

Intellectual Autonomy and Its Vices

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Abstract: This chapter argues for three related points. First, answerability is the key to intellectual autonomy. However, in order to enjoy that status that befits an intellectually autonomous subject, other epistemic subjects must also recognize that one is answerable for one's believing. Second, systemic conditions of social oppression impede recognition since they promote situations in which members of oppressed groups are disabled in their attempts to make themselves answerable for their believing. Third, these oppressive conditions foster the development of the epistemic vices of hyper-autonomy in privileged individuals and of heteronomy in those who are subordinated.

In this chapter, I carve out a notion of intellectual or epistemic autonomy that stands in opposition to two families of intellectual vices of hyper-autonomy and heteronomy of the intellect. I suggest that answerability as a form of responsibility for one's beliefs is key to intellectual autonomy. Answerability provides the means to flesh out the idea that to exercise intellectual autonomy is to have one's own reasons for one's beliefs.¹ However, the epistemic value of intellectual autonomy so understood is not transparent, since a person can believe something autonomously and yet that belief be shoddily arrived at or based on poor evidence. The same worry about the epistemic value of intellectual autonomy can be raised for other dominant accounts of this notion. For instance, an agent can be self-reliant in her believing and at the same time be careless. The view that epistemic autonomy consists in the harmonization of one's attitudes faces the same problem since one can

¹ The idea that the reasons for one's belief are one's own is ambiguous. Each conception of autonomous belief provides its own different disambiguation of this core idea.

harmonize one's beliefs away from the truth. In addition, there is no guarantee that psychological harmony tracks or reflects logical or probabilistic consistency. So, it would seem at best moot whether there is any value in the notion of intellectual autonomy that is not wholly subsumed into the practical value of the notion of personal autonomy.

I answer this worry by proposing that the epistemic value of intellectual autonomy is, counterintuitively, as a necessary condition for an agent to qualify for the role of informant; that is, as someone who is able to convey information by means of testimony. However, to perform this epistemic role, it is not sufficient that agents are answerable for at least some of their beliefs because their reasons for these are their own, agents must also be recognized by other agents as being answerable. Hence, although it is possible to be intellectually autonomous without being recognized as such, without recognition intellectual autonomy loses its epistemic value (but not its practical value). In sum, intellectual autonomy that is worth having epistemically has others' recognition as one of its pre-conditions.

The chapter consists of four sections. The first argues that intellectually autonomous belief is belief for which the agent is answerable. The second section demonstrates that the epistemic point of distinguishing agents who are intellectually autonomous from those who are not is that only the former are fit to offer testimony. That is, intellectual autonomy is epistemically valuable because it marks out those who can invite others' trust and thus convey information to them. Since one can invite trust only if one's authority to issue invitations is recognized, the value of autonomy partly depends on others' recognition that one is answerable. The third section analyses how failures of recognition can undermine intellectual autonomy by effectively turning informants into mere sources of information. The final section explores the causal influences of structural oppressive relations on people's psychologies contributing to the genesis of intellectual vices of arrogance and vain narcissism as irresponsible hyper-autonomy and of servility and timidity as intellectual heteronomy.

1. Intellectual Autonomy as Answerability

In this section I argue that intellectual autonomy consists in the proper exercise of one's epistemic agency understood as the ability to responsibly form, revise, and sustain one's beliefs in the light of one's own reasons. I contrast this view with two other existent accounts of intellectual autonomy. The first equates autonomy with self-reliance (Fricker, 2006). The second identifies autonomy with rational self-governance by means of conscientious reflection about one's beliefs (Zagzebski, 2012).

The person who is intellectually autonomous is the person who can make up her own mind as to what she believes. Her views and opinions are her own because they are based on reasons that are also her own.² One could initially frame these thoughts in terms of non-interference. The autonomous person does not suffer from undue interference from external sources of information such as media outlets or other epistemic agents. She is also not subject to the interference of internal non-rational forces such as desires, wishes, or impulses. The account of intellectual autonomy as self-reliance is designed to screen off external influences. The view that autonomy is rational self-governance is especially suited to neutralize the influence of internal conative and affective forces on belief formation.³

Accounts of intellectual autonomy as absence of interference, despite their initial appeal, are defenseless against the thought that interference is always present in human cognition. Complete self-reliance would be stultifying for human beings who are interested in acquiring knowledge or at least true belief. Much of what we learn, we learn from other people. Thus, either not all outside influence undermines autonomy or autonomy is not something to which we should always aspire in the intellectual domain. Either way we need to distinguish good from bad external influences. I suspect, however, that it would prove exceedingly hard to formulate a principled demarcation in the vocabulary of self-reliance.⁴

Similarly, human reasoning is always or nearly always affected by emotional responses. Epistemic feelings and emotions such as doubt, certainty, anxiety, and curiosity have been clearly shown to have widespread influence on human cognitive processing (Dokic, 2012;

² These reasons include reasons to trust the testimony of some others. Her reasons to believe some testifiers (but not others) are her own in the sense that they reflect the quality of her judgment about whom to trust.

³ So understood, autonomy is a matter of degrees and inversely proportional to the influence of external and non-rational influences. Thanks to Jon Matheson for stressing the point.

