Synthese (2023) 202:32
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-023-04259-3

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Collective arrogance: a norms-based account

Henry Roe[1]

Received: 30 August 2022 / Accepted: 29 June 2023

Abstract
How should we understand the arrogance of groups that do not seem to exhibit group agency? Specifically, how should we understand the putative epistemic arrogance ascribed to men and privileged or powerful groups in cases raised in the extant philosophical literature? Groups like these differ from others that are usually the subject of work on collective vice and virtue insofar as they seem to lack essential features of group agency; they are *sub-agential* groups. In this article, I ask whether extant summative or anti-summative accounts of collective epistemic vice offer a basis for understanding the structure of the epistemic arrogance of men and the privileged. I argue that a summative formulation and two prominent anti-summative positions fail to adequately account for the structure of group arrogance in such cases. This leaves us lacking an understanding of how sub-agential group arrogance works. To address this, I defend a collectivist account of group arrogance that takes social norms as the determinative basis of group arrogance.

Keywords Arrogance · Collective vice · Vice epistemology · Social epistemology · Collective agency

1 Introduction

Arrogant people appear presumptuous, conceited, obnoxious, and entitled. Worse, they are frequently oblivious of these faults and so seem utterly intransigent, incapable of change, and infuriatingly so. Encounters with arrogant people are rarely pleasant and often fractious. In a contemporary context in which arrogance is increasingly observed in political leaders, the stakes are even higher. This is perhaps one reason why philosophers continue to be interested in this subject. Politicians like Henry Kissinger (Tiberius & Walker, 1998), David Cameron (Tanesini, 2016), and Donald Trump (Battaly, 2020) have been used as illuminating case studies for understanding

✉ Henry Roe
hroe90@gmail.com

[1] Department of Philosophy, University of Sheffield, 45 Victoria Street, Sheffield S3 7QB, UK

Published online: 17 July 2023

arrogance. But individuals are not the only ones labelled arrogant: groups of people are often said to be arrogant, too. The charge has been levelled at men (Frye, 1983), the powerful and privileged (Lynch, 2018; Medina, 2013; Superson, 2004; Tanesini, 2020; herein, just 'the privileged'), and white feminists (Lugones, 2003; Ortega, 2006)—and this is just within the philosophical literature. Outside of the academy, charges of arrogance aimed at a diverse range of other groups abound.[1]

Here, I understand epistemic arrogance to be a vice; a 'canonical epistemic vice', even (de Rooij & de Bruin, 2022). Epistemic vices are conceived broadly to include character traits, attitudes, sensibilities, and thinking styles that systematically prevent, stifle, or obstruct access to epistemic "goods" like truth, knowledge, or 'cognitive contact with reality' (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 167) and that warrant blame or criticism for this. As such, I am working broadly within the framework of Cassam's (2019) 'obstructivist' account of epistemic vice, an approach chiefly concerned with the consequences of traits, attitudes, or ways of thinking, rather than their characteristic motivations. Epistemically arrogant individuals take themselves to occupy a special epistemic position in relation to others, which they assume or think affords them certain epistemic licenses (e.g., to know, believe, think, or ignore)—but they are mistaken, either because they do not occupy the epistemic position that they think they do or because the epistemic license that they claim is not warranted given their epistemic position.[2]

Some groups that are said to be arrogant—men and the privileged, for instance—are not archetypal group agents (like corporations or government departments) but large, informally organised groups defined by common characteristics or features rather than explicit legal structures. They are groups in the sense that they are social categories, or what Reza Lahroodi calls 'mere populations', distinct from 'established' social groups that are founded to perform particular functions insofar as they lack the coherence or unity of purpose that makes established groups capable of action analogous to that of individuals (Lahroodi, 2019, p. 407). In other words, men and the privileged are what we might call, following Nguyen and Strohl (2019, p. 996), 'sub-agential' groups. Whilst established social groups have been almost the sole focus of philosophical work on collective epistemic virtue and vice, here I seek to explore the question of how we should make sense of claims that *sub-agential* groups like men and the privileged can be epistemically arrogant.[3] This is not to say that the arrogance of agential groups cannot be understood in similar terms to that of sub-agential groups but that attributions of arrogance directed at sub-agential groups raises distinct challenges for those seeking to understand such claims.[4]

[1] Here are two illustrative examples: the British, it is claimed, are arrogant regarding their cultural output (O'Connor, 2021) whilst 'arrogant middle-class' Extinction Rebellion climate protestors are the target of a Conservative MP (Fogarty, 2019).

[2] This is broadly consistent with other accounts of arrogance, such as those from Dillon (2007), Roberts and Wood (2007), and Tanesini (2016, 2021) (though my 'obstructivist' stance is somewhat at odds with Tanesini's 'motivationalist' approach to epistemic vice).

[3] I do not address here the claims of arrogance made by Lugones (2003) and Ortega (2006) against white feminists because this group is less clearly sub-agential.

[4] My hope is that the norms-based account of collective epistemic arrogance elaborated here may be usefully applied to agential as well as sub-agential cases, though this is outside of the scope of this paper.

In sect. 2, I introduce Frye's (1983) influential work on male arrogance before turning to contemporary literature on the arrogance of privileged social groups and argue that these are properly understood as collective epistemic vice claims. In section three, I consider summativist and non-summativist approaches to collective epistemic vice and argue that the claims made regarding the arrogance of men and the privileged speaks in favour of a non-summativist account of the structure of these groups' epistemic vice. I consider two extant accounts, from Fricker (2010, 2020) and Holroyd (2020), and consider how they might help us to understand the structure of sub-agential group arrogance. I argue that Fricker's account is incompatible with the cases of group arrogance considered here and Holroyd's account, though compatible, offers an inadequate explanatory framework for understanding sub-agential group arrogance. I aim to solve this problem in section four by offering a framework based on Davidson and Kelly's (2020) view of social norms. Norms, I argue, are the binding collective feature of sub-agential groups that explain how they can be epistemically arrogant. I end by defending this position against possible objections, principally by clarifying how this approach is genuinely collectivist.

