one becomes more vulnerable for diseases. The antidote to resist disease is, clearly, to strengthen one’s immune system. But the crux of this analogy is that precisely when the immune system is low, it is hard to work on strengthening it. Though we wish upon the sick person that they regain their strong immune system, we equally know that the circumstances for the sick person need to change for her to get better: she needs to rest, work shorter hours, feed herself well, and so on. If none of her circumstances change, she may well never rebuild her immune system. I am of course not implying that those lacking the opportunity to come to self-love are sick in any way, or are helpless beings that need to be ‘saved’. What I am trying to say with the analogy is that we cannot wish for self-love and at the same time not take into consideration the role of

circumstantial factors in whether one can or cannot come to love oneself, just like we cannot simply wish for a strong immune system without taking into account that perhaps long hours at work have contributed to the lowering of it.

In analogy with the previous chapters this is usually the part where I formulate some tentative recommendations. But looking back on this final chapter, the account of self-love painted here is in itself a recommendation. I have argued that we should move from an understanding of self-love as self-indulgence or self-adoration towards self-love as really looking at the self, analogous to the way we look at our loved ones. Self-love need in this understanding not be uncritical or self-centered. On the contrary, it is part of self-love that it enables us to see ourselves in relation to others, and take our normative context seriously in ways that require working on the self as well. Such an understanding of self-love can be conducive to social progress and to a better understanding of current injustices. Self-love should extend well beyond the marketization of self-care in the form of scented candles or expensive healthy detox juices. In fact, we can understand this marketization as an inhibitor of self-love as I have depicted it here rather than a propellor of it: the idea that self-love can only be practiced in one way (by buying the right candle, for instance) encourages us again to hold on to a fantasy of ourselves, thinking that if only we could buy the recommended self-care props we would be whole and accomplished, and precisely what we need to be.

The account of self-love presented here encourages us to seek the extension of ourselves not elsewhere – in other people or in what we can buy. What can be done to encourage such self-love is most evidently to allow and encourage, as Nussbaum also argued, vulnerability in the self. We should make sure that no one is discouraged from really looking at the self either because they are inhibited from doing so, or because they choose not to at the cost of others. Continued conversations about the space we take in relation to others is important for these purposes. As a society, we can pay attention to the paths of life we present to one another as true possibilities, implicitly or explicitly, and make sure these paths are not disproportionately narrow for some, or closed without good reason.

Finally, we need to understand that self-love is not a magic tool that will inevitably lead to social justice. Many of the injustices we face to-

day, from the climate breakdown to racism, are incentivized to a large extent by economic motivations. Analyzing such problems in terms of self-love, it might be argued, can divert the attention from the true harmful actors: institutions, systems, or companies that instantiate injustices for economic benefits. If self-love is encouraged one-sidedly, as a tool for empowerment, then it presents a faulty image of responsibility and condemns victims of injustices to an isolated futile struggle to solve their own problems, rather than being able to condemn the larger structures that underlie them. But self-love as understood here should precisely not be encouraged one-sidedly in those who are currently discouraged from it. Self-love is also importantly due for those who live comfortably with fantasies. Self-love requires us to look at circumstances and social structures, the intersections of social issues, our place within them, and the normative demands our context makes on us. Self-love compels us to search for and take our responsibility, as well as admit in honesty that there are things that we cannot do alone.





# Pride: a skewed distribution?

## Conclusion

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Pride is warranted by at least three attitudes and their constitutive beliefs about the self: self-esteem, self-respect, and self-love. It is logical for pride to come about, though not necessitated nor all-things-considered appropriate per se, when a person has one of these three attitudes. In its different forms, pride requires from us as moral evaluators that we take into account the specific moral grammar of each of these warranting attitudes. The first task at hand in evaluating pride is therefore one of taxonomy: what is the kind of pride that we have in front of us really responding to? This in itself can be complicated, for pride does not always clearly tell us what it responds to. We saw that self-esteem pride can for instance sometimes present itself as self-respect pride, and can even legitimately feel as such for the proud person. A proud person can erroneously be convinced that she can lay claim to what should be freely given, mistaking the logic of respect for that of esteem. We saw how self-respect pride and self-love pride work in tandem, though they have quite a different departure point. In short, self-esteem pride is warranted by the belief in personal and local excellence or achievement. Self-respect pride is warranted by the conviction that one is, on the ground of being a person, deserving of equal treatment, including non-humiliation and being granted certain rights. Self-love pride, lastly, sprouts from the interest in exploring the way that *your* particular personhood takes shape, while suspending judgment about whether it is a particularly praiseworthy way.

