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Creativity, Vanity and Narcissism

Matthew Kieran

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1. Introduction

Creativity matters. Many of humankind's greatest achievements are the upshot of
creativity. Education systems and organisations (allegedly) seek to cultivate creativity
while politicians and governments implement policies to facilitate it. Millions of
human beings make choices that are only rational given that being creative is highly
prized. From academics, scientists, artists, musicians and engineers to business people
and the world of work, creative fulfillment is integral to the lives of many.
Traditionally philosophical work has tended to focus on defining creativity, the key
processes or faculties involved and value questions. I will just assume here that an
action is creative if it involves someone's abilities and judgement in appropriate ways
that issue in something new and valuable (Gaut 2010: 1040). Elsewhere I have argued
for a new approach that puts character centre stage, in particular arguing for a virtue
theoretic approach to exemplary human creativity and what it is to be a creative
person (Kieran 2014a and b). What follows is the development of a new challenge to
such an approach. The challenge arises from the putative recognition that a degree of
narcissism and vanity promotes people's creativity. If so, the challenge goes, then the
virtue theoretic approach to exemplary human creativity either cannot be right or
becomes far less attractive in so far as the personal vice of vanity is a creative strength.
Independently of how forceful the challenge is, addressing this in detail will force us to
examine the nature of vanity and its implications for creative character in some detail.

The first section will briefly elaborate the virtue theoretic approach to creative character and the nature of the challenge. Once the conceptual landscape has been laid out we will look at evidence for thinking that creative people often tend toward vanity and then go on to develop a new account of just what vanity is which helps to explain why this might be so. With this in place we can then explore the putative benefits and costs of vanity for creativity. This will then allow us to address the challenge head on. It will be argued that while vanity may appear to be a creative strength, in reality it turns out to be a creative vice. Nonetheless, it will be argued, vanity is a particularly interesting creative vice since it is a close cousin to creative virtue. Raising and addressing the challenge will cast new light on vanity, creative character and associated claims (both within philosophy and more broadly). Practically speaking we should find out whether or not promoting creativity must or should come at the apparent cost of encouraging narcissism and vanity.

2. A Virtue Theoretic Approach to Creative Character and the Challenge

Here is the basic picture (Kieran 2014a and b). If we want to realize our creative potential, and more reliably achieve new, surprising and more worthwhile things, then the best way to do so is to cultivate creative virtues. Virtues are admirable traits that enable more reliably enable greater, more worthwhile creativity. It takes courage to take certain risks, resilience to cope with failure, persistence to go on in the face of difficulties and curiosity to question things and explore uncharted territory. Thinking in terms of creative virtues gives us both an explanation of key causal mechanisms that enable us to be more creative and makes sense of evaluative attitudes toward creative people's achievements, underperformance and failings. While we admire people's creative courage and curiosity, we often regret (and sometimes condemn) creative

cowardice, timidity and incurious acceptance of current orthodoxy. Creative vices are disadmirable traits that explain creative failure, underperformance and misdirection. In addition, I take it that being a creative person is either a partial constituent of or one of the multiple realisors for a good, flourishing, fulfilling life.

The conception of creative virtue fits with various models of virtue more generally (Aristotle 1976; Hume 1975; Zagzebski 1996; Swanton 2003). However, exactly what the challenge from vanity amounts to partly depends on the conception of creative virtue at issue. It might pose a particular problem if we assume creative virtues should be unified or consistent with moral virtue (Kieran 2014 b: 223-229). If the conception is entirely instrumentalist (Driver 2001), shorn of the admirability requirement, then vanity in principle could straightforwardly be a creative virtue if it promotes creativity. If the conception is entirely one of personal worth (Baehr 2011), independent of outcome, then even if vanity promotes creative achievement more than anything else it would still remain a vice (assuming vanity is disadmirable). The idea that vanity could be a creative strength rather than a weakness is a challenge in so far as it threatens to prise apart the twin aspects of a) excellence or admirability and b) what best enables the realisation of greater, more worthwhile, more reliable creativity.

Independently of the challenge, looking at vanity's relation to creativity has wider significance. First, addressing the challenge will involve giving a new characterisation of the nature of vanity. Second, examining vanity's relation to creativity will involve explicating not just when, where and why it appears to benefit creativity but coming to understand the fundamental costs of creative alienation and imprudence that vanity brings with it. If we are not careful it might seem like vanity is a creative cost worth paying. If the argument below is on the right lines, then this is

not so. Vanity really is a creative vice or weakness. Nonetheless, if the argument is right, then vanity is also the least harmful and most amenable of creative vices (or weaknesses). It is a creative vice that is in principle easily turned toward and cultivated into creative virtue.