2 Some (putative) arrogant groups

In an influential essay on arrogance and love, Marilyn Frye (1983) charges men with a distinct form of arrogance. For Frye, male arrogance is a matter of perception; a self-centred way of seeing the world that sees the actions of those around them as aimed at or somehow to do with them. The arrogant perceiver believes 'that everything exists and happens for some purpose, and he tends to animate things, imagining attitudes toward himself as the animating motives. Everything is either "for me" or "against me"' (p. 67). The end purpose of this perception is the 'acquisition of the service of others' (p. 66)—namely, women—and it is men who are in the cultural and material position to realise this aim.[5] Men can shape the roles of women according to their interests because they have the 'cultural and institutional power to make the misdefinition stick' (p. 70). Significantly, for our purposes, Frye claims that the arrogant perceiver 'has the support of a community of arrogant perceivers' (p. 72, footnote) who are amongst the most powerful individuals in society.

Importantly, for Frye male arrogance develops and flourishes within communities of powerful people in insidious ways; it is bolstered by social forces and achieves the same oppressive results as 'overt force' (p. 70) through its ability to define. Those who control the 'material media of culture and most other economic resources' (p. 72, footnote) can normalise arrogant perceptions in ways that hide the arrogance inherent to them. In other words, male arrogance is a 'stealthy vice' (Cassam, 2015): it is often "hidden" in commonly accepted practices related to social roles, norms, expectations, or other features which are self-perpetuating insofar as they appear to many as unquestioned facts of the world. Frye is therefore explicit, where others are not, in

[5] This claim is obviously in need of an intersectional analysis, as it is surely not *all* men who occupy this cultural and material position.

stating the role of communities of people in perpetuating or catalysing arrogance and the oppression that it is said to support.

Of course, Frye is not alone in thinking about these issues, which have been central to feminist discourse for decades. But Frye's particular focus and labelling of the phenomena as arrogant offers an influential and developed position that is therefore useful for our purposes here. Relatedly, Amia Srinivasan's (2021) recent discussion of male sexual entitlement—manifested as the presumption of a 'right to sex' and most explicitly articulated in online "incel" forums—appears to add support to the view that these kinds of arrogant assumptions of (in this case, sexual) license are attributable to men as a group.

Kate Manne's (2018; 2020) recent monographs on misogyny and male entitlement suggest a similar conclusion. Like Srinivasan, Manne (2020) also discusses male entitlement to sex, along with a range of other entitlements that, it is argued, men see themselves as having. Perhaps most significantly, given our primary focus is on *epistemic* arrogance, Manne explores male entitlement to knowledge, whereby men take themselves to be entitled 'to occupy the conversational position of the knower by default: to be the one who dispenses information, offers corrections, and authoritatively issues explanations' (2020, p. 52). This entitlement is most clearly demonstrable with reference to the phenomenon of mansplaining and is problematic in virtue of the fact that often men are wrong to assume this conversational position, because there are frequently more knowledgeable and authoritative *women* present in these contexts.

While Srinivasan and Manne's work can offer further support to those seeking to defend the claim of arrogance levelled at men, Frye's account of arrogant perception makes the charge most directly. It is not my task, here, to defend these claims, though I am sympathetic to them. Rather, I use these cases of putative group arrogance to elaborate on what kind of account of group vice is required in order to understand the social metaphysics of such claims. However, I accept that the claims must at least have some plausibility in order to motivate the discussion around group arrogance. For those sceptical of their plausibility, I would refer to the wealth of testimonial evidence that these authors draw upon in their discussions of these topics, for example Manne's analysis of misogynistic comments that abound in the media and Srinivasan's commentary on the (sometimes violently) distorted reasoning found within the 'manosphere'. Additionally, and as Manne (2018) also notes, there is an extant literature in social psychology on the way certain traits of dominance are gendered, so that controlling and arrogant behaviour is expected in men but prohibited in women.[6]

Other philosophers have taken aim at a broader (but overlapping) social group: the privileged. Privileged social groups are those who have the most power in society in light of their socio-economic position. Part of their social privilege is a distinct *epistemic* privilege, which José Medina describes as 'the privilege of knowing (or always being presumed to know), of always being heard as a credible speaker, of always commanding cognitive authority' (2013, p. 30). Although the specifics of their arguments vary, philosophers who have claimed that privilege is closely connected with arrogance include Superson (2004), Medina (2013), Lynch (2018), and Tanesini (2020). No one claims that *all* privileged people are (epistemically) arrogant or that

[6] For a good example of this work, see Rudman et al. (2012).

the privileged are *necessarily* arrogant, but that privilege *facilitates* arrogance. In other words, members of this group are dramatically more likely to demonstrate arrogance in virtue of their group membership.

Alessandra Tanesini argues that 'arrogance is hard to preserve in the absence of social privilege' (2020, p. 64) and Medina that epistemic arrogance is a principle 'vice of the privileged' (2013, pp. 30–40). Anita Superson claims that 'cultural domination' is a benefit of privilege that 'facilitates the cultivation of arrogance' by presenting the perspective of the privileged as 'the only one, or the only one that matters', meaning that 'a society's culture will express the experiences, values, goals, and achievements of the privileged group that produces it and will represent their perspective on, and interpretation of, events as that of all of humanity, or, "the truth"' (2004, p. 37). There are echoes of Frye's words, here, in that Superson is claiming that the privileged have the resources and power necessary for making politically salient (mis)definitions "stick", which in turn reinforces the arrogance of the group.