Though pride in its three forms, and the erroneous conflation of them, can take on gravely harmful forms that nourish inequality and undermine solidarity, we should not wish the emotion of pride away entirely. On the contrary, pride has been presented here as a valuable emotion for

both personal well-being and living out flourishing lives, as well as for political empowerment and social progress. Pride's value can in particular be noted when we look at what happens when pride is thwarted, penalized, or simply absent. The absence of pride, and especially of its underlying beliefs, is often a real loss. When we look at people who are discouraged from taking pride, we can notice a pattern. The impediments to pride are not, as it appeared throughout the thesis, randomly distributed, but rather trace the very same lines as do other social injustices, to the disadvantage of marginalized groups. We saw, for instance, how Marsha P. Johnson, as many other Black trans women, paid for her self-love pride with her life. In the chapter on self-respect, we saw how Black youth might internalize ideas of worthlessness and are thus hindered in feeling self-respect pride.

#### THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

As a concluding remark, I want to consider one other way in which pride (and therefore also its added value to a life) is discouraged more in some than in others. In the example of Marsha P. Johnson or the Black school boy convinced he is "nothing", pride is penalized or discouraged for its content: the hostility is aimed at the trans features of Marsha P. Johnson, and the Black boy learns not to read his Blackness as a worthy property. But we should also consider whether there is something about the logic of pride, an emotion characterized by focus on, and appreciation of, the self which often involves taking space, that penalizes some more than others for embodying it. We might think that pride is evaluated differently by the beholder depending on who is expressing it. Further research into pride should take such an option into account, and in these concluding remarks I give some contours as to why this perspective might be relevant in the case of pride. To develop a full-fledged theory about the perception of pride, we need psychological and sociological studies to determine whether we do indeed appreciate pride more in some, and react more hostile to others, even if their expressions are similar. But I think even with the current philosophical scholarship about emotions and marginalized groups, we have reasons aplenty to ask these questions, and to seriously consider them as a factor in evaluating pride.

Soraya Chemaly has thematized how our social context comes with

forms of emotion distribution (Chemaly 2018). She shows that the way we respond to feelings in others, and the way we evaluate them, is deeply embedded in the way that our culture distributes emotion in relation to status and identity. To give one straightforward example: a boy sobbing while watching a romantic movie can expect to be mocked more than if a girl were to sob at the same scene. The governing social expectation for the boy is that he does not cry or get emotional at romantic scenes, but rather remains stoic and untouched. Chemaly explains how the roles that govern our social identity play a significant role in shaping which emotions we can express freely without penalization, and which come at a social cost. These mechanisms might lead one to choose in favor of oppressing a given emotion, or transferring it to other behaviors. The boy at the movies, for example, has several implicit options. He either cries and suffers the mockery. Or he feels sad but holds back his tears, keeping his feelings bottled up. Or, alternatively, he finds other ways of expressing an emotion he has never really been able to develop, like smacking his friend, or giggling nervously.

Chemaly takes on specifically the case of anger, and thereby follows in the footsteps of feminist scholars like Marilyn Frye (1983) and Audre Lorde (1984) arguing that anger is typically presented as a masculine emotion. What follows from the association of masculinity and anger, as Chemaly describes, is that girls from a young age adapt to expectations and learn to either suppress or transform their anger into other forms, notably into sadness. If women express anger nonetheless, their rage is treated significantly different from that of their male counterparts. A similar difference in response applies to the anger of Black men, she argues. “In the United States, anger in white men is often portrayed as justifiable and patriotic, but in black men, as criminality; and in black women, as threat. In the Western world, which this book focuses on, anger in women has been widely associated with “madness,”” Chemaly writes (2018, xiv). Audre Lorde has written beautifully about the ways a Black woman’s anger is disproportionately dismissed as harsh, disruptive, and unproductive (1984, 127, 131).

