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Work, Social Status & Self-Esteem

By
Sanat Sogani

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Supervisor: Professor Anca Gheaus

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Sanat Sogani, candidate for PhD degree in Political Theory declare herewith that the present thesis titled "Work, Social Status and Self-Esteem" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

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Vienna, 24 August 2025

Sanat Sogani

Abstract

This thesis takes seriously people's moral interest in having a secure sense of self-respect and in relating to others as social equals. Through three-interconnected papers, it discusses what these moral interests imply for the design of our social institutions, most importantly that of workplaces. In doing so, it draws on, and contributes to, three sub-fields of political theory, all of which have witnessed increasing interest in recent years: relational egalitarianism, the philosophy of work and the philosophy of self-esteem. The three papers are as follows:

Paper 1: 'Lawn for Professors Only': A Moral Inquiry into Workplace Status Hierarchies

Paper 2: Adequate Opportunity to Deserve Appraisal Respect

Paper 3: The Tragedy of the Social Bases of Appraisal Self-Respect

Acknowledgements

The subject I disliked most in school was 'social studies.' To me, it felt like reading a washing machine manual—boring and mostly useless in daily life. Some parts, like the importance of fundamental rights, seemed too obvious, while others, like memorizing the number of constitutional amendments, felt unnecessary. It was only in college that I realized social and political life was full of unsettled, thought-provoking questions. An introductory political theory course with Sandipto Dasgupta and Pratap Bhanu Mehta lit that spark, which was potent enough to make me switch my major from computer science to PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics).

During my master's, I got introduced to the philosophy of work through a 2016 paper by Anca Gheaus and Lisa Herzog - The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!). I decided to write my master's thesis on the topic, under the supervision of Lea Ypi. I had no idea then that I was to later pursue a doctorate on the same theme under Anca's supervision.

Anca has been the best supervisor I could have asked for. This project owes everything to her constant personal and professional support. I can only hope that some of her rigor, wisdom, kindness, and commitment to philosophy have rubbed off on me. I am grateful to Andres Moles and Zoltan Miklosi for engaging sincerely with my half-baked ideas and offering guidance whenever I felt stuck in my research. The ideas presented in this thesis matured thanks to feedback and comments from numerous scholars over the last four years, not all of whom can be named here owing to space constraints. Having said that, I would like to mention a few, exchanges with whom have been particularly helpful – Alexander Motchoulski, Caleb Althorpe, Clemens Loidl, David Leopold, Dmitry Sereda, Callum Macrae, Han van Wietmarschen, Imre Szabo, Jessica Isserow, Jon Mandle, Jonathan Wolff, Michael Cholbi, Rajesh Parameswaran, Stuart White and Tom Parr. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues at CEU's political theory research group, whose warmth and camaraderie made my time in Vienna memorable, and whose friendly challenges

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I could not have undertaken a four-year project without the affection and emotional security provided by friends and family. My wife's constant companionship made Europe feel like home. Her relentlessly holding me accountable to my own professed ideals ensured I never lost sight of the broad goals which motivated this project. My heartfelt gratitude to my brother for being my biggest cheerleader and for being an excellent sounding board. And to my parents, for going above and beyond to ensure I could attend excellent academic institutions and pursue an academic path far too unconventional for families in a similar social position. Finally, my sincerest gratitude to the security guards, cleaners, technicians and others whose labour, though unseen, made it possible for me to think, read and write in comfort.

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Introduction

"So, what line of work are you in?". Questions about work and occupation are among the first ones to pop up when strangers make each other's acquaintance. The way one answers—whether as a diplomat or a shop assistant—can greatly influence how they are perceived and treated by others. Occupations often play a major role in determining an individual's social status. They also affect how much esteem they can receive from others. Publishing a ground-breaking scientific theory or winning an international sports championship, for instance, can attract vast amounts of praise from others. A call centre agent may find it impossible to receive similar amounts of work-related esteem irrespective of their performance on the job. The esteem, disesteem or lack of esteem people receive from others can in turn significantly impact a person's sense of self-esteem. This thesis delves into some of the normative implications of this relationship between people's jobs, their social status, and self-esteem. I use the terms "work", "occupation", "employment" and "job" interchangeably, to refer to work performed by people with the expectation of a wage.

That there is a hierarchy between occupations is implicitly acknowledged *via* the concept of occupational mobility. Moving from being a cleaner to a manager in an office would typically be viewed as an instance of 'upward mobility,' while transitioning from a university professor to a security guard would typically be seen as 'downward mobility.' Occupational hierarchies often intersect with hierarchies of race, gender and caste. For example, Black and low-caste individuals as well as women tend to be disproportionately represented in lower-ranking occupations such as janitors, porters, barbers, security guards, nursing assistants and leather workers. In contrast, they tend to be underrepresented in higher-ranking positions like doctors, software developers, bankers, lawyers, and managers (Nagarajan, 2018) (Wilson, Miller, & Kassa, 2021). The increased representation of women, blacks, and low-caste individuals in high-ranking occupations is widely regarded as an essential aspect of social reform. Policies aimed at achieving this goal often include

improving access to education, implementing anti-discrimination laws, and promoting affirmative action.

Even if we lived in a world where people's gender, caste or race had no bearing on their occupation, the hierarchy between occupations may remain. One obvious factor that makes some jobs better than others is pay. In the EU, for instance, the average hourly earnings of managers are more than 3 times the average earnings of 'elementary workers' such as cleaners and labourers (Hourly earnings vary widely across occupations, 2021). The ratio is even higher in the US with managers earning close to 5 times more than cleaners per hour on average (Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, 2025).

But pay is not the only factor that contributes to some occupations ranking above others. Some jobs are better than others because they offer more non-monetary goods of work such as opportunities to achieve excellence, to receive esteem, to belong to a community, and to make a social contribution (Gheaus & Herzog, 2016). On the flipside, some jobs are inferior to others because they carry more bads of work, for instance, because they are more precarious, unpleasant, stigmatizing, monotonous and unfulfilling.

X's job, offering an overall better package of goods than Y's, may entail distributive inequality but not necessarily relational inequality between X and Y: if, for example, the inequality is justified, it may not prevent X and Y from relating as equals to each other. In this thesis, I leave to one side the intrinsic wrongs, if any, of distributional inequalities. I focus, instead, on relational or social hierarchies that may or may not be caused by unequal distributions.

I am specifically concerned with social status hierarchies, which can be broadly understood as systems of ranking individuals within a group, where certain members are expected to be treated with greater respect, regard, honour, consideration or deference. Philosophers disagree about whether all social hierarchies fit this description. Niko Kolodny, for instance, proposes that social

hierarchies may also consist of only asymmetric power relationships. On his account, A may be socially superior to B if A exercises greater power over B than B exercises over A (Kolodny, 2023, pp. 93-94). Such asymmetric power relationships do not necessarily imply that others in the society show A greater respect, regard, or consideration than they show B. Nevertheless, according to Kolodny, we can say that there is a social hierarchy between A and B (Kolodny, 2023, pp. 95-97). Other philosophers, such as Jake Zuehl, argue against the idea of classifying relationships consisting purely of asymmetric power relationships, that do not also entail disparities of respect or regard, as social hierarchies (Zuehl, 2024)[1]. According to him, all social hierarchies necessarily entail disparities of respect or regard. For him, all social hierarchies are equivalent to what I broadly refer to as social status hierarchies. In this thesis, I do not take a position on this debate on the nature of social hierarchies. If Kolodny is right, then my analysis focuses on a subset of social hierarchies, namely social status hierarchies, which for present purposes refers to a system of ranking individuals according to the respect, regard, consideration and other such attitudes they are expected to be treated with. If Zuehl is right, then the distinction between social hierarchies and social status hierarchies, as I am deploying the term here, effectively collapses.

An illustrative case of the kind of hierarchies I focus on in this project would be a society where only some people get to have the title of 'Dr.' and those with such titles are treated with greater respect than those without such titles. Or an organization where employees with corner offices are treated as superior to employees without corner offices. Such status hierarchies necessarily supervene on certain shared beliefs about values prevailing in the organization or society (Ridgeway, 2019, p. 11). In an organization where corner offices have no prestige value, the distribution of office spaces need not contribute to status hierarchies between employees.

[1] Han van Wietmarschen, likewise, argues that relationships should not be classified as social hierarchies merely because they involve asymmetries of power (Wietmarschen, 2025).

The philosophical literature on relational egalitarianism or social hierarchies is vast and growing. Yet, there remains little consensus on what precisely is the core complaint against social hierarchies - if, indeed there is any such general complain. I summarise below some of the major responses provided by philosophers in response to this question. However, in the dissertation I do not attempt to resolve it. Instead, I proceed from a premise that appears to represent uncontroversial common ground amongst relational egalitarians: namely, that when policies contributing to social status hierarchies lack justification, they are wrongful.

Kolodny argues that sometimes social hierarchies are morally objectionable because they cause some people to stand in relations of inferiority to others. The complaint may get neutralised if certain conditions obtain, such as for instance, when there are mechanisms for the persons at the bottom of the hierarchy to hold those at the top accountable or if the hierarchies can be impersonally justified. When such conditions are missing, however, those at the bottom end of these hierarchies tend to have a complaint against inferiority that is *sui generis* (Kolodny, 2023, pp. 87-102).

Daniel Viehoff offers a moralized conceptual account of status hierarchies. (Viehoff, 2009, p. 11). He argues that common to all social status hierarchies is that they violate moral equality and for that reason are morally objectionable. He argues "if we are all moral equals, matter equally, etc., then social status hierarchy is objectionable because it treats us as if we were not" (Viehoff, 2009, p. 18). He distinguishes between mere status differentiation and social status hierarchies, claiming that all instances of the latter are morally problematic. He illustrates the difference between status difference and status hierarchy by comparing the case of an on-duty doctor's vehicle getting priority in traffic to a lord's carriage getting priority in traffic. The former is presumably justified by appeal to the interests of everyone in having access to emergency medical services and thus may merely count as an instance of status differentiation, rather than of status hierarchy. The latter is presumably justified by assuming the lord's interests as more valuable than those of others in

the society, and for that reason being an instance of social status hierarchy which is intrinsically objectionable (Viehoff, 2009, pp. 17-18).

Another way of normatively dealing with social status hierarchies is by defending the 'presumption of equality', i.e. the idea that any departures from equality must be justified. Perhaps, we don't have always have universally acceptable reasons in support of either equality or inequality. Even then, inequalities need to be justified (Gosepath, 2015). The presumption is usually discussed in the context of distributive justice, but we can imagine an analogous argument in the case of social hierarchies. Perhaps, there is nothing intrinsically wrong about social hierarchies. Still, any social arrangement should start from the baseline of equality, such that any departure from status equality should be justified.

This dissertation draws on a likely common ground between the various normative views about the deontic status of social status hierarchies: at the very least, policies that contribute to social status hierarchies must be justified. I do not take a stance on whether this justificatory requirement arises because equality should be the default baseline, or because social hierarchies are intrinsically objectionable. The point of convergence is that whether one views status hierarchies as intrinsically objectionable (Viehoff), or as problematic absent neutralising mechanisms or sufficient justification (Kolodny; presumption of equality), justification remains necessary. Nor do I take a stance on whether, even when such hierarchies are justified, they entail a regrettable residual loss of value.

The dissertation consists of three papers, to which I now turn my attention. The first paper asks whether organization leaders and managers can ever be justified in pursuing workplace policies that contribute to social status hierarchies. I consider three plausible considerations — drawing on familiar arguments for distributive inequalities considered plausible by egalitarians — that organizational leaders may use to justify policies that tend to contribute to social status hierarchies between some of their employees:

i. **Efficiency:** Status hierarchies may help increase efficiency in at least two ways:
    a. **Status goods as incentives:** Status hierarchies may be used to create aspirational roles within an organization, thus incentivising individuals to maximise their productivity in competition for these roles, which offer them access to the good of superior status.
    b. **Enforcing legitimate authority:** Elevated status may be used to reinforce the authority of managers or supervisors, where in such authority is itself justified by appeal to increased efficiency
ii. **Rewarding desert:** Status hierarchies may be used track desert, such that those who contribute more to an organization rightly merit a superior status.
iii. **Compensating unequal burdens**: Differences in status may be used to equalise the benefit packages associated with jobs, such that the good of superior status helps offset other burdens associated with a job.

I show that each of these justifications holds only limited promise and thus the justificatory burden for workplace status hierarchies is higher than it may first appear. In showing this, the paper concludes that organization leaders are often likely to wrong some of their employees through decisions that tend to create or maintain status hierarchies within workplaces; such hierarchies often lack good enough justification.

A distinction that plays an important role in the second and third papers of the thesis is one drawn by Stephen Darwall, between two kinds of respect – recognition respect and appraisal respect. To give recognition respect to something, in general, is to give due consideration to that thing in one's deliberation. Thus, giving recognition respect to a person amounts to giving due consideration to their moral agency. In contrast with recognition respect, appraisal respect constitutes respect for excellence that one displays as a person or as being engaged in some specific pursuit (Darwall, 1977). Appraisal respect is often referred to as esteem in psychology, as well as in common parlance.

Darwall uses the term 'esteem' to refer to admiration for any quality of a thing or a person such as its appearance, predisposition etc. Appraisal respect is a subset of esteem and is reserved for the excellences that are the product of an individual agent's intentional actions. Throughout the rest of thesis, I use Darwall's terminology.

The second paper proceeds by assuming the truth of the claim, advanced perhaps most famously by John Rawls, that social bases of self-respect is a primary good (Rawls, 2001). This means that social institutions in a just society should be designed such that they sustainably support people's self-respect. Applying Darwall's distinction between recognition and appraisal respect to self-respect, it arguably has two components – recognition self-respect and appraisal self-respect. The former entails a secure belief that one has inviolable dignity, and this belief is necessary for an agent to demand, with confidence, from others around them that their basic rights be respected. The latter entails confidence that one has valuable ends and talents. The paper focuses on the social bases of appraisal self-respect as a primary good and what it implies for the structure of jobs in a society. I assume that, psychologically, most of us generally require some amount of positive affirmation or appraisal respect from others to have a secure sense of appraisal self-respect.

The second paper delves into the relationship between people's jobs and their appraisal self-respect. The fact that a job often means a lot more than money to those who work at it is well-established. The philosophy of work has acquired renewed salience recently, at least partly because of speculations of mass replacement of jobs with automation (Cholbi, 2022). Losing a job can mean not just loss of income but also loss of an important source of meaning and identity. An important question within philosophy of work has been whether meaningful work is a requirement of justice. Some have answered in the affirmative. Caleb Althorpe, for instance, argues that meaningful work is intrinsically linked to social contribution, and being able to make a social contribution is crucial for people's self-respect. Thus, not having a meaningful job can seriously dent people's prospects of having a secure sense of self-respect (Althorpe, 2022). Others have argued that assuming

meaningful work to be a requirement of justice violates non-perfectionism, which is generally taken to be a key tenet of liberal theories of justice (Arneson, 1987) (Kymlicka, 2002, pp. 72-73, 190-195) (Nozick, 1974, pp. 246-250). Richard Arneson demonstrates the tension between meaningful work as a requirement of justice and non-perfectionism in the following passage:

> 'If some people reasonably want chocolate ice cream and other people equally reasonably have a taste for vanilla, it would be unfair for the state to glorify the eating of chocolate ice cream and forbid the eating of vanilla, and also wrong, though to a lesser extent, for the state to subsidize the eating of chocolate ice cream and to penalize the eating of vanilla ice cream by special taxes on its production, sale, or consumption. It would equally be wrong and for just the same reason to favor those with a taste for meaningful work over those with alternative tastes, such as a taste for meaningful consumption and leisure time activity' (Arneson, 2009, pp. 140-141).

In this account, the assumption is that sometimes there may be a trade-off between doing work that is meaningful and doing work that is better paid, where doing the latter affords access to more leisure time or consumption goods to the workers. It would be wrong, according to Arneson, for a society to prioritise the former kind of work over the latter when it is plausible that at least some people in that society would prefer higher pay over more meaningful work.

In subsequent work, Arneson significantly revises his position, becoming more receptive to the idea that the provision of meaningful work may be a requirement of justice. He argues that a preference for meaningful work is far more consequential to one's life prospects than, for example, a preference for chocolate ice cream. A better analogy, he suggests, is with healthcare (Arneson, 2009, p. 145). Some individuals may have little interest in healthcare and might even refuse medical treatment when ill. Nevertheless, public provision of healthcare can reasonably be regarded as an integral part of a liberal theory of justice, even if it imposes dispreferred opportunity costs on some. By the same reasoning, meaningful work may also be considered a requirement of justice, even if some members of society do not prefer it over more income or free time.

Several other philosophers defend the idea that meaningful work is a requirement of justice, though only contingently. In most contemporary societies, work occupies a central place in

people's lives: engaging in paid employment is typically necessary to meet basic needs, and jobs often impose significant constraints on people's discretionary time. Under these conditions, it is difficult for individuals to pursue enough meaningful activities outside of work. This, in turn, can undermine their secure sense of self-respect as well as access to other intrinsically valuable goods, such as excellence, community, opportunities for contribution, and social recognition (Gheaus & Herzog, 2016). If paid work ceased to be a non-optional aspect of people's lives, meaningful work might no longer be a requirement of justice.

I take a parallel approach to the issue of self-respect in the second paper: whether people's jobs contribute to their appraisal self-respect matters from the standpoint of justice only because, in present-day societies, work is necessary and tends to consume so much of their time. The amount of time people spend at work affects their prospects of receiving appraisal respect from others, which in turn affects their prospects of having a secure sense of appraisal self-respect. I somewhat sidestep the debate on meaningful work, however, since the exact relationship between meaningful work and appraisal self-respect is not self-evident. Theoretically, it seems possible for one to be engaged in a job that they find meaningful but for their work not to elicit appraisal respect from others, thus failing to support their appraisal self-respect. For example, a call centre employee working for a suicide prevention hotline may find their work meaningful. However, if their role is limited to repeatedly reading from a fixed script for 40 hours a week, it may not necessarily invite any admiration from others that could support their confidence in their own talents, and thus their appraisal self-respect. Maybe justice requires that jobs are both meaningful and supportive of appraisal self-respect. This may not be difficult as psychological evidence suggests that features commonly associated with meaningful work are positively correlated with appraisal self-respect (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Alternatively, we could define meaningful work in a way so as to include considerations of appraisal self-respect within it. Here, I do not take a position on whether having a meaningful job is necessary or sufficient to sustain people's appraisal self-respect.

Appraisal respect from others must be perceived as deserved by an agent for it to sustainably support their appraisal self-respect. For appraisal respect from others to come across as deserved, it must be a response to certain kinds of actions from the agent. Both the second and the third paper discuss in detail the nature of appraisal respect and the kinds of actions that can enable an individual to sustainably receive deserved appraisal respect from others. I assume that deserved appraisal respect comes as a response to extra-ordinary achievements. Drawing on Gwen Bradford's seminal account, I maintain that such achievements must involve actions that are both sufficiently difficult for the agent and competently caused by them (Bradford, 2015, p. 25). Such extra-ordinary achievements can be hard to realise outside paid work, considering the significant limits that employment imposes on people's discretionary time.

The second paper concludes with some remarks on the policy implications of restructuring jobs so as to increase working people's opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect from others. Such policies may include, for instance, encouraging decentralised decision-making within organizations, job diversification and increasing worker autonomy. In some ways, such recommendations speak against the increasing hyper-specialisation and limitations on worker autonomy witnessed in organizations over the last few decades (Malone, Laubacher, & Johns, 2011). These practices are often seen as integral to efficiency maximisation and thus economic prosperity. Many public institutions around the world have attempted to emulate these practices, with the goal of efficiency maximisation, a trend often referred to as 'New Public Management (NPM)'. Common features of NPM include division of work into ever smaller tasks, subcontracting, strict monitoring of performance with pay linked directly to performance and limited involvement of workers in decisions about values and goals that should guide the organization (Gruening, 2001). From one perspective, NPM entails a move away from strict organizational hierarchies to decentralisation. Rather than a centralised body overseeing the whole production process, responsibility for parts of the production may be delegated to many smaller

firms or to mid-level managers. This often implies increased autonomy for mid-level managers or for owners of the small firms that take contracts to manage part of the production. However, such practices also tend to entail that workers at the lowest level perform a narrow range of well-defined tasks, with strict monitoring and little say or even knowledge of how their actions fit into the overall production process. A software developer working indirectly for a public sector organization, through a subcontracted firm, for example, may be responsible for implementing a single module of code according to detailed specifications, without participating in design discussions or understanding how their contribution fits into the broader system being developed. They may be entirely unaware of whether the code they are developing is being used for improving the reservation system for public transportation or for increased citizen surveillance. Such a worker may have opportunity to earn appraisal respect only for the narrow range of tasks they perform, which, depending on the nature of their tasks, may be inadequate for their self-respect.