⁴ Such demarcation can be made in terms of those influences that promote knowledge or true belief and those that are obstacles to their acquisition and preservation. But autonomy as self-reliance would be orthogonal to these concerns. See Code (1991) for a different criticism of intellectual autonomy as self-reliance.

Hookway, 2008). There is robust empirical evidence that these feelings play an important and epistemically positive role in the self-governance of human cognition (Proust, 2013).⁵ Arguably, the effective self-management of belief is as much due to affective monitoring and control than it is to reflection. Therefore, either emotional influence on reasoning is not always autonomy undermining or intellectual autonomy itself is not something always to be pursued. Either way, there is no clear criterion based on the notion of reflection that demarcates affective influences that are compatible with autonomy or explains the circumstances in which autonomy is detrimental.

Be that as it may, it is possible to begin thinking of autonomy not primarily as the absence of interference on one's thinking of forces outside reason but in terms of epistemic responsibility. According to this view, an agent is intellectually autonomous if she is responsible for at least some of her beliefs. Relatedly, a belief is autonomously held by an agent if she is responsible for it. Autonomy so understood is not a virtue or a character trait. It is a property of those epistemic subjects whose beliefs at least sometimes are responsibly held and sustained.

This notion of epistemic responsibility is in turn fleshed out as answerability. That is, a person is epistemically responsible for one of her beliefs if and only if she is answerable for that belief.⁶ I borrow from Shoemaker (2015) this notion of answerability as a kind of responsibility. He argues that agents are responsible in the sense of being answerable for those actions and beliefs that are the expression of the quality of their judgment. More specifically, agents are answerable for those views and behaviors that they are capable of justifying by supplying reasons in their support and by considering whether their conduct and beliefs are better than some relevant alternatives. For example, a person who decides to set off for a sailing trip is answerable for her choice if she can assess whether it is a good idea to go sailing by considering reasons that support going but also reasons in favor of a different decision.

⁵ There is, however, disagreement as to whether these feelings and emotions are metacognitive states (Carruthers, 2017).

⁶ Responsibility for belief and other cognitive states is not limited to epistemic responsibility. It is only this latter that I identify with answerability as the key to intellectual autonomy. Thus, we might be morally responsible for cognitive biases even though we are not epistemically responsible for them.

Of course, the person who decides to go sailing, and sets off without consulting the weather forecast, is answerable for her poor decision making. She might not have good reasons for her decision, and she might have given no thought to the option of staying put.

Nevertheless, she is answerable, provided she can assess the situation by considering a variety of reasons in support of alternative choices. Importantly, in Shoemaker's view the ability to consider reasons for doing or believing something other than what one does or believes is essential to answerability. A person who can trot out reasons in favor of a belief or a course of action but is genuinely unable to entertain alternatives is not answerable for her attitudes and activities. In his opinion, such a person might be a psychopath. Her actions exhibit a lack of judgment, rather than manifesting its poverty. It might be thought that the view of intellectual autonomy as answerability is a version of the capacity for rational self-governance model. In many ways this observation is correct since answerability is often said to require this capacity (Scanlon, 1998). However, the kind of rational self-governance presupposed by answerability is different from Linda Zagzebski's account in several respects. First, Zagzebski presupposes that self-governance requires the ability to critically examine one's attitudes by way of reflection. In her view, this ability partly consists in "making higher-order judgements about the components of the self that ought to change" (2012, p. 236). Instead, the ability to justify one's views and to compare them with alternative beliefs, which I take to be necessary for autonomy, does not require the capacity to reflect on one's beliefs. It is sufficient for answerability that one is responsive to both the reasons in favor of, and against, an attitude. It is enough that one can evaluate the evidence supporting one's opinion and the opposite point of view. Unlike Zagzebski's, the model of rational self-governance as answerability, does not require the presence of second-order beliefs about one's first order beliefs.

Second, in Zagzebski's account, rational self-governance is identified with minimizing cognitive dissonance. In her view, the conscientious agent surveys her attitudes and seeks to harmonize them, in the sense of reducing any felt psychological tension among them. Her account of reasons falls out of this structural view of rationality. Reasons, then, would be the considerations endorsed by the rational person. This is the person in whom cognitive dissonance has been dissolved. Yet, such person might engage in extensive wishful thinking if she has ended up harmonizing her beliefs to make them consistent with her desires

(Fricker, 2016, p. 163). The answerability model I advocate relies instead on a more substantial notion of reason as a consideration in favor of a belief, a choice, or a course of action.⁷

The model of intellectual autonomy as answerability is intuitively attractive because it offers a plausible articulation of the thought that the intellectually autonomous agent is the person whose beliefs are based on her own reasons. According to this view, to base one's beliefs on reasons that are one's own is to be answerable for those beliefs because one can evaluate the reasons for and against them. In short, to be autonomous is to be answerable for one's beliefs since these reflect the quality of one's judgment (or evaluative abilities).