Might it be the case that we do not only evaluate these emotions differently, but actually perceive them differently to begin with? Kate Manne argues, specifically in her argument for the case of gender, that the focus

on double standards alone in accounting for the hostility women receive is too narrow to capture all that is at play (2017, 269). The assumption of double standards is that we observe behavior as neutral first, and evaluate it with different standards second. But Manne points to evidence suggesting that this assumption of a neutral observation is not self-evident. Indeed, it seems plausible that we might perceive similar actions or behaviors differently from the start, varying depending on the perceived identity of the agent.

It has long been established that the same action can look different depending on who performs it. Preceding Manne's argument, many existing studies give us reason to assume that we do indeed operate with something like a "split perception", as Manne calls it (269). In her work on reasonableness and how we change our minds, Eleanor Gordon Smith points to some of these studies (2019, 50). One experiment showed that when women occupy exactly half of the airtime in a classroom or a panel discussion, they are perceived as unfairly having taken up more than half, or even as dominating the airspace (Cutler and Scott 1990). Another study concluded that men are perceived as showing more "expertise" when reading out loud the exact same weather forecast as their female counterparts (Brann and Himes 2010). That this split perception is not only gendered, but also for instance racialized, becomes clear in yet another famous experiment first conducted by the American hidden-camera show *What Would You Do*, but replicated many times over in different forms after that (Bergman 2016, Sloan 2011). When two men, one Black or brown and one white, fiddle at a locked bike and try to cut the lock, one is perceived as a thief and the other as a bike owner who must have lost his keys. In these or similar experiments, onlookers stop and ask for an explanation from the Black man, they call the police or take pictures as if documenting a crime scene. The white man is either unnoticed, or even assisted and offered help with the bolt cutter. Another famous experiment, known as *The Police Officer's Dilemma*, asked participants to engage in a first-person computer game in which they had to decide whether or not to shoot the fictive character on the screen (Correll et al. 2002). The on-screen character was sometimes carrying a harmless object like a cellphone, and in other cases a gun. The experiment is famous for corroborating the existence of "shooter bias", confirming that Black unarmed men are more likely to be shot in

police encounters than unarmed white men. What it also suggests, however, is that participants actually perceived the undefined object differently depending on the ethnicity of the character. Participants were more likely to perceive an undefined object as a gun in the hands of a Black man, and as a cellphone or otherwise harmless object in the hands of a white man.

Kate Manne adds to this list of studies another experiment indicating split perception, in which women's behavior was perceived as being riskier than the exact same behavior performed by a man (Thomas, Stanford, and Sarnecka 2016, Manne 2017, 269). The experiment subjects were asked to assess the degree of risk a parent exposed their child to when leaving their young child home alone. All else being equal, the moms were perceived as having endangered their child more than the dads. The split perception offers a good explanation of other everyday experiences of women as well, Manne goes on to show. It might explain the unilateral visceral reactions to women in power as opposed to men in power, which she labels as a traditionally masculine position. Women aspiring for these positions are called nasty, fake, and believed to be 'up to something', even if we have more reason to critique their male opponents, Manne shows with the example of Hilary Clinton. What Manne wants to show is that we do not merely hold women, in her case, to different standards, expecting them to meet higher demands than men to be evaluated positively, but rather that we perceive the very same acts differently from the start. On Manne's account, women are evaluated negatively in these contexts not because they are held to different standards, but because their behavior is from the start perceived differently than the very same behavior from men. Even if we then apply the same standard for both genders, she has likely already lost.