3. Vanity Fair

It is hardly a new or startling observation to note that creative people often seem particularly given over to vanity. The self-ascription of vanity amongst creative people is pretty common. Leo Tolstoy characterized his own creative motivation as being driven by "vanity, self-interest and pride" (1983: 18). George Orwell identified his first motivation in *Why I Write* (2000: 3) as "sheer egoism" going on to characterise serious writers as being more vain and self-centred than most. In a similar vein Sylvia Plath held that "writers and artists are the most narcissistic people" (Orr 1966: 171). The biographies, case studies and testimonies about creative people across every domain are littered with excesses of self-aggrandisement and self-admiring conceit. To take a case in point, Steve Jobs would talk about himself in boastful, grandiose terms, had a particular penchant for comparing himself with Leonardo, and falsely claimed credit for ideas, patents, and achievements. It comes as no surprise in the authorized biography to learn that Tina Redse, a close ex partner and friend to Jobs who works in mental health, thinks Jobs perfectly matched the criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Isaacson 2011: 266). A similar theme of vanity emerges in John Richardson's vivid portraits of modernist masters and the wider cultural scene knowingly entitled *Sacred Monsters, Sacred Masters* (2011). Grandstanding and self-conceit are far from confined to the creatively successful. The creatively ambitious who meet with little apparent success can be just as prone to overclaiming and self-

glorification. Adam Rounce's study of failed writers from the latter part of the eighteenth century shows self-conceit and the feverish pursuit of reputation to be just as common amongst the less than successful (sometimes with painful results). Percival Stockdale's vanity was so piqued at the success of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* that he embarked on a mammoth rejoinder, thirteen years in the writing, which, rather sadly, met with deserved indifference and served only to underscore Johnson's creative achievement. As one critic put it, "Mr. Stockdale is entitled to the same sort of gratitude which we feel to a dull landlord who has invited us to dine with an interesting visitor" (Rounce 2013: 183).

It is also worth considering our own experiences. If you work in a domain where people strive to be creative – whether it be music, literature, academics, engineering or business – consider some of the behavior you have witnessed and, possibly, your own. It is not uncommon to see people boasting, grandstanding, name dropping, posing, over claiming credit or significance, checking out citations, reviews, over reacting to criticism, savouring praise, feuding with others, over sensitively reacting to not being talked about and resentful at not being invited to events or conferences. In more extreme cases people have been known to re-edit their Wikipedia entries in vainglorious, puffed up terms and post self-glorifying reviews of their own work anonymously on Amazon. No doubt many of us might tend to over attribute vanity to others whilst underestimating our own. Yet the quiet pangs of disappointment at a bad critical review or not being referred to in some article along with pleasures taken in praise or adulation may be glimmers of a vanity that lies within.

In addition to first person experience, testimony and historical case studies, there is a body of work in psychology that claims there are significant links between

narcissism and creativity. Narcissism, whether pathological or sub-clinical, is typically characterized by a grandiose sense of self-importance, high self-belief and the seeking out of attention and admiration (Campbell and Miller 2011). Raskin (1980) found a small yet significant positive relationship between creativity and narcissism. In particular, those who scored highly on both self-reported creativity and test measured creativity tended to score much more highly for narcissism than other subjects. This is consistent with more recent work. Narcissists tend to score much more highly than normal subjects for self-reported creativity (Jonason, Potter and Richardson 2015) and score higher in creative achievement (Furnham 2013). Whilst evidence concerning creative achievement or performance is more mixed (Goncalo, Flynn and Kim 2010) than for self-reported creativity (which is hardly surprising given vain people will likely report themselves as more creative than normal), variability in the creative performance of narcissists might be explained in terms of self-enhancement opportunities. Wallace and Baumeister found that subjects low in narcissism performed no differently whether they faced a high or a low self-enhancement opportunity whereas "narcissists consistently performed better when high performance would be self-enhancing than when it would not be" (2002: 830). Narcissists "performed relatively poorly when feedback would be known only to themselves, but they outperformed everyone else when the feedback was anticipated to be made public. These findings suggest that narcissists are mainly motivated to win the admiration of others rather than prove something (in this case creative ability) to themselves" (2002: 831).

In what follows we will see just why the psychological evidence for vanity enhancing *actual* creativity is, at best, mixed and, moreover, why vanity tends to

operate positively, where it does so, only in light of opportunities for a particular kind of self-enhancement.