Plausible notions of epistemic praiseworthiness and blameworthiness also fall out of this account as one would expect given that autonomy is necessary for epistemic responsibility. Epistemically praiseworthy belief is belief that is to the credit of the agent who is answerable for it. Similarly, epistemically blameworthy belief is belief to the demerit of the answerable agent. Both categories apply exclusively to beliefs that reflect the epistemic quality of the agent's judgment and thus are autonomously held. Blame is fitting only when the belief reflects fallacious inferences, neglect of available counter-evidence, culpably mistaken assessments of the probative qualities of one's evidence, and so forth. Praise is fitting only when the belief reflects an excellent use of the agent's evaluative abilities in ways that are intellectually virtuous (e.g., open-minded).⁸

Finally, the model's plausibility is strengthened by its ability to yield the intuitively correct answer in several hypothetical examples. For instance, on the one hand, the person who has been indoctrinated by a guru is not intellectually autonomous to the extent to which she has lost the ability to evaluate reasons against what her leader tells her to believe.

Indoctrination undermines the abilities required for answerability, so that the follower is no longer able to even entertain the possibility that the guru is not to be trusted. The follower might trot out reasons to endorse the guru's beliefs, but if she has really been indoctrinated, she is not answerable for her beliefs as she is not able to evaluate any alternatives.

⁷ For this chapter, I set aside difficult questions about epistemic reasons for belief and whether these concern exclusively evidence in favor of said belief.

⁸ There are many accounts of responsibilist intellectual virtues. I take no stand on this issue here as all accounts agree that people are worthy of praise when they believe virtuously.

On the other hand, the person who believes something on the mere saying so of another is autonomous in her believing if she is answerable for trusting the other's testimony. She is answerable when her trusting attitude reflects the quality of her judgment. Provided that this agent can consider reasons not to trust someone's testimony, her judgment to trust is her own. This pair of examples suggests that outside forces undermine autonomy only when they erode a person's ability to consider alternatives to her beliefs but are otherwise compatible with it.

It is now also possible to demarcate those internal influences that undermine intellectual autonomy from those that do not. An individual that, due to extreme tiredness, makes a reasoning mistake has been temporarily incapacitated in her evaluative abilities. Her mistake is not reflective of the quality of her judgment and this is why on this occasion her belief is not autonomously held. However, a person who trusts her intuition on some specific point could be exercising her autonomy and, in fact, her belief might even be praiseworthy if her intuitions reflect her expertise on the given subject matter.

To summarize, I have proposed that we think of intellectual autonomy as the possession of the capacities required for answerability. These are the abilities to evaluate the reasons for one's views but also for those opinions that one opposes. I have fleshed out this idea by saying that autonomously held beliefs are those that reflect the epistemic quality of the judgment of the believer. I have also added that epistemic blame and praise are fitting only when the agent is answerable for her belief.

2. Answerability and Recognition

In the previous section I have identified intellectual autonomy as a property of those subjects with the evaluative capacities required to provide reasons for their beliefs and consider alternatives to them. So understood, intellectual autonomy is not a relational property. Hence, were there to be a thinker who is completely deprived of any contact with other epistemic agents, that person might be autonomous in her believing. She would still be answerable to herself for her views.

In this section, I argue first that, although intellectual autonomy is not a positive epistemic status, it demarcates something that is of great epistemic importance since it identifies an essential property of those who are fit for the role of informants. Second, I show that, to perform this role, possession of the evaluative abilities that make one answerable for one's beliefs is not sufficient, one must also be recognized by other epistemic agents as a person whose reasons are her own. Absent this recognition, an epistemic agent cannot offer reasons on which others depend for their testimonial beliefs.

Intellectual autonomy is not itself the mark of a positive epistemic status since one can be autonomously unreliable, shoddy, and somewhat prejudiced. This is apparent when self-reliance is singled out as the mark of intellectual autonomy, since a person can be extremely bad at finding and evaluating evidence and counter-evidence for her beliefs whilst carrying out these activities without depending epistemically on any other agent. But this is also true in Zagzebski's model of autonomy as critical self-reflection. In her view, reflection requires doing conscientiously what we already do naturally. What we do naturally is seek to reduce felt psychological tension or cognitive dissonance. We perform the task conscientiously when, animated by the desire for truth, we use our faculties as well as we can (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 55). But now suppose that felt psychological tension is not a good indicator of contradiction or of probabilistic inconsistencies. The careful use of our faculties to achieve harmony among our attitudes could lead us to form beliefs that are based on fallacious reasoning, if the agent experiences some consistent beliefs as dissonant or some inconsistent ones as harmonious.⁹ The conception of intellectual autonomy as answerability is no different in this regard. The individual who is answerable for her beliefs has reasons that reflect the quality of her judgment, but this can be very poor indeed.

It might be argued that even if intellectual autonomy is not sufficient to confer any positive epistemic status to belief, autonomy is necessary for beliefs to have some positive epistemic status. The point is at best moot. One might have a true belief that one has not autonomously acquired or maintained. It also seems possible to continue to know something having both forgotten how one knows it and lost one's ability to evaluate properly that content. This might happen in the early stages of dementia for example. That

⁹ Be this as it may, if it is instead impossible in Zagzebski's account to be a bad but autonomous thinker, then her conception of intellectual autonomy is highly revisionary.

said, it is not implausible that intellectual autonomy is a necessary condition for some internalist notion of justification. But, even if that is granted, it only serves to raise again the question of epistemic significance. In the same way in which one might wonder why we should care for intellectual autonomy since it is not a truth-conducive notion, one may question the epistemic value of internalist accounts of justification.