More evidence for the phenomenon of split perception can be found in Chemaly's work on anger. According to one of the key experiments for her thesis, we do not only evaluate anger differently depending on gender perception, but actually ascribe different emotions to the very same expressions in infants depending on which biological sex we believe them to have. In a 1976 experiment, researchers masked a babies' gender and then asked adults to describe what they observed. The result was striking. "Adults 'saw' different emotional states depending on whether they thought the baby was a boy or a girl. A fussy boy, for example, was

considered irritable and angry, whereas a fussy girl was more likely to be described as fearful or sad” (Chemaly 2018, 4). Chemaly extends her analysis to racialized perceptions of anger as well, and its intersections with gender, illustrated by the treatment of Serena Williams’ anger at an umpire while calling him out for treating her more harshly than men. The Black tennis player’s anger was called a ‘tirade’ on news outlets, she was dismissed as being a poor loser, and received the highest ever fine for ‘verbal abuse’ in the history of the U.S. open (Chemaly 2019). It was noted afterwards that many male champions, mostly white, had not been sanctioned to the same extent, or had even been glorified as ‘bad boys’ and rewarded with magazine-covers while using language much more profane than Williams’.

#### SPLIT PERCEPTION OF PRIDE

If such a split perception exists demonstrably for behaviors like taking traditionally white masculine goods such as power and status, as Manne contends, and for asserting one’s anger and being loud about a perceived injustice, as Chemaly shows, it seems almost unlikely that pride escapes this split perception. As an emotion of *taking*, and not rarely a loud response to perceived injustices, pride is perhaps the ultimate culmination of what Chemaly and Manne describe. The proud person claims space, rights, entitlements, sometimes attention, prestige, or status. The focus of pride is the self, even if some forms of pride are conducive to paying due attention to others, as discussed in the previous chapter. Pride is self-asserting and makes demands on the world, as does anger. In her give/take model, Manne predicts that women are not expected to take in these ways (2017, 129-132). Women are expected to give and care for others, and to live their lives always in relationality with others. Pride as expressed by a woman, perhaps more than any other emotion, inverts these expectations.

Chemaly also expresses how female entitlement is often actively discouraged by teaching girls to be accommodating, likeable, and not too demanding. “We are so busy teaching girls to be likeable that we often forget to teach them, as we do boys, that they should be respected” she writes (Chemaly 2018, 8). For Chemaly, this idea that women should not *take*, to put it in Manne’s terms, is reflected in their convoluted relationship with anger. Women, she writes, are taught that their anger “will be an im-

position on others, making us irksome and unlikeable. That it will alienate our loved ones or put off people we want to attract. That it will twist our faces, make us ugly (...) As girls, we are not taught to acknowledge or manage our anger so much as fear, ignore, hide, and transform it” (xvi). Anger, as a response to a perceived injustice, can react to infringements of respect. It thus takes a sense of self and what one is owed to be angry in the first place. As I have proposed in chapter three, pride as warranted by self-respect reflects the same sentiment, and might therefore even be said to precede anger. Self-respect pride springs from the idea that the self is not treated properly as any person is due, and it is especially awakened by injustices. It seems plausible to me, based on the accounts by Manne and Chemaly, that there is something about the logic of pride that makes us expect, accept and encourage it in some, and experience it as disruptive, arrogant, and undue in others.

In 2010, the Belgian political journalist Linda De Win competed in the popular game show *De Slimste Mens Ter Wereld* (The World’s Smartest Person). The show’s premise is simple: local celebrities complete rounds of quizzes against each other, and whoever wins remains seated for next day’s episode. Linda De Win won 11 times in a row, establishing the record at the time, and won the season finale. But her winning record is not what went down in Belgian collective memory. De Win was dubbed the show’s ‘most controversial player’ and received death threats online (Dumon 2010). Fans of the show found her annoying, merciless, and too competitive. De Win did indeed demonstrate her ambition to win clearly, but so did many of the male contestants. De Win’s competitive behavior was seen as cold, humorless and harsh. In response to one episode in particular, when she moved closer to the screen to read the questions and pointed out to the producers that the letters were too small for her due to eye problems, she was called annoying and a poor loser.