4. The Nature of Vanity

What is vanity exactly and how might it be related to creative ambition? It is central to the notion of vanity that, in some sense, the vain think too much of themselves. According to some, vanity "seems to consist almost entirely in a person's having an excessively high self-estimation" (Tiberius and Walker: 383). Yet self over-estimation need not be a function of vanity and, at least as a conceptual matter, vanity need not involve self-overestimating beliefs. Whilst there is a non-contingent association between vanity and self-overestimating tendencies, it is consistent with being vain that self-estimating beliefs are justified and true. Steve Jobs may have been vain about his creative abilities and vision yet the relevant beliefs might well have been justified and true. Vanity as a matter of principle is consistent with having justified, true high self-estimations though this may rarely be the case as a psychological matter. Thus whilst it is a necessary condition of vanity that the relevant self related beliefs must involve high self-estimation they need not be unwarranted (though they typically are for reasons which remain to be accounted for).

The high self-estimating beliefs must be with respect to something that is construed as valuable, admirable or praiseworthy in some respect or an indirect reflection of or relation to such. Whilst this may be a truism it is worth reflecting on why this should be. Roberts and Wood characterize vanity as "an excessive concern to be well regarded by other people, for the social importance their regard confers on oneself" (Roberts and Wood 2010: 237). Yet vanity need not be concerned with or driven by social importance. What matters to the vain is the seeking and the getting of

praise, adulation or esteem from others (Nuyen 2010: 616) since, as Taylor puts it, "the vain offer their appearance as a means of seducing others into thinking well of them, which in turn is a means of seducing themselves to think well of themselves" (Taylor 2006: 72). Vanity seeks and delights in self-glorification (which typically is though need not be concerned with social significance). Ordinary delight in praise is to be distinguished from delighting in praise *as* an apprehension of the self as being or appearing highly admirable or praiseworthy. It is one thing to have the thought 'how nice it is to do something that others value' or 'how pleasing that others value what I do'. It is quite another to think 'others value what *I* do' where you are foregrounding your self as the object of your appreciation.

The drive to appreciate the self *as* glorified, esteemed or praiseworthy is fundamental to vanity. Whilst Narcissus admiring his own reflection is a stereotypical depiction of vanity, this might not be quite right. Narcissus, after all, did not realise that he was looking at his own reflection. There is no faintly self-conscious (or even subconscious) awareness in Narcissus' admiration of the face that he sees as his own. He was admiring his own beauty, true enough, but he was neither admiring his own beauty *as his* beauty nor was the admiration subconsciously driven by this recognition. The content of Narcissus' admiration is not self-glorifying in the manner constitutive of vanity. Yet it is no accident that vanity is often represented by figures looking at their self-reflections (as Narcissus is). It is not just that a common self-conscious object of vanity is someone's physical appearance as beautiful or desirable. It is because vanity involves seeking out or presuming an audience, even if that is only oneself, God or some hypothetical, idealised audience. It is not just that "vanity is *typically* [my emphasis] selective of an audience" (Roberts and Wood 2010: 238), but, rather, that vanity is essentially so. Vanity necessarily involves apprehending the self *as* one's self

who is, could or would be highly appreciated by some implied audience and savouring that as the object of appreciation.

To bring this out consider a contrast between arrogance and vanity. Arrogance need know nothing of how the self appears to others and may care not a jot. Hence arrogance is often bound up with indifference, complacency or contempt with respect to others. The arrogant may become angry when others are less than deferential or do not recognise their presumed superiority or entitlement qua human being (Tiberius and Walker 1998: 382). Yet the arrogant need not (and typically do not) dwell on or savour their self-image as admired or admirable to others. Arrogance presumes what vanity delights in. Vanity, by contrast, always addresses itself to an implied audience given that what matters is appreciation of the self as glorified. Vanity is thus necessarily indexed to an implied audience in a way that arrogance is not. Vanity seeks approval, praise, admiration or esteem (even if at its most removed this is only appreciation by the self of one's self). Hence the truly vain often spend a lot of time and effort foregrounding themselves to others in the best light possible and tracking the extent to which others do or do not respond to them in such a light. Vanity seeks and savours applause and admiration whilst arrogance presumes itself straightforwardly entitled to or above such matters.

If the above is right then there are three basic elements constitutive of vanity: high self estimate underwriting the sense of self as deserving glorification, the desire for self-glorification and appreciation of the self as glorified (or glorifiable) by an implied audience. Thus we can arrive at a new, more formal characterisation of vanity as follows:

A person is vain to the degree that features playing a causal role in someone's judgements, responses or actions are driven by, along with concomitant rationalisations, the desire for gratification in apprehending the self as glorified – combined with a conception of the self as deserving of appreciation as glorified (partly constituted by high self-estimation) - via the elicited or solicited appreciation or esteem of an actual or idealised implied audience.