One could think that, with the advance of automation, repetitive and monotonous jobs that do not demand skills regarded as uniquely human such as creativity and ethical judgement will eventually disappear. It's precisely these jobs, one may argue, that are likely to present workers with inadequate opportunities to deserve appraisal respect. Thus, one may argue, it may be more sustainable, from the perspective of self-respect, to focus our political effort on re-distributing the gains from technology, rather than on reforming jobs that are likely to become obsolete anyway.

I am sympathetic to the re-distributive proposal, which would imply distributing the gains from technological progress more equally. With massive economic gains from technology and an egalitarian distribution, a 'post-work' future or a future with significantly less work may not be so unimaginable (Cholbi, 2022). In such a world, even people who lose their jobs to technology may have sufficient resources to get by without having to work, thus having enough time to act in appraisal worthy ways outside of work. As mentioned earlier, the prospects employment offers for people's appraisal self-respect is a matter of justice only contingently. Under conditions of

extensive redistribution and technology-driven economic growth, it might cease to be a justice concern altogether. With greater discretionary time, people could have ample opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect outside of employment.

When considering policies aimed at expanding opportunities for individuals to earn deserved appraisal respect, we need not view the redistributive proposal and the job reform proposal I advance in the second paper as mutually exclusive. They may in fact complement each other. I am sceptical that relying on redistributive proposals alone is politically feasible, and therefore a likely strategy to ensure that everyone has adequate opportunities to deserve appraisal respect from others. Massive redistributions such that everyone gets to enjoy much higher leisure time and resources may be much harder to realise, politically, than changes to job profiles. As Tom Parr points out, speculations about something like a 'post-work' future are not new. Sure, the kinds of technological changes we are witnessing today, particularly ones related to artificial intelligence are new. However, automation per se, and speculations that it will massively reduce the net number of jobs is not (Parr, 2025, pp. 2-3). Despite massive automation in the 20th century, the fraction of adults in paid employment increased considerably during this period (Blau & Winkler, 2018, pp. 93-95). This is at least in part because the kind of massive redistribution of the benefits of technology that could make post-work a reality did not happen. As an example, India still has about 4.75 million domestic workers, though unofficial estimates put the figure as high as 80 million. They perform household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and washing (Mollan, 2025). Such jobs persist despite the availability of labour-saving technologies like dishwashers, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners. The fact that millions of people work in such jobs itself suggests that the economic benefits of technological progress have not necessarily percolated to those at the bottom of the class ladder. The wages of those in such jobs are often so low that employing a worker can be cheaper than purchasing and maintaining appliances. Some members of the higher

classes can afford both: appliances handle part of the workload, while domestic workers take care of the residual tasks that technology does not fully replace.

Furthermore, not all jobs that are likely to offer inadequate opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect can be replaced by technology without significant loss of value. A care worker's job may consist entirely of repetitive tasks such as showering, carrying the patient around and dispensing medicines, offering them limited opportunities to show extra-ordinary achievements at work. Substituting their job entirely with technology may be undesirable considering the centrality of human connection in care work. Instead, reforming the job such that, for instance, the care worker has more autonomy in managing the care of a patient may be more desirable, while increasing their opportunities to receive appraisal respect from others. In sum, we should be sceptical that a post-work future by itself could remedy the lack of opportunities many workers face to act in appraisal-worthy ways. There are strong reasons against fully automating certain kinds of work, such as care work. Moreover, considering the large wealth and income disparities globally, and the lack of political will to significantly close these gaps, the market for jobs is likely to remain significant. In such a scenario, reforming jobs may be the most effective and sustainable means of meeting the self-respect–related demands of justice.

The third paper delves deeper into the nature of appraisal self-respect and discusses a potential tragedy embedded in the distribution of the social bases of appraisal self-respect. I argue that, even if we organize social institutions in the best possible way, some individuals may, despite their best efforts, fail to have extra-ordinary achievements that would earn them appraisal respect from others. This, in turn, risks undermining their ability to maintain a secure sense of appraisal self-respect. If such an outcome were to occur, it would be tragic, for no further changes could provide the necessary social support for sustaining self-respect.

Appraisal self-respect—or self-esteem, as it is more commonly referred to in psychology—is one of the most widely studied topics in the field (Zeigler-Hill, 2013, p. 1). One point of broad

consensus amongst psychologists studying self-esteem is the empirical finding that people almost universally prefer high self-esteem, and that it is positively correlated with overall life satisfaction and self-reported happiness. Conversely, low self-esteem has been identified as a causal factor in various physical and mental health problems, including depression (Zeigler-Hill, 2013, pp. 7-9). The inability of some individuals to maintain a secure sense of self-esteem can have serious and lasting negative effects on their quality of life. Moreover, because self-esteem reflects a person's confidence in their ends and abilities, its absence should be a particular moral concern for theorists of justice who regard individual agency as inviolable and worthy of protection. Without confidence in one's ends and abilities, individuals are unlikely to be able to formulate and execute plans of life (Rawls, 1971, p. 440), thus preventing them from exercising their agency effectively.

One premise about self-esteem, crucial to both the second and the third paper, that many psychologists and some philosophers may find controversial is the dependency thesis, i.e. the claim that individuals usually require some amount of external affirmation to have a secure sense of self-esteem. The empirical fact that our self-perceptions get routinely affected by the attitudes and behaviours of others is fairly uncontroversial. Members of stigmatized groups such as overweight individuals (Miller & Downey, 1999) and individuals with physical abnormalities (Loey & Son, 2003) tend to report low levels of self-esteem. The most prominent explanation for the low levels of self-esteem reported by individuals who belong to stigmatized groups is that they internalize the negative views of their groups that are held by wider society (Zeigler-Hill, 2013, p. 4). The dependency thesis, however, claims more than this empirical fact. It claims that in general we cannot help but be affected by the attitudes of others in this way. There are certainly exceptions. At times, we are able to maintain a high opinion of ourselves, despite occasional negative feedback from others. Moreover, some people may be able to maintain a high self-esteem despite stigma and *persistent* negative feedback from others. These exceptions, however, do not by themselves disprove the claim that we generally require some amount of positive affirmation for the sake of

our self-esteem. Upholding high self-esteem despite receiving disesteem or no-esteem from others may be possible sometimes and for some people, but it is very unlikely for this to hold true for everyone all the time.

Another empirical premise, crucial to both papers, is the claim that an agent must believe they deserve the appraisal respect they receive from others for it to support their appraisal self-respect. The third paper goes on to argue that, for people to sustainably receive deserved appraisal respect from others, it is crucial that appraisal respect is in fact deserved. After stating, and to some extent making a case for these empirical premises, I discuss what makes appraisal respect deserved. Here, too, I draw on Bradford's criteria of achievement, since deserved appraisal respect comes as a response to achievements. I trace the source of the tragedy of the social bases of self-esteem to the 'difficulty' condition of what makes an action potentially an achievement and thus potentially esteem-worthy. I reconstruct and provide further support for Bradford's argument that what guides reasonable judgements on whether an action is difficult and thus potentially esteem-worthy is the performance of others (Bradford, 2015, pp. 56-58). Simply put, if most members of a reference group can perform a particular action, it is unlikely to be difficult. Therefore, individuals need to exceed the perceived group average or norm in order to demonstrate that they have crossed the difficulty threshold and are thus worthy of appreciation. The tragedy of the social bases of self-esteem materialises when individuals fail to exceed the group average or norm along any of the given dimensions in any of the groups they are a part of and thus fail to demonstrate their esteem worthiness. In the final section of the paper, I discuss three strategies to avoid the tragedy: (a) that the respect worthiness of people's performances can be evaluated purely based on intra-personal comparisons (b) that anyone can deserve appraisal respect for the exercise of a good will, even if they are not able to deliver extra-ordinary results and (c) that people can receive appraisal respect for the achievements of other members of their group. I show that these strategies show limited promise and are unlikely to fully eliminate the possibility of the tragedy being materialised.

The central claim of the third paper —that some people may fail to receive deserved appraisal respect even under ideal conditions—does not undermine the central claim of the second, namely, that workplaces should be restructured to ensure that everyone has adequate opportunities to receive such respect. While the possibility that some individuals may be unable to obtain deserved appraisal respect can never be entirely eliminated, its likelihood can be greatly reduced by ensuring these opportunities exist in the workplace. The possibility of a tragic outcome, even in an ideal scenario, does not prescribe inaction in the non-ideal circumstances of here and now.

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Paper 1: 'Lawn for Professors Only': A Moral Inquiry into Workplace Status Hierarchies

Abstract

Organizational leaders often play a key role in creating or maintaining workplace status hierarchies. They may, for instance, give special uniforms, honorary titles, or corner offices to some employees such that these employees come to be treated as superior to others. This paper focuses on workplace policies that are wrong primarily because they contribute to a status hierarchy between their employees, without adequate justification. Three common justifications are considered—drawing on familiar arguments for distributive inequalities considered plausible by egalitarians: efficiency gains, rewarding desert, and compensation for unequal burdens. The paper shows that these justifications, despite having *prime facie* plausibility, do not turn out to hold great promise upon further scrutiny. It concludes that workplace hierarchies demand a higher justificatory standard than often acknowledged and offers a framework for evaluating their permissibility.

Keywords: Social Equality, Status, Hierarchy, Work, Jobs

Introduction

An article written by a graduate student at the University of Oxford reads:

> "The green and lush lawns of the colleges you observe are due to the policy Oxford has maintained for centuries of allowing only professors to step on the grass. Everyone else is obliged to keep walking along the concrete path, even when talking to a professor who may be walking through the grass. The rule is indeed an odd one since it creates a certain one-upmanship between the professors and other teaching and supporting staff, as well as students" (Suti, 2020).

Is this rule, henceforth referred to as 'restrictive lawn policy', merely 'odd' or is it also morally objectionable? I argue that the restrictive lawn policy is likely to be morally objectionable because it contributes to a status hierarchy (or 'one-upmanship) between professors and other staff[2] without justification.

For comparison, consider another policy, allowing only men to walk on the university lawns. It would likely trigger a media uproar and protests demanding the university to immediately repeal it. Like its sexist variation, although less egregiously, current restrictive policy entails certain expressive harms on people excluded from the lawn access. (The sexist policy would, admittedly, be even worse than the current restrictive policy because of its potential to contribute to demeaning stereotypes, and thus disadvantage people of other genders further.) Restrictive lawn policy, here, serves as an example of a broader category of policies that reinforce social status hierarchies. In this paper, I examine such policies by using the lawn example, and other similar examples, as paradigm cases. I assume – relying on a growing philosophical literature on relational

[2] For simplicity, I focus only on the hierarchy between professors and other staff members here. It is a separate question if students can also count as employees, especially in cases where they are net contributors to the social value of the organisation.

egalitarianism[3] – that when policies contributing to social status hierarchies lack justification, they are wrongful. I show the difficulties of justifying them.

This paper uses a schematic example of a workplace imagined as a five-person community—A, B, C, D, and E—to explore how workplace status hierarchies can give rise to employee complaints. In the lawn example, A is a faculty member permitted to walk on the lawn, while B, a receptionist, is not granted that access. C and D are other university members who interpret this privilege as a sign of A's greater respect-worthiness. E, a university administrator aware of C and D's perceptions, implements the restrictive lawn policy, thereby reinforcing a status hierarchy between A & B. This five-person model is deployed here merely as a heuristic for analysing how individuals within a firm may contribute to status hierarchies and for identifying who may be held responsible in case there are any legitimate complaints from those treated as inferior as a result of such hierarchies. In practice, a community may consist of more or fewer than 5 members upholding a status hierarchy[4]. The moral objection to the restrictive lawn policy derives from the fact that it is likely to contribute to a status hierarchy between A and B without justification, whereby the policy conveys that the former is in one way socially superior to the latter.

B's complaint against E in this particular case is not the merely distributional complaint of those who have lesser access to the benefit of lawn access. Assuming that preserving lawns requires that only a limited number of people can access them (Zednik-Hammonds, 2024) – the merely distributive complaint might go – why should these people be the professors, rather than, for instance, those selected by a random procedure? Such procedure appears to be fairer since it gives everyone an equal opportunity to the benefits of walking over the lawn. This distributive complaint however seems trivial, assuming that the benefit of walking on the lawn is itself trivial. The more

[3] See (Anderson, 2017) (Kolodny, 2023) (Motchoulski, 2021) (Scanlon, 2018) (Viehoff, 2009) (Wietmarschen, 2025) for some influential accounts of relational egalitarianism.

[4] For instance, it is possible that E and A are the same i.e. a decision maker influences the distribution so that they themselves come to be treated as superior to B.

substantial complaint that B has against the restrictive lawn policy is its effect on the status hierarchy between A and B.

More generally, I focus on workplace policies that are wrong primarily because they contribute to an unjustified status hierarchy between their employees. Organizational leaders routinely create or reinforce social status hierarchies at work. These hierarchies are often upheld by privileges for those in superior positions in the form of corner offices, exclusive rights to parking spaces, honorific titles, special uniforms, personal assistants etc. Such workplace status hierarchies have received strikingly little philosophical attention, at least compared to other distributional and relational issues at workplaces. To some extent, this is unsurprising – some people being treated as superior to others may not be the most urgent workplace issue at hand, especially in cases where the treatment is not demeaning, or exploitative, or entailing significant constraints on liberties for anyone. The worry seems even weaker considering that rarely anyone has high or low status across all social contexts (Ridgeway, 2019, p. 98). A clerk may have the lowest status in their office but enjoy high status in their evening football club. Yet, having an inferior status at one's workplace is not morally trivial – having to spend 35-40 hours almost every week for many years in a community where one is constantly reminded, through various explicit and implicit symbols, that one is below somebody else can have detrimental effects on one's well-being[5]. Such hierarchies can also bias other people's attitudes towards oneself and undermine one's self-confidence (Ridgeway, 2019, pp. 58,110). Considering such potentially adverse consequences of status hierarchies, their creation or reinforcement in workplaces demands justification. As a corollary, unjustified status hierarchies are morally objectionable.

[5] In a health psychology study with 193 participants, respondents were asked to place themselves on a 9-rung ladder based on where they stand compared to other persons in the United States in terms of income, education, and occupation. Those placing themselves on a lower rung, and thus *perceiving* themselves to have a low status were more likely to fall sick when exposed to a virus. Crucially, the researchers control for objective measures of socio-economic status in this study, thus establishing a correlation strictly between perceived status of oneself and susceptibility to sickness (Cohen, et al., 2008). While this study combines the effects of subjective economic, educational and occupational status, it lends credence to the broader premise that whether one is perceived as above or below others has strong psychological effects, even after isolating the effects of material inequalities. This is assuming that others' perceptions of one's status generally have strong effects on one's subjective status.

Several philosophers have argued that status hierarchies are inherently, and not just instrumentally, objectionable. For example, Niko Kolodny argues that social status hierarchies generate claims against inferiority that are sui generis (Kolodny, 2023) i.e. people seen as an inferior have an irreducible complaint against hierarchical arrangements. Daniel Viehoff argues that social status hierarchies are wrong because they violate moral equality (Viehoff, 2009) i.e. to be treated as a social inferior is wrong because it suggests that one is less morally worthy than another human being. For the purposes of this paper, all I assume is that creation or reinforcement of status hierarchies is objectionable in the absence of justification. Whether or not there is something regrettable about status hierarchies even when justified, because there is something inherently bad about them, remains an open question for the purposes of this paper.

Unjustified status hierarchies are objectionable from the perspective of those treated as inferiors. I examine what I take to be three of the most plausible ways in which organizational leaders may justify, to those treated as inferiors, their decision to create or reinforce workplace status hierarchies. These are the same considerations often invoked to defend inequalities in debates about distributive justice.

i. **Efficiency gains:** Status hierarchies may help increase efficiency in at least two ways:
    a. Status goods as incentives: Status hierarchies may be used to create aspirational roles within an organization, thus incentivising individuals to maximise their productivity in competition for these roles, which offer them access to the good of superior status.
    b. Enforcing legitimate authority: Elevated status may be used to reinforce the authority of managers or supervisors, where in such authority is itself justified by appeal to increased efficiency
ii. **Rewarding desert:** Status hierarchies may be used track desert, such that those who contribute more to an organization rightly merit a superior status.

iii. **Compensating unequal burdens**: Differences in status may be used to equalise the benefit packages associated with jobs such that the good of superior status helps offset other burdens associated with a job.

I show that, in a variety of cases, many of these considerations, despite having prima facie plausibility, are not weighty enough to justify status hierarchies. To analyse the status-based complaints in the examples below, I continue to imagine the workplace in each case as a community consisting of positions A, B, C, D and E. A can be said to enjoy a higher status compared to B if other employees, denoted here by C and D, tend to treat A as superior to B. E is a decision-maker within the organization who holds the power to contribute to a status hierarchy between A and B, generally by influencing the distribution of resources within the organization. In each case, C's and D's dispositions are amongst the facts assumed as fixed in E's decision-making process. This is a significant assumption. On a plausible view, C and D can have duties to change their attitudes to avoid contributing to status hierarchies. While this presents an intriguing possibility worthy of further philosophical exploration, I take it to be beyond the scope of this paper.

Justification 1 – Status hierarchies may be necessary to achieve efficiency gains.

The first justification assumes that organizational leaders are permitted or maybe even required as a matter of justice to pursue policies that help achieve efficiency gains. Social status hierarchies can help achieve efficiency gains in at least two plausible ways.

Justification 1.1 – Status Goods as Incentives

Consider again the restrictive lawn policy mentioned above. A university administrator may justify the policy by arguing that ensuring the professors are treated as superior to others is necessary for creating desirable incentive structures: giving special privileges to professors, such as exclusive rights to lawns, is likely to make their position more prestigious and aspiration-worthy. This can

encourage a high number of scholars in the university to maximise the quality of their teaching and research so that they can get to these positions, which in turn is likely to benefit everybody in the university and even society at large.

Let us further assume the following (table 1) to be the resulting level of professorial prestige and teaching/research output in the case of each policy (with 1 being the lowest).

Table 1

Policy	**Prof. Prestige**	**Quality of Teaching & Research**
Restrictive Lawn Policy	3	3
Inclusive Lawn Policy	1	1
No Access Lawn Policy	1	1

Based on the above table, the teaching and research output would be the highest in the case of the restrictive lawn policy because of its effect on professorial prestige. While the empirical connection between the lawn policy, professorial prestige and teaching/research output remains controversial (as discussed later), let's for the moment assume the above empirical claims are true. A policy allowing only professors to walk on the lawns is likely to make their position prestigious and aspiration worthy, which is likely to maximise the quality of teaching and research as a result, relative to the other two policies. In such a choice situation, E may attempt to justify the status-conferring unequal distribution to B by arguing that it is necessary to create a desirable incentive structure. E may argue that it is a cost worth bearing for an increase in teaching and research output[6], which is likely to benefit everyone in the university, including B. The question is whether

[6] On one plausible view, even a significant increase in academic output may not outweigh the costs generated by status hierarchies. Here, I assume that there is a certain increase in academic output *d* which is high enough to justify status hierarchies and the difference in academic output between the restrictive lawn scenario and the inclusive lawn scenario is *d*.

this is a good enough justification for a status hierarchy that results in B being treated as inferior to A.

B may push back against E, by rightly noting that the knowledge production corresponding to each policy is contingent on the motivations of the agents involved, and these motivations themselves express particular attitudes and are responsive to reasons. G.A. Cohen has, convincingly in my view, argued that individual attitudes should themselves be subject to considerations of justice (Cohen, 2008, p. 33). It is possible for university teachers and researchers to strive for excellence even if this does not lead to any status rewards such as exclusive rights to access the college lawns as professors. This means that, in reality, the schedule of possibilities is wider:

Table 2

Policy	**Prof. Prestige**	**Quality of Teaching & Research**
Restrictive Lawn Policy	3	3
Inclusive Lawn Policy (if staff driven by status rewards)	1	1
No Access Lawn Policy (if staff driven by status rewards)	1	1
Inclusive Lawn (if staff not driven by status rewards)	1	3
No Access Lawn (if staff not driven by status rewards)	1	3

In the revised choice set (Table 2), the same level of teaching and research output can be achieved without introducing the restrictive lawn policy. If staff are not moved by status rewards, by stipulation, the academic output would be the same irrespective of whether the lawn access is restrictive, inclusive or completely forbidden (no access for anyone). Assuming that the university

could in fact employ academics, who don't need status incentives in order to provide teaching and research of the same quality, E's choice of the restrictive lawn policy wrongs B. It does so because a restrictive policy is not necessary to achieve the desired organization's goals. Thus, E chooses a status hierarchy-inducing policy without justification.