De Win could be said to express self-esteem pride: wanting to win or achieve highly can, as we saw in chapter 1, be driven by a desire for pride. Self-esteem pride might be (one of) De Win’s motivators, but functioning more clearly as a case of pride were the typical expressions associated with pride in her response to a win. When De Win celebrated a right answer by clenching a fist, for instance, she was called a bad sport. Yet viewers did not think twice about male competitors who often responded similarly to



a win. De Win faced a dilemma that, all else being equal, the men in her place did not face: either respond with pride (where it might indeed be apt to do so) and suffer the social punishment of being judged unlikeable, or refrain from responding with pride, and pick the social rewards of being the likeable and non-threatening underdog who won more by accident than because she really wanted it. More than her male counterpart, De Win had to negotiate between her arguably apt emotional response, and her desire to maintain a life without the animosity of a large chunk of the Belgian audience.

#### WHO GETS TO BE PROUD?

Amia Srinivasan calls the specific burden of strategic emotion regulation that often falls on members of marginalized groups “affective injustice” (2018), and describes this as “the injustice of having to negotiate between one’s apt emotional response to the injustice of one’s situation and one’s desire to better one’s situation” (135). De Win wasn’t responding to an injustice done to her by expressing pride, so perhaps her example might not map onto Srinivasan’s concept entirely. But another set of examples might shed light on why we should at least consider the topic of affective injustice when thinking about the moral evaluation of pride. In the Netherlands and in Belgium, in recent years there has been an increase in protest about a blackface figure appearing annually as the help of Sinterklaas, a Dutch folklore saint comparable to Santa Claus. The early-day activist group Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP) argues that this tradition is humiliating and fosters the discrimination of Black people in the Netherlands and Belgium by maintaining racial stereotypes. The protest against humiliating treatment presupposes the realization that one is worthy of respect on the basis of the fact that one is a person, which I have called the warranting attitude for self-respect pride. Self-love pride might also play a role in the protests against Zwarte Piet (Black Pete), as the protest departs from the idea that Black people struggle, in part because of racist traditions like these, to take pride in their particular traits. Jerry Afriye, a spokesperson and founder of KOZP, recounts his intentions behind the protests in an interview: “I was trying to do my part to put some pride into these young

black girls and boys, be proud of who you are, because we have seen many examples of children coming home and jumping in the shower trying to wash their skin off because the children at school are teasing them that they are ugly, that they are dirty (...) One girl recently was asking why can other kids get clean but I can't? Why is my dirtiness permanent? And she was referring to her skin" (Swaab, Carleton, and Garen 2019).

The protests of KOZP have been met with great resistance. Especially in the early days, the peaceful protests often derailed as police violently handled the – then still mostly Black – protestors (Bergman 2020). Jerry Afriye lost his job after a police officer physically harassed him, and subsequently filed a complaint against Afriye (Duin 2020). Violent counter protestors often show up at the demonstrations, and welcome anti-Black Pete protestors with slurs, violence, and spitting (Swaab, Carleton, and Garen 2019). Elvin Riggers, another foreman of the anti-Black Pete demonstrations, describes in a recent documentary about activism in the Netherlands that he fears for his livelihood every time he leaves for a protest (Bergman 2020). In 2019, the annual national convention of KOZP was violently disturbed by counter protestors breaking the glass of nearby cars and buildings (Hielkema 2019). Though the voices of KOZP are slowly but surely getting a seat at the table (in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020 representatives of KOZP were invited to speak with the prime minister about the issue of race in the Netherlands) and the Black Pete tradition is on its way out in most of the Dutch large cities, their protest has been and still is met with overwhelming hostility and violence by counter movements and by the police force alike.

In the meantime, another story about pride made headlines in the U.S. In the same wake of the BLM protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd, a group of counter protestors readied themselves to protect the nation against the demonstrations. This militant group, loosely related under the banner of 'the Proud boys', have since then repeatedly shown up heavily armed to oppose and repress BLM protests (Belam and Gabbatt 2020). One incident in particular received media attention when the 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse shot two protestors in Kenosha, Washington. The teenager, who took it upon himself to "protect" the businesses in town, was able to walk away from the scene even though bystanders yelled that he had shot people. In a filmed interaction, police officers