Be that as it may, in what follows I argue that intellectual autonomy as answerability is an epistemically useful notion because of its connection to the role of an informant in the epistemic practice of testimony. More precisely, according to the view defended here, being an informant is a social epistemic status that entitles one to play the role of giver of testimony. Individuals function as informants when they are properly treated as answerable for their beliefs. Thus, functioning as an informant comprises two requirements. The first is intellectual autonomy, which consists of the intellectual abilities that make one answerable for at least some of one's beliefs. The second is others' recognition that one is answerable.¹⁰

Testimony is essential to the transmission of knowledge. But in order for the practice to work well we need to mark out those who are fit to play the role of testifier. Craig (1990) has argued that we first developed for this purpose the concept of "good informant" out of which we devised the concept of "knower" to include good informants who cannot be recognized anywhere and by anyone. This account implicitly subscribes to the indicative picture of telling that Moran (2018) has extensively criticized. According to this view, a speaker's testimony is evidence of what the speaker believes but supplies by itself no epistemic reason to believe what the speaker says. Craig's good informant is the person who reliably believes what is true, and honestly says what she believes. Given the indicative picture of telling, Craig's good informant is the ideal person on whose testimony others can rely.

In my view the ordinary epistemic practice of testimony does not fit the indicative picture (Tanesini, 2020a). Instead, it is best understood as involving the performance of speech acts of telling which institute novel obligations akin to assurances. If this is right, the significant distinction in this epistemic practice is not that between good informants and everything

¹⁰ Recognition is here thought as an attitude that tracks independent qualities that are constitutive of autonomy. Hence, recognition might be misplaced. One might fail to recognize individuals who are answerable or might misrecognize as answerable individuals who lack autonomy.

else including mere sources of information as well as bad informants.¹¹ Rather, the crucial contrast is between informants (both good and bad) and mere sources of information. This contrast is crucial because it identifies the category of entities capable of giving assurances from those that lack this capacity. Intellectual autonomy as answerability specifies what it takes to assure, since assuring involves making oneself answerable for one's claim.

In what follows, I first make intuitively plausible the claim that only intellectually autonomous agents can be informants. Second, I deploy Moran's (2018) account of testimony as the offer of an assurance to develop the connection between answerability for belief and being an informant. Third, I show that to be an informant one must be recognized by others as someone capable of answering for one's beliefs.

We can get a grip on the notion of being an informant by demarcating it from the concept of being a source of information. Intuitively only agents can be informants, while other entities function exclusively as sources of information. That said, some human beings are also not fit to be informants, while others who are capable of informing function at times as sources of information. Seeing what these examples have in common helps to single out the qualities required for functioning as an informant on a given occasion. Those human beings who are not fit to be informants are those whose evaluative judgment is missing or severely impaired due to mental illness, dementia, or psychopathology. Arguably, very young children are also not able to function as informants because they have yet to develop their evaluative abilities. Thus, people who cannot be informants are those who are not answerable for their beliefs due to their impaired or unformed judgment.

There are also occasions when people who are capable of informing function as sources of information. There are at least two different cases. First, one might observe a person and infer some information from his appearance or some other fact about him. For instance, if a student arrives late to class covered in sweat, I infer that he has rushed to try to be punctual. I obtain this information from the student, but it would be inappropriate to say that he has informed me.¹² Second, one might extract information from a person by means of torture, or by causing her to be extremely tired and stressed. In this situation also, it is

¹¹ For defenses of the assurance picture in different guises see Moran (2018), Faulkner (2014).

¹² See Fricker (2007, p. 132) for this kind of case.

appropriate to say that the interrogator gets some information out of an individual, but the person subjected to the treatment does not inform the interrogator since her speech, whilst constituting an intentional action, is not a genuine act of telling, at least if the latter requires the giving of an assurance. Assurances must be given freely. In this regard they are akin to genuine promises and offers since these also cannot be extorted.¹³ This is why the subject who speaks under torture or extreme duress is not functioning as an informant but as a mere, and most likely unreliable, source of information.¹⁴

These considerations suggest that the notion of being an informant is tied up with the possessions of those evaluative faculties required to be answerable for one's beliefs. These same considerations also indicate that people function as informants in the epistemic practice of testimony when their speech is freely offered, precisely in the sense of being offered as something for which the speaker takes responsibility by making herself answerable for her beliefs. If this is right, the notion of intellectual autonomy is tied up with that of being an informant since only intellectually autonomous agents can genuinely convey information to others by way of testimony, because only those people who are autonomous have beliefs for which they are answerable.

These connections between autonomy, answerability, and testimony are best articulated using Richard Moran's (2018) assurance theory of testimony.¹⁵ In his view, when a person provides another with information by means of testimony, then that person tells the other something that conveys that information. In other words, testimony is conducted through the speech act of telling.¹⁶ Further, in Moran's opinion, the giving of an assurance, which he models on the idea of promising or giving one's word, is a necessary condition of telling. Thus, the offering of a piece of testimony is an invitation directed to the addressee to trust

¹³ That is the obligations one acquires by promising or offering must be voluntary if they are to be binding.