There is a good deal of overlap between these two groups, of course, as many men will also be privileged, but we can treat them as separate groups insofar as they can be differentiated by different features or characteristics (gender; social privilege). One commonality, however, is that both groups are what Lahroodi calls 'mere populations', as opposed to 'established' social groups (2019, p. 407). Population groups have common characteristics like gender, social class, or support of a particular football team, whereas established groups include intimacy groups (families or housemates), task groups (juries or teams) and corporations. Established social groups are 'paradigmatic' collectives: 'relatively coherent units in which the members are bonded and united together in some fashion', interacting frequently, and 'capable of action in a manner not dissimilar to that of a single subject or agent' (2019, pp. 407–408). Populations, it is suggested, lack the coherence, unity, and interaction that makes some groups capable of joint action; they do not meet the criteria of group agency which, on Pettit and List's (2011) account, requires that the group can have representations and motivations (beliefs, knowledge, desires, etc.) and the ability to process and act on these (for instance, via voting mechanisms or decision-making hierarchies). To borrow Nguyen and Strohl's phrase, men and the privileged appear to be 'sub-agential' groups insofar as they lack the organisational structure and decision-making abilities that are required of group agents (2019, pp. 996–997). To make sense of claims that men or the privileged can be epistemically arrogant therefore requires us to have an account of how *sub-agential groups* can be said to hold collective epistemic vices. As I shall argue in section four, men and the privileged do have certain shared features that make them *more* coherent, unified, and capable of group action than their description as 'mere populations' suggests, and indeed agential *enough* to meet the demands of at least one account of collective epistemic vice, but I do not here consider the possibility that they could be group agents.

3 Some structures of collective epistemic vice

Proceeding on the understanding that the cases of men and the privileged are claims of collective epistemic vice, then, how should we understand this group vice to be

structured? We have a few options. First, group vice may be structured *summatively*. For summativism to obtain, all or most members of the group must have the vice in question individually for the group to have the vice. This is because summativism holds that collective vices are nothing beyond the aggregation of individuals' personal vices, meaning that the group vice is reducible to the vices of the group's members. For example, a governmental panel may be said to be closedminded if all or most of its members are individually closedminded. The sum total of closedminded individuals within the group explains why the group is well-described as closedminded and the group's closedmindedness is reducible to the closedmindedness of individual group members. As Lahroodi (2019, p. 411) has noted, summatively structured group vice is not genuinely collective vice, as the vice-ascriptions are ultimately aimed at group members as private individuals rather than the group itself. For our purposes, to describe a group of people as arrogant in a summative sense would just mean that all or most of the individual members of that group are themselves arrogant as individuals. Group arrogance consists in nothing more than enough group members being arrogant people.

But summativism does not seem to be the account of group arrogance that Frye, Medina, Tanesini, Superson or Lynch have in mind. None of them suggest that the arrogance of men or the privileged is a result simply of a majority of the members of these social groups demonstrating epistemic arrogance as private individuals and nor do they argue that a majority of group members do in fact display the vice of arrogance. Further, discussion of the (epistemic) arrogance of men and the privileged does not appear to be used as a shorthand for discussing the individual vices of members of these groups. Instead, what seems to be the focus is how the arrogance of group members is facilitated via (irreducible) features inherent to group membership. But there is no reason to think that the arrogance-facilitating function of group membership means that arrogance must be common to a majority of group members. Some might think that it is true that most members of the groups in question do in fact demonstrate forms of epistemic arrogance as individuals, but the authors' discussions of these cases do not appear to *require* this. While this pushes us towards *nonsummative* (or, as I prefer, *anti-summative*) accounts of collective vice, it does not provide conclusive reasons for abandoning summativism. *That* the cases are not described in summativist terms is not a reason to think that they *could* not be. I return to this issue in Sect. 4.3, where I defend an explicitly collectivist (anti-summative) account of group arrogance. For now, I take it that descriptions of the cases of group arrogance offer reason enough to look elsewhere.

How about anti-summativism then? Anti-summativism is the view that all or most individual members of a group need not have the vice in question *as individuals* for the group to have a vice. In other words, groups can have vices or virtues which its individual members do not. Typically, anti-summativism is taken to be the 'relevant philosophical challenge' (Fricker, 2010, p. 235) because it seeks to defend an account of group behaviour that is genuinely collective, i.e., irreducible to individual member-level features. To say that a group is arrogant in an anti-summative sense would be to say that irreducible group features make the group itself arrogant. Anti-summativism looks to offer a way forward where summativism fails. However, for it to do so we need an anti-summativist account of collective epistemic vice that tells a plausible story of

precisely which irreducible group-related features constitute the group's arrogance. Let's consider two prominent options.

3.1 Fricker's anti-summativism

Miranda Fricker's anti-summativism seeks to account for *institutional* virtues and vices, for example the racism of London's Metropolitan Police service (2010) and the 'inferential inertia' of the BBC relating to former TV presenter Jimmy Savile's sexual abuse of children (2020). For Fricker, the genuinely collective group features that substantiate the anti-summativist account are, inspired by Gilbert's (1987, 1989, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2013) substantial work on collective agency, joint commitments made under conditions of common knowledge. Groups are appropriately bound together in virtuous or vicious ways insofar as their members jointly commit to practices—including epistemic practices—*and understand that they are committing to this*. Fricker (2010, pp. 238–239) borrows Christine Korsgaard's (1996, chpt. 3) concept of 'practical identities' to carve out an account of precisely how individuals' joint commitments are shaped and how they sometimes conflict with their personal commitments. Our practical identities are the social roles we inhabit that involve various associated commitments. A member of a drama society, to use Fricker's example, adopts the practical identity of a society member in committing to the society's survival and flourishing. However, in their practical identity as a private individual and local resident who is 'regularly inconvenienced by the society's occupying the town hall and taking up all the parking places on a Thursday evening', the individual group member might be unmoved by the society ceasing to exist (Fricker, 2010, p. 238). Here, then, an individual's commitments *qua* private individual are in conflict with their commitments *qua* drama society member; commitments that are shaped by their different practical identities.