It is worth foregrounding certain advantages arising from this definition. It is not enough to be vain to be so motivated since the vain must also apprehend themselves *as* glorified. The characterisation also explains why we often take self-glorification to be indicative of vanity – because it appears to be vain – whilst recognising that this is not necessarily so. Furthermore, the motivation for delighting in the glorifying appearance of the self explains both i) why those who are vain tend to have grandiose thoughts, imaginings and fantasies about themselves and ii) why the vain typically solicit the esteem of others for themselves since this is taken to track and reinforce the glorifying appearance of the self as it is delighted in. Indeed, given the centrality of delighting in the self as glorified, the characterisation captures the sense in which vanity is addressed to an implied audience whether this be actual or idealised others, the self or God. Lastly, whilst it is not constitutive of vanity as such that it involves self-overestimation, we can explain why vanity of its nature tends toward self-overestimation. The desire for self-glorification provides the rule under which the vain person is disposed to act. The vain seek to focus on and draw attention back to themselves in self-glorifying attention-seeking ways. This explains why we associate a cluster of tendencies with vanity such as compliment seeking, boastfulness, self glorifying exaggeration, over-claiming knowledge, valued relations, responsibility for

achievements, over sensitivity to praise and criticism, focusing on comparative recognition, the magnification of small differences in self-promotion, an over emphasis on tracking praise, esteem and esteem indicators that seem to self glorify and directing the gaze of others to such. As vanity gives rise to a drive to reify whatever appearance most glorifies the desired self-apprehension this, in turn, gives rise to a defeasible tendency toward self-deceptive self-overestimation.

5. Vanity and Creative Endeavour

If the characterisation of vanity is on the right tracks then we are in a position to generate – consistent with and partly explained by appeal to the above characterization of vanity – distinct but inter-related empirical hypotheses which could capture why those who are or who strive to be creative (or at least some subsection thereof) might be especially susceptible to vanity. By way of background we should bear in mind that in being or seeking to be creative someone is aiming at doing something not just worthwhile but new. Creative people thus achieve something comparatively distinctive which naturally tends to garner praise or esteem.

(I) Vanity as causing creative endeavour:

To the degree that someone is vain, he looks for self-glorifying ways in which he can or can appear to be – to some relevant implied audience – esteemed or esteem worthy. In many domains being creative is highly valued and certain domains are highly valorised as creative domains. Hence vanity may play a causal role in people aiming for creative activity and domains. Now, as Adam Smith suggests at one point, productive purpose and the pursuit of ambition, achievement, acquisition and pre-

eminence in general may often be driven by vanity (Smith: 61). But is there any particular pull to being creative given non-creative success elsewhere, say as a lawyer or broker, is highly regarded? Here are some possible reasons to think so: a) the high prestige seems more unique to the creative person b) the self-glorification available is not so easily comparable with (or discounted by the success of) others c) there is often an explicit link to – and socio-institutional structures supporting – finding actual audiences and d), at least in the arts, the creative material can be all about the self.

(II) Creative endeavour as expressing and amplifying vanity:

To the degree that someone is or appears to be creative, then her (apparent) creative activity affords more means for her to manifest or express her vanity to some relevant implied audience. What it is to be (or appear) creative is – amongst other things – to do (or appear to do) something that is comparatively new and worthwhile. In being creative someone can express and amplify the qualities which she believes underwrite the high self-regard she has for herself and, in so doing, facilitate the solicitation of the esteem of others in self-glorifying ways. In other words where someone is being creative i) she has more outlets for expressing or manifesting her vanity and ii) being creative in certain ways may amplify the signalling strength or expression of someone's vanity.

(III) Creative endeavour as leading to the acquisition and cultivation of vanity:

To the degree that someone is (or appears to be) creatively successful, and highly praised or flattered as special in glorificatory ways that are conditional upon,

construed as or internalised as linking someone's creative achievement to their specialness, then this may cause someone's natural delight in the esteem of others to develop into vanity. Creative gifts, roles and achievements (or the appearance of such) can garner much praise, admiration and flattery in ways which do or can be taken to glorify the creative person. This is often linked to – or construed as being dependent upon – the 'specialness' of the person concerned. Where someone consistently meets with large amounts of high praise for being special and receives indicators of such in many different forms then this may cause the creative person to become vain (even though this was not the case before). More succinctly put, being on the receiving end of flattery for creative gifts or achievement may lead to the acquisition or cultivation of vanity.

6. Vanity as a Creative Strength?

The thought cannot be that wherever there is greater vanity there is ever-greater creative advantage. The very phrase 'vanity project' is often used to pick out pretty worthless, ridiculous and disastrous work resulting from excessive self-regard. Where vanity is radically unhinged from contact with reality, it often leads to disaster or, if not disaster, a waste of time and effort. Nonetheless, setting vastly delusional judgement aside, a degree of vanity may be creatively adaptive.