thank Rittenhouse for being at the scene, and offer him water (Litke 2020). The particular scrutiny the treatment of Rittenhouse received in several media outlets had to do with the comparison to how Black protestors were treated, and to how George Floyd himself was handled by the police. The interaction was called out as symptomatic of a system where Black protest is struck down, while white shooters are thanked and hydrated. That the president refused to condemn the armed militias like the Proud Boys in a presidential debate several months later, and was rather instructing them to “stand back and stand by” (NBC 2020), was read to confirm this differential treatment even in the highest political ranks. When Trump supporters, among whom significant numbers identified as Proud Boys (Carroll, 2021), stormed and broke into the Capitol in January 2021, they sat triumphantly at the desks of representatives, and walked away with the speaker’s lectern. Analysts were quick to remember the large numbers of police present at BLM protests at the same scene some months earlier, and pointed out that Black people would not even have made it to the stairs (Borger, 2021).

We have looked in this thesis to the question for whom it is appropriate, and in what contexts, to be proud. Theoretically, as we did with Breivik, we now have some helpful tools to condemn the sentiment behind far-right militants like the Proud Boys as well. But as long as theoretical condemnation does not translate into real consequences, the theory remains in vain. We need to scrutinize our responses to pride, and wonder not only who gets to be proud in the normative sense, but also in the factual sense. That means considering both who gets to express their pride publicly, and for whom the very experience of pride is accessible at all. Salient norms and expected responses to a given emotion do not only significantly shape the expression of an emotion, but also affect the experience of the emotion itself, as has been argued by Chemaly, but also for instance by Alison Jaggar (1989) and Sara Ahmed (2004). For these reasons it is crucial to ask: who do we allow their pride? Even if something like white pride or straight pride makes the average liberal progressive cringe, we need to be willing to ask whether the theoretical rejection translates into material and affective consequences.

If anything became clear from disentangling the complexities of pride, it is that pride cannot be evaluated in a vacuum. Philosophers who

look for objective criteria to evaluate pride *in abstracto* overlook the ways in which the moral evaluation of pride hinges on who the proud person is, and how they relate to others. When pride relates to self-esteem, an important pitfall is the failure of the proud person to recognize the demands and sensitivities of the context she is in, which might result in taking pride in ways that are inconsiderate and hurtful. When pride relates to self-respect, we need to understand the social position the proud person inhabits, and with that knowledge scrutinize their claim to respect. If a person is not significantly disrespected, her claim might inflate and harm legitimate claims to self-respect pride. Furthermore, the factual context of the proud person sheds light on whether she is in fact disrespected, regardless of whether she *feels* she is. Knowledge of a person's social embeddedness helps understand a pride claim as either one for equality or superiority. Lastly, as a tool for empowerment pride as self-love can only exist if no one is socially prevented from cultivating it. Throughout the chapters we saw increasingly that often historically marginalized social groups struggle to take pride. In the conclusion I explored how social expectations might be one of the mechanisms contributing to this skewed distribution of pride. This comes at a moral cost, because as we saw throughout the thesis, pride might indeed contribute greatly to living flourishing lives and overcoming oppression.

The hypothesis that pride is socially punished more in some than in others, and that this has to do with the internal logic of pride as an assertive emotion, needs to be further corroborated by empirical studies. But it is not a consideration that we can easily dismiss, as becomes clear from the handful of examples and scholarship that we do have at hand. I have explored the theoretical tools to scrutinize pride, by distinguishing three attitudes underlying the emotion, each with their corresponding moral grammar. Pride is, in some forms and in some contexts, a particular important ally to social justice. The question, and the task at hand, is now: do we follow through on the theory in real life?

The discrepancy between for whom it is appropriate to be proud in theory and who is allowed their pride in practice is not coincidental, but rather fundamental to the logic of pride. Pride as a tool of empowerment is precisely valuable and justified when the space to take that pride cannot be taken for granted. This is especially the case for self-respect pride as a

core emotion of social protest. In a sense, when animosity to one's pride stops, pride itself becomes redundant, because pride exactly responds to the lack of recognition embodied in this animosity. Again, pride presents us with a sort of tragedy: it is an emotion most valuable to those who encounter obstructions in experiencing and expressing it, and these obstructions are sometimes precisely what renders pride justified. The goal of such pride is thus not to have more of it, but to eventually eradicate the need for it entirely.