More recently, Fricker has developed this view by building in an account of institutional ethos, where ethos is the collective analogue of individual character, defined as 'a set of interrelated dispositions and attitudes, where (in the case of a virtuous person) these are conceived as temporally and counter-factually stable motives towards good ultimate and mediate ends' (Fricker, 2020, p.93). Fricker states that.

> *institutional epistemic vices are displayed—either in thinking or, where persistent, also at the level of institutional character—whenever there are culpable lapses in the institution's epistemic ethos and/or in the implementation of its ends.* (2020, pp. 100–101; emphasis in original)

This iteration of Fricker's view incorporates two distinct kinds of epistemic defect that collectives can demonstrate: motivational defects within the epistemic ethos and performative defects relating to the implementation of group ends.

One problem with applying this account to the cases of group arrogance in question should be immediately clear following the previous discussion around varieties of groups and group agency: Fricker's account is concerned with formally structured, 'established' or institutionalised groups. As I have suggested, men and the privileged appear to be *sub-agential* groups, making a straightforward application

more complicated. The possibility of sub-agential groups possessing group 'ends' is questionable because such groups typically do not have formalised methods for establishing their purposes or for expressing these collectively. Accounting for the arrogance of sub-agential groups in terms of a culpably defective performance regarding the implementation of ends is therefore unlikely.[7] However, some might think that there remains the possibility of expanding Fricker's account if a good case can be made that the group's epistemic arrogance has followed from a culpable lapse in the collective's epistemic ethos.

It is unclear if the account can be extended in this way, however. For one, the joint commitment model looks implausible in the case of group arrogance. Fricker contends that cases of epistemically bad motivations will be 'unusual at best' and so locates the disvalue of the motivational component of vice instead in an 'inadequate commitment to good epistemic ends' (2020, p. 99). Holroyd (2020) convincingly argues that a failure to commit to virtuous ends need not signal vice, because some groups may simply have different priorities that do not require them to commit to some virtuous ends. Perhaps the condition that lapses in epistemic ethos need be *culpable* to some extent clarifies how a failure to commit to virtuous ends is sometimes vicious and other times not. But, in the context of male arrogance and the arrogance of the privileged, locating a group's vice in inadequately virtuous motivations appears inapt—because arrogance, working within the framing of vice that I am using, here, is not a matter of a particular motivational orientation but of mistakenly assuming an epistemic position or orientation that systematically obstructs one's access to epistemic goods. Culpable lapses of ethos, as analogous to culpable lapses of motivation, do not appear well-suited to describe the phenomena at issue in the cases described.

To explain, consider what Fricker's account demands for ascriptions of collective epistemic arrogance to obtain. We have already discounted the possibility of the fault being found in the implementation of the group's ends—because sub-agential groups are not clearly constituted in a way that would make the establishment of group ends possible. This means that the group's defect must be found in their motivational orientation or, in Fricker's terminology, their epistemic ethos. Because this is an anti-summative account, Fricker seeks to define an irreducibly collective feature of the group that functions to produce the epistemic ethos, as analogous to an individual's character. Fricker understands such collective features to be formed by a joint commitment (themselves shaped by our various and sometime conflicting practical identities). Thus, the epistemic ethos will be constituted via joint commitments.

The problem is that group members must jointly commit *under conditions of common knowledge*—a condition which is implausible in many, if not all, contemporary contexts. Imagine men, for instance, unanimously and with self-awareness, committing to the acquisition of the service of women. Though Fricker (2010, pp. 244–247) clarifies that the motive need not be conceived of *as vicious* and that group members can become party to joint commitments merely as 'passengers' (by letting the

[7] This is not to say that the group's behaviour is not defective but just that it is implausible that the group's performance is a result of the kinds of ends that the group has set for itself.

commitment stand or failing to object to it), contexts in which such an overtly oppressive commitment could be made seem sparse at best.[8] More plausibly, manifestations of arrogance in privileged groups (including men) will most often be the result of a closedmindedness or thoughtlessness derived from an ignorance of, or insensitivity towards, the people to whom their arrogance is directed.[9] In these cases, which I take to be typical, privileged individuals will not be knowingly *committing* (as mere passengers or not) to the pursuit of conversational domination (e.g., mansplaining) or the persistent ignoring and diminishing of testimonies of women and other members of marginalised communities. It appears far more plausible, instead, that these privileged individuals are simply unaware that this is what they are doing or take for granted that what they are doing is entirely normal and acceptable behaviour.[10] If this is the case, it suggests that sub-agential group arrogance is unlikely to be structured via the joint commitment framework.

To be clear, Fricker grounds an epistemically vicious ethos (in part) in an *inadequate commitment* to virtuous epistemic ends rather than in a commitment to vicious epistemic ends. Perhaps members of privileged groups are simply inadequately committed to the virtues (like humility) opposed to arrogance, then. However, Fricker's account relies on a metaphysics that understands collective virtues and vices as grounded in joint commitments, so arrogant groups must be jointly committed in a way that warrants the ascription of epistemic arrogance. But arrogant sub-agential groups are not aptly described in terms of the presence of inadequate joint commitments or in terms of joint commitments at all.

If Fricker's account is unable to tell a plausible story about how sub-agential group arrogance is anti-summatively structured, we might be inclined to think that this is so much the worse for the suggested cases of collective arrogance; that these are not genuine cases of collective arrogance at all. I will suggest, however, that a more plausible story can be told. Moreover, the problem with accounting for group arrogance in terms of joint commitments shaped by our practical identities is explained by the way in which arrogance is, in Robin Dillon's words, commonly

> a matter of inexplicit assumption, unarticulated taking for granted, implicit expectation, a matter of presumption… a matter of what goes without saying and without thinking, more a matter of understanding, interpretation, construal, and perception than of inference, explicit belief, and declaration. It tends to operate stealthily, without thought, and unconcerned about, inattentive to, or contemptuous of truth and reality. (Dillon, 2007, p. 108)

This ought to be motivation enough to look elsewhere for an anti-summativist account that can help us understand the arrogance of sub-agential groups.