¹⁴ Moran (2018, p. 62) argues that speaking under duress still constitutes telling because it is unlike speaking under hypnosis which does not. I disagree. The difference between these two cases is that the person who speaks under duress is acting intentionally whilst the person under hypnosis is not. However, speaking under duress is not intentional under the description of being a telling because it does not constitute the giving of an assurance since the latter must be given freely, as Moran himself holds.

¹⁵ I have offered an alternative to Moran's view in my (Tanesini, 2020a). The differences between our positions do not matter much for the claims I wish to defend in this chapter, since I agree with him that telling is a communicative speech act that misfires without uptake. For this reason, I use Moran's account with which the reader is more likely to be familiar.

¹⁶ There are tricky issues here since there seems to be instances of testimony that do not require telling. I set these cases aside.

the speaker based on the fact that the speaker freely undertakes a responsibility to be answerable for her beliefs. That is, the speaker commits to having reasons that speak in favor of the piece of information that she is communicating via testimony. But, of course, the speaker can so commit only if she possesses the evaluative faculties that are constitutive of answerability. Hence, in offering her testimony a speaker presents herself as being answerable for her beliefs, and invites others to share that presumption.

In Moran's view, freely giving an assurance provides every agent (including but not exclusively the addressee) a defeasible epistemic reason to believe the testimony. That is, one can reason that the agent would not freely risk the burden of justifying the belief and the costs associated with failure to do so unless the agent had good reasons for the truth of her belief. However, the giving of an assurance also supplies the addressee specifically with an entitlement to censure the speaker if it turns out that she cannot discharge her obligation to answer for her belief.¹⁷

For Moran, telling, as the giving of an assurance, is a communicative act, and as such it requires uptake on the part of the addressee to be fully felicitous. Moran conceives of uptake in Gricean terms according to which it consists in the addressee recognizing that the speaker intends that the addressee has a reason to believe what he is told partly in virtue of recognizing the speaker's intention to supply him such a reason by shouldering responsibility for the truth of what she is telling. But there are alternative accounts of uptake that could be adopted instead. These do not hinge on the audience's recognition of the speaker's intention but on its recognition of the speaker's ability to testify, which is manifested in treating the speaker's speech act as an instance of telling rather than of some weaker speech act in the assertive family such as suggesting, proposing, speculating or even perhaps guessing (cf., Kukla, 2014).

Be that as it may, it is not wholly up to the speaker whether she is fully successful in performing the speech act necessary to testify. Instead, her audience must at least grant the speaker's presumption that she is answerable for her beliefs. Unless this assumption is

¹⁷ Moran uses the vocabulary of accountability to flesh out the obligation undertaken by the speaker toward her audience. This is the relation that licenses specifically the addressee's censure of the speaker. What warrants that censure is that speaker is blameworthy for her belief because it reflects the poor quality of her judgment.

accepted, it is impossible for the speaker to offer a testimony. This is so, because telling requires providing an assurance, something that the speaker can do only if her ability to shoulder the responsibility for the truth of her beliefs is acknowledged. If this presumption is not granted, the speaker is illocutionarily disabled since her speech act misfires by, for instance, being ignored or by being treated as mere speculation.

I have suggested in this section that the primary epistemic value of intellectual autonomy is as a necessary condition for being an informant. I have now argued that a person cannot fully function as an epistemic informant unless others share her presumption that she is intellectually autonomous. In this sense, social recognition that one is answerable for one's beliefs in addition to actual ability to answer for one's beliefs is also necessary to fully function as an intellectually autonomous individual can legitimately expect to function.

To conclude, although the capacities constitutive of intellectual autonomy are individual cognitive abilities, an important reason why their possession matters epistemically is that they qualify those who have them for the crucial social epistemic role of being an informant. Hence, those individuals who are intellectually autonomous but whose autonomy is not socially recognized are denied the possibility to perform the social epistemic role that is fitting of their status.¹⁸

3. Oppression, Testimonial Injustice, and Intellectual Autonomy

I have argued in Section 12.2 that when agents invite others to believe what they are telling them, they also invite others to share the presumption that they (the speakers) are answerable for their beliefs. I have also argued that if this presumption is not granted, speakers are disabled in their ability to perform the speech act of telling and thus ultimately to offer a testimony. Finally, I have also claimed that if people are unable to function as informants, they are unable to perform those functions that intellectually autonomous agents should legitimately expect to perform. Thus, insofar as the epistemic value of

¹⁸ In this regard my account differs from several feminist account of autonomy as answerability. Those accounts often identify answerability with a disposition to make oneself accountable to others (Code, 2006; Grasswick, 2019). In my view, it is possible to be autonomous and to lack this disposition. Autonomy combined with an unwillingness to make oneself responsible to others for one's claims is, as I briefly show below, a trademark of the vice of intellectual arrogance.

autonomy lies in the fact that it qualifies one for the role of being an informant, failure of recognition disqualifies one from the social status that gives autonomy its epistemic value.