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#### CHAPTER 4: A PARTICULAR LOVE

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#### PRIDE. A SKEWED DISTRIBUTION? CONCLUSION.

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# English summary

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The main argument of this thesis is that pride can be understood as an umbrella emotion warranted by three different attitudes: self-esteem, self-respect, and self-love. This conceptual framework offers novel insights into the moral perks and perils of pride. Ultimately, the thesis aims to understand and evaluate some of the most blatant examples of pride in contemporary society, and shed light on its political implications.

In chapter one, I discuss some historic and contemporary philosophical accounts of pride. I distinguish between descriptive accounts of pride and the normative evaluation of pride, and between fittingness of pride and all-things-considered appropriateness of pride. I go on to argue that pride can be warranted by three different attitudes. Each of these have a different moral grammar, and respective standards of moral scrutiny apply. One of the problems with pride occurs when we fail to distinguish the different attitudes that pride can reveal, but rather conflate and confuse their specific logic.

Chapter two focuses on self-esteem pride. Pride in its paradigm form is often the kind of pride warranted by self-esteem: winning a competition, developing a skill, or achieving something are all examples of positively esteeming the self. I discuss this form of pride as a valuable form of motivation, though one that comes with important disclaimers. I present a fundamental objection to pride as a moral motivator, and argue that self-esteem pride can be read as a second-best motivator if true, intrinsic moral motivation is absent. I paint six pitfalls of self-esteem pride, and end the chapter with some recommendations to prevent or mitigate these pitfalls.

Chapter three centers on the notion of self-respect pride. I present self-respect as the valuable idea that one is deserving of treatment appro-

priate to one's personhood. This treatment includes but is not restricted to non-humiliation and being granted basic rights. I distinguish the logic of self-respect from that of self-esteem by arguing that whereas self-esteem is governed by ideas of ranking and hierarchy, self-respect is characterized by ideas of equality. Inherent to respect is furthermore the notion of entitlement, whereas self-esteem is not something we can claim. A major issue with pride is the conflation of these two attitudes: the hierarchical logic of (self-)esteem is wrongfully applied to the egalitarian attitude of (self-)respect, leading to harmful claims of superiority under the banner of equality.

In chapter four, I draw on the philosophy of Iris Murdoch to develop an account of self-love as really looking at the self. I debunk the common ideas that self-love makes us uncritical and unable to look outside of the self. Instead, I show that self-love precisely requires us to look at the self critically, and is conducive to loving others. I argue that self-love implies that we see past the fantasies we have of ourselves and try to see the self for what it really is, embedded in a normative context. Such self-love can debunk both images of the self as grand and almighty as well as images of the self as small and unworthy, and presents itself in this way as a fundamental ally to social progress.

In the conclusion, finally, I consider whether pride presents us with a case of affective injustice. I suggest that pride is discouraged and punished in some harsher than in others, simply due to its logic of taking and claiming space. The conceptual framework of the three main chapters of this thesis are helpful to determine who gets to be proud in the normative sense: who deserves, all-things-considered, to be proud, and for whom is it good to be proud? In the final pages of this thesis, I suggest that we should consider who gets to be proud in the factual sense as well. Who is allowed, even encouraged, to be proud, and who suffers social reprimands for it? I conclude that pride as a tool of empowerment is often precisely valuable and justified when the space to take that pride cannot be taken for granted, and that therefore the end goal should not be to have more pride, but rather to eradicate the need for it entirely.

# Nederlandse samenvatting

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Centraal in deze thesis staat het idee dat trots een paraplu-emotie is die door drie verschillende houdingen gewaarborgd wordt: zelfwaardering, zelfrespect, en zelfliefde. Dit conceptuele raamwerk biedt nieuwe inzichten in de morele waarde en gevaren van trots. Deze thesis werpt licht op enkele van de meest pregnante voorbeelden van trots in onze samenleving, en duidt hun politieke implicaties.