Then, whether E wrongs B depend on whether the last two options (i.e the no access lawn policy and the inclusive lawn policy when the staff are not driven by status-based rewards) are really available to E. What if the academic staff simply refuse to put in the same amount of effort in the absence of status-based rewards? Worse still, some of them may threaten to migrate to a different institution where the prospects of receiving such rewards are available. In such a scenario, E may be justified in implementing the restrictive lawn policy. Even in such a case, however, B's complaint wouldn't dissolve. Rather, it will be directed not against E, but against A and other academic staff who make their efforts contingent on whether they enjoy an unequal status within the university.

It is an empirical question whether in practice the last two options above are available to university administrations and decision makers at other workplaces. What would be wrong is for organisations to not even consider the possibility of the last two options. The fact that such status-based rewards are strictly necessary to create the right incentive structures so as to maximise output is not self-evident, even in highly capitalist, profit-driven organizations. Particularly in cases wherein there are large number of bidders for a job position, many of the prospective employees may be willing to deliver the same level of output in the absence of status-based rewards. Some faculty members in a university, for instance, may aim to maximize their academic output due to the intrinsic satisfaction derived from significant academic achievements[7]. In such a case,

[7] Some organizational psychologists, economists and management scholars in fact argue that extrinsic rewards crowd out intrinsic motivation in many work-related contexts, thus having little to no overall effect on performance. See for e.g. (Frey & Jegen, 2001). Others have challenged this claim, showing that external rewards can enhance intrinsic motivation and creativity. See for e.g. (Eisenberger & Aselage, 2009) (Fang & Gerhart, 2012). Much of this debate focuses on monetary rewards; similar research on the effect of status rewards on employee motivation and performance seems to be lacking. Scholars on all sides of this debate, however,

employees like B might have a strong complaint against decision makers like E, a complaint that is inadequately answered by an incentive-based justification.

Generalising, even when productivity is a sufficiently important consideration to outweigh status based complaints, the incentive-based justification does not fully address the grievance of those treated as inferior as a result of status-reinforcing workplace policies. Superior status serves as an incentive only if talented employees base their motivation to work hard on receiving higher status as a reward. In such cases, a firm's productivity-based justification does not resolve the status-related complaint but instead redirects it towards employees who may threaten to reduce their productivity in the absence of status rewards. To mitigate such grievances, employees may have a duty to not be, and publicly signal that they are not, influenced by status rewards. This may involve, for example, employees in high status positions voluntarily giving up existing symbols that signal their superior status[8].

The dialectic in this section replicates, in a different context, the well-known debate between John Rawls and Cohen concerning the justification of incentives within distributive justice. Rawls's difference principle allows for departures from equality, including inequality-generating incentives, if they are necessary to maximally benefit the least advantaged (Rawls, 1971). Cohen challenges this view, arguing that in a truly just society, individuals who endorse egalitarian principles of justice would not require special incentives to be productive. Cohen contends that justice extends beyond the rules of institutions to encompass individual attitudes and dispositions (Cohen, 2008). If individuals were committed to the principle of benefiting the least advantaged, they would not strategically withhold their labour or productivity in the absence of unequal rewards.

acknowledge that intrinsic motivation tends to be a powerful driver of employee performance. This is sufficient to make plausible our claim that status rewards may not be strictly necessary to maximise output.

[8] See (Morree, 2017) for some concrete examples of organizational leaders giving up status symbols in an effort to break away from entrenched status hierarchies.

Extending the Cohenite perspective to status rewards, I argue that while productivity is a significant normative value, the use of status rewards as incentives is objectionable at the bar of justice. This is because the pursuit of productivity driven by the desire for status-superiority would be contrary to an egalitarian ethos. Following Cohen, I contend that justice applies not only to the basic structure of society but also to the choices and motivations of individuals within it. A society where individuals' productive contributions are contingent upon the expectation of greater status for themselves would fall short of a fully just society.

Justification 1.2 – Status Goods as necessary for the enforcement of bosses'/managers' legitimate authority

Some employees, in particular managers can perform their jobs well only if their decisions are respected and their orders followed by others. Managers tend to exist in firms because labour contracts are necessarily incomplete. This is because it is often impossible to specify at the time of making the contract exactly what tasks a worker will perform. For example, it may not be efficient or even feasible to specify in the labour contract for an automobile mechanic exactly the number of cars they will work on in a particular day, a list of cases they may be assigned, the customer accounts they will be responsible for handling etc. Such decisions may be best made on an ad hoc basis depending on a number of factors – the demand, the complexity of technical problems, and the availability of workers on a particular day. Managers generally serve a coordinating function by making these decisions and specifying on a daily basis instructions left unspecified by a contract[9]. They can only serve this coordinating function, and thus contribute to an organization's efficiency, if their directions are, in fact, followed by their subordinate workers.

One may think that the bosses/managers need to have a superior status compared to their subordinates to ensure their orders are respected. If a supervisor A tells a mechanic B – 'you can't

[9] Here, I do not suggest that such a coordinating function is necessarily served by a manager or boss-like figure. In some cases, such micro decisions may be taken democratically, with the use of algorithms, through market coordination or other such procedures. For a historical explanation of the centrality of the 'boss' in modern workplaces and possible alternatives to this mode of economic organisation, see (Anderson, 2017).

take your break right now' or 'drop what you are doing and wash that car first', it is expected that A's commands are sufficiently action-guiding for B. After all, for A to have authority over B *is* for B to perform certain actions at least partly because A commanded them to do so (Kolodny, 2023, p. 92). If a fellow mechanic C tells the same things to B, it may not have any effect on the balance of reasons that guide B's future actions. For A's commands to carry such weight, it may be argued, A's position in the organisation must be treated as more respect worthy than B's or C's, by B. The garage owner E may create the conditions for this status hierarchy by giving the supervisor a uniform that's associated with prestige and superiority. They may be given special offices, and the mechanics may be explicitly required to address their supervisors by their titles. Such measures, E would hope, are likely to help entrench a status hierarchy between the supervisors and the mechanics at the garage.

Status hierarchies, in such cases, would be justified if they were necessary to enforce the legitimate authority of a manager. This raises the question: are there alternative, less morally troubling ways to accomplish the same goal? I argue that it is indeed possible for legitimate authority to be respected without relying on status hierarchies. For example, consider the dynamic between an orchestra conductor (A) and a violinist (B). B may follow A's commands during a concert, not because of A's superior status, but because they genuinely believe that doing so is essential for the success of the concert. Similarly, a mechanic may acknowledge the reason-giving force of their supervisor's instructions. Thus, they may respect the supervisor's authority, because they consider this to be crucial for functioning of the garage and for them to do their job well. A similar relationship of authority between bosses/managers and employees is conceivable in other kinds of workplace contexts. If despite such a possibility, a decision maker E promotes a status hierarchy between A & B to increase the likelihood of B respecting A's authority, then they seem to wrong B. B would have a complaint against E, for unjustifiably making them stand in a relationship of

inferiority with respect to A even though other, less objectionable, ways of enforcing A's authority were available.

What is needed for A's authority over B to be respected depends on a number of factors, most of all on the prevailing ethos and attitudes at the workplace. If B, C & D are sceptical of the importance of A's authority and/or lack the motivation to follow it, coercive power or status hierarchies may be needed to ensure obedience. In this case, E may be off the moral hook as they are in a position to answer B's inferiority-based complaint by justifying the status hierarchy as necessary to achieve the firm's goals. In a different environment, where B, C & D are intrinsically motivated to follow A's authority as a means to achieve the firm's goals, such measures may be uncalled for. When such an environment and motivational structures are lacking, B may have a very weak or no complaint against E.

While the strength of B's complaint against E depends on background social norms and the prevailing ethos in the workplace, arguably E may have some control over the social norms and ethos themselves[10]. At first glance, B seems to have a complaint against themselves, and other employees at their level (C & D). It is because of their own unwillingness to follow A's legitimate authority that E resorts to reinforcing a status hierarchy. And yet, it can sometimes be unsatisfactory to say that B has no one else but themselves, and other employees like them, to blame for the inferior position they are in. We can imagine a mechanic B asking the garage owner E, 'why should our supervisor A have a special office, uniform and title, all of which tend to convey a sense that they have a superior status to us?'. E may respond, 'because unless you treat them as a superior, you would be tempted to disobey them and not follow their orders.' To this B may ask, somewhat in disbelief, 'why would I want to put us in an inferior position *and* follow someone's

[10] To recall, in the case where E maintains a status hierarchy between A & B because A threatens to lower their productivity in the absence of status markers, B seems to have a complaint directed at A, and not necessarily at E. This is because, *ex hypothesi*, E fails to get A to perform at the required level without offering status-based incentives. A similar complaint against A is unlikely to arise in the present scenario.

authority when I am tempted to not follow it anyway?' Such an exchange could suggest that there is an underlying explanation for B's disobedience to A, a problem that could be addressed by E. Perhaps, B is sceptical of the legitimacy of A's authority because they doubt A's competence or the need for a supervisory position itself. Arguably, E could be held responsible for failing to create a more trustful environment to allay such concerns, and finding other, more objectionable means to enforce A's authority instead. In such cases, B's inferiority-based complaint against E may still stand because of E's failure to address the underlying causes behind failures of compliance.

There is another possibility, where the lack of respect for authority can be attributed to ignorance or bias on part of B, C & D. These employees may fail to appreciate the need for a supervisory position. Alternatively, they may doubt A's competence because of bias, perhaps because A is a woman and/or a person of colour. In such cases, E may be forced to ensure A occupies a high status, as a way to counteract other's employees' resistance to respect A's authority. In such cases, there may not be any status-based complaints against E. Any status complaints in this scenario, on behalf of B, would be against themselves or other employees, i.e. C & D.

Justification 2 – Some employees rightly deserve superior status

Some status hierarchies may be justified on grounds of desert i.e., that A deserves to have a higher status than B. As theorists of desert have pointed out, desert claims can be made sense of only by specifying a relevant desert basis (Brouwer & Deijl, 2020). In the workplace context, there are multiple ways of specifying the desert basis. A could be said to deserve a higher status than B because they put in more effort or took greater risks or have greater expertise in the field or contributed more to the organisation or incurred higher burdens than others and so on.

Since it is practically impossible to discuss all the above-mentioned desert bases within the scope of this paper, I focus on one which I take to reflect a commonly held view i.e., a desert-based justification based on value added or contribution. The following analysis should generalise for

other kinds of desert bases too. A contribution-based desertist justification for higher rewards seems to be at the centre of a recent controversy at an American university where a lecturer resigned from a course after learning she'd be paid less than her teaching assistant. The lecturer went on to argue "For the university to suggest that my work is less valuable, or I bring less to the table than a teaching assistant who just got a bachelor's degree a couple of months ago and has no expertise in my field, is really insulting" (Lu, 2024). Relevantly for our purposes, the lecturer resigned from the course only after learning the salary of her teaching assistant; her concern was thus fundamentally comparative. The complaint is that the lecturer's greater expertise and higher contributions are not appropriately respected. The lecturer would likely have this complaint even if she was paid the same as the teaching assistant in this case. The lecturer's complaint here is probably best captured as a desert claim. For our purposes, we can imagine a similar case, except where what is at stake is not pay but some kind of status rewards i.e. a lecturer demands to have a superior status in the university relative to the teaching assistants, as a recognition for her higher contributions to the university.

Contribution-based desertist claims derive their strength from a widely shared intuition that those who contribute more to the common pool should get more out of the common pool. Many philosophers are sceptical of such desertist claims (Brouwer & Deijl, 2020). Rawls, for instance, argues that, since no one deserves their starting place in society and their inborn talents, no one deserves a greater share in the distribution of goods that result from social cooperation (Rawls, 1971, p. 274). Even if we agree that it is inherently good for everyone at a firm if an employee contributes more, and that A in fact contributes more than B, this does not mean that others at this firm should treat A as superior to B. This is because A's higher contributory potential compared to B can to some extent be attributed to luck, meaning that A's contribution is not a proper desert basis. Perhaps the demand and supply happened to be such that A's skills turned out to be more valuable. Or A may have turned out to be generally more talented than B because

of their genetic make-up or because of differences in quality of parenting available to each of them. If such differences in social or natural luck are significantly responsible for A's higher contributory potential than B, they cannot justify A getting a higher share of goods, including a higher social status, assuming, as many philosophers do, that desert should be responsibility sensitive.

Some theorists, such as T.M. Scanlon, defend the possibility of desert that is not responsibility-sensitive. Writing about moral desert, Scanlon proposes a "compatibilist view of moral responsibility, according to which the appropriateness of blame and other reactive attitudes does not presuppose free will" (Scanlon, 2015). One can justifiably be said to deserve reactive attitudes such as blame and praise for actions that reflect their normative attitudes towards others, i.e., the reasons that guide their treatment of others. In fact, such judgements of other people's normative attitudes are appropriate as they give meaning to our interactions with them. For instance, it is appropriate to react with admiration to someone who endangered their own life to save a drowning child. Perhaps the rescuer's bravery can be attributed largely to luck. An attitude of admiration is nevertheless appropriate for the rescuer's bravery and disposition for selflessness.

Something similar could perhaps be said about non-moral types of desert: the athlete who owes their prowess to luck deserves admiration and so does the worker who, in virtue of their inborn abilities contributes more than others to the goals of a firm. On the Scanlonian picture, what individuals can be said to deserve is only certain reactive attitudes and not any particular material treatment, such as a certain share in the distribution (Scanlon, 2018, p. 123). Applied to the present case, one may say that worker A deserves more admiration than worker B because their higher contributions indicate a disposition to work hard and a commitment to their field of expertise in ways that B's actions do not. Such attitudes towards A & B are entirely appropriate for someone who values qualities like hard work and commitment. In this case, inequalities of admiration might themselves be morally unobjectionable.

However, that A is more admiration-worthy than B does not by itself justify pursuing policies that position them as having a higher status than B within the organization. E may appreciate A's disposition for hard work and commitment and structure their relationship with A accordingly such as by trusting A more than B when assigning important projects. However, they may not justify contributing to a status hierarchy between A and B by providing arguments for why they admire A more than B. A having a higher status than B implies other employees respecting A more than B, not because of A's attitudes but because A now has this higher status owing to various status markers. So, for those convinced by Scanlon's account, even if we accept that A may rightfully be said to deserve higher admiration than B, it does not imply that A can be said to deserve a higher status as a result. In fact, status hierarchies can distort actual admiration, as well as blame or other reactive attitudes that people deserve. Empirical evidence suggests that an individual's actual evaluations of others and their status rankings of others often come apart because, when ascribing status, they take into account status responses of other evaluators in the group (Ridgeway, 2019, pp. 71-94). C usually comes to treat A as superior to B, at least in part because they believe that most other people in the group give a similar status ranking to A and B. Thus, it is possible that C finds B's performance more admiration-worthy than A's but they end up treating A as more respect-worthy than B because of what they see as the prevailing social hierarchy in the organisation. In this way, "higher status actors are seen as more competent and valuable than they would be if not for the status belief." Correspondingly, low status agents are seen as less competent than they otherwise would be (Ridgeway, 2019, pp. 93-94). Thus, assuming Scanlon is right about desert being relevant in the realm of attitudes and dispositions, status hierarchies are unfit to generate the right kind of responses in agents to other people's dispositions and actions.

Not merely unfit, but counterproductive: The desert-based justification for status hierarchies seems to rely on a plausible conditional premise: individuals should receive unequal admiration if

and only if they differ in their actual admiration-worthiness. However, when status positions influence how much admiration people receive, the antecedent of this conditional is not satisfied. In such cases, admiration tends not to track genuine admiration-worthiness but is instead distorted by the very structure of the status hierarchy.

Inequalities of esteem and status hierarchies are conceptually separate. In a workplace context, consider a restaurant where the chef, B, is the most admired among employees, yet the manager, A, holds the highest status. Other staff members, C and D, may regularly praise B's commitment towards their work and offer no comparable admiration to A. Nevertheless, they may treat A as occupying a higher status position, for instance by addressing A with formal titles or giving greater weight to A's opinions in meetings than to B's.

While the two are conceptually separate, there is often a causal connection between inequalities of esteem and status hierarchies. Those who occupy superior status tend to attract greater esteem. Moreover, those receiving greater esteem tend to eventually occupy superior status. Since my concern presently is with the creation or reinforcement of status hierarchies, I will focus on the latter effect.

Some employees receiving significantly greater public esteem than the rest, especially from those in powerful positions such as E, can eventually experience a rise in social status. Imagine both A and B work as cashiers in a supermarket. E, the store manager, may sincerely believe A to be a more hardworking cashier than B, and they may express this appreciation in the form of an 'Employee of the Month' award for A. Assume all attributes of A and B's jobs—such as pay, responsibilities, organizational power, etc.—are exactly the same. A one-off recognition of A's dispositions and efforts in the form of an award may not cause A to enjoy a superior status relative to B. However, let's assume A receives this award 10 months in a row. In such a scenario, it's plausible to imagine that A experiences a rise in status relative to B, and the fact of 10 consistent Employee of the Month awards may itself become a status symbol. Other employees may react to

this differential status by pausing conversations when A walks by, waiting for A's input before making minor scheduling tweaks, or deferring to A in casual problem-solving. Such a status hierarchy may persist even if, in the eleventh month, someone else is recognized as Employee of the Month by E.

In such a case, one may argue, desert seems to justify status hierarchy. Desert implies that those who are more esteem-worthy get higher esteem. Sometimes such expressions of differential esteem, particularly by powerful actors in an organization can create or reinforce status hierarchies. Such status hierarchies may be justified as inevitable side effects of tracking esteem based on actual esteem-worthiness.

Such an argument does not work, however, because status hierarchies do not inevitably have to accompany differential esteem. Even public expressions of differential esteem, such as one-off awards of excellence, may not necessarily lead to the creation of status hierarchies. And when they do, organizational leaders may have duties to find alternative ways of esteeming that avoid such status-generating effects. They may have such duties not only because of the moral objectionability of status hierarchies but also to preserve the principle of desert itself, since status hierarchies can distort subsequent judgments of esteem-worthiness. These duties apply especially to agents like E, who occupy powerful positions within organizations, since public expressions of esteem from them are more likely to have strong status-generating effects. However, they may also apply to less powerful agents if it can be shown that their expressions of esteem significantly contribute to the creation or reinforcement of status hierarchies.

Justification 3 - Status hierarchies may be necessary to compensate unequal burdens.

Jobs are rarely similar to each other in terms of the burdens and benefits they entail on the worker. Some jobs are inherently more stressful (salespersons), dangerous (fire fighters), strenuous (construction workers), emotionally taxing (therapists) and repulsive (toilet cleaners) than others.

On the flip side, some jobs give more opportunity than others to enjoy monetary and non-monetary goods such as recognition, skill development, community etc (Gheaus & Herzog, 2016). One may argue that the question of whether a particular workplace status hierarchy is justified cannot be answered without seeing how the hierarchy fits into the broader distribution of such burdens and benefits at a workplace, wherein being inferior in a workplace status hierarchy counts as a burden and being a superior counts as a benefit. On one view (referred to as welfare egalitarianism henceforth), what may be required to gauge if equality is achieved is for us to compare the package of burdens and benefits across jobs. In a firm, job 1 may entail higher stress, higher income and few opportunities to form communal bonds with others. Job 2 may entail a lot of flexibility, low pressure and relative lower incomes. It would be wrong, according to welfare egalitarians, to conclude from this that those taking job 1 get the better end of the bargain in this workplace. In fact, equalising incomes between job 1 and 2 would entail an injustice, as someone taking up job 1 would be insufficiently compensated for the higher burdens.

Applied to the present case, a welfare egalitarian justification for status hierarchies would entail that such hierarchies can be used to compensate for overall inequalities in the benefits and burdens associated with various jobs in an organisation. Consider the case of a hospital, where surgeons tend to enjoy higher status than nurses. This may be because the surgeons get certain goods such as the title of a doctor, premium uniforms, public recognition, none or only some of which the nurses have access to. E, the hospital management, may justify the hierarchy by arguing that A, the doctors, perform work that is significantly more burdensome – they have higher personal liability, more unpredictable hours, tedious tasks and have to undergo very long periods of training to gain requisite qualifications. Thus, it is only appropriate[11], E may argue, that A, the surgeon is

[11] This formulation suggests that desert may be doing some justificatory work here i.e., people who do more burdensome work 'deserve' to be compensated to a higher degree. Such a view is put forward by Huub Brouwer and Willem van der Deijel who call it the "compensatory desert" view (Brouwer & Deijl, 2020). Scanlon, on the other hand, thinks that such a principle cannot be desertist in the proper sense as it relies on a further principle which requires that individuals' levels of well-being should be roughly equal (Scanlon, 2018, pp. 127-128). I agree with Scanlon here and thus consider the welfare egalitarian justification as separate from desert.

treated as superior to B, the nurse. A needs to be compensated for the higher burdens that they incur relative to B; treating them as superior to others such that they come to occupy a higher status than B is one way of compensating them.