[8] Incel (involuntary celibate) culture is perhaps one particularly extreme but concerning context in which such an outwardly misogynistic motivation or commitment might be far more common.

[9] See Tanesini (2020) and Battaly (2020) for illuminating discussions of the connections between arrogance, ignorance, and closedmindedness.

[10] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this possibility and pushing for further clarification on the suitability of the joint commitment model, here.

3.2 Dispositional anti-summativism

Jules Holroyd (2020) has offered an alternative anti-summativist account of collective epistemic vice that develops upon Byerly and Byerly's (2016) account of collective virtue. Holroyd states that 'a collective C has vice V to the extent that C is disposed to behave in ways characteristic of V under appropriate circumstances' (2020, p. 138). On this account, then, it is the *dispositions* of groups that account for the possibility of them having vices, rather than joint commitments. In Byerly and Byerly's original formulation, they respond to a concern raised about how to understand group dispositions by offering an alternative framing of the dispositional account: 'A collective C has a virtue V to the extent that the members of C are disposed, *qua* members of C, to behave in ways characteristic of V under appropriate circumstances' (2016, p. 43; emphasis in original). Again, we can substitute 'virtue' for 'vice' here and have an alternative articulation of the dispositional account relating to collective epistemic vice. This iteration of the account seeks to explicate the mechanics of group dispositions by locating them in group member dispositions *qua group members*. In other words, the dispositions of the group are reducible to the dispositions of the group members, but the members' dispositions are oriented around and constituted by their participation in the group, meaning they are irreducible to group members merely as private individuals.

This account states that the epistemic vices of groups are based on the dispositions of the members of these groups *qua group members*. All that is required for collective vice, then, is that members of groups have particular dispositions that are identifiably group-related, meaning that collective intentionality (including the joint commitment account) is not required for group vice. This is because group-dependent properties like dispositions related to group membership need not require collective agency. To illustrate how this is so, consider how a disposition to behave in a hostile manner to fans of a rival football team does not require that the group of football fans have collectively processed, considered, and then decided upon this course of action as a group agent might. Problems around group agency do not therefore arise on the dispositional account.

This feature of dispositional anti-summativism looks like a key area of compatibility for those who hope to defend claims of sub-agential group arrogance. What's more, the account looks *prima facie* consistent with the claims of male and privileged arrogance. Frye, I think, would agree that men are disposed, *qua men*, towards epistemic arrogance. And it appears a fair estimation of views regarding the arrogance of the privileged that this group can be described as epistemically arrogant because members of privileged groups are disposed, *qua members of this group*, to behave in ways characteristic of epistemic arrogance under appropriate circumstances. Neither claim entails that *every* group member behaves in epistemically arrogant ways but merely that members' group membership disposes them in this way.

While the dispositional view may be correct in claiming that men or the privileged are arrogant insofar as membership in these groups disposes the members to behave arrogantly, we may still wonder why exactly membership in these groups does this. The dispositional account offers compatibility with cases of sub-agential group arrogance, but not explanatory power. Nor should we expect it to. Philosophical accounts

of the structure of collective vice need not deliver explanatory power as well as the social metaphysics, and it may be the case that group-related dispositions are explained differently in different cases, or that different vices or virtues require different explanatory toolkits in different contexts. For our purposes, however, this leaves a gap in our understanding and aetiological questions regarding group arrogance unanswered. This is what I turn to next.

4 Group arrogance, explained by norms

So far, I have sought to understand the ascription of epistemic vice to two putatively arrogant groups—men and the privileged—with reference to two extant anti-summative accounts, having offered reasons against a summativist interpretation. I have argued that Fricker's anti-summativism will not accommodate these cases and that the dispositional account, while compatible, leaves explanatory questions regarding the structure of collective arrogance unanswered. So how can we better understand group arrogance in these cases? My suggestion is that we can explain the arrogance of groups like men or the privileged by modelling the arrogance-oriented dispositions of such groups around the concept of social norms. I begin by discussing the "qua-talk" at the heart of the dispositional account and its relevance to social roles and their attendant norms, before clarifying precisely how this gives us a distinctively collectivist account of group arrogance.

4.1 On being disposed *qua* sub-agential group member

What does it mean for a man or a member of privileged social groups to be disposed to behave in certain ways *qua* member of that group? Dictionary definitions point towards actions 'qua' members as actions members take *in their capacity as* members. But what our capacities are as members of different groups differs depending on context. For example, talk of a BBC presenter or a Met police officer acting *qua* institutional member could mean that they are acting as a representative of this group or acting to fulfil their functional role within this group, among other things. They may only be disposed *qua* group member whilst in uniform or when they are on duty, or perhaps their group-related dispositions extend beyond work contexts. But to talk of a man or privileged individual acting as a representative of, or fulfilling his functional role as, a man or privileged person is ill-formulated, because these social groups are expansive, loosely constituted groups which appear not to have objectively identifiable spokespeople or explicitly determined functions, roles, or motives.

I suggest that we can make sense of actions *qua* sub-agential group members in terms of members' responsiveness to the social norms that govern the group. To be disposed to behave *qua* man or privileged person can therefore be understood as to be disposed to behave in ways responsive to the attendant social norms of masculinity or privilege. Such norms will be characteristic of men or the privileged in general, though they need not be followed or demonstrated by most or all members of these groups. As such, social norms offer a unique way of understanding collective epistemic arrogance

(and, potentially, other vices) in that the norms themselves can be said to contain the group dispositions and thus themselves act as irreducible group features that make the account genuinely collectivist.