Inflated self-estimation of abilities, for example, can lead people to set themselves high targets to aim at (or at least higher than they would otherwise do so). In virtue of doing so they may thus be more likely to aim at something more creatively worthwhile if they are orientated to what is creatively valuable and prepared to persevere. Moreover, in setting themselves at harder, more difficult problems the vain may be more likely to work at the edge of their creative capacities and thus, in so far

as they persevere, more likely to skill themselves up. Similarly, inflated self-estimation often leads people to take greater risks. In part this may be because the inflated self-estimate in vanity gives rise to blindness about and underestimation of some risks or because vanity tends toward more highly valuing the rewards of risk taking (Foster, Shenesey and Goff: 2009; Foster and Brennan 2011) where that kind of success is construed in a self-glorificatory light. Hence vanity may sometimes act as a spur to embark on more creatively ambitious projects and activities. Moreover, at least where the vain judge it likely they will be exposed to the relevant implied audience, they may be more motivated to persevere in the face of failures or set backs and thus overcome creative challenges. This is consistent with findings suggesting those registering more highly for narcissism may outperform others where they know the results will be public (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002). Vanity, at least under certain circumstances, can act as a creativity enhancer for creative development and achievement.

It is crucial to bear in mind that the inflated self-estimation bound up with vanity is constrained and shaped by the desire for self-glorification with respect to an implied audience. What this means is that, where activity is visible to and judged as worthwhile by the relevant implied audience, to the degree someone is vain he may well tend to persevere and strive to a high degree. The vain person will also be highly averse to (visible) failure or anything that threatens to undermine self-glorification and, where such arises, will tend to redouble their efforts in order to compensate. Where creative endeavour and achievement depends upon perseverance or fortitude in the face of failure then, where visible to the relevant implied audience or a threat to self-glorification, a degree of vanity may put someone at an added advantage (at least where what is being pursued is apprehended in terms of worthwhile glory). Moreover, given that the desire for self-glorification with respect to an implied audience is the

motivation which gives the rule to how the vain person acts, to the degree someone is vain she will tend to pay close attention to what is esteemed by the relevant implied audience. This in turn might lead to becoming more discriminating about the values, norms and judgements of the relevant implied audience. In so far as this is true she may tend to be good at anticipating what the implied audience will value or esteem as surprising, new and valuable. In other words, vanity may aid greater tracking and discrimination about what will likely be esteemed as creative.

How adaptive this is with respect to true creativity will depend upon the presumed judgements and dispositions of the implied audience. It will hardly provide a great creative boon if someone is more attuned to anticipating what the judges on the X Factor will admire. However, if someone is attuned to anticipating the judgements and dispositions of an implied audience which has some kind of track on what is genuinely creative, then vanity to that extent might seem to confer a genuine advantage. The vain person may thus be systematically more discriminating about and attuned to anticipating what will likely be taken as creatively worthwhile.

7. A New Challenge?

To the extent the above seems right, then we may have a new challenge to the virtue theoretic approach to creative character. Vanity, commonly thought of as a personal vice, sometimes enables people to be more rather than less creatively successful. A degree of vanity, at least where relevant to the implied audience and self-glorifying self-image, can seem to give rise to higher, more ambitious task setting, higher self set creative expectations, creative risk taking, perseverance and the discriminate seeking out or anticipation of creative projects likely to be well received. This seems at odds with a virtue theoretic account of exemplary human creativity that holds the aspects of

admirability and the promotion of greater, more reliable, more worthwhile creativity. The problem is, though, that whilst vanity is a disadmirable trait, it sometimes seems to enable greater creative achievement. Independently of addressing the challenge itself, what follows is of much wider interest. We will find out just how fundamental vanity's creative misguidance is. Vanity may tend toward various types of creative problems including anxiety or psychic depletion where performance fails to live up to the glorifying self-image. Yet vanity's most fundamental, problematic errors are tendencies towards creative alienation and imprudence.

8. (Un)Creative Alienation from Others

In most creative domains we rely heavily upon collaboration and co-operative activity. Even where collaboration seems far from central we typically depend on broader co-operative activity. Even single authors, for example, standardly rely upon co-operative norms and practices in the development of their creative work. Most authors seek feedback, appreciate good editors and listen to (some) criticism. This requires co-operation and the presumption of co-operative reciprocity is built into many related practices. Even authors renowned for their individuality or splendid isolation often turn out to rely heavily on at least a few others in the process of creative honing and refinement. To take just one example, Raymond Carver relied heavily for the development of his style and form on his respective editors Gordon Lish followed by Tess Gallagher. So much so that when Carver's original, unedited versions of some short stories were published Giles Harvey claimed "it has only inadvertently pointed up the editorial genius of Gordon Lish" (Harvey 2010).