In this section, I contrast two different examples of testimonial injustice to illustrate two different ways of wronging an epistemic agent. The first injustice consists in treating someone as a lesser quality informant than she deserves to be treated. The second injustice consists in treating a person, who legitimately expects to be treated as an informant, as if she were a mere source of information. This second kind of case is naturally interpreted as denying an agent's autonomy; in the first kind of case autonomy is diminished but not denied.

We owe the concept of testimonial injustice to Miranda Fricker (2007) who defines it as the kind of injustice that befalls epistemic agents whose credibility is deflated due to persistent identity prejudice. A paradigmatic example of this phenomenon would be a case where a woman's testimony on a mathematical problem is not taken as seriously as it deserves because her addressee holds prejudicial views about women's mathematical abilities. In this instance, the listener attributes to the speaker a degree of credibility on the matter at hand that is less than the speaker deserves. This mistaken attribution is not an honest mistake, but it is culpable because it is based on a prejudice. It makes sense to think of the hearer's conduct as wrongful because, by systematically deflating the speaker's credibility, he is also, out of prejudice, attributing to her a worse quality of judgment than she deserves.

But testimonial injustice can also cut deeper than this. Fricker's own two paradigmatic examples of testimonial injustice arguably exemplify this more extreme form of testimonial injustice. For instance, Margie Sherwood's claim that Ripley killed her boyfriend is dismissed by the boyfriend's father on the grounds that it is based on female intuition rather than facts (Fricker, 2007, p. 9). This dismissal represents Margie as being unable to evaluate evidence since she cannot distinguish reasons from hunches. It is not designed to portray her as less credible than she actually is, but to present her as not able to perform the role of informant. This form of epistemic injustice does not consist in deflating the credibility of an agent by treating her as being less good than she is. Instead, she is treated as someone who cannot have reasons of her own because her judgment is impaired. Margie, as Fricker also claims, is treated as a mere source of information rather than as an informant.

This deeper kind of epistemic injustice disables Margie, on that occasion, so that she cannot testify as to the probable causes of her boyfriend's disappearance. This disablement does not mean that she is unable to responsibly form beliefs on the matter. But it deprives her of the benefits that give intellectual autonomy its epistemic value, since it makes it impossible for her to qualify in that instance as an informant.

4. Heteronomy and Hyper-autonomy

I have argued that failures of recognition can rob intellectually autonomous agents of the social epistemic value that befits them as capable of being informants. In this section I first note that failures of recognition can be causally responsible for changes to people's psychology. These changes result in a progressive loss of intellectual self-trust that in turn leads to a reduction in the ability to form beliefs for which one is answerable because they reflect the quality of one's own judgment. That is, intellectual autonomy is often to some degree causally dependent on its social recognition.

Second, I elaborate on these points to explain how structures of oppression might contribute to the genesis of the intellectual vices of servility and timidity in the subordinated and those of intellectual arrogance and narcissism in the privileged. I conclude the section by showing that timidity and servility are forms of heteronomy of the intellect while arrogance and narcissism are tantamount to hyper-autonomy.

People who are not thought of as answerable for some or all their beliefs are not asked to provide an opinion. They are not invited to join the conversation. If they nonetheless volunteer some information, their contributions might be discounted, dismissed, given little weight, or taken as suggestions rather than assertions. This kind of treatment is corrosive of intellectual autonomy since the agent whose contributions are regularly dismissed is likely to suffer a loss of trust in the quality of her own judgment. When this happens, she might stop seeking to form her own reasons for her beliefs because she judges the quality of her critical abilities to be poor and thus not fit to be relied upon. These considerations indicate

that lack of recognition can change agents' psychology because it can erode or impair those abilities that are constitutive of autonomy.¹⁹

I borrow from Young (1990) the notion of oppression as a matter of structural relations among social groups leading to unfair distributions of goods or to failures of recognition. Young argues that these forms of injustice can be prevalent in democratic societies even in the absence of overt coercion. Further, as these relations are structural, it is possible for members of some social group to be oppressed even in circumstances where there is no specific social group whose members can be identified as the oppressors.

Young identifies five forms, or faces, of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, subordination or cultural imperialism and violence. These are not intended to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive. Exploitation causes individuals to sacrifice their interests to serve those of other people. In the epistemic domain, it might involve engaging in extensive cognitive labor designed to address primarily other people's epistemic needs rather than one's own (Berenstain, 2016). Marginalization excludes people from the production and distribution of goods. This includes being shut out of the places where knowledge is produced or distributed such as universities. Powerlessness occurs when one has no control over the structure of one's daily life. In the epistemic domain this is especially prevalent when members of some groups, such as ill people, are treated as objects of others' research but are not allowed to contribute to it. Subordination occurs when some groups in society are represented as embodying the standard that others should also attempt to match. When these representations are internalized, they cause individuals who belong to subordinated groups to think of themselves as inferior. Finally, violence is the creation of a climate of fear through mocking, intimidation, and abuse. In the epistemic domain this is exemplified by the online abuse to which women who speak up against misogyny are subjected.