At this point, the two ideals of equality seem to come in conflict with each other. We face a difficult choice between the ideal of equalising the package of burdens and benefits distributed to individuals and the social egalitarian ideal of eliminating social status hierarchies. Accommodating both ideals as considerations of justice would entail sometimes compromising on one goal for the other. Thus, a welfare egalitarian justification of using status hierarchy as a compensation for unequal burdens may be plausible in some cases. However, considering that unjustified status hierarchies are morally objectionable, they may be used only if other less objectionable methods of compensation have been exhausted. For instance, the doctors may be compensated for the higher burdens in the form of shorter working hours, early retirement options and other benefits which may less likely result in status hierarchies. Having said that, in some cases, status may be the only option available to an employer to compensate employees performing work that is disproportionately burdensome. For example, a public employer may have legal and financial constraints on how much they can pay those performing dangerous public jobs such as firefighters. In such cases, they may undertake campaigns to influence public opinion such that firefighters come to occupy a superior status in the society.

Conclusion

It is morally objectionable for a social institution to position certain individuals as having lower status than others without justification. This concern is especially pressing in the workplace, where status hierarchies significantly shape people's lives and are often difficult to escape, given the high

cost of leaving a job. Workplace hierarchies demand justification, as the moral risks they inflict are significant. This paper examines what I take to be three of the most plausible justifications that could be offered by firm leaders for establishing or maintaining workplace status hierarchies, with the aim of showing their difficulties. These justifications parallel ones often offered in defence of inequalities in debates about distributive justice.

First, status hierarchies could be defended as necessary for achieving efficiency gains within an organization. One way in which status hierarchies can contribute to this goal is by creating effective incentive mechanisms to maximise productivity. However, it is not self-evident that status hierarchies are *necessary* to create such incentives. And even when it can be shown that they are, this necessity arises only because talented employees may refuse to contribute at the desired level without status rewards. While firm leaders may avoid moral responsibility in such cases, the talented employees themselves wrong others in the organization by compelling leaders to contribute to hierarchies that position some employees as inferior.

Another way in which status hierarchies may be necessary for efficiency is that they enforce the authority of managers or bosses—an authority justified by the claim that their properly followed commands are necessary for the efficient functioning of an organization. Where employees resist such authority due to ignorance or bias, leaders may not bear moral responsibility for creating status mechanisms to address such resistance. If the resistance stems from a failure on the part of leadership to foster trust, leaders' reliance on status hierarchies rather than addressing trust deficits constitutes a moral wrong against those employees relegated to inferior positions.

A second plausible justification I consider for status hierarchies is desert. I argue that status hierarchies tend to distort evaluations of individuals' attitudes and actions. Under hierarchical arrangements, individuals perceived as superior may receive excessive admiration due to their elevated status, thereby undermining the principle of desert.

Finally, I consider welfare egalitarianism as a potential justification for status hierarchies. In situations where status hierarchies are the least objectionable way of compensating for unequal burdens, there may be no wronging involved.

There may be plausible justifications other than the three considered above for workplace policies that contribute to status hierarchies, some of which could be specific to particular contexts. Consider a company, where for a hundred years, the front row seats in official ceremonies have been reserved for the company's board of directors. This may contribute to a status hierarchy between the directors and other stakeholders in this company. A possible defence of the policy could be cultural preservation: one might argue that maintaining a century-old tradition has inherent value, and that this value alone justifies the policy's continuation. The strength of such a justification would need to be carefully analysed, similar to the other justifications discussed above, to determine whether it is normatively compelling enough to outweigh the moral concerns associated with status hierarchies. This paper provides a framework, along with illustrations, to guide such normative analyses of workplace status hierarchies. Additionally, through a detailed examination of some plausible justifications for status-inducing policies, I show that the justificatory burden for hierarchical workplace arrangements is often much greater than it might initially appear.

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Paper 2: Adequate Opportunity to Deserve Appraisal Respect

Abstract

The design of the structure of our social institutions should be such that people have an adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal respect. Philosophers commonly distinguish between two kinds of respect – recognition respect and appraisal respect. The former amounts to giving due consideration to a person's moral agency. Appraisal respect, often referred to as esteem in psychology, constitutes respect for excellence as a person or as engaged in some specific pursuit. Both kinds of respect are generally necessary to sustain our self-respect. Some people's jobs affect their prospects of securing their self-respect because of the lack of opportunities to receive appraisal respect from others, both at and outside of work. While labour rights tend to focus on preserving worker's recognition respect or dignity, justice also requires regulating workplaces to ensure that individuals have adequate opportunities to act in appraisal respect worthy ways at work and/or outside of work; such regulations may include, for instance, job diversification, redistribution of work and lower levels of micro-management.

Keywords: Jobs, Respect, Work, Recognition, Labor, Self-esteem

Introduction

People's jobs, in general, significantly affect how much they are respected. One of International Labor Organization (ILO)'s key objectives, since its inception, has been to preserve workers' dignity, i.e., to ensure that employers give their employees the respect that they are owed as human beings (ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, 2022). The various ILO conventions are meant to ensure that workers are not exploited and that their basic rights are respected. However, this is not the only sense in which jobs affect the amount of respect people receive. Consider the difference in respect received by the footballer Lionel Messi and that received by a ticket checker in a football stadium. Owing to their respective jobs, these two individuals are valued and treated very differently by people they interact with. This difference in prestige or respect may itself be unobjectionable. Having said that, as I argue in this paper, how much respect (used in this latter sense) people have the opportunity to receive as a result of their jobs is not entirely beyond the scope of justice.

In this paper, assuming a broadly Rawlsian framework, I argue that the division of labour in a society should be such that people have an adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal respect. I build on John Rawls' idea that the social bases of self-respect is a primary good (Rawls, 2001, p. 60). I begin with a discussion of a more commonly and widely accepted idea, i.e. that people's jobs should not undermine their self-respect. Following Stephen Darwall, I distinguish between two kinds of respect – recognition respect and appraisal respect (Darwall S. L., 1977). In the second section I argue that both kinds of respect raise considerations of justice, even though the concerns raised by each of them may not be equally weighty. In the third section, I discuss the kind of obligations that follow vis-a-vis jobs if appraisal respect is treated as a consideration of justice. I conclude by outlining possible policy implications of acknowledging a principle of adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal respect to regulate workplace justice.

Jobs as sites of justice

Jobs[12] have to be evaluated against principles of justice for two, jointly sufficient, reasons: (i) they typically mediate who gets what, including social primary goods, in a society where most individuals need to take up a job to acquire the means of consumption, and (ii) they absorb a significant chunk of individuals' waking lives, putting them under the direct control of an employer for a good part of the day and limiting their discretionary time (Rose, 2016). If at least one of these features were to change, then the justice related concerns about jobs I raise in this paper would likely become less urgent or perhaps even disappear.

J.M. Keynes famously predicted that 100 years from when he was writing, that is roughly now, people wouldn't have to work more than 15 hours a week, leaving them with a lot more time for leisure (Keynes, 1930). While the global per capita income multiplied over the years[13], as he predicted, paid employment continues to occupy a significant portion of people's waking lives. Shortening work hours to the extent that we spend more time in leisure than at work would mitigate the concerns that I raise here, but it is unlikely in the foreseeable future. An alternative way of mitigating these concerns would be to institute something like a universal basic income that is large enough to make engaging in productive work optional. However, it seems unlikely that any economy today has sufficient resources and/or the political will to implement such a scheme.

Thus, I assume the following two features of the world to be constant – (i) paid employment as a necessity for most people and (ii) a large working time to leisure time ratio. Under such conditions, the provision of many primary goods, i.e., part of the *distribuendum* of justice, is significantly determined by employment opportunities. Primary goods are "things citizens need as free and equal persons living a complete life…" (Rawls, 2001, p. 58) irrespective of their particular conceptions of the good.

[12] For current purposes, the terms 'jobs', 'employment opportunities' and 'occupations' are used interchangeably.
[13] The global GDP per capita (at constant prices) has more than tripled in the last 50 years alone (World Bank national accounts data; OECD National Accounts data files, 2023).

The relevance of jobs for the social bases of self-respect

An often ignored but important primary good, access to which depends on how the labor market is structured, is the social bases of self-respect. Self-respect, for Rawls, consists in having (a) confidence that one's conception of the good is worth carrying out and (b) confidence that one can realize this conception of the good. The state does not have a direct responsibility to ensure that citizens have self-respect. However, it has the responsibility for maintaining institutional arrangements i.e., the social bases, that support people's self-respect (Rawls, 2001, p. 60).

Rawls himself does not draw, in his early work, an explicit connection between jobs and self-respect. For him, the most important social bases of self-respect are the public recognition of just institutions and a diversity of communities (Rawls, 1971, p. 544). It is the latter condition that is relevant for the present discussion. For Rawls, in an otherwise just society, as far as self-respect is concerned, it is sufficient for there to be at least some association where an individual can realize their plausible conception of the good and have one's worth as an individual affirmed. On this view, it seems to follow that one's job may not be all that important for self-respect in a well-ordered society. One could rely on non-work-related associations to secure their self-respect. There is no reason to think of the workplace as a privileged context within the Rawlsian framework, where one's self-respect is affirmed.

Yet, as Jeff Moriarty notes, this interpretation of Rawls is not entirely accurate. In *The Law of Peoples,* Rawls writes: "Lack of opportunity for meaningful work is destructive not only of citizen's self-respect but of their sense that they are members of the society and not simply caught in it" (Rawls, 1999, p. 50) (Moriarty, 2009). This statement suggests that the workplace is in fact a privileged context for securing self-respect. I think this is correct and, in the following sections, I defend this

view. Unlike Moriarty, however, my concern is with opportunities to deserve appraisal respect rather than with meaningful work[14].

Appraisal respect as a consideration of justice

To see why one's job is a privileged context for realizing self-respect, I rely on Stephen Darwall's distinction between 'recognition respect' and 'appraisal respect'. To give recognition respect to something, in general, is to give due consideration to that thing in one's deliberation. Thus, giving recognition respect to a person amounts to giving due consideration to their moral agency. In contrast with recognition respect, appraisal respect constitutes respect for excellence that one displays as a person or as being engaged in some specific pursuit. Darwall uses the term 'esteem' to refer to admiration for any quality of a thing or a person such as its appearance, predisposition etc. Appraisal respect is a subset of esteem and is reserved for the excellences that are the product of an individual agent's intentional actions (Darwall S. L., 1977). Henceforth, I will be using the terms "esteem", "recognition respect" and "appraisal respect" as Darwall defines them. To see how recognition respect and appraisal respect come apart, consider the following examples: 'A' could have recognition respect for B, giving due consideration to B's moral agency even while thinking that she lacks any admirable qualities. On the other hand, A could treat B like a slave, while admiring B's efficiency at completing a complex task (Kolodny, 2014)[15].

Moral philosophers generally consider 'recognition respect' as indefeasible, i.e., as something unconditionally due to all persons. It is morally much worse to treat someone else as a slave than

[14] In this paper, I deliberately steer clear of the term 'meaningful work' since, the relationship between self-respect and meaning is not self-evident. Gomberg's account, according to which meaningful work involves complex tasks, and an appreciating audience (Gomberg 2007) makes appreciation and respect constitutive to it. However, theoretically, it seems possible for one to be engaged in a job that they find very engaging and purposeful but get very little appreciation for. Maybe justice requires that jobs, in addition to ensuring adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal respect, must also be meaningful. This may not be difficult as psychological evidence suggests that features commonly associated with meaningful work are positively correlated with appraisal self-respect (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Alternatively, we could define meaningful work in a way so as to include considerations of self-respect within it. Here I leave it open whether adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal respect is necessary or sufficient to make a job meaningful.

[15] Matthew Kramer argues that one cannot have appraisal self-respect without already having recognition self-respect (Kramer, 2017). It is unclear if this necessity extends to respect for others. As the slave example suggests, one can appraise Y's abilities without recognizing Y as a moral agent. For the argument here, it suffices to note, as Kramer does, the fundamental distinction between recognition and appraisal respect.

to fail to admire any of their qualities. Arguably, recognition respect for moral agency also explains the priority of the basic liberties for Rawls (Rawls, 2001, p. 111). Recognition respect clearly falls within the purview of workplace justice - for instance, requiring that no job should treat the worker as less than human and violate their dignity. It is less clear whether appraisal respect, too, raises issues of justice (Dillon, 2019). Those who are skeptical of the fundamental importance of appraisal respect for justice might say that it is a consideration of justice only indirectly, say as relevant to incentive-setting. For example, firms may want to ensure that their employees receive appraisal respect so that they are motivated and work efficiently. In this case, there is no deeper justice-based reason for ensuring that individuals in a society get appraisal respect. In fact, some plausibly believe that conferring high amounts of appraisal respect is *bad* as it can lead to excessively high self-esteem manifesting itself in the form of vanity, arrogance, and narcissism (Dillon, 2019). At first glimpse, Rawls too seems to be concerned only with recognition respect, for instance, when he says the social bases self-respect in a just society is "the publicly affirmed distribution of fundamental rights and liberties" (Rawls, 1971, p. 544).

However, recognition respect alone cannot explain Rawls' concern with the existence of "full and diverse internal life of the many free communities of interests that equal liberty allow" (Rawls, 1971, p. 544) as part of the social bases of self-respect. If recognition respect for individuals could be secured by just public institutions alone, why would it matter, for the social bases of self-respect, whether there are diverse and rich communities of interest? To see why, imagine a state wherein citizens' basic liberties are secured and though they are free to associate with one another, there are very few communities where citizens interact. Think, for example, of a society that is dominated by one kind of industry – say, a tea plantation. In this society, almost all adults spend most of their waking time on tea farms. Outside of the workplace, they meet each other only occasionally, such as during elections. There are very few non-professional communities in this society, except families and households. Such a society would not only be dry, boring and severely limit the range of ends that people can pursue but also undermine people's prospects at securing

their self-respect. In this society, there would inevitably be some individuals who are passionate about their job and/or have talents that are particularly relevant for working on a tea plantation. Such individuals are likely to perform better than others in the tea industry and enjoy high amounts of appraisal respect as a result. Individuals with other interests and talents wouldn't get to receive this appreciation since there aren't other communities where they can exercise their agential capacities in an admiration-worthy way. This monotonous society seems to convey to those who do not have the interest or talent for tea plantation that their goals do not matter and/or that they do not have the capacity to live an admirable, self-directed life unlike the talented tea planters. As a result, they are likely to lack confidence in their own worth and that of their goals.

Rawls' concern with diverse communities of interests suggests that he considers opportunity to receive appraisal respect as an important social basis of self-respect. A similar interpretation of Rawls has been offered by his critics who argue that he equivocates between at least two meanings of self-respect when presenting reasons for why the social bases of self-respect is one of the "most important primary goods" (Rawls, 1971, p. 348). He sometimes uses self-respect to refer to a Kantian sense of dignity and at other times uses the term to refer to self-esteem or more relevantly for present purposes, appraisal self-respect (Kramer, 2017) (Eyal, 2005) (Doppelt, 2009) (Moriarty, 2009). Rawls himself acknowledged this ambiguity in his later writings (Rawls, 1993, p. 404). I think these philosophers are right that Rawls switches between these two different kinds of self-respect. They try to resolve this ambiguity in various ways. Nir Eyal, for example, argues that to be consistent, Rawls can only be concerned with appraisal self-respect when arguing for the political importance of social bases of self-respect (Eyal, 2005). Cynthia Stark argues that Rawlsian self-respect should be interpreted as a form of confidence that one's contribution to a scheme of social cooperation matters (Stark, 2011). Following Matthew Kramer, I resolve this ambiguity in Rawls by arguing that the social bases of self-respect can be properly understood as a primary good only by taking into account both the recognition and appraisal aspects of self-respect (Kramer, 2017, p. 303).

If the appropriate object of recognition respect is individuals' agential capacities, the appropriate object of appraisal respect is the exercise of those agential capacities[16]. People, as moral agents, command our recognition respect because we assume them to have the capacity to act in ways that are responsive to reasons. We think that this capacity is sacrosanct and that respect for it cannot be easily compromised to further other ends. We would consider it disrespectful to snatch a stranger's cigarette and throw it away, even if we were certain that smoking would significantly increase their chances of contracting cancer. This is because we assume that the stranger (an able-minded adult in this case) has the capacity to arrive at reasoned judgements and we have no grounds to override their will. This would hold true even if the stranger was acting irrationally or based on incomplete information. We may inform them, argue with them, but not paternalize them. On the other hand, we would be justified to snatch the cigarette from a 10-year-old child, precisely because we assume that the child does not have a fully developed capacity to make reason-based judgements.

Whether we owe recognition respect in regular social interactions depends simply on our reasonable assumptions that other people have agential capacities. It would be inappropriate for us to wait for the adult stranger in the above example to prove that they have the capacity for making reason-based judgements before we decide whether to snatch their cigarette. In fact, this way of relating to people, wherein we make our respect for other people's agential capacities contingent on our evaluations of their actual capacities, seems to go against the very spirit of recognition respect. Ian Carter rightly argues that "agents who meet a certain threshold deserve 'opacity respect', such that we should avoid acting on assessments of the very capacities on which their moral personality is taken to supervene" (Carter, 2021). Once we have reasons to assume that

[16] Darwall does not explicitly draw a connection between recognition respect and appraisal respect in this way. However, various claims in his essay suggest that he would agree with the idea that the appropriate ground for appraisal respect is the realisation of agential capacities. For instance, *"...lack of personal warmth is an appropriate ground for failing to have appraisal respect for someone to the extent that we conceive such a lack to be the result of insufficient effort on the person's part. But insofar as we so conceive it, we regard it as a lack in the person's agency: an unwillingness to do what is necessary to treat others warmly.* (Darwall, 1977, p. 43)"

a person has a certain level of agential capacities, it would be disrespectful to try and establish how high the person's agential capacities, in fact, are.

None of this rules out, however, the fact that people *exercise* their agential capacities to different degrees and that it is morally appropriate to evaluate them based on that fact. To return to our earlier example, it may be inappropriate for us to assume that the smoking stranger is incapable of resisting their cravings and thinking about their long-term interests, and that therefore they should let someone else make decisions on their behalf. However, it may *not* be inappropriate for us to think that it is quite reckless of them not to try and quit smoking. It won't be inappropriate to tell them - "you know you are perfectly capable of resisting your cravings if you put in enough effort." The distinction between recognition respect and appraisal respect is helpful to see why we are able to make both of these judgements without any contradictions. In making the second statement, we are giving recognition respect for the person's moral agency while withholding our appraisal respect for them based on how they act.

Appraisal respect reflects judgements about how well individuals act on their agential capacities, and this bears on individuals' confidence in their own ends and abilities. Empirical evidence suggests that people with low appraisal self-respect (commonly referred to as self-esteem in psychology) are likely to lack confidence that they can pursue their goals and are likely to lack initiative in social contexts (Dillon, 2019) (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). This is an important reason why appraisal respect is important for a liberal account of justice – it affects people's appraisal self-respect, which in turn affects their ability to live a life according to their own conception of the good i.e. as an agent[17]. Perhaps appraisal respect is less morally weighty than recognition respect, as is evident from the fact that it is worse to treat someone like a slave than it is to treat them as if they lacked any valuable talents. However, recognition respect by itself

[17] There may be other reasons why appraisal respect is a consideration of justice, independent of its effects on people's self-respect, namely because it is the appropriate or morally required attitude toward certain qualities. Recognition respect, too, is not typically seen as morally required only insofar it is necessary for individuals' self-respect.

is not enough to fully affirm our self-worth. To sustain our self-respect, it is crucial that we are also appreciated for our particular achievements that are, at least in part, a product of our conscious efforts.

To specify the conceptual relationship between recognition respect, appraisal respect and self-respect more precisely, we could think of recognition respect and appraisal respect as affecting the recognition aspect, and the appraisal aspect, respectively, of people's self-respect. Receiving recognition for our moral agency in the form of legal rights, for instance, is generally necessary for upholding a sense that one is a moral being i.e. an end in themselves. Receiving appreciation for the exercise of our talents is generally necessary for us to gain and maintain confidence that we have valuable goals, talents and the abilities to meet one's goals.