Even where vain people are charismatic - since grandiosity combined with solicitousness for your interest can be a powerful combination - in so far as vanity

tends toward grandstanding and self-involvement the appeal tends to wear off (at least at close quarters over time). Vanity is not something people tend to find particularly attractive. Nonetheless, the deeper creative problem with vanity is that it tends to corrode co-operation and collaborative activity - even when people are strongly committed to so working and it is in the creative self-interests of all to do so. Inflated self-estimation guided by the desire for glorifying approval from others tends toward self-aggrandizement. Thus there is a tendency to focus on, foreground, exaggerate and over claim with respect to things that garner esteem or admiration (Paulhus, Harms, Bruce and Lysy, 2003; Tracy, Chenge, Robins and Trzesniewski, 2009, Wallace 2011). Over time this will tend to be corrosive of the trust required for collaborative creative relationships to work effectively and, at least to the extent that co-operative activity is at close quarters, anything more than fairly minimal co-operation. How so?

Features of vanity and narcissism such as grandstanding, disagreeable responses and praise or blame shifting (Wallace 2011) often play a role in co-operative breakdowns. Such behaviour naturally tends to lead to puzzlement, disappointment and resentment from others. Yet even where this is not so, whilst vain people may at first impress to the extent they foreground overclaimed knowledge and abilities, over time the ways in which the vain fall short will become apparent. The recognition that the vain person does not know or is not capable of doing what was claimed may start to become all too apparent. A vain person will come to seem unreliable at least to those who are well motivated. Actually, it is not so much that the vain are unreliable but, rather, reliable in the wrong kind of way. They will also tend not to work at commitments that are invisible to or fail to garner the esteem of the relevant implied audience. This is problematic at least where part of being committed to working

collaboratively or co-operating in the right kind of ways involves putting effort in as required even where it is not visible to others (never mind garnering esteem).

Depending on the psychology of those involved a vain person's tendencies may thus prompt others to withdraw from collaborative and closely co-operative activity or prompt conflict. Either way, the vain person will tend to seek whatever reinforces or serves their self-conception as admired or admirable. Such strategies may range from pacifying solicitousness to diversionary aggression or outright apology. Even where an apology is forthcoming, the nature of the apology may well tend to focus on the vain person at the expense of the injured party and be excusing rather than contrite. Over time, at least where people have a choice, this gives further reason for others to withdraw and only engage in minimally co-operative behavior given the assumption that the vain person is not to be trusted. Even in cases where people cannot wholly withdraw – due to work organization or power relationships – co-operation will tend to be much more minimal, partial or contingent than it would otherwise have been.

Two complicating factors are worth bearing in mind. First, what self-glorifying manoeuvres the vain person pulls and indeed exactly how so will depend upon whose esteem she is seeking in self-glorifying. What exactly is taken to self-glorify will depend upon the vain person's conception of what she takes the relevant audience to esteem. Second, how vanity manifests itself within collaborations and inter-personal co-operative activity will depend upon how the vain person conceives of the relevant relationships. The kind of difficulties that arise between a vain person and presumed inferiors as contrasted with near equals will often be rather different from those that arise between a vain person and presumed superiors whose esteem and applause is desired.

Vanity thus tends to make creative friendships, collaboration and close co-operation a fraught process – and tends to undermine them in the long run. This is prudentially speaking a bad thing for the vain person – to the extent that developing and realising creative potential depends upon these things. This is not to say that vain people cannot achieve creative heights. Other people often put up with abuse or exploitation by highly creative people and strive to make such relationships manageable. What many people put up with from Steve Jobs in comparison with what they would normally put up with from anyone else is an eye opener (Isaacson 2011). Nonetheless there is a natural tendency for such relationships to implode. Moreover, to the extent creative people are vain, they will have a natural tendency – when things do go wrong – to blame those they were collaborating with or external factors. Where there is a repeating pattern of such relationships, as can be seen from the Steve Jobs biography, the vain will tend not to be critically aware enough to see themselves as the issue except in so far as the repeating pattern is diagnosed in self-glorifying ways.

To take a case in point, Morrissey's autobiography, in the words of one critic (Gill 2013), "is a heavy tome, utterly devoid of insight, warmth, wisdom or likeability. It is a potential firelight of vanity, self-pity and logorrhoeic dullness. . . a humiliation constructed by the self-regard of its victim." Whilst the judgement seems overly harsh – it does possess warmth, insight and even likeability in parts – Morrissey's vanity seems to explain a grand litany of falling out with labels, managers, musicians, fans and music journalists – often ones who time and time again seem to have gone out of their way to accommodate him – even as self described – and manifests both inflated self belief and aggrandizement. Any problems or short fallings nearly always seems to be down to – allegedly - the stupidity, vulgarity, indifference,

insensitivity and talentless fault of dullard judges, fellow band members, music press journalists or fans - never his own – whilst all triumphs seem to have been achieved despite everyone else rather than partly facilitated by them.