These systematically unjust structural relations have pervasive, and well-established effects, on the psychology of those who are oppressed in these ways. My focus here is on the damage done to intellectual self-trust. Intellectual self-trust requires an optimistic attitude

¹⁹ For similar arguments with regard to personal autonomy see Govier (1993) and McKenzie (2008) and de Prado Salas (this volume).

toward one's ability to be successful in one's epistemic activities (Jones, 1996, 2012). This attitude is partly an affective positive stance of self-confidence about one's own evaluative abilities. Such confidence is eroded when one loses trust in the quality of one's judgment. It is inflated, when one overestimates the quality of one's judgment because one is full of oneself. In what follows, I elaborate on these features of self-trust. I show that oppression can erode or inflate it, before showing how its erosion causes heteronomy and its inflation hyper-autonomy.

Intellectual self-trust is trust placed in one's own intellectual abilities. Such trust involves a disposition to rely on these abilities but also a positive affective attitude of confidence about one's abilities.²⁰ An optimistic stance about one's ability to deliver is necessary for self-trust since the person who relies on her faculties, but is doubtful about the epistemic values of their outputs, is not trusting her own faculties. Further, this trustful attitude is partly affective because, as Jones (2012) has convincingly argued, a person might believe that her faculties are trustworthy without feeling able to trust them. For example, one can be in the grip of anxiety about having forgotten one's passport at home, and thus keeps looking for it, even though one distinctly remembers putting it in one's bag.

Affective self-confidence in one's intellectual abilities is a component of self-trust that is susceptible to social influence. It is, as Jones also remarks, "socially porous" (2012, p. 245). Those relations that I have described above as oppressive are especially effective in undermining the intellectual self-confidence of those who are oppressed and in inflating the self-confidence of those who are privileged. The existence of these structural relations generates misleading reasons that cause those who are wronged by them to believe that their intellectual abilities are epistemically worse than they are, and those who benefit from these structural relations to overestimate the quality of their intellect. But these same structural relations also directly impact the affective stances that individuals have toward their intellectual abilities by inducing a loss of confidence in some through the creation of a climate of fear, anxiety, and shame, and by causing overconfidence in others by generating an environment that stimulates complacency and self-inflation.

²⁰ This is not a full analysis of self-trust, which in my view also involves confidence in one's willpower (Tanesini, 2020b).

Exploitation, powerlessness, and subordination cause individuals to occupy positions of inferiority where they are often required to serve the needs of others, to structure their days in accordance with what others command and, if they have come to internalize social norms, to see themselves as inferior to those who occupy positions of privilege. Being repeatedly subjected to this treatment is a source of shame since it causes one to think of oneself as less worthy than other people. But people who are chronically made to feel ashamed of themselves cannot at the same time sustain a confident optimistic outlook about their intellectual capacities. Thus, by inducing shame these structural relations of oppression cause members of oppressed groups to experience a loss of intellectual self-trust.

As I have argued elsewhere, entrenched dispositions to think of oneself as intellectually inferior, to experience chronic shame about one's alleged shortcomings, when combined with a tendency to attribute any failures to lack of ability and any success to environmental circumstances, are among the characteristic manifestation of the vice of intellectual servility or obsequiousness (Tanesini, 2018, 2021). Those suffering from this vice are also predisposed to try to please other more powerful individuals. This tendency is often a consequence of being exploited since survival in these conditions requires that one becomes adept at recognizing others' needs and servicing them well. If these considerations are correct, then those who are subjected to some forms of oppression also suffer the psychological damage of losing trust in their own intellectual abilities and of developing a tendency to seek to ingratiate themselves to those who are more powerful than they are.

Marginalization and violence cause oppressed individuals to be pushed out of the system for the production and distribution of knowledge or to prefer exclusion to the risk of being the target of intimidation, harassment, abuse, or threats. Being treated in these ways denies one access to resources that help to improve one's intellectual capacities, but it also engenders a heightened sense of vulnerability. That is, it impacts what Jones (2004) has described as basal security which is an affective assessment of one's vulnerability to threats. Those who have low basal security are always fearful, even when they are not actually afraid. As a result, they are also especially risk averse and hypervigilant about threats. The experience of oneself as especially vulnerable impacts one's sense of oneself as able to cope and thus impacts confidence in one's ability and generates widespread anxiety and

pessimism about one's future (Govier, 1993). Hence, this affective stance is also responsible with a resigned pessimistic outlook that is incompatible with the optimism characteristic of self-trust.

The dispositions to retreat, to avoid confrontation, to self-silence are among the manifestation of the vice of intellectual timidity (Tanesini, 2018, 2021).²¹ Those who suffer from this vice are too scared to express their own opinions. Overtime they might also develop the belief that they are silent because they have nothing of interest to contribute. This conviction might be based on trusting the judgment of others who do not take seriously what one says. But it might also be the result of seeking to address cognitive dissonance between one's self-imposed silence and one's self-esteem. It is easier to live with oneself if one rationalizes one's silence by thinking that one has nothing to add rather than thinking that one lacks the courage to speak out.