I avoid the stronger claim that respect from others is *strictly* necessary for sustaining our self-respect. Rawls seems to think otherwise, at least when it comes to the appraisal aspect of self-respect. He writes that "...unless our endeavors are appreciated by our associates, it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile…" (Rawls, 1971, pp. 374, 386). Colin Bird, amongst several others, has challenged the 'dependency thesis' i.e., that our self-respect must depend on respect from others. He presents stoicism as a tenable position wherein it remains possible for one to not lose self-respect despite external degradation (Bird, 2010). While Bird discusses his challenge to the dependency thesis primarily in the context of recognition self-respect, the stoic alternative seems applicable to the case of appraisal self-respect too. Consider the case of someone working long hours to design click bait ads. The ad designer may find her job thoroughly monotonous and worthless, which primarily requires her to make simple, minor tweaks in existing designs that will increase the number of people clicking on the ad. Most people may think of her as earning a living by deceiving and manipulating innocent online users. Perhaps even her family members may withhold their respect from her, not just as a worker, but also as a family member as she fails to spend enough time with them because of her long working hours. Even under such

conditions, we can imagine her taking pride in the fact she performs such a soul-crushing, stigmatized job just to be able to provide for her family. In other words, she could have a secure sense of self-respect despite being deprived of any admiration.

Consider another example, that of 'dirty work.' Workers performing tasks that are seen as disgusting or degrading, such as collecting garbage or cleaning toilets, often themselves come to be seen as dirty (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). And yet, such 'dirty workers' tend to report relatively high occupational pride and esteem. They might derive their sense of self-respect from solidarity networks. Workers in such dirty occupations tend to have a strong in-group identity precisely because of external degradation; they see themselves as being in the same boat fighting against the negative perceptions of their occupations. Blake Ashforth and Glen Kreiner argue that the workers in these groups may come to form negative opinions of the out-group so as to delegitimize their opinions (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). For instance, such workers may think of themselves as performing tough work while thinking of out-group members as ignorant, performing jobs that are easy and meaningless. In this way, they may continue to hold a secure sense of self-respect in the face of stigmatization, by attributing, in this case perhaps correctly, the lack of appraisal respect to a failure of their society, rather than personal failures of members of their group.

The case of dirty work does not necessarily undermine the thesis that positive appraisals from others is a pre-condition for self-respect. After all, these workers still seem to rely on a community of people appreciating their work, only their community is restricted to fellow workers. Their self-respect might still be threatened in cases where such solidarity networks fail to coalesce, for example because of short term contracts that prevent the formation of a stable community of workers. The hypothetical case of the ad designer is much harder as, here, the worker seems to have a secure sense of self-respect despite getting almost no appraisal respect from those around them. Perhaps this hypothetical case is not too far from some real-world examples and hence it may be incorrect to say that the dependency thesis holds universally. Nevertheless, the dependency

thesis does seem to hold generally, i.e. one's self-respect tends to have a social basis (Dillon, 2019). In fact, the persisting self-respect of the ad designer despite such adverse conditions comes across as almost heroic. And the fact that such fortitude strikes us as heroic suggests that it is more an exception than the norm[18]. Having a strong sense of self-respect despite degradation and/or no external affirmation may be extremely difficult for most people considering our psychological make-up[19]. Thus, even if the dependency thesis does not hold true universally, expecting people to take full responsibility for their own self-respect, no matter what the social conditions, would be unfair. For 'adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal respect' to be treated as a regulative ideal in the design of social institutions, it is sufficient for the dependency thesis to hold true generally, if not universally.

Appraisal respect and jobs

A structure of social institutions designed such that the responsibility for gaining appraisal respect falls entirely on the individual can lead to serious moral wronging. Some may not receive the respect they deserve due to biases, ignorance, or inattention. For example, nurses may be seen as performing only simple tasks like administering medicine or paperwork, while their emotional labor and professional judgment go unrecognized. Conversely, others may receive undue respect; for instance, high earners may be assumed to perform complex work when that is not the case.

Moreover, which actions are seen as admiration-worthy depends heavily on social and cultural context (Anderson, 2023, pp. 30). A doctor performing a heart transplant may be praised in one community but condemned in a religious community that considers organ transplants unholy.

[18] See Matthew Kramer and Robert Yanal for similar observations (Kramer, 2017, p. 366) (Yanal, 1987). Yanal argues, for instance, (emphasis in original): "Spinoza, exiled and excommunicated, *could* have had good self-esteem. Yet such instances strike us as heroic (or perhaps a little mad), but in any event beyond the pale of how normal people operate."

[19] Jean Jacques Rousseau famously argued that the need for recognition and appreciation itself arises in society (Rousseau & Cole, 2010). One could follow this line of thought to argue that even if evidence from modern psychology suggests that people need affirmation from others to live fulfilling lives, this is not necessarily 'natural.' Perhaps ascetics and other individuals leading completely isolated lives are able to confidently live by their conception of the good, without having any interactions, let alone appreciation from others. This interesting possibility lies beyond the scope of this paper. I focus on people living in modern day societies, where they find themselves in a complex web of interactions, constantly being judged and affected by others.

Appraisal respect varies with subjective, culturally shaped attitudes. For instance, teachers tend to enjoy high status in China and Malaysia but lower status in Brazil (Wood, 2018), reflecting differing cultural beliefs and social factors.

Finally, some individuals may be deprived of the opportunity to receive appraisal respect because they have neither control over their work tasks to exercise their agential capacities at the workplace, nor sufficient discretionary time to develop and showcase these capacities outside paid employment.

For the purposes of the paper, I focus only on the last aspect, i.e., the constraints that paid employment imposes on the opportunity to receive appraisal respect by curtailing people's opportunity to exercise their agential capacities in appraisal worthy ways. If the bulk of our time is spent at the workplace, then the tasks constituting a job significantly affect which of our agential capacities are successfully realized. This is not to ignore the importance of cultural attitudes in determining people's opportunities for appraisal respect, an issue that certainly merits further research but lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

I argue that states have a duty to ensure that individuals can access opportunities to receive appraisal respect. This is because (i) appraisal respect from others is important for us to sustain our confidence in our own thoughts, beliefs, capacities and life projects and (ii) how much appraisal respect we have the opportunity to receive is significantly determined by our social institutions, perhaps most of all by our workplaces, for reasons outlined earlier. People's jobs significantly affect the amount of respect they receive from others and thus, their self-respect.

In a qualitative study with youth of two different regions in Australia, David Farrugia concludes that his interviewees "position work as the key site for self-expression and the cultivation of personal uniqueness" (Farrugia, 2021). His interviewees routinely contrast 'job' with 'career'. The former refers to something like a bunch of tasks that need to be performed at a firm in return for a certain amount of monetary payment. 'Career', on the other hand, is fundamentally about agential

identity for these respondents. It allows one to tell a story about the cultivation of oneself, a story of progression through conscious effort and decisions. Farrugia highlights that his interviewees regularly associated a career with a 'life path' and an opportunity to find one's 'niche'[20].

One way to understand why career tends to play such a significant role in the formation of agential identity is through appraisal respect. Someone who works let's say as a cashier in a supermarket, throughout their working life may struggle to have a secure sense of appraisal self-respect. While performing important and strenuous work, such an individual may not find sufficient opportunities to have their particular talents appreciated. Owing to the nature of the work, there are likely to be very few ways in which the worker can show their unique contribution and/or exceptional achievement on the job. Finding such opportunities outside of the workplace, such as in a sustained hobby, may be very difficult for workers with little discretionary time. Despite working hard, they may struggle to have confidence that their individual agency matters and that they indeed have the capacity to live by a conception of the good that is of their own choosing. In the worst cases, such an individual may reflect on their working life and feel that they have failed in an important sense, i.e., to exercise their complex agential capacities in valuable ways, which in turn is likely to have a detrimental impact on their self-respect.

Desert as a criterion for appraisal respect

A possible solution to the problem of people receiving inadequate appraisal respect could be to praise everybody indiscriminately. On this proposal, appraisal respect can be thought of as a good, the distribution of which is relevant to justice, but which is in a crucial respect dissimilar to money, healthcare or education. Unlike these other goods, appraisal respect is not a rival good: praising

[20] For more empirical evidence for the claim that people's jobs affect their self-respect and identity, see (Anicich, Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2016). Drawing on set of surveys conducted in the US, the authors argue that "*employees who occupied positions that lack respect and admiration in the eyes of others (i.e., that lack status) but who simultaneously control important resources (i.e., have considerable power) were the most likely to initiate conflict with others*." The authors suggest that this may be because such individuals experience injuries to their (appraisal) self-respect because of their low status. They express this hurt in the form of demeaning behavior without fear of repercussions because of their powerful positions. Considerations of appraisal respect are also prominent in the demands of trade unions and other worker associations. For example, Eurocarers, an organization representing the interests of informal carers at the European level, places 'recognition' at the top of its 10-point agenda (EuroCarers, 2023). Arguably, their demand is best understood as a demand for greater appreciation of the contributions of informal carers to the economy.

one person does not reduce the amount of praise that's available for others. Since we know that some jobs give inadequate opportunity to workers to receive appraisal respect from those they interact with, perhaps employers, co-workers, customers and citizens at large should praise everyone around them, irrespective of their actions.

Appraisal respect, however, cannot be given indiscriminately if it is to play a role in the upholding of the receiver's self-respect[21]. Rather, it must be given as a fitting response to specific actions. In fact, giving even sincere praise where it's not appropriate can be detrimental to the receiver's appraisal self-respect, as illustrated in the following passage from *Bullshit Jobs* (Graeber, 2018, p. 102): *"Dan, an administrative contractor for a British corporation's offices in Toronto, was convinced he did only about an hour or two of real work a week—work he could have easily done from home. The rest was entirely pointless. Putting on the suit and coming to the office was, he felt, just an elaborate sacrificial ritual; a series of meaningless gestures he had to perform in order to prove himself worthy of a respect he did not deserve."*

In this case, while others consider Dan to be doing complex and worthwhile work for most of the day, he himself considers most of what he does at work to be worthless. Getting respect that one feels one does not deserve may lead to the experience of self-doubt and feelings of inauthenticity. Moreover, praising somebody for mundane actions can come across as condescending and undermine the receiver's self-respect. Thus, while desert may or may not be a valid criterion to determine the distribution of goods such as money, healthcare and political rights, it is an essential criterion when giving appraisal respect[22]. Thomas Scanlon rightly argues that pure desert claims are valid when it comes to attitudes such as praise, admiration, guilt etc. There are certain attitudes that are appropriate for certain kinds of actions. For instance, a feeling of gratitude is appropriate for someone who selflessly benefitted me. (Scanlon, 2018, pp. 117-132). These attitudinal responses do not prescribe any particular distributions of benefits other

[21] Put another way, opacity respect is not appropriate when appreciating people for their particular actions. Whereas giving recognition respect to people requires us to practice an "evaluative abstinence" beyond a certain threshold (Carter, 2021), fitting appraisal respect requires evaluating people for their particular actions and such evaluations are likely to be scalar.
[22] Rawls famously argued that moral desert cannot ground principles of distributive justice (Rawls, 1971, p. 312)

than the positive reactive attitude, however. Even if a person X can be said deserve gratitude from Y, they cannot demand anything else from Y because of it.

It is, of course, *possible* for unfitting appraisal respect from others to support one's self-respect. An agent can share the unfitting appraisal judgements of others, thus having an inflated sense of self-respect, one that is at odds with their actual talents and accomplishments. Kramer, amongst several others, rightly warns against the promotion of such misplaced self-respect, arguing that "A state of deludedness about one's own merits is not ethically to the benefit of the person who is in that state, even if he or she experiences heightened pleasure while the delusion persists" (Kramer, 2017, p. 324). Designing social institutions such that people get undeserved appraisal respect for the sake of their self-respect is undesirable. This is so, at least in part because, in a society where undeserved admiration is pervasive, individuals' trust in others appraisal may fall over-time. As a result, others appraisal judgements may cease to support people's self-respect in the long run.

The three conditions for deserved appraisal respect

Appropriate appraisal respect comes as a response to extra-ordinary achievements or 'Achievements with a capital A', as Gwen Bradford calls them. Bradford points out that capital-A achievements (just achievements henceforth) consist of an agent 'competently bringing about a product through a difficult process' (Bradford, 2015, p. 25). I argue that a just society should ensure people have adequate opportunities to have capital-A achievements so that they can merit appraisal respect from others, which can in turn support their self-respect.

Matthew Kramer makes a similar argument, claiming that a just society should promote achievements that can support people's self-respect. However, his account is in one way more demanding than the one I advance here. He argues that the *"*…the attainment of excellence by a society through the emergence of impressive feats within it is a necessary condition for the warrantedness of a robust sense of self-respect on the part of each individual who belongs to that

society" (Kramer, 2017, p. 37). For Kramer, it is generally (though not strictly) necessary for individuals' self-respect to live in societies with sterling achievements, such as great works of art and beautiful monuments that these individuals can take pride in (Kramer, 2017, pp. 355,366).

The capital-A achievements discussed by Bradford are less demanding – they are meant to be distinguished from mundane accomplishments such as tying one's shoelaces. The kind of sterling achievements that Kramer refers to seem a lot more demanding, and thus rarer, such as the production of *Othello* or the construction of *Taj Mahal*. Vicarious pride is a widespread phenomenon, whereby individuals often take pride in sterling achievements of other members of groups they identify with. Kramer may be right that some sterling achievements in societies are generally required for individuals living in those societies to have warranted self-respect. Consider, Nguyễn An Ninh, a Vietnamese anti-colonial thinker's clarion call to his fellow citizens to raise Vietnam's status and dignity in the world, just as Rabindranath Tagore did for India. According to Ninh, Vietnamese could have self-respect only if they produced their own 'great men' like Tagore (Ninh', 1924) (Pham, 2024, p. 96).

For the purposes of this paper, I leave open the empirical question of whether some sterling achievements in societies, over and above capital-A achievements by individuals, are generally required to support people's self-respect. What would be implausible is for someone to argue (unlike Kramer) that such sterling achievements by a few individuals are *sufficient* to support everyone's appraisal self-respect in a society. To take an extreme example, a society where one person regularly produces great works of literature while others spend all their time performing mundane tasks such as tying shoelaces is unlikely to reliably produce a belief in everyone that they are appraisal worthy. On the flipside, a society where someone is an above average musician, another an above average poet, yet another an above average athlete but the society has a whole has no outstanding achievements to show may afford everyone a secure sense of appraisal self-respect. Thus, the focus of this paper is in promoting opportunities for individuals to have capital-

A achievements. Perhaps for the sake of self-respect, an ideal society would also require some sterling achievements, which could be promoted by a separate set of policies such as subsidies for resource-intensive arts. For the moment we assume that adequate opportunities to deserve appraisal respect only require opportunities for individual achievements that may not be sterling[23].

An individual can be said to act in an appraisal worthy way when they act intentionally to realise some plausible conception of the good and the action(s) required to realise their goal is sufficiently difficult[24]. To feel the intuitive force of this criterion for appraisal worthy actions, consider the case of a person who spends a whole day counting the number of blades of grass in a park[25] . Such an act is likely to be seen as too futile and too simple to evoke any admiration in others. The three conditions specified above i.e. an action is (i) sufficiently difficult for the agent (ii) competently caused by an agent and (iii) directed at some plausible conception of the good are necessary to deem an action appraisal worthy. Counting blades of grass throughout the day is unlikely to satisfy (i) or (iii) and is thus unlikely to be seen as appraisal-worthy.

To see why (i) and (iii) are necessary to deem an action appraisal worthy, we can consider examples where only one of the conditions is satisfied. Assume, for instance, that there exists a complicated instrument that allows an agent to count blades of grass very precisely. To be able to use the instrument, one needs to undergo years of sophisticated and difficult training. Even if the agent is able to successfully complete the training and use the instrument to count blades of grass precisely, their action is unlikely to be seen as appraisal worthy. In this case condition (iii) is not satisfied. Consider another case of a person who believes that a good life entails following the

[23] One virtue of the account advanced here, unlike Kramer's, is that it does not violate liberal neutrality at any stage. As Paul Billingham and Anthony Taylor rightly argue, implementing Kramer's 'aspirational perfectionism' would require public officials to make substantive judgements about what count as sterling achievements that could support people's self-respect (Billingham & Taylor, 2018). This in turn would require relying on a thick conception of the good. No such judgements are required by the current account. An action directed at *any* plausible conception of the good could be appraisal worthy.

[24] For Bradford, there is no requirement for actions to be directed at some plausible conception of the good for them to count as capital-A achievements as she wants her account to be value neutral (Bradford, 2015, p. 25). In this sense, one can say that capital-A achievements are necessary but not sufficient for them to be appraisal worthy. In my account, actions have to also be directed at ends that hold some value for those achievements to be appraisal worthy. For this reason, not all extraordinary achievements may be appraisal worthy, but all appraisal worthy actions will be extraordinary achievements, according to Bradford's criteria.

[25] See Rawls (Rawls, 1971, p. 379).

rituals of some religion X. The only ritual devotees of X in fact have to follow is to mechanically say a short prayer before every meal. In this case, even people who believe in X and hence respect its conception of the good, are unlikely to deem the actual act of saying prayers before the meal appraisal-worthy. In this case condition (i) is not satisfied. Contrast this with a case wherein subscribing to a particular religion requires an individual to observe fasting for 30 consecutive days. In the second case, a devotee is likely to be seen as deserving appraisal respect even by some non-believers, because the religious practice requires high levels of self-control which is presumably difficult.

A few caveats are in order for these conditions of appraisal-worthiness. First, it is theoretically possible for every action to be directed at some plausible conception of the good. Even counting blades of grass may count as appraisal-worthy if somebody undertakes this action intentionally to, for instance, improve their attention span. A person may be deemed praiseworthy precisely for engaging in a task as non-engaging as grass blade counting (assuming this is difficult for the moment for condition (i) to be satisfied) if they do so as a practice for holding their attention for longer, wherein striving towards longer attention spans maybe considered as a part of some plausible conception(s) of the good. However, it is not sufficient for someone's actions to *merely contribute* to some plausible conception of the good for them to be seen as appraisal worthy. Rather, condition (ii), i.e. an intentionality requirement must be met; it is necessary for a person to *direct* their action at realising a particular conception of the good for them to be seen as appraisal worthy. If an increased attention span is an unintended side effect of grass blade counting, it is unlikely to be an achievement, and thus, appraisal worthy.

The second caveat is that there is no absolute, threshold level of difficulty that an action must meet for it to be appraisal worthy. Rather, the difficulty of an action must be relative to one's

endowments[26]. A person who has lost three out of four limbs and is still able to swim across a pool is likely to be seen as appraisal worthy while a fully able-bodied human being engaging in the same activity is unlikely to be seen as such.

We can see that the conditions necessary for an action to count as appraisal worthy are fairly demanding. Many jobs do not offer adequate opportunity to act in appraisal worthy ways because (a) the goal at which an agent's actions are directed cannot plausibly be seen as a conception of the good or (b) the actions required to achieve the goal are not sufficiently difficult. Consider the following hypothetical example of a job depicting scenario (a). Suresh works in a brick factory and his job is to load finished bricks onto trucks for transport. The job is quite difficult in that it requires quickly carrying very heavy loads of fragile bricks. Suresh was hired for the job because he is extraordinarily swift at carrying and loading.

Suppose one day Suresh performs exceptionally well and loads more bricks in a single day than anyone has ever loaded in history. Although the process to get to this world-record-of-brick-loading was, by stipulation, very difficult, it is unlikely to be appraisal worthy because it is not directed at realising some plausible conception of the good. Moving bricks from point A to point B does not seem to be a goal that has intrinsic value. One may argue in response that making beautiful functional buildings, of which moving bricks is a small part, is a plausible conception of the good. However, even if Suresh is *contributing* to the construction of buildings, it seems far-fetched to say his actions are *directed* at the construction of buildings[27]. As Bradford rightly points out, for an action to be directed (or in her terminology, to be competently caused), it is necessary that the agent 'has sufficient amount of the right sort of understanding about her process and its

[26] More precisely, as Bradford rightly points out, the difficulty threshold for Achievement in case of a particular activity is determined by how difficult the activity is for a typical member of one's reference class (Bradford, 2015, pp. 39-63). Here, reference class refers to other people with roughly similar native endowments for the activity that is being evaluated. Thus, if it turned out that most people with only one limb are able to swim across a pool easily, then one such single-limbed person's action of swimming across a pool is unlikely to be seen as an achievement and thus appraisal worthy. For the sake of simplicity, I proceed as if achievement is sensitive only to one's own talents in a non-comparative way since it is talent-sensitivity that is of relevance here.