In a recent paper on the subject, Lacey J. Davidson and Daniel Kelly describe social norms as 'the rules, often unwritten, that organise social life, marking out what behaviours are required, appropriate, permitted, or forbidden for different kinds of people in different circumstances' (2020, p. 194). They argue that work on social norms offers a way to overcome debates about individualist versus structuralist approaches to bias, oppression, and injustice because norms can bridge the gap between individualist and collectivist understandings of these phenomena. Social norms aid our understanding of how individuals are connected to their social realities because, they suggest, they 'form a soft but durable connective tissue that binds individuals to groups via cycling loops of mutual influence' that result in a 'normative pull' toward particular group behaviours (p. 198). Davidson and Kelly explain how individuals have 'norm systems' that often function without 'conscious guidance' and beyond our awareness (p. 196). These systems include an acquisition mechanism, which identifies and internalises the prevalent norms in a person's local community and culture, and an execution mechanism, which identifies situations and types of people to which an internalised norm might apply and motivates behaviour in accordance with the norm. Norms are affective; they 'feel like the right thing to do', and not necessarily for personal gain (p. 197). While the norm system is likely an innate and universal feature of human psychology, the specific contents of norms are not. This explains how some social norms will mean that groups demonstrate collective epistemic arrogance and other norms will not.[11]

Social norms therefore offer a distinct way for us to understand the "qua-talk" relating to sub-agential groups like men and the privileged. We can make sense of the arrogant groups discussed here insofar as it is possible to identify dominant social norms within male and privileged groups that elicit, promote, or encourage behaviour that is epistemically arrogant. As a starting point, there are a number of candidate social norms that we might think dispose groups to behave in characteristically arrogant ways, like norms that require members to dominate discursive situations, to assume a right to control conversations, to deny perspectives that do not reflect members' own experience, to show no empathy for or to wilfully ignore members of less-privileged groups, or to uphold and promote group distinctiveness, superiority, or uniqueness.

4.2 Norms-based arrogance and collectivism

Before explaining in more detail how a norms-based account of collective epistemic vice is genuinely collective, let me respond to a possible objection. It is open to suggestion that the social norms account of collective vice is similar to or even the same as Fricker's anti-summative account. Fricker understands the collective ethos of a group to consist of joint commitments shaped by our practical identities. If our

[11] I focus on Davidson and Kelly's account of social norms here due to its focus on bridging the gap between individual and collective social phenomena, but Bicchieri's (2006) work offers an alternative framework (that is largely compatible with this one, as Kelly and Davis (2018) discuss).

practical identities are related to our social roles, and if we can understand social norms to be a matter of joint commitments related to our social roles, we might think that there is very little differentiating these views.[12]

There are good reasons to discount this worry, however. First, many social norms, including those related to sub-agential collective arrogance, do not appear to be things that individuals or groups commit to, certainly not knowingly. The identification and internalisation of norms usually occurs without our awareness or guidance. We don't collectively decide upon them as the rules to shape our conduct or assent to them as knowing (if conflicted) 'passengers'. The operation of social norms may sometimes be unconscious and often will not occur voluntarily, and so they do not seem to be unanimously committed in any sense Gilbert appears to intend.

Second, although the Korsgaardian understanding of practical identities and norms fits the joint commitment model well, it is incompatible with this account of social norms. This is because, as Davidson and Kelly note, for 'voluntarists' like Korsgaard 'the authority that a norm holds over an individual rests in the individual's voluntary acceptance of the norm and her conscious, deliberate commitment to or endorsement of it' (2020, p. 195). If this were right, then it suggests that social norms could indeed be a matter of joint commitment. But while there are many roles and norms that we seem to take on voluntarily (like those related to work or hobbies), it is implausible that this is true of the norms and roles at issue in sub-agential groups. These roles and norms seem to maintain their authority without individuals voluntarily accepting them. Our racial, gender, and class-related identities involve social roles and norms that we do not enter into voluntarily—they are roles and norms that we become responsive to and evaluable under because they are what have been *ascribed* to us by other members of our communities. On this view—which Davidson and Kelly, following Witt (2011), call *ascriptivism*—many social roles and their related norms cannot be conceived of as things we voluntarily accept or commit to. While I will not offer a full defence of *ascriptivism*, I find it compelling in relation to the norms of sub-agential groups.[13] It also marks an important difference between Fricker's joint commitment model and a norms-based account of collective arrogance.

Perhaps a stronger objection to the idea that we can understand the collective epistemic arrogance of sub-agential groups as grounded in the social norms of such groups stems from the earlier discussion of the distinction between summativism and anti-summativism. As discussed, Lahroodi (2019) notes how summative approaches to collective virtue and vice are not *genuinely* collective because the group virtues and vices are reducible to individual members of the collectives in question rather than the collectives themselves. One could suggest that the norms-based account of collective epistemic arrogance described here is open to a similar kind of summativist reduction—in that the arrogant dispositions of the group are to be found in the behaviour of individual members influenced by the social norms operative within that group.[14]

[12] I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue and pushing me for a response on this.

[13] Davidson and Kelly (2020, p.195)—whose pluralism with regards to *voluntarism* and *ascriptivism* I share – offer a fuller discussion of this distinction. Most important for my project is that the norms relating to privileged social groups are ascribed, rather than voluntary.

[14] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue. Cordell (2017) makes a related charge of reducibility against Fricker's (2010) account of collective virtue.

While I accept that toxic social norms can (and do) elicit or facilitate the development of epistemic arrogance in many privileged people, we ought to remember what taking on a summativist approach commits us to. On this view, ascriptions of vices, including arrogance, to social groups depends on most or all members of that group possessing the vice in question. This is a view that some might find plausible in relation to men or the privileged more generally, but it is not one that we *have to* accept in order to ascribe vices like arrogance to social groups. This is because social norms can operate without having the effect that most or all members of a group act in accordance with the norms. All that is required (according to the account introduced here) for norms to have normative force is for group members to be '*responsive to* and *evaluable under* those norms' (Davidson & Kelly, 2020, p. 194). Being responsive to a norm involves 'calibrating' one's behaviour in relation to the norm, while being evaluable under a norm means that others can and will evaluate an individual in relation to a norm.