Despite their differences, both intellectual servility and timidity erode intellectual autonomy understood as the ability to answer for one's opinions because these reflect the quality of one's judgment or evaluative abilities. This erosion takes two forms. First, timidity and servility impact the quality of a person's judgment. They, therefore, contribute to making that person a worse thinker. To see this, consider that those who are timid or servile do not trust their intellectual abilities. This lack of self-trust includes pessimistic tendencies about one's ability to improve and a tendency to attribute failures to one's own shortcomings. These attitudes cause one to be resigned to failure, to avoid trying to improve or to stretch one's horizons. All these tendencies are likely to atrophy one's intellectual abilities. In this sense, lack of confidence in one's intellectual abilities becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy since it induces attitudes that are detrimental to one's intellectual development.

But intellectual servility and timidity also erode autonomy in a second and deeper way. They cause one to become intellectually heteronomous, rather than merely a bad autonomous epistemic agent. To see this, consider that intellectual servility includes a tendency to ingratiate oneself to those who are powerful. Thus, obsequious individuals are predisposed to defer to others' opinions more often than they should. It is this excessive deferential

²¹ Note that it might be prudentially rational to exhibit these dispositions in conditions of oppression even though they typify an intellectual vice.

tendency that causes them to express opinions for which they do not have their own reasons. They are often not answerable for their beliefs because these do not express the quality of their judgments but of the powerful individuals they seek to please. Relatedly, intellectual timidity predisposes people not to have an opinion on many subject matters. When this happens, these individuals do not have beliefs for which they are answerable. Thus, intellectual timidity is another cause of heteronomy of the intellect because, by depriving people of the courage necessary to have a view for which one is answerable, it renders them mute.

Structural relations of oppression also have detrimental effects on those privileged individuals who benefit from others' oppression. My interest here lies with those effects that have an impact on self-trust by promoting its unwarranted inflation. Those who are the beneficiaries of others' exploitation are used to have their needs serviced by others. They are thus likely to find that things are easy for them since others have already smoothed their path. This sense of ease combined with an experience of powerfulness gained at the expenses of others' powerlessness is bound to produce an inflated sense of one's own abilities. One might thus develop a tendency to attribute to one's own capacities successes that are at least partly caused by others' assistance, but also by the absence of challenges since potential competitors have been marginalized or have, out of fear of violence, self-silenced. In these ways, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and violence contribute to misleading privileged individuals into thinking that they are cleverer, more creative, and intelligent than they are. But benefiting from these injustices also directly affects one's self-confidence. Those who are made to feel powerful, feel invulnerable; they are, thus, prepared to take more risks than they would otherwise. The feeling that success comes relatively easy to them might also make them feel superior to others who are less successful than they are. These feelings and emotions combine into an over-optimistic form of self confidence in one's intellectual abilities. These dispositions and affective attitudes are characteristic of the intellectual vice of arrogance that includes feelings of superiority, of invulnerability, a sense that one's opinions cannot be improved upon, and a conviction that one owes one's successes primarily to one's own talents (Tanesini, 2021).

In addition, individuals who benefit from cultural imperialism are invited to think of people like them as the standard by which the performance of members of other groups is to be

gauged. They are thus, likely to suffer from a tendency described by Spelman (1990) and by Lugones (2003) as “boomerang vision.” Those who exhibit it evaluate others positively to the extent to which they resemble themselves, but do not think that a feature they have might be good because members of some other group have it. This egocentric approach seems characteristic of arrogance but also narcissism which in the intellectual domain, for instance, manifests itself in behaviors that evince a conviction that everyone else must be interested in what one has to say.

Both intellectual arrogance and narcissism are harmful to individuals’ intellectual autonomy. First, these epistemic vices contribute to making people worse thinkers by causing them to overestimate the epistemic quality of their evaluative abilities. But second, they also undermine intellectual autonomy itself. I argued in the first section of this chapter that to be answerable for one’s own beliefs one must be able to supply reasons for these, but also to assess contrary evidence. It is only when one can consider reasons against one’s views that the reasons one has reflect the quality of one’s own good or bad judgment. Arrogance and narcissism impair a person’s ability to take seriously the possibility that she might be mistaken.

Insofar as the arrogant or narcissistic person can appreciate contrary views, even though she does not pay attention to them, she is autonomous in her bad thinking. However, there are individuals whose arrogance or narcissism goes so deep that their capacity for assessing alternatives to their beliefs is reduced. These people often seem to retrofit the reasons they trot out to the beliefs that they already hold. When this happens, these individuals’ autonomy has been eroded because their excessive self-confidence has impaired their judgment since they have lost the ability to evaluate alternatives to their viewpoint.

In conclusion, I have argued that intellectual autonomy is best thought as the quality of epistemic agents who are responsible for their good or bad believing. I have fleshed out this notion in terms of answerability. I have also argued that the point of having a notion of intellectual autonomy is to identify those agents that are fit to be informants in the epistemic practice of testimony. I have shown that to occupy this role, individuals must be answerable for their beliefs, but also recognized as such. In this sense the value of intellectual autonomy is partly constituted by social relations of recognition. In the final

section, I have argued that systemic relations of oppression are causally responsible for deflating or inflating people's confidence in their evaluative abilities. These influences on people's psychology undermine intellectual autonomy by promoting heteronomy in some and hyper-autonomy in others.²²

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²² Thanks to the editors of this volume for some extremely helpful comments on a first draft.

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