[27] And thus, making a social contribution is by itself insufficient for an agent to be said to deserve appraisal respect.

relationship to the product' (Bradford, 2015, p. 64). This sufficient understanding seems lacking if Suresh is unaware of how exactly his actions fit into the larger construction process. Saying that Suresh's actions are directed at the construction of *some,* unspecified building seems to dilute the concept of directedness to an unnecessary degree. In our example, which is not too far from the position many workers in contemporary economies find themselves in, Suresh is more like a 'cog in the machine' not having the kind of involvement in the production process wherein his actions could be called as being directed at a plausible conception of the good.

Consider another example of a job depicting scenario (b). Berta is employed by Disneyland to dress up as Mickey Mouse and meet the incoming children of tourists. Berta is very motivated for the job and tries her best to make the children happy such as by greeting them individually, posing for pictures with them etc. We can assume that her actions are *directed*, and don't just *contribute* to realising a plausible conception of the good, i.e. making children happy. However, her actions are unlikely to count as achievements, and thus appraisal worthy, because the tasks required of her don't seem to be sufficiently difficult. If on the other hand, Berta was expected to perform a very difficult set of stunts to entertain the guests, her actions would likely satisfy the criteria of being appraisal worthy.

Conclusion & policy implications

Social institutions should be designed to ensure that citizens have adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal-respect. This principle has a direct bearing on workplace justice. Jobs that leave individuals with little discretionary time and do not give them sufficient opportunity to undertake sufficiently difficult actions directed at realizing a plausible conception of the good at work are likely to lack adequate opportunities to deserve appraisal respect.

In the introduction, I claimed that the structure of jobs raises justice-related concerns for two reasons: jobs are a necessity for most people, and they significantly limit people's discretionary time. Some ways to address the respect-based concerns discussed here are to ensure workers have

a large amount of leisure time or a large enough basic income to make paid work optional. Assuming that both options are either politically or economically unfeasible in most societies today, another policy option is to restructure jobs with the goal of giving all workers adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal respect. Below I briefly discuss three possible and complementary ways in which jobs could be restructured to make them more conducive for seeking appraisal respect.

Policy proposal 1: make jobs more difficult and demanding

Existing simple and repetitive jobs could be made more demanding in terms of required skills and creativity, as has been suggested by several scholars, though for a variety of different reasons (Gomberg, 2007) (Gheaus & Herzog, 2016). This may come across as counterintuitive at first – an objector may argue that the last thing we need to make workplaces just is to expect more from the workers. However, making job profiles more demanding in this way need not mean longer working hours. Moreover, it should come with a corresponding increase in wages to at least maintain the existing ratio of wage to value added. A comparative study of two groups of Latina domestic workers in the US shows that domestic workers who are expected to undergo training, follow strict quality standards, and participate in worker meetings are more likely to be seen as respect-worthy, both by themselves and others, than those workers who are expected to do none of these (Salzinger, 1991). Richard Ocejo argues that jobs such as butchering, bartending and hairdressing are now viewed as more prestigious in parts of the US than they were a couple of decades ago. This is because, in these parts, the above-mentioned jobs have become more demanding in terms of skills and training. Rather than being limited to the repetitive tasks of slicing meat, pouring drinks or cutting hair, the modern butcher, bartender and hairdresser, in many cases, is expected to innovate and personalize their products to suit their clients' needs (Ocejo, 2017). The aim, of course, is not to make all jobs so difficult that some people are unable to succeed at any of them; such a division of labor would threaten the appraisal self-respect of those facing repeated failures on the job market. Rather, the aim is to make jobs sufficiently varied

in terms of tasks and complexity to allow for the exercise of a diversity of agential capacities for all working adults.

Policy proposal 2: redistribute work that does not satisfy the conditions of deserved appraisal respect

Many 'essential' workers for e.g., machine operators, janitors, garbage collectors, or delivery drivers perform jobs that may be socially necessary but may not present adequate opportunity for the workers to get appraisal respect. Such jobs could be redistributed such that no one has to perform them as full-time occupations throughout their working age. Several scholars have proposed a policy of redistributing work to correct a variety of different injustices (Bubeck, 1999) (Kandiyali, 2022)[28]. For example, low-skill, repetitive jobs in manufacturing, retail, and logistics could have an upper age limit (e.g., 35), with assured pathways to jobs with better opportunities to receive fitting appraisal respect. Some tasks, like cleaning, could be shared among skilled workers, with everyone contributing a small portion of their time. While specialized cleaning roles would still exist, jobs would be restructured to give all workers opportunities for appraisal-worthy work. This redistribution may also create new roles in other skilled areas as workers balance maintenance with their primary tasks.

Policy proposal 3: increase worker autonomy and participation in decision-making

A third possible way to restructure jobs to make them conducive for seeking deserved appraisal respect is to grant workers greater autonomy and decision-making powers. In the Long-Term Care sector, for instance, although the workers perform socially valuable work, they often have very little autonomy and workloads consisting almost entirely of standardised repetitive technical tasks such as feeding, toileting, showering, dispensing medications and moving residents around the

[28] Interventions to redistribute work may, at first glance, seem to conflict with freedom of occupation, another one of Rawlsian primary goods. This does not have to be necessarily the case, however. Redistributing work could also entail redesigning job descriptions. For instance, expecting managers to empty the trash cans in their offices, rather than a full-time cleaner doing it, is unlikely to restrict anybody's freedom of occupation.

building. In many cases, the problem has worsened – for instance, due to the deskilling of feminised care work and the shifting of power from frontline care workers to management (Baines & Armstrong, 2018). Such micro-management practices severely limit some workers' opportunities to showcase that they are autonomously taking complex decisions about the care of their patients, and thus act in appraisal worthy ways. Even though they perform strenuous work that contributes to the well-being of their elderly, they likely fail to satisfy the directedness criteria discussed above. If, instead, these workers had more control over how the care for each user is delivered, they may be able to act in ways that are directly aimed at realising a plausible conception of the good - helping their care-recipients lead a decent life in this case, rather than mechanically carrying out a set of pre-defined tasks. This is likely to expand caregivers' opportunities to receive appraisal respect.

The list of three policy options discussed above is by no means exhaustive and is primarily meant to illustrate how a principle of adequate opportunity to deserve appraisal respect could be operationalized in policy making. Of course, in actual policy decision making, each of these policy proposals would have to be balanced against other normative concerns such as those of efficiency, full employment and freedom of choice of occupation.

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Paper 3: The Tragedy of the Social Bases of Appraisal Self-Respect

Abstract

Appraisal self-respect, often called self-esteem in psychology, requires some degree of appreciation from others. For it to sustainably support people's appraisal self-respect, this appreciation or appraisal respect must usually be deserved. Justice therefore requires social institutions to provide adequate opportunities for people to deserve appraisal respect. This paper exposes a potential tragedy in the distribution of the social bases of self-respect. Even under the best institutional arrangements, some people may be unable to deliver performances that merit deserved appraisal respect. Performances must cross a difficulty threshold to be esteem-worthy. To judge whether a performance meets this threshold, others usually rely on interpersonal comparisons. This introduces a socially comparative dimension to evaluations of esteem-worthiness, making it impossible for everyone to receive esteem for performance along a given dimension within a reference group. Broadening the range of qualities and achievements that can merit esteem—John Rawls's proposed solution—reduces the risk of this tragedy but cannot fully eliminate it.

Keywords: social comparison, social bases of self-respect, self-esteem, ideal theory, moral psychology

Introduction

John Rawls famously identified the social bases of self-respect as "perhaps the most important primary good", arguing that just societies must structure institutions to support a secure sense of self-respect for all citizens (Rawls, 1971, p. 440). Self-respect, i.e. confidence in one's own worth, ends and abilities, is a pre-condition to lead self-directed, fulfilling lives. While Rawls is not explicit on this in his Theory of Justice, self-respect seems to have two components – dignity and self-esteem, or to use Stephen Darwall's terminology, recognition self-respect and appraisal self-respect (Darwall S. L., 1977). Dignity refers to the belief in one's intrinsic worth as a human being, while appraisal self-respect involves confidence in the value of one's *particular* talents and pursuits. Rawls vacillates between these two different kinds of respect when discussing the social bases of self-respect (Kramer, 2017) (Eyal, 2005) (Doppelt, 2009) (Moriarty, 2009). Rawls himself acknowledged this ambiguity in his later writings (Rawls, 1993, p. 404). Following Matthew Kramer, I resolve this ambiguity in Rawls by assuming that the social bases of self-respect can be properly understood as a primary good only by taking into account both the recognition and appraisal aspects of self-respect (Kramer, 2017, p. 303). This paper focuses on the appraisal aspect of social bases of self-respect, henceforth referred to as the social bases of appraisal self-respect.

Social primary goods are goods all citizens need irrespective of their initial conditions and their conceptions of the good (Rawls, 1971, p. 62). The social bases of appraisal self-respect is a social primary good, in the sense that social institutions heavily determine how much deserved appraisal respect individuals are able to receive from others. As I argue below, whether or not people receive deserved appraisal respect from others directly affects their prospects of having a secure sense of appraisal self-respect. This paper exposes the possibility of a tragedy embedded in the distribution of the social bases of appraisal self-respect, namely that even in an ideal society it may be impossible to ensure, through institutional design, that all citizens have adequate opportunities to receive

deserved appraisal respect from others. This, in turn, implies that social institutions, even in an otherwise ideal society, may not be able to provide all citizens with sufficient prospects to secure their appraisal self-respect.

The paper begins by discussing the nature and value of appraisal self-respect in order to establish two key claims – (i) that people's appraisal self-respect usually depends on some amount of positive affirmation from others and (ii) that the person must believe the appraisal respect they receive from others is deserved for it to sustainably support their appraisal self-respect and that, generally, such belief depends on the respect actually being deserved. In section 2, I discuss a plausible view, according to which there are three conditions that any activity or performance (used interchangeably henceforth) has to satisfy for it to be praise-worthy, i.e. difficulty, competent causation and advancement of a plausible conception of the good. In section 3, I argue that there tends to be a socially comparative dimension to evaluations of praise-worthiness. This is because we have to often rely on other's performances to gauge if a performance is difficult and thus potentially praise-worthy. In section 4, I re-construct Rawls' argument for the social bases of appraisal self-respect being adequate to ensure that everyone is able to receive deserved appraisal respect from others. I show that Rawls' solution may not be able to ensure adequate opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect for everyone. Moreover, no foreseeable modifications to Rawls' theory of institutional design could solve for this potential inadequacy. In the fifth and final section, I discuss, against the plausible view discussed in section 2, three possible strategies to deny the tragedy – (a) that the respect worthiness of people's performances can be evaluated purely based on intra-personal comparisons (b) that anyone can receive deserved appraisal respect for the exercise of a good will, even if they are not able to deliver extra-ordinary results and (c) that people can receive deserved appraisal respect for the achievements of other members of their group. I show that these strategies hold limited promise and are unlikely to fully insure against the tragedy being materialised.

1: The Nature and Value of Appraisal Self-Respect

Appraisal self-respect reflects individuals' confidence in their own ends and abilities. People with low self-esteem are likely to lack confidence that they can set worthy goals and pursue them; hence they lack initiative (Dillon, 2019) (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). The social bases of appraisal self-respect thus should be considered a primary good in the sense that they directly affect people's ability to settle on a conception of the good and live their life according to that conception, i.e. as an agent. Someone suffering from crippling self-esteem can have access to a myriad of rights and resources and yet fail to lead a life of their own choosing. Such individuals are likely to continuously doubt the value of their ends, as well as their ability to follow through on plans to achieve those ends.

Receiving appreciation or positive appraisal respect from others is generally necessary for us to have a secure sense of appraisal self-respect. The need for social approval seems particularly salient in childhood. While empirical evidence suggests that the need for positive affirmation tends to decline between late childhood and early adolescence, the need seems to remain important for a healthy conception of the self at all stages of a typical person's life (Rudolph, Caldwell, & Conley, 2006). Rawls seems to think so too, when he writes that "...unless our endeavors are appreciated by our associates, it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile…" (Rawls, 1971, pp. 440-441). But perhaps, against Rawls, appraisal respect from others is not *strictly* necessary for sustaining our appraisal self-respect. Colin Bird, amongst several others, has challenged the 'dependency thesis' i.e., that our self-respect must depend on respect from others. He presents stoicism as a tenable position wherein it remains possible for one to not lose self-respect despite external degradation or lack of external validation (Bird, 2010). While Bird discusses his challenge to the dependency thesis primarily in the context of recognition self-respect, the stoic point seems applicable to the case of appraisal self-respect too.

Some people may be able to uphold their appraisal self-respect despite receiving no positive affirmation or even receiving constant negative feedback from others. Consider the fictitious character *Matilda*, the protagonist in Roald Dahl's well-known children's novel by the same name. Despite enduring neglect and verbal abuse from her parents and school principal, Matilda demonstrates an unwavering belief in her intelligence and moral convictions. She teaches herself to read at an early age, even while being repeatedly told she is worthless. She remains confident that her father's dishonest business practices are wrong, despite being dismissed by the adults around her (Dahl, 2024). A real-life parallel can be seen in the story of *Teezo Touchdown*, an American rapper who was frequently ridiculed for his unconventional music and fashion before rising to fame. Reflecting on his early career, Teezo described his inner confidence by saying, "I've always been famous to me—it was just hoping everyone else would see it" (Tharpe, 2023). Matilda and Teezo's enduring confidence in their values and talents is likely to strike us as remarkable. The fact that it does so suggests that for most people, despite genuine efforts, it may be psychologically quite difficult to sustain a high opinion of themselves when they receive no external positive affirmation whatsoever. Thus, even if the dependency thesis does not hold true universally, it seems to hold generally: one's self-respect, of which appraisal self-respect is an integral part, tends to have a social basis (Dillon, 2019). If so, expecting people to take full responsibility for their own appraisal self-respect, no matter what the social conditions, is unfair.

Moreover, it may not even be desirable for individuals' appraisal self-respect to be completely independent of other's judgements. Jessica Isserow rightly argues that "we shouldn't want to condone simply ignoring others' feedback altogether." Others' evaluations can ensure that one's appraisal self-respect has some connection with reality. Ignoring other people's evaluations invites the risk of becoming delusional. Isserow illustrates her point with the example of science fiction character Zapp Brannigan. Zapp regards himself as a military hero and 'God's gift to women', an opinion that is completely at odds with the beliefs held by other people about him. Even though

Zapp seems to have very high appraisal self-respect, it seems the kind of appraisal self-respect that is unhealthy. (Isserow, 2023). Such beliefs can not only set Zapp up for failures but also harm those around them. In the original example, Zapp constantly pursues a woman, despite her obvious disinterest. We could also imagine Zapp making other mistakes, such as over-evaluating his odds of winning military conflicts and participating in dangerous battles that he is likely to lose as a result. The judgments of others can provide valuable evidence for the extent of one's abilities. Of course, one's self-beliefs shouldn't be completely beholden to others' judgements. Having said that, others' judgements can help one arrive at accurate judgements about oneself, allowing the agent to make decisions based on more reliable data. Moreover, having an accurate understanding of one's talents is plausibly good in itself. Thus, making one's self-image, and consequently appraisal self-respect fully immune to other's evaluations may be not only be unfeasible but also undesirable both in itself and instrumentally.

For positive appraisal respect from others to support an individual's appraisal self-respect, the individual must believe it is genuinely deserved. Receiving praise that one believes one does not deserve can in fact be counterproductive, triggering feelings of inauthenticity and an experience of impostor syndrome[29]. Additionally, the agent must believe that the person offering the appraisal respect truly believes that the agent is deserving of it. Imagine a debut novelist receiving enthusiastic praise from friends for their first book. The novelist begins asking specific questions about the book and soon realises that none of the friends have actually read it. The praise was given not based on the work itself, but simply to boost the novelist's confidence. Upon learning this, the novelist is likely to feel hurt, insulted or betrayed rather than genuinely appreciated. This is because, without having read the book, the friends could not have sincerely believed that that the debut novelist is deserving of appraisal respect for their book.

[29] Impostor syndrome refers to the common experience of feeling like a 'fraud', i.e. one is not as capable as others believe them to be (Levy, 2022).

There may be cases where the agent incorrectly concludes that the respect giver genuinely believes in their praiseworthiness and this mistaken conclusion ends up supporting the agent's appraisal self-respect. In the example above, the novelist could have continued in blissful ignorance, believing their friends had genuinely read and appreciated the book. Moreover, there may be cases where both the respect-giver and the respect-recipient come to incorrectly believe in the respect-recipient's praiseworthiness. In other words, the agent thinks they are praise-worthy. The respect-giver, too, wrongly believes that the agent is praise-worthy. And the agent knows that the respect-giver's appreciation is sincere, though both are unaware that the appraisal respect is in fact, undeserved. Take, for example, a stage actor who receives widespread admiration. Their shows are consistently sold out, and they have a large, devoted fan base. However, most of what makes their performances impressive is due to the work of others—the sound designers, set crew, directors, and so on. In reality, the actor's individual talent is quite average. Yet, the audience mistakenly attributes the success of the performances primarily to the actor, when this is not truly the case. The actor takes the audiences' response as evidence of their extra-ordinary talent and enjoys high appraisal self-respect as a result.

Thus, strictly speaking, a performance does not have to be, in fact, deserving of appraisal respect for it to support one's appraisal self-respect. Nor does a respect-giver have to be, in fact, sincere in their appraisal respect for their appreciation to support the recipient's appraisal self-respect. What is strictly necessary is that the agent *believes* that they are deserving of appraisal respect and that other's expressions of appraisal respect are sincere. Such beliefs can be based on incorrect facts, and such factually incorrect beliefs can nevertheless support high appraisal self-respect.

However, at the level of institutional design, there are strong reasons to ensure that appraisal respect is genuinely deserved and given sincerely. First, because people having mistaken beliefs about their esteem-worthiness seems bad in itself, in so far as self-knowledge has intrinsic value. Moreover, in a society where people routinely offer praise that is undeserved and insincere, the

effectiveness of positive feedback in supporting appraisal self-respect is likely to diminish significantly. The pervasive mismatch between actual desert and expressions of appraisal respect may become public knowledge. In such a society, admiration may be dealt with scepticism as not being deserved or sincere. Thus, expressions of appraisal respect, when not sincere and not tracking desert may fail to sustainably support people's appraisal self-respect. This is a strong reason to ensure that expressions of appraisal respect track actual desert, as our primary moral interest in social appraisal respect derives from the support it provides to people's appraisal self-respect.

Despite the institutional goal of ensuring that social appraisal respect is deserved and sincere, at least some instances of people giving undeserved or insincere appraisal respect to each other may be morally permissible. In fact, there may be situations where offering undeserved appraisal respect to proximate others—such as to children and maybe even to adults struggling with abysmally low self-confidence—may be not only acceptable but even morally required. This does not necessarily undermine the argument that social institutions be structured so as to encourage appraisal respect that is deserved and sincere. Consider an analogy with promises. We have good reasons to structure society in a way that encourages people to keep their promises. Yet there may be cases where breaking a promise might be justified to prevent a greater harm—for example, breaking a promise to buy a friend beer after discovering that the friend suffers from alcoholism. Nonetheless, in general, we have reason to promote a society where promises are reliable, because if people frequently break them, they lose their value. The same logic applies to appraisal respect. While there may be occasional instances when offering undeserved praise supports people's appraisal self-respect and is thus morally permissible and maybe even required, at the broader, institutional level, we should cultivate norms that encourage appraisal respect to reflect actual merit. This ensures that expressions of admiration maintain their value and meaning, thereby providing stable, meaningful support for people's appraisal self-respect over time. Thus, for the sake of people's

appraisal self-respect, institutions should be designed such that everyone has adequate opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect from others.

2: Deserved Appraisal respect as a response to Achievements

On a very plausible account, appraisal respect is deserved when it comes as a response to extra-ordinary achievements or 'Achievements with a capital A', as Gwen Bradford calls them. Bradford points out that capital-A achievements (just "achievements" henceforth) consist of an agent 'competently bringing about a product through a difficult process', where competence is broadly defined as the agent having the right kind of knowledge about how their actions cause the product (Bradford, 2015, pp. 25, 65).