Now it may be that some are tempted to deny this is really a problem vanity causes for creativity per se. Vanity may turn out to be a social vice but it may be thought that creativity is not inherently a social activity. This seems perverse given that creative development and the most isolated creative activities typically depend on all sorts of co-operative norms and practices. Nonetheless it is true that certain kinds of creative activity are not especially collaborative. Poets, painters, authors, landscapers, mathematicians and composers, for example, often work as loners (though not nearly as much as we might think) and their creative activities can perhaps be pursued in splendid isolation. Moreover, even where creative activities require co-operation or collaboration, at least where the vain are in positions of power or dominance, others may be prepared to co-operate enough for the vain to pursue their creative ambitions. Various star architects, chefs, academics or entrepreneurs may have assistants who make huge allowances for them. Where vanity seems to give certain adaptive advantages, in prudential terms at least, foregoing long-term creative trust in collaboration or co-operation may seem like a cost worth paying. This may help to explain why in domains associated with an individual star system vanity may be far more prevalent. Nonetheless, despite appearances, as we shall see, vanity most fundamentally tends towards creative imprudence.

9. Creative Imprudence

It might be thought that, creative co-operation aside, given the putative creative benefits outlined above people's vanity serves their creative self-interests. However, as

we shall see, vanity not only often pulls away from the best kind of creativity and creative development but leads to creative imprudence.

In so far as people's vanity leads to the overestimation of the nature of what they have achieved, their role in such and what they are capable of doing well, vain people will naturally tend to overreach themselves. It is all too easy for vain people to set themselves at creative ambitions that they are badly placed to realize. Moreover, vanity will tend to be blind to certain risks, underestimate others and over value certain kinds of rewards given the grandiose self image and implied audience involved. Thus it is that vanity will have a tendency to set people up to fail and give rise to what may turn out to be a huge amount of wasted creative time and effort.

In so far as vain people are guided by the self-glorifying desire for esteem, they will tend to put in hard work *only* where this is either visible to the relevant implied audience or devoted toward something that it is assumed will eventually be visible to (and esteemed by) them. Even where vanity motivates, it does so by tracking the vagaries of intellectual, artistic or design fashion as indexed to the relevant implied audience. To the degree creative people are vain they will tend to track what is conventionally approved of and esteemed by the implied audience. Hence vanity tends toward creative cowardice in seeking conformity toward the values and interests of the implied audience. This explains just why vanity orientates itself toward the least interesting kind of creativity (where it is tracking what is creative at all). The vain will be averse to trying out genuinely new, radical, potentially transformative possibilities, relative to the implied audience. Vanity will tend to track what seems a safe bet for high esteem and, for the vain, the worst kind of risk is losing the esteem of the implied audience or indeed opening up to the possibility of indifference, ridicule and looking downright silly. Taking genuine creative risks often open up the possibility of losing

the kind of self-glorifying self-gratification that drives the vain. Vanity, then, explains a lack of truly creative courage in the pursuit of what is really safe in conforming to the expectations of others. The vain seek to show off qualities that will most easily garner praise and adulation. By contrast, the creatively courageous are prepared to try things out which may well be thought likely to meet with incredulity. At least to the extent transformative, radical creativity depends upon trying out the genuinely new and surprising, rather than safely elaborating on that which is most likely to elicit esteem, vanity pulls away from the most significant kind of creativity. Vanity may appear courageous, and no doubt the vain will tend to promote their work more, but by its nature it will tend to be conformist and conventional relative to the relevant implied audience.

The vain person will also tend toward close-mindedness in dismissing all too easily the criticism of those who are not part of the implied audience or consider doubtful, where possible, the status of those who are critical (as being part of the true implied audience). In other words vanity tends to insulate against and lead to the dismissal of criticism as voiced by those perceived not to belong to the implied audience whose esteem and approval is being sought. This is problematic given that – at least sometimes – precisely what is needed to develop creatively is to listen to the worries, objections or points of view of those outside the group one does (or aspires to) belong to. Where criticism and disesteem comes from those who belong to the implied audience – and their being so cannot reasonably be put into doubt – then the vain person will tend to be over sensitive. This helps to explain tendencies either to a) over react in response to such criticism by trying to realign creative projects or activity in line with the esteem of the relevant group – or b) over react in dismissing them as thereby showing themselves not to be a group whose esteem is worth soliciting and

thereby seeking to realign to some other grouping. This explains why the vain may tend toward certain creative vices in ways that seem inconsistent. The vain can be both overly solicitious of the opinions of others while yet also snobbishly dismissive (Kieran 2010) where there is a mismatch with the sought for self-glorification.