Importantly, there are a variety of ways in which one can be responsive to a norm—meaning there is no singular causal path between the presence of a social norm and the resulting behaviour in individuals subject to the norm: 'Rebellion is one way of being responsive to a norm; so is compliance' (Witt, 2011, p. 43). This means that there is no necessary connection between membership of an epistemically arrogant sub-agential group and compliance with the social norms distinctive of that group (which warrant its status as epistemically arrogant). Social norms transcend the dispositions of individual group members. As a result, the social norms account of collective arrogance does not require that all or most individual members of an arrogant group are individually arrogant, as the summativist would insist. It would not be surprising, however, if many of the arrogant group's members did turn out to be individually arrogant—given that compliance is at least one way in which group members respond to their group's norms. In fact, this feature of the account helpfully clarifies how one's membership of a privileged social group can facilitate epistemic arrogance.[15]

A final consideration follows an objection raised by Cordell (2017) against other attempts to collectivise virtues and vices. Cordell argues that some attributions of collective virtue and vice tend to elide features of collectives with collective character traits without these features counting as substantive virtues or vices. For a feature to count as a substantive virtue or vice, the (collective) agents must be able to evaluatively reflect on it so that they can decide whether to cultivate or eliminate it. While I think this is plausible in the case of substantive virtues, I agree with Holroyd's response that this

[15] It is worth clarifying that it is implausible that we will be able to identify the relevant social norms without a significant proportion of members feeling the normative pull of the norms in question. If few men felt the normative pull to (arrogantly) claim epistemic privileges, then it would be unclear that there was a social norm to do so. However, feeling a normative pull need not necessitate compliance, because conforming to the required behaviour can sometimes be quite difficult. To see why, consider how norms of appearance for women may still hold normative force while few women may in fact conform to them (and, for some, this may be impossible). But even in cases where there is a majority of members complying with the relevant social norms, the account I offer here is at odds with summativist views. This is because, while summativism suggests that a collective has a vice because most individual members do, the norms-based account suggests that individual members have the vice because the collective does (i.e., arrogant dispositions are determined by distinctive social norms of the group). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising and so helping me to clarify this.

is an 'excessively restrictive view of collective vice' (2020, p. 140). Many individual vices—including arrogance—are not plausibly fostered by processes of evaluative reflection. In fact, it seems probable that they are often the result of a lack of such reflection, and there is no reason to think that this should not also apply to collectives, including sub-agential groups. Moreover, the conception of epistemic vice employed here includes a broader range of phenomena than just character traits. While some might be metaphysically spooked by the idea of collective character traits, perhaps the idea that collectives can have distinctive attitudes, sensibilities, or ways of thinking in virtue of their social norms will be less controversial.

Finally, recent work from Medina (2021) and Anderson (2021) points towards group norms playing a crucial role in prompting or inhibiting epistemically virtuous or vicious group behaviour. My suggestion is that when sub-agential groups possess social norms that impel epistemically arrogant behaviour in group members it is appropriate to attribute to that group the collective vice of epistemic arrogance. My hope is that this offers a fruitful path forward for future research in this area.

5 Conclusion

I have argued that a full understanding of the epistemic arrogance of groups requires a different model of collective epistemic vice. My proposal is that putting social norms at the centre of such an account provides a viable path forward. Having introduced the work of various philosophers whose work, I suggest, ascribes epistemic arrogance to men and the privileged, I discussed the possibility of accounting for the arrogance of these groups with reference to various views regarding the possible structures of group vice. The arrogance of men and the privileged cannot be established on summativist terms, I argued, because the features constitutive of the group's arrogance are not reducible to members *as private individuals* but to the behaviour of group members acting *qua group members*. I considered two anti-summative accounts of collective epistemic vice but concluded that neither offers an adequate explanatory framework for understanding group arrogance in these cases. I subsequently argued that philosophical work on social norms can provide a basis for a novel understanding of the arrogance of these sub-agential groups that is compatible with the cases in question. I then clarified how this position is distinct from Fricker's joint commitment model and explained how the account is genuinely collectivist.

This proposal, I hope, naturally prompts the investigation of interesting and related topics. It raises the question of how different group memberships, and their related norms, might intersect to increase, or perhaps decrease, the likelihood or frequency of epistemic arrogance. Additionally, given that norms can operate without our awareness and may often establish themselves outside of our conscious control, questions around the kind of responsibility that apply at the individual and collective levels are made pertinent. I hope also that the norms-based model further motivates and informs amelioratory approaches to collective epistemic vice. As Medina has recently stated, the 'significance of groups for epistemic behaviour in general and for epistemic virtues and vices in particular cannot be overstated' (2021, p. 337). For those who take seriously the arguments regarding the epistemic arrogance of men and the privileged, the

impact of—and necessity to ameliorate—such collective epistemic vice also cannot be overstated. Social norms, I argue, offer a distinctive and useful framework through which to understand how collectives can be said to hold vices like arrogance and how their members can demonstrate them. A better understanding of how such norms become so resilient will be vital in the path towards their amelioration.

Acknowledgements I want to thank Jules Holroyd, Ryan Byerly, Alyce Biddle, Ben Jenkins, Ian Kidd, Taylor Matthews, Alice Monypenny, George Surtees, the Sheffield Postgraduate Seminar (April 2022), and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments, feedback, and encouragement with this paper.

Funding This work was supported by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (Grant Number AH/L503848/1) through the White Rose College of the Arts & Humanities.