In hoofdstuk één bespreek ik enkele historische en hedendaagse filosofische opvattingen over trots. Ik onderscheid descriptieve van normatieve theorieën over trots, en beschrijf dat emoties die passend zijn toch alles-in-overweging-genomen ongepast kunnen zijn. Vervolgens beargumenteer ik dat trots door drie verschillende houdingen gewaarborgd kan worden. Elk van deze houdingen heeft een eigen morele grammatica met respectievelijke morele vereisten. Een van de problemen met trots stelt zich wanneer we geen onderscheid maken tussen deze drie houdingen, maar in plaats daarvan hun specifieke logica verwarren en vermengen.

Hoofdstuk twee gaat over trots als zelfwaardering. Trots in haar meest paradigmatische vormen is vaak gelegitimeerd door zelfwaardering: een wedstrijd winnen, een kunde beheersen, of iets bereiken zijn voorbeelden van positieve waardering van het zelf. Ik bespreek deze vorm van trots als een waardevolle vorm van motivatie, als we tenminste enkele belangrijke overwegingen in acht nemen. Ik overweeg een fundamenteel bezwaar tegen trots als morele motivatie en breng daar tegenin dat trots een tweede-beste motivator kan zijn als intrinsieke morele motivatie afwezig is. Ik schets zes valkuilen voor trots als zelfwaardering en eindig het hoofdstuk met enkele aanbevelingen om deze te voorkomen of op te vangen.

In hoofdstuk drie staat trots als zelfrespect centraal. Ik begrijp zelfre-

spect als het waardevolle idee dat iemand een bepaalde behandeling verdient die in verhouding staat met het feit dat zij een persoon is, zoals het toekennen van basisrechten en bescherming tegen vernedering. Ik onderscheid zelfrespect van zelfwaardering door te stellen dat zelfwaardering doordrongen is van een hiërarchische logica en een logica van verschil, terwijl bij zelfrespect net gelijkheid centraal staat. Het is bovendien inherent aan respect dat men er recht op heeft, terwijl waardering precies niet iets is dat men kan claimen. Een grote valkuil bij trots is de vermenging van deze twee houdingen: de hiërarchische logica van (zelf)waardering wordt al te vaak verkeerdelijk op de egalitaire houding van (zelf)respect toegepast. Die verwarring leidt tot schadelijke superioriteitsclaims onder de vlag van gelijkheid.

In hoofdstuk vier werk ik aan de hand van de filosofie van Iris Murdoch een concept van zelfliefde uit als het echt kijken naar jezelf. Ik weerleg het gangbare idee dat zelfliefde ons onkritisch maakt en ons verhindert om onszelf te overstijgen. In plaats daarvan verdedig ik dat zelfliefde ons net vraagt om kritisch naar onszelf te kijken, en ook bijdraagt aan oprechte liefde voor de dingen buiten onszelf. Zelfliefde houdt in dat we de fantasieën die we over onszelf hebben doorprikken en onszelf zien zoals we echt zijn, ingebed in een normatieve context. Zulke zelfliefde kan beelden van het zelf als groot en almachtig ontkrachten, maar ook ideeën over het zelf als klein en onwaardig. Op die manier is zelfliefde een fundamentele bondgenoot voor sociale vooruitgang.

In de conclusie overweeg ik tenslotte of er bij trots sprake is van affectief onrecht. Ik suggereer dat trots voor sommigen sterker ontmoedigd en bestraft wordt dan voor anderen, enkel en alleen door de interne logica van trots als een nemende en assertieve emotie. Het conceptueel raamwerk uit de drie centrale hoofdstukken van deze thesis helpt ons om na te denken over wie er trots mag zijn in de normatieve zin: wie verdient het, alles in overweging genomen, om trots te zijn, en voor wie is het goed om trots te zijn? In de laatste pagina's van deze thesis stel ik dat we ook moeten kijken naar wie er in de feiten trots mag zijn. Aan wie wordt het toegestaan, of zelfs aangemoedigd, om trots te zijn, en wie wordt er sociaal voor afgestraft? Ik concludeer dat trots als een middel voor empowerment vaak net waardevol en legitiem is bij hen voor wie het niet vanzelfsprekend is om de ruimte in te nemen om trots te zijn. Om die reden is het einddoel

niet om trotser te zijn of meer trots te hebben, maar wel om de nood aan trots zelf overbodig te maken.