Achievements are necessary but not sufficient for receiving deserved appraisal respect. Achievements also need to be directed at a plausible conception of the good for them to be appraisal respect-worthy. Therefore, three conditions are jointly necessary and sufficient for a performance to be appraisal respect-worthy: (i) difficulty (ii) competent causation and (iii) causing the advancement of a plausible conception of the good. To see why each of the three conditions are necessary, consider the following examples where only two of the three conditions are satisfied.

a) Ada believes that a good life entails following the rituals of some religion X. The only ritual devotees of X in fact have to follow is to mechanically say a short prayer before every meal. Ada's act of mechanically saying the prayers is unlikely to be appraisal respect-worthy since the (i) difficulty condition is unlikely to be satisfied.
b) Bea works in a paint factory under very difficult conditions. Unbeknownst to her, the paint she co-produced has been used in a globally renowned art work. Her contribution to the artwork through her paint production is unlikely to be appraisal respect-worthy since (ii) the competent causation condition is not satisfied. She does not have sufficient

understanding, or more precisely, sufficient justified true beliefs about how her actions led to the production of a globally renowned art work (Bradford, 2015, p. 80).

c) Cio has developed a sophisticated tool that reduces the time it takes to tie one's shoe-laces by an average of one second. The act of creating this tool is unlikely to be appraisal respect-worthy since condition (iii), i.e. advancement of a plausible conception of the good is not satisfied.

Of the three conditions of appraisal respect-worthiness, the one most relevant for present purposes is difficulty. I follow Bradford in assuming that difficulty is always relative to the agent (Bradford, 2015, p. 28). Even the act of mechanically saying a short prayer can be difficult for someone suffering from a severe cognitive impairment. For such a person, being able to say a few lines without interruptions can be an achievement and something they could get merited appraisal respect for. As Bradford notes, difficulty measures effort; an action can be called difficult when it exceeds a certain threshold of effort. When we say a particular activity, let's say running a marathon is difficult, what we usually mean is something like 'for most people, running a marathon requires an extra-ordinary amount of effort'. This leaves open the possibility of their being some human being for whom running a marathon is quite effortless and thus does not feel like an achievement to them.

3: The Comparative Dimension of Appraisal Respect-Worthiness

There tends to be a socially comparative dimension to the standard by which an agent's action can be publicly deemed to be an achievement, and thus appraisal respect-worthy. In other words, whether an agent's action can be publicly recognized as deserving of appraisal respect depends at least partly on the performance of others in their reference group. The comparative dimension is specific to the difficulty condition of deserved positive appraisal respect discussed earlier. To recall, an action is considered difficult when it exceeds a certain threshold of effort. Exceeding this effort

threshold makes a performance difficult, which in turn makes it a potential achievement, and thus potentially appraisal respect-worthy. Put differently: exceeding the threshold of effort is necessary for difficulty; difficulty is necessary for achievement; and achievement is generally necessary for appraisal respect-worthiness. By this chain of conditions, exceeding the threshold of effort becomes a generally necessary condition for appraisal respect-worthiness.

Earlier, I noted that difficulty is always relative to the agent. Following Bradford, let us assume that effort can be quantified in hypothetical *eff* units[30]. Suppose that when an activity requires more than 10 eff from an agent, it is considered difficult for that agent. For example, tying shoelaces may require only 2 eff for a typical person, but 15 eff for someone with amputated hands. In this case, tying shoelaces is not difficult for the typical person but is difficult for the amputee, since the required effort exceeds the 10-eff threshold. At first glance, this agent-relativity suggests that difficulty is not socially comparative—whether an activity is difficult for an individual depends solely on their own capacities and is independent of others' performances.

However, in practice, it is often quite difficult for us to assess precisely how much effort a given activity required from an individual. In some cases, rough cardinal comparisons are possible—for instance, comparing the effort needed to tie shoelaces for an able-bodied person versus an amputee. But these comparisons become nearly impossible when differences in relevant capacities are minor or imperceptible. In such cases, looking at the performance of others who are relevantly similar to an agent serves as a good proxy for evaluating how difficult an action might have been for the agent.

Consider two able-bodied adults, Dan and Eva. It may be true that tying shoelaces requires 3 eff for Dan and 2 eff for Eva—a difference that is likely imperceptible even to them. But it would be

[30] To be precise, Braford uses *eff* to denote intensity of effort and uses other notations to denote other parameters of effort such as duration. She then considers various options to combine these parameters to calculate total effort involved in an activity (Bradford, 2015, pp. 40-51). Here, I bracket these various components of effort and use *eff* to denote one unit of effort.

hard to believe that Dan's tying shoelaces requires 12 eff for him, making the task difficult, given that Dan is relevantly similar to Eva and others in their reference group, most of whom tie shoelaces with minimal effort. To assess whether someone's performance required effort exceeding the difficulty threshold, we often have to rely on comparing it to the performance of others in the reference group. If a significant portion of the group routinely performs at a certain level, delivering that level of performance is unlikely to be difficult.

In the absence of direct, precise knowledge of an individual's internal capacities, the group norm—here assumed to be the average level of performance—serves as a proxy for the threshold of difficulty. Performing significantly above the group norm can serve as indirect evidence that an individual's performance required considerable effort, potentially exceeding the difficulty threshold. Such exceptional performances may therefore be considered achievements and, consequently, as potentially appraisal respect-worthy.

Consider the example of Fahad, a high school student. To assess whether swiftly calculating 12×2 is difficult for him, we can examine whether other students in his class (assumed to be relevantly similar to Fahad) are able to solve the problem quickly. If most students in the class can give the correct answer quickly, we can infer that the task should not be difficult for Fahad. If he answers correctly, he may not deserve any admiration. On the other hand, suppose Fahad is asked to swiftly calculate 1345×64, and none of his classmates is able to produce the correct answer quickly. In that case, we may infer that the task is difficult for Fahad. If Fahad alone provides the correct answer, his performance is likely to exceed the difficulty threshold, justifying deserved appraisal respect for his performance.

The socially comparative dimension of appraisal respect-worthiness arises from the epistemic difficulty of accurately assessing differences in individual capacities. In practice, we often have to rely on a proxy: the distribution of performances within the reference group. Exceeding the group

norm can provide plausible evidence that an action must have been difficult for the agent and thus potentially-esteem worthy. For performances that are average or below, on the other hand, we lack plausible evidence that they would have been beyond the difficulty threshold for the agent.

If public judgments of difficulty—and therefore of appraisal respect-worthiness—are typically based on the average performance of the group due to the epistemic challenge of directly assessing individual capabilities, then not all performances can be deemed difficult and thus appraisal respect-worthy. For good reasons, only those who surpass the average emerge as plausible recipients of deserved appraisal respect and by definition, not everyone can be above average. I now explore how this socially comparative aspect of appraisal respect-worthiness risks producing a tragedy of the social bases of appraisal self-respect, even within an ideal society as envisioned by Rawls.

4: Diversity of Communities of Interests as Social Bases of Appraisal Self-Respect

Rawls seems to think that the strict priority of basic liberties in his theory of justice is sufficient to yield the appropriate social bases of appraisal self-respect. In an ideal society, it is quite likely that for each person there will be "at least one community of shared interests to which he belongs and where he finds his endeavours confirmed by his associates" (Rawls, 1971, p. 442). According to him, because an ideal society has a diversity of non-comparing groups, it is possible for each individual to belong to at least one group where their ends and abilities are affirmed by others. For each individual, there is at least one group where they can find others who share their set of values and can thus appreciate their ends and their competence in fulfilling those ends. Moreover, rather than all individuals' appraisal respect-worthiness being evaluated across a limited set of salient dimensions such as income, there would be a plethora of features for which individuals can receive positive appraisal respect from others. In a society where one's appraisal respect worthiness is measured only by, say, financial success, there is a high risk of some people not receiving any deserved appraisal respect. This is especially true for those who lack talents like strategic thinking,

often necessary for high-paying jobs or running a profitable business. On the other hand, in an ideal society, someone with other kinds of skills that cannot easily be monetized may nevertheless have significant prospects of receiving deserved appraisal respect. An origami expert, for instance, is likely to find some others in an ideal society who appreciate the beauty of paper art as well as how difficult it usually is.

The existence of several communities of interests, however, may not be enough to ensure everyone has adequate opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect from others. Even if we assume that in an ideal society everyone finds at least one group where their ends are affirmed by others, not everyone within that group may have adequate opportunities to receive deserved positive appraisal respect for their performance in advancing those ends. This is because, for the epistemic reasons discussed earlier, the standard by which someone's appraisal respect-worthiness is evaluated in a particular domain is likely to be affected by the performance of other group members. For a performance to be appraisal respect-worthy, it must generally require an extra-ordinary amount of effort. Judging whether an action requires an extra-ordinary amount of effort from an agent generally requires comparing their performance to that of relevant others. If most people in the relevant reference group routinely achieve a certain level of performance, performance at that level is unlikely to provide credible evidence of requiring effort that surpasses the difficulty threshold. Let's assume, for simplicity, that the difficulty threshold is equal to the average level of performance in any reference group. On this model thus, an agent can be said to be putting an extra-ordinary amount of effort, and thus potentially deserving appraisal respect only when they deliver performances that are above average. Some people in any reference group will inevitably perform at the average or below average levels. They may thus fail to demonstrate that they have crossed the difficulty threshold, which is necessary to receive deserved appraisal respect.

Geoffrey Brennan and Philip Pettit present a powerful example to demonstrate this social comparative dimension of public standards of appraisal respect worthiness: Which acts of honesty

are deemed to be deserving of positive appraisal respect in a group tends to depend on what is the 'normal' level of honesty in the group (Brennan & Pettit, 2004, p. 19). If politicians, say the truth, on average, 50% of the times, a politician being honest 80% of the times may receive deserved positive appraisal respect. This is because being honest 80% of the times as a politician is likely to be difficult, considering it is well above average. But if in a club of reputable journalists, people are honest 90% of the times, a journalist in such an association being honest 80% of the times is unlikely to be appraisal respect-worthy. This is because, being honest 80% of the times as a journalist is unlikely to be difficult, considering others, on average, say the truth more frequently. Similarly, along every dimension of performance in any group, there are likely to be some people who perform at average or below levels, thus failing to demonstrate that they have surpassed the difficulty threshold.

This does not yet contradict the Rawlsian claim that a liberal society with a diversity of non-comparing groups is sufficient to ensure everyone has the opportunity to receive deserved positive appraisal respect from others. After all, people would normally be part of multiple groups and there will be many dimensions along which people's performances are measured within those groups. Thus, even if a person fails to exceed the standard of one performance in a particular group, they can perhaps exceed the standard of appraisal respect worthiness along some other dimension or in some other group. All that is required is that everyone has the opportunity to get some deserved appraisal respect from others along at least one significant dimension valued by the group(s) they are a part of[31], not that they should be able to get appraisal respect for every single activity or in every group they are a part of.

[31] Arguably, this is a very minimal condition for what is required for appraisal self-respect. In reality, this may not be enough, and further conditions may have to be satisfied. Some psychologists, such as C. J. Mruk and E. J. O'Brien, argue that only appraisal respect directed at characteristics an individual personally values can support their appraisal self-respect. For example, they note that "athletic success will be meaningless to someone whose sense of competence is tied to musical rather than athletic performance" (Mruk & O'Brien, 2013, p. 168). See also (Isserow, 2023) for similar claims. In this paper, I seek to show that satisfying even the minimal conditions for everyone may be impossible if certain distribution of talents and associative ties were to obtain in an ideal society.

However, what if some people just happen to be mediocre or worse by the standards of each group they are a part of, or, indeed, any group they might aspire to become part of? We can imagine an individual in an ideal society whose typical day consists of working in a meaningful job, taking care of their children and pursuing some other interests in the discretionary time they have left. It just so happens that this person's performance as a worker, a parent and a participant in whatever activity they pursue just happens to be average or less. They do not necessarily get any disesteem from others. However, they also do not receive any deserved appraisal respect since their performance, being average, does not provide credible evidence of having surpassed the difficulty threshold and thus praiseworthiness in any of the domains. If, as we have assumed, some amount of deserved appraisal respect is generally necessary to secure people's appraisal self-respect, such a person's appraisal self-respect may lack the requisite social bases to be secure.

5: Strategies to avoid the tragedy

Strategy 1 – Appraisal respect for Intra-Personal Growth

One way to avoid the tragedy is to challenge the claim that we can only verify if someone's actions exceeded the difficulty threshold, and are thus potentially esteem-worthy, by comparing their performance with others. We also have good reasons to give deserved esteem to those who show significant intra-personal growth. In doing so, we can verify someone's esteem worthiness by comparing their present performance with their own past performance. Consider Harsh, who at time t_0, in their very first yoga class, struggles with even basic yoga poses. However, a few weeks later, at time t_1, he has progressed to performing intermediate poses. At t_1, he may receive deserved positive appraisal respect for surpassing his own performance at t_0. Considering that Harsh struggled with even the basic ones initially, one may argue that performing intermediary poses is

likely to have required extra-ordinary efforts from him. Thus, at least in some cases, the difficulty, and hence praiseworthiness, of a performance can be measured without any reference to others' performances. Such cases could suggest a way out of the tragedy – for at least in some domains all individuals within a group could receive deserved positive appraisal respect, not for being significantly better than the average, but for being significantly better than their past selves in the relevant domain. The improvement over time can serve as credible evidence that an agent crossed the difficulty threshold.

However, even if appraisal respect were directed toward people's growth in a particular domain, it is not obvious that interpersonal comparisons can be completely avoided. This is because not *just any* growth could be publicly recognised as appraisal respect-worthy. A language learner who adds five new words to their vocabulary in a month is unlikely to receive deserved appraisal respect, for such growth strikes one as not typically requiring extra-ordinary amounts of effort. To evaluate which growth may have required extra-ordinary effort and is thus deserving of appraisal respect, one often has to, again, rely on the performance of relevant others. If other language learners with apparently similar capacities are able to learn five new words, on average, in a day, learning five words in a month is unlikely to be appraisal respect-worthy. On the other hand, we might justifiably hold someone in high esteem for progressing from complete beginner to holding conversations in a new language within a week, since such rapid advancement is rare and likely very challenging. In this sense, judging the difficulty—and therefore the respect-worthiness—of someone's growth often requires comparisons with the growth of others in the same reference group. Similar epistemic challenges arise when assessing how difficult it is for someone to achieve a certain level of improvement, just as they do when judging the difficulty of reaching a particular level of absolute performance in a given domain.

Strategy 2 – Appraisal respect for Good Will

A second strategy for avoiding the tragedy challenges the claim that agents need to prove that they are performing difficult actions for them to receive deserved esteem. One might think that there is at least one kind of actions for which we can justifiably offer deserved praise irrespective of how difficult they are — namely, acts of goodwill. By avoiding judgements of difficulty, we can avoid the epistemic challenge of evaluating difficulty, and the interpersonal comparisons required to overcome the epistemic challenge. Immanuel Kant famously argued that a good will "….deserves to be highly esteemed for itself and is good without a view to anything further…" (Kant, 1997, p. 10). An individual can perform below average in all the groups they are a part of and yet receive deserved appraisal respect for the purity and goodness of their intentions. To wit, the proposal is that everyone can receive deserved appraisal respect if they act out of a good will. According to Kant, a person acts out of good will when they act solely out of a universal maxim. Any inclinations such as sympathy or instrumental reasons should play no role in motivating an action for the will to be good, and thus appraisal respect-worthy (Kant, 1997, p. 13). Not even the desire for esteem itself should play a role in the motivations.

Against this solution, another epistemic problem arises: it is often nearly impossible for others to know whether an agent performs an action only out of the goodness of their will. Kant gives us the example of a tradesman who "…does not overcharge, but keeps a fixed price for everyone, so that a child buys of him as well as any other" (Kant, 1997, p. 11). It is usually impossible to know whether the shopkeeper's refraining from exploiting innocent customers, such as children, is done out of a desire for esteem, to ensure that he maintains a trustworthy reputation or out of a good will. Similarly, someone helping a stranger cannot automatically be assumed to be acting out of a good will. Perhaps they naturally have an abundance of sympathy and are thus instinctively driven to helping others. Such an offer of help to strangers when driven by sympathy thus "…deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem. For the maxim lacks the moral import, namely, that such actions be done from duty, not from inclination" (Kant, 1997, p. 11).

Let's for the moment assume that somehow this epistemic problem could be overcome. Perhaps in at least some cases, we can reasonably conclude whether or not someone acted out of a good will. This is especially true in cases where no other plausible motive, except acting out of a sense of duty, could be established. Consider Isha, whose co-worker Jake is facing recurring verbal abuse from their boss. Isha despises Jake as a person but nevertheless considers it her duty to report the abuse to their organization's disciplinary committee. Isha is aware that there is a significant risk of her losing her job as the boss will quite likely get to know about the complaint. She nevertheless, driven by duty, goes ahead and files the complaint on behalf of Jake. Let's further assume that by some accident, other employees in the organization get to know about Isha's brave move and are well aware of her dislike for Jake. They would be justified in giving deserved appraisal respect to Isha for it is quite plausible that she acted out of duty alone, lacking any other plausible motive to file the complaint.

However, not all such apparent exercises of good will are likely to provide sufficient evidence of being appraisal respect-worthy because, acts of good will, like other kinds of actions also need to surpass a difficulty threshold. And as a matter of fact, some comparisons seem necessary in this context as well to evaluate if an act of good will was sufficiently difficult for the agent. Contrast the above with another example where Isha is standing in a ticket line. She has an opportunity to jump the queue without being noticed. However, she decides not to. A bystander may observe Isha's behaviour and believe that Isha had no motive other than a sense of civic duty to maintain the queue. And yet, this act of good will may not provide sufficient evidence of being appraisal respect-worthy. Even if the bystander were to shower praise on Isha for sticking to the queue, the praise is likely to come across as undeserved.

Isha's first act of good will, i.e. filing a complaint on behalf of Jake strikes us as appraisal respect-worthy but not the second act of good will, i.e. to maintain the queue. The difference in intuitions is most likely explained by the stakes involved in the two acts – in the first case, Isha risks

significant harm to herself and has to ensure her personal dislike for Jake does not get in way of exercising her duty. As a result, the first act of good will is likely to have required a significant amount of effort, plausibly beyond the difficulty threshold, to for instance, overcome the instinct to not risk her job for a person she dislikes. The second act, on the other hand, is likely to have required only a trivial amount of effort.

Thus, not all acts of good will by themselves are likely to provide sufficient evidence of being appraisal respect-worthy. Acts of good will also have to surpass a certain difficulty threshold for them to be classified as appraisal respect-worthy. And like any in other dimension, often the performance of others in one's reference group will provide credible evidence for where the difficulty threshold for the relevant action might be. If in Isha's company, it were a norm for individuals to report abusive behaviour against fellow employees despite personal risks, her act may not be seen as appraisal respect-worthy. If risking one's job to protect a fellow employee is a norm, it may suggest that the action is not *that* difficult and thus appraisal respect-worthy. Conversely, if Isha is part of a culture where people routinely break queues, her decision to remain in line—despite knowing that jumping ahead would carry no social consequences—may justifiably be seen as appraisal-worthy. In such a context, we seem to have good reasons to believe that resisting the temptation to seize an advantage was genuinely difficult, especially when those around her habitually exploit such opportunities.

Strategy 3 – Vicarious Appraisal Respect

A final strategy I discuss to avoid the tragedy challenges the claim that agents need to demonstrate extra-ordinary achievements to deserve appraisal respect. Members of a group, according to this strategy, can secure their appraisal self-respect by receiving vicarious appraisal respect for the achievements of fellow group members. Matthew Kramer, for instance, has argued that "everyone who belongs to a country in which some outstanding accomplishments occur is thereby warranted in harbouring a heightened sense of self-respect… (Kramer, 2017)" Kramer's proposal is that

individuals can come to derive a sense of pride, and deservedly so, for the achievements of their fellow group members. People may, for instance, warrantedly take pride in the achievements of those from the distant past—such as the construction of magnificent monuments—when they feel a sense of shared identity or connection with the builders of those monuments. Similarly, they may warrantedly bask in the glory when someone from their network receives a prestigious award, like a Nobel Prize. Even if Kramer is right, I earlier argued for the dependency thesis i.e. that we generally require some degree of external affirmation to have a secure sense of appraisal self-respect. If the dependency thesis is correct, then individuals deriving a sense of pride for the achievements of others, in the absence of any appraisal respect from others, is likely to be insufficient to secure their appraisal self-respect.

Perhaps a Kramer-like proposal can be advanced for appraisal respect from others as well, i.e. people can come to deserve appraisal respect from others for the achievements of their co-nationals or other group members. Kramer argues that even 'pure' cases of vicarious pride can be warranted i.e. where it is clear that the person deriving a sense of pride from an achievement can claim no responsibility in bringing about the achievement (Kramer, 2017, p. 358). For vicarious appraisal respect to successfully avoid the tragedy, similarly pure cases of warranted appraisal respect from others must be possible i.e. we need to show that people can come to deserve appraisal respect for achievements of their fellow group members even when it is clear that they have played no significant part in bringing about the achievement. For instance, an agent could be said to deserve positive appraisal respect for being a part of a university one of whose scholars has recently won a Nobel Prize, although the agent made no significant contribution to the Nobel prize winning research.