Conceptually speaking vanity need not always produce such errors all the time. However, given what it is to be vain, to the degree someone is vain he will have marked tendencies toward making such mistakes. Vain people expose themselves to the strong possibility of certain kinds of creative failings, misdirection and stunted creative development. They will also fail to possess certain creative virtues, such as true courage, which facilitate and enable the most significant kind of creativity. The problem is compounded where people meet with some degree of early or intense creative success, reward, applause and esteem given a) the multiple functions of esteem indicators and b) that admired success attracts people and systems serving distinct motivations and functions other than tracking true worth. As creative success is rewarded with indicators of esteem – or indicators taken as such – this, in turn, can attract people and systems with ends that are orthogonal to tracking true creative worth. Hence the acquisition and development of vanity may proceed in ways which bring about or reinforce echo chamber effects and an epistemic insulation from the kind of criticism required for creative development.

Vanity might be thought of as analogous to a particularly fickle kind of stimulant that can on occasion boost performance likely to be recognized by an implied audience as creative on particular kinds of occasion but – at least over time – will tend toward fundamental creative misjudgment and misdirection. Furthermore, vanity brings with it natural tendencies toward certain other creative vices. The vain seek something, via being creative, which is at best orthogonal to creativity and at

worst a problematic rival. Now seeking praise is far from a bad thing. The trouble is that vanity seeks praise as self-glorifying. In effect vanity fixes on defeasible indicators of what it is to be, creatively speaking, on the right track in relation to some external goal – that you are glorified as praised or praiseworthy – and then treats those indicators as the goal itself. The fundamental error is that the vain value attitudes of praise or admiration as ends in themselves rather than as, at best, indicators of creative progress or achievement and this, in turn, explains tendencies toward error and misdirection.

10. From Vanity as a Creative Vice to Creative Virtue

Fame and glory are often orthogonal to genuine achievement. Vanity takes indicators of creative success (i.e. attitudes of others such as praise, applause or more indirect cultural esteem indicators) as *the* end to aim at *for the sake of* self-glorification. By contrast the best creative end to aim at just is the end of doing something new that is good or worthwhile, though, of course, this will often involve aiming at something that is esteemed by others. It is true that if we are aiming at something creatively worthwhile we may sometimes justifiably believe that what we do deserves praise (though not as much as the vain would). Nonetheless, this should be a by-product of the ends exemplary creativity aims at rather than the end itself. Exemplary creativity tends to insulate people from the errors vanity is susceptible to. Why? The creatively virtuous aim to do something new and worthwhile, so concern for garnering esteem as such does not figure directly in their reasoning about what they do.

Nonetheless we can explain why vanity may seem, mistakenly, to be a creative strength. It is not just that vanity may sometimes bring apparent creative advantages alongside exposure to significant creative misdirection and failings. It is also that of all

the creative vices, vanity may be the closest cousin to creative virtue. As Hume suggests more generally "vanity is so closely allied to virtue, and to love the fame of laudable actions approaches so near the love of laudable actions for their own sake, that these passions are more capable of mixture, than any other kinds of affection" (Hume 2007: 87). More strongly still, as Smith held (Hanley: 104-109; 144–145), vanity is educable from the love of praise toward what is worthy of praise. The vain person who seeks glorification from actual praise can be shown that he will tend to be more creative if he seeks merited praise. Notice that a vain person seeking merited praise could have the same creative behavioural profile as a fully virtuous person. This is one reason why vanity is the closest cousin to creative virtue. The second reason is that the vain creative person who seeks merited praise may be shown it would be better still if he sought doing what is worthwhile rather than aiming directly at self-glorifying esteem. Vanity can thus be harnessed in creative development, via psychological bootstrapping, into the cultivation of genuine creative virtue. No doubt if we are aiming to do something creatively, we do so because we think it is worth doing. To the extent we think something is worth doing – and we have done it well – we *may* approve of ourselves and enjoy the praise of others (though the creatively virtuous may be more focused on what could or might have been better). Hence creative virtue is consistent with delight in esteem. Nonetheless, creative virtue involves enjoying the praise of a relevant implied audience (where it is enjoyed) as a byproduct of aiming to do something well rather than the end goal itself. Hence, as with Gregor Mendel, Emily Dickinson, Vincent Van Gogh or Vivian Maier, exemplary creative people sometimes pursue self set creative ends even where their achievement is (at least as yet) unrecognized and unsung.

If the above argument is on the right lines then the apparent challenge to a virtue theoretic approach to exemplary human creativity has been met. In raising and then meeting the challenge we have seen how and why vanity, when properly understood, may enable creativity in some circumstances whilst yet undermining it much more fundamentally. Conceiving of vanity as a close cousin to creative virtue captures this kind of relation and shows how we might psychologically leverage vanity into creative virtue. If so then, in both conceptual and practical terms, this is an interesting, significant result that casts new light on the nature of creative character. Creativity not only need not come at the cost of personal vice but vanity itself can be turned toward creative virtue.[1]

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