Declarations

Conflict of interest No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

Anderson, E. (2021). Epistemic bubbles and authoritarian politics. In Elizabeth Edenberg & Michael Hannon (Eds.), *Political Epistemology* (pp. 11–30). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192893338.003.0002

Battaly, H. (2020). Closed-mindedness and arrogance. In A. A. Tanesini & M. P. Lynch (Eds.), *Polarisation, Arrogance, and Dogmatism: Philosophical perspectives.* Taylor & Francis.

Bicchieri, C. (2006). *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. Cambridge University Press.

Byerly, T. R., & Byerly, M. (2016). Collective Virtue. *The Journal of Value Inquiry, 50*(1), 33–50. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10790-015-9484-y

Cassam, Q. (2015). Stealthy vices. *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective, 4*(10), 19–25.

Cassam, Q. (2019). *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*. Oxford University Press.

Cordell, S. (2017). Group virtues: No great leap forward with collectivism. *Res Publica, 23*, 43–59. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-015-9317-7

Davidson, L. J., & Kelly, D. (2020). Minding the gap: Bias, soft structures, and the double life of social norms. *Journal of Applied Philosophy, 237*, 190–210. https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12351

de Rooij, B., & de Bruinde, B. (2022). Real-life collective epistemic virtue and vice. In M. Alfano, C. Klein, & J. de Ridder (Eds.), *Social Virtue Epistemology* (pp. 396–414). Taylor & Francis.

Dillon, R. S. (2007). Arrogance, self-respect and personhood. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 5–614*, 101–126.

Fogarty, S. (2019). Irritated tory MP blasts "arrogant middle-class" extinction rebellion climate protesters. *LBC*, Retrieved August 24, 2022, from https://www.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/shelagh-fogarty/mp-assumes-climate-change-protestors-on-benefits/

Fricker, M. (2010). Can there be institutional virtues? In T. Gendler & J. Hawthorne (Eds.), *Oxford Readings in Epistemology.* (Vol. 3). Oxford University Press.

Fricker, M. (2020). Institutional epistemic vices: The case of inferential inertia. In H. Battaly, Q. Cassam, & I. J. Kidd (Eds.), *Vice Epistemology: Theory and practice.* Routledge.
Frye, M. (1983). In and out of harm's way: Arrogance and love. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory.* Crossing Press.
Gilbert, M. (1987). Modelling collective belief. *Synthese*, *73*(1), 185–204.
Gilbert, M. (1989). *On Social Facts*. Princeton University Press.
Gilbert, M. (2000). *Sociality and Responsibility: New essays in Plural Subject Theory*. Rowman and Littlefield.
Gilbert, M. (2002). Belief and acceptance as features of groups. *Protosociology, 16*, 35–69.
Gilbert, M. (2004). Collective epistemology. *Episteme, 1*(2), 95–107.
Gilbert, M. (2013). *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World*. Oxford University Press.
Holroyd, J. (2020). Implicit bias and epistemic vice. In I. J. Kidd, H. Battaly, & Q. Cassam (Eds.), *Vice Epistemology: Theory and practice.* Taylor & Francis.
Kelly, D., & Davis, T. (2018). Social norms and human normative psychology. *Social Philosophy and Policy, 135*, 54–76. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052518000122
Lahroodi, R. (2019). Virtue epistemology and collective epistemology. In H. Battaly (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology* (pp. 407–419). Routledge.
List, C., & Pettit, P. (2011). Group agency: The possibility, design, and status of corporate agents. Oxford University Press.
Lugones, M. (2003). *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*. Rowman & Littlefield.
Lynch, M. P. (2018). Arrogance, Truth and Public Discourse. *Episteme, 315*, 283–296. https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.23
Manne, K. (2018). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.5840/tpm20188033
Manne, K. (2020). *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women*. Crown.
Medina, J. (2013). *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. Oxford University Press.
Medina, J. (2021). Vices of the privileged and virtues of the oppressed in epistemic group dynamics. In M. Hannon & J. De Ridder (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology* (pp. 1–10). Taylor & Francis.
Nguyen, C. T., & Strohl, M. (2019). Cultural appropriation and the intimacy of groups. *Philosophical Studies, 4176*, 981–1002. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1223-3
O'Connor, R. (2021). The UK has been arrogant and entitled about its culture for too long. No wonder Europe is sick of us. *The Independent*, Retrieved August 24, 2022, from https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/brexit-eu-british-tv-music-b1870531.html
Ortega, M. (2006). Being lovingly, knowingly ignorant: White feminism and women of color. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy, 321*, 56–74. https://doi.org/10.2979/HYP.2006.21.3.56
Roberts, R. C., Wood, W., & Jay (2007). Humility. *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*. Oxford Scholarship Online
Rudman, L. A., Corinne, A., Moss-Racusin, J. E., Phelan, & Nauts, S. (2012). Status Incongruity and backlash effects: Defending the gender hierarchy motivates prejudice against female leaders. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48*, 165–179. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.10.008
Srinivasan, A. (2021). *The Right to Sex*. Bloomsbury.
Superson, A. (2004). Privilege, immorality, and responsibility for attending to the 'facts about humanity.' *Journal of Social Philosophy, 135*, 34–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2004.t01-1-00213.x
Tanesini, A. (2016). Calm down dear": Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance. *Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume, 90*, 71–92. https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akw011
Tanesini, A. (2020). Ignorance, arrogance, and privilege: Vice epistemology and the epistemology of ignorance. In I. J. Kidd, H. Battaly, & Q. Cassam (Eds.), *Vice Epistemology: Theory and Practice.* Routledge.
Tanesini, A. (2021). *The Mismeasure of the Self: A Study in Vice Epistemology*. Oxford University Press.
Tiberius, V., & Walker, J. D. (1998). Arrogance. *American Philosophical Quarterly, 435*, 379–390.
Witt, C. (2011). *The Metaphysics of Gender*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199740413.001.0001
Zagzebski, & Trinkaus, L. (1996). *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press.