Pure cases of deserved vicarious appraisal respect seem highly implausible, however. As discussed earlier, deserved appraisal respect for an agent necessitates that the agent competently causes an appraisal respect-worthy performance. Vicarious deserved appraisal respect directly violates this

necessary condition as it implies that an agent can deserve appraisal for a performance that they have made no significant contribution to. Relaxing the competent causation condition of appraisal respect-worthiness comes at a significant cost – without this condition, the link between appraisal respect and self-confidence becomes tenuous. Deserved appraisal respect from others rightly contributes to individual's self-confidence in their own ends and abilities. An agent competently achieves something, appreciation for which gives them credible evidence to believe in their own ends and abilities. It is because of this effect on self-confidence that deserved appraisal respect from others demands moral consideration. Receiving appraisal respect for others' achievements indicates very little about one's own ends and abilities and thus cannot truly bolster one's confidence in them. Thus, even if an agent could receive deserved appraisal respect without competently causing an action, it would not be clear why such appraisal respect could fulfil the function it is supposed to play in Rawls' account, namely to support individuals' confidence in their ability to form and pursue a conception of the good. If appraisal respect is to serve as a reliable indicator of one's own competence and values, it must be tethered to actions or traits that the individual is genuinely responsible for.

Conclusion

Justice requires that institutions be designed such that all individuals have adequate opportunities to receive deserved positive appraisal respect from others. This is because receiving appraisal respect that an agent believes is deserved and sincere is generally necessary to secure their appraisal self-respect. The tragedy of the social bases of appraisal self-respect is that even otherwise fully just institutions may fail to ensure such adequate opportunities and thus the social bases of appraisal self-respect for everyone.

For agents to sustainably receive appraisal respect from others that they believe is deserved and sincere, it is important that they receive appraisal respect that is in fact deserved. Performances

generally have to satisfy three conditions for the agent to be deserving of appraisal respect – (i) that the action is difficult for the agent (ii) that the action is competently caused by the agent (iii) and that the action causes the advancement of a plausible conception of the good. Of these three conditions (i) i.e. difficulty tends to introduce a socially comparative dimension into judgements of appraisal respect. Often, observers lack direct access to whether an agent's action required effort beyond a certain difficulty threshold. Instead, they must rely on indirect indicators—typically, by comparing the agent's performance to that of relevantly similar others—to estimate how difficult the action likely was. If most members of a group achieve a certain level of performance, performance at that level provides insufficient evidence of having exceeded the difficulty threshold. Conversely, performing at a level that few others reach is likely to be difficult, and therefore potentially worthy of appraisal respect. To illustrate how relying on others' performances as a proxy for difficulty can shape people's prospects of receiving deserved appraisal respect, I assume, for simplicity, that the difficulty threshold in any domain is set at the average performance within the relevant reference group. On this model, only those who perform above average can credibly signal that their effort exceeds the difficulty threshold, thereby qualifying for deserved appraisal respect. However, not everyone in a group can be above average. Those not exceeding the average may fail to demonstrate that their efforts surpass what is considered difficult and, consequently, miss out on deserved appraisal respect. Moreover, some individuals may consistently perform below average across all the groups they belong to, thereby receiving no deserved appraisal respect at all. This model highlights a central source of the tragedy: because we are largely dependent on comparisons with others to estimate difficulty—and thus respect-worthiness—there remains an unavoidable risk that some individuals, even under ideal conditions, may fail to receive deserved appraisal respect from others.

I discuss three plausible strategies to escape the tragedy. The first strategy challenges the claim that interpersonal comparisons are the only credible way to measure difficulty and hence esteem-

worthiness of a performance. We could gauge if an action is difficult for the agent by looking at their own past performances. An agent can receive deserved appraisal respect for showing significant growth compared to their past performance. I show, however, that what counts as *significant* growth can itself be hard to determine without looking at the growth of other members of one's reference group. A below average growth, on my model, may fail to demonstrate that the growth required effort beyond the difficulty threshold and thus fail to demonstrate appraisal respect-worthiness. Thus, the comparative dimension of appraisal respect-worthy standards, and hence the possibility of the tragedy remains intact.

The second strategy argues that an agent can received deserved positive appraisal respect merely for the exercise of a good will, even if their action does not result in an extra-ordinary results. On this view, we need not assess the level of difficulty involved in the action when evaluating good will, thereby avoiding the epistemic challenges tied to such assessments. Yet, attributing praise for good will introduces its own epistemic difficulty: it is often impossible to determine whether an action was genuinely motivated by good will. What may appear to stem from a universal maxim could in fact arise from instinct or from other, self-serving motives. Furthermore, even if this epistemic barrier could sometimes be overcome, I argue that not every instance of good will is sufficient to warrant appraisal respect since a difficulty condition must be met in this context too, which introduces the need for comparison. Fulfilling the duty to say the truth, when it's very easy, for instance, is unlikely to be appraisal respect-worthy. Like other kinds of actions, exercises of good will can be deserving of appraisal respect only when they exceed the difficulty threshold. And like other kinds of difficulty threshold, often the actions of others will be the only source of credible evidence for where the threshold may lie. Only acts of good will that are somewhat rare, thus suggesting they are difficult, are likely to be appraisal respect worthy. As a result, those acts of good will that are performed routinely by others in one's reference group are unlikely to merit appraisal respect, thus retaining the possibility of the tragedy.

A third strategy denies the premise that individuals can deserve appraisal respect only when they, themselves, achieve something. Rather, individuals can deserve appraisal respect for the achievements of others in their group. This strategy thus effectively denies that competent causation is a necessary condition for appraisal respect-worthiness. I argue that without competent causation, the link between appraisal respect and self-confidence becomes tenuous, thus putting the moral value of appraisal respect from others on shaky ground. Deserved appraisal respect from others indicates that an agent has valuable talents and abilities, which is why it is morally valuable. Vicarious appraisal respect for other's achievements fails to serve this signalling function.

Having considered these strategies, it seems that the theoretical possibility of the tragedy being materialized cannot be ruled out even under otherwise just circumstances. The tragedy applies only to the primary good of social bases of appraisal self-respect. Under just institutional arrangements, everyone can have adequate access to other social primary goods discussed by Rawls - rights, liberties, opportunities, income and wealth – irrespective of their talents, group memberships and other particular features. Even social bases of recognition self-respect can be provisioned in this way. It may be impossible, however, to ensure that everyone has access to adequate opportunities to secure their appraisal self-respect. This is because of two peculiar features that apply only to the good of social bases of appraisal self-respect – first appraisal respect has to be deserved for it to be appropriate. Second, public standards for giving deserved appraisal respect need to make reference to the actions of others in one's reference group.

One may acknowledge the theoretical possibility of the tragedy of the social bases of appraisal self-respect and yet argue that it is quite unlikely for it to materialize. One could contend that surely everyone is above average at *some*thing in *some* group they are a part of. In a liberal society marked by a rich diversity of traits for which individuals can earn appraisal respect, and a multiplicity of social groups with varying values, it is plausible that even those with seemingly limited talents can perform above average in at least one domain in one group, and thus demonstrate their appraisal

respect-worthiness. Given such a diversity of talents and the many social contexts in which they are recognized, the likelihood of a total failure to receive appraisal respect along any dimension appears quite low. The tragic scenario may thus seem of little interest practically - rendering the conclusion logically sound but arguably trivial. However, until we can conclusively demonstrate that human talents and associative ties tend to be distributed and structured in such a way that everyone is capable of delivering above-average performance in at least one significant domain in one of their groups, given the right social conditions, we cannot dismiss the significance of the argument *a priori*. It is also possible that talents and group memberships tend to be distributed in a way such that some people in every group are able to exceed the standards of difficulty, and thus appraisal respect worthiness along multiple domains while others struggle to exceed the standard in any of them.

Considering how important appraisal self-respect is for people's lives to go well, irrespective of their substantive conceptions of the good, it would indeed be quite tragic if some people find it unable to secure their appraisal self-respect, even under the best possible institutional arrangements. In this paper, I discuss three plausible strategies to deny the tragedy, none of which unfortunately turn out to hold great promise upon further scrutiny.

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Conclusion: Jobs, Social Status and Self-Esteem

An estimated 3.7 billion people worldwide are either in employment or actively seeking employment (UN Population Division, 2025). Those in employment spend on average 35-50 hours per week at work, the exact number at least partly dependent on where in the world one is working (ILOSTAT, 2025). The time one spends at work daily often far exceeds the time one spends socialising in a non-work context, pursuing a hobby or in any other activity. It is no surprise then that one's job often becomes an integral part of one's identity, affecting one's social status and self-esteem.

Such effects are perhaps most noticeable at the extremes. A popular actor or the CEO of a large multinational company, for instance, may find it easy to leverage their occupational identity to gain access to other influential people. At the same time, this occupational identity can be difficult to leave behind, drawing unwanted attention or intrusions into their privacy even outside of work. At the other extreme, being in some jobs can subject the individual to particularly degrading treatment from others, even when not at work. Some sanitation workers in India, often referred to as 'manual scavengers' for instance frequently face humiliation. They clean septic tanks, sewers and dry toilets with their bare hands. These workers are often subject to 'untouchability': being treated as pollutants and being expected to maintain a certain distance from the rest of the population. Although both the occupation of manual scavenging and the practice of untouchability have been outlawed in India for several decades now, at least 66,000 people have been documented to still be in the profession. The degrading treatment received by these workers has much to do with the fact that these workers are generally 'Dalits', one of the lowest Hindu castes (Pundir, 2021). Political theorist Rajeev Bhargava, however, has convincingly argued that even if caste was somehow removed from the equation, it is unlikely that anyone doing such a job can ever completely evade degradation. He reports the first-person account of one such sanitation worker that provides a vivid description of the job – "In the rainy season it is really bad. Water mixes with

faeces and when we carry it on our heads, it drips from the baskets on to our clothes, our bodies, our faces. When I return home, I have difficulty eating food sometimes. The smell never gets out of my clothes, my hair" (Bhargava, 2010, p. 48). For a person performing such a job, it is hard to imagine that they can simply leave their work-self behind once they log out of work. The work they perform is likely to inevitably adversely affect how they are perceived by themselves as well as others.

Jobs that are somewhere in the middle of these two extremes perhaps don't affect the identity of the worker as starkly. Nevertheless, they too tend to significantly impact a person's identity, social standing and the respect they receive from others. The first two papers of this dissertation unpack some of the normative implications on job design of this relationship between people's jobs, their social status and self-respect. The third paper exposes a tragic possibility in the distribution of the social bases of self-respect: even if workplaces and other social institutions are structured to best support individuals' sense of self-respect, some people may still end up with insufficient opportunities to maintain it. The second paper is currently re-submitted for review at the journal of *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy (CRISPP)* after a first revise and resubmit decision, while the other two are being prepared for submission to peer-reviewed journals.

The first paper, titled '*Lawn for Professors only: A Moral Inquiry into Workplace Status Hierarchies*' discusses the difficulties of justifying policies that contribute to social status hierarchies in. I proceed from the assumption, which appears to be a common ground amongst relational egalitarians, that creation or reinforcement of status hierarchies is objectionable in the absence of justification. An adequate justification is available when it can be shown that social status hierarchies are necessary to advance normatively weighty goals. I consider three plausible normative goals that organizational leaders might invoke to justify policies contributing to social status hierarchies among employees: increasing efficiency, rewarding desert, and compensating

unequal burdens. In developing these, I draw on familiar arguments that are often considered plausible by egalitarians to defend distributive inequalities.

The first justification assumes that organizational leaders are permitted or maybe even required as a matter of justice to pursue policies that help achieve efficiency gains. Social status hierarchies can help achieve efficiency gains in at least two plausible ways. First, status hierarchies may be used to make some positions in the organization prestigious and thus aspiration worthy. This may incentivise workers to improve their performance in competition for these prestigious positions, which in turn is likely to increase the overall efficiency of the organization. Against this, I argue that status hierarchies are not strictly necessary to achieve such efficiency gains. Superior status serves as an incentive only if talented employees base their motivation to work hard on receiving higher status as a reward. If organizational leaders fail to get the talented employees to improve performance in the absence of status rewards, they may be permitted to purse policies that contribute to status hierarchies. Even then, however, the complaint of those treated as inferior as a result of these policies does not get answered adequately. Rather, it gets re-directed towards the talented employees who make such inegalitarian policies necessary. This argument parallels G. A. Cohen's point that if individuals were committed to the principle of benefiting the least advantaged (referred to as the difference principle by John Rawls (Rawls, 1971)), they would not strategically withhold their labour or productivity in the absence of unequal rewards (Cohen, 2008). Similarly, if citizens display an egalitarian ethos, they won't require higher social status to be efficient.

Another way in which status hierarchies may help achieve efficiency gains is by enforcing the legitimate authority of managers or other boss-like figures. Managers can help achieve significant efficiency gains by serving a coordinating function. However, they can serve this function effectively only if their authority is in fact recognised and their commands followed by other employees in the organization. One may argue that it is generally necessary for the manager to have a higher social status than others for their authority to be recognised in such a way. Against

this, I argue that their authority can still be respected without elevated social status, provided that employees genuinely recognize the value of following the manager's direction in order to accomplish the organization's goals. When such recognition is lacking, both organizational leaders and employees may have duties to ensure that the need for the position of authority is clarified, understood and genuinely appreciated.

A second potential justification for work-related social status hierarchies is that they can help track desert. I consider one particular desert-basis, i.e. the value added by employees, or their contribution – though the discussion generalises for other desert bases as well. Simply put, one may argue that those who contribute more to an organization deserve a higher social status. T.M. Scanlon, amongst several others, has argued that a principle of desert may be appropriate when it comes to reactive attitudes such as admiration and blame, even if desert is an inappropriate justification for the distribution of material goods such as income (Scanlon, 2015) (Scanlon, p. 123). Those who contribute more to an organization indicate a disposition to work hard and a commitment to their field of expertise that is presumably greater than those who contribute less. For this reason, one may argue that those who contribute more to an organization can be said to deserve greater admiration than others. However, I show that someone deserving greater admiration does not imply they are deserving of higher social status. In fact, status hierarchies tend to distort evaluations of esteem, causing some people to receive more admiration than others, not because they are more esteem-worthy but because they have a higher social status. Thus, status hierarchies may not only be unfit but counterproductive to ensure reactive attitudes such as praise and blame track actual performance.

The third and final justification for work-related status hierarchies I consider is that they may be used to compensate for unequal burdens entailed by different jobs. Those performing more burdensome jobs can be compensated by giving them access to the good of higher social status. I acknowledge that there may sometimes be a tension between the welfare egalitarian ideal of

ensuring that the overall burdens and benefits of jobs are roughly equal, and the social egalitarian ideal of ensuring that people in an organisation relate to each other as equals. Sometimes, it may be justified to compromise on the social egalitarian ideal for the welfare egalitarian ideal when there is no other less morally objectionable way to compensate for unequal burdens. However, organization leaders in general are likely to have a large range of less objectionable ways to compensate for unequal burdens that are unlikely to contribute to social status hierarchies, such as by reducing the working hours of those performing particularly burdensome work. If despite the availability of such alternatives, they pursue status-inducing policies, then they wrong those treated as inferior as a result of such policies.

The second paper, titled '*Adequate Opportunities to Deserve Appraisal Respect*' builds on the claim, advanced perhaps most famously by John Rawls, that social institutions ought to be designed such that they give citizens sufficient opportunities to secure their self-respect (Rawls, 1971, p. 440). I focus on the 'appraisal' aspect of people's self-respect, which corresponds to the confidence individuals have in their particular ends and abilities. I assume that people generally require some amount of positive affirmation from others and that this affirmation must come across as deserved for it support people's appraisal self-respect. At the level of institutional design, to ensure appraisal respect from others comes across as deserved, it is desirable that the appraisal respect people give to each other is in fact deserved. This is because in a society where people routinely give each other undeserved praise, people's trust in the admiration they receive from others may deteriorate. As a result, the appraisal respect they receive from others may fail to support their appraisal self-respect. I argue that for an action to be deserving of appraisal respect, it must satisfy three criteria, i.e. that the action is (i) sufficiently difficult for the agent (ii) competently caused by an agent and (iii) directed at some plausible conception of the good. People's jobs often give them inadequate opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect because the tasks constituting their job tend to not satisfy one or more of these three conditions. To ensure people have adequate opportunities for appraisal respect at work, their jobs must require complex abilities as well as give the worker

an opportunity to directly contribute to the advancement of some plausible conception of the good. Thus, jobs that consist of a very narrow range of low-skill tasks directed at trivial goals are least likely to afford opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect at work.

The paper concludes with some policy recommendations on how jobs could be re-designed to ensure those at work have adequate opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect. Such policies could include, for instance, professionalisation of jobs currently consisting solely of low-skill tasks. Entry-level care jobs, say, could be professionalised in this way by requiring specialised training and certification. Such changes could not only increase care-workers' opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect but also improve the overall quality of the care services available in the society (Hemmings, Oung, & Schlepper, 2022). These changes should be accompanied by adequate training and upskilling opportunities for workers currently stuck in low-skill occupations to be able to perform the re-designed jobs. For jobs that cannot be re-designed in this way, such work can be re-distributed. This could include, for example, job rotation wherein different employees in an organization take turns to perform the low-skill tasks, leaving enough time and opportunity for everyone to engage in skilled work. The principle of adequate opportunities to deserve appraisal respect also lends support to increasing worker autonomy and participation in organizational decision making. This could increase workers' opportunities to engage complex skills with the aim of furthering a plausible conception of the good, rather than focusing on narrowly defined goals that may be trivial in themselves.

The third paper, titled 'The Tragedy of the Social Bases of Appraisal Self-Respect' exposes the possibility of a tragedy, namely that even in an ideal society it may be impossible to ensure, through institutional design, that all citizens have adequate opportunities to receive deserved appraisal respect from others. Drawing on and further developing the account of appraisal respect provided in paper 2, I argue that a key source of the tragedy is that there tends to be a comparative dimension to evaluations of praiseworthiness of actions. Several philosophers have argued that whether a

performance supports a person's self-esteem depends on how that performance compares to that of others in one's reference group (Nozick, 1974, pp. 239-246) (Brennan & Pettit, 2004, pp. 18-21). Robert Nozick, for instance, claims that "When everyone, or almost everyone has some thing or attribute, it does not function as a basis for self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on *differentiating characteristics*; that's why it's *self*-esteem [emphasis original]" (Nozick, 1974, p. 243). The examples Nozick presents in support of his claim all suggest that what he implies is that an agent's performance must be *better* than most others for it to support their self-esteem. He claims that if everyone in a society could perform as well as Aristotle, Goethe, or Marx, performance at those levels is unlikely to support people's self-esteem (Nozick, 1974, p. 241). Unlike Nozick, I don't consider it impossible that people can get deserved esteem from *themselves*, even when they don't outperform others. However, when it comes to admiration from others—which I consider as generally necessary for appraisal self-respect—I share a similar view: the standards by which performances can credibly be judged as esteem-worthy in public typically involve an inescapable element of social comparison. I trace this comparative dimension of public judgements of praiseworthiness to 'difficulty', as one of the three necessary conditions an action must satisfy to be deserving of appraisal respect.

I argue that when evaluating whether an agent's performance is difficult enough for them and thus appraisal-worthy, we generally face an epistemic barrier; namely we don't have knowledge of the exact talents and capacities of others. In the absence of this knowledge, the performance of relevant others serves as a reliable proxy for evaluating if an action could have been difficult enough for the agent to be praiseworthy. If most people in one's reference group can perform at a certain level, we have good reasons to believe that performance at that level is unlikely to be difficult and thus unlikely to be deserving of admiration. Only performances that are in some sense extra-ordinary compared to the performance of others in one's reference group are likely to give us credible evidence that they must have been difficult for the agent and are thus potentially praise-worthy. It is this need for proxy in evaluating the difficulty and thus praiseworthiness of other's

performances that is a key source of the tragedy of the social bases of self-esteem. Not everyone in any reference group can deliver extra-ordinary performances. Thus, some people in any group are likely to inevitably fail to demonstrate that their performance was difficult enough and thus potentially esteem-worthy. The tragedy materialises when some people are unable to deliver extra-ordinary performances in any of the groups, they are a part of.

I consider three possible ways to escape the tragedy of the social bases of appraisal self-respect, but I show that each holds only limited promise. First, I explore the idea that instead of comparing performances to that of others, we could measure difficulty by looking at an agent's growth relative to their own past performance. However, I argue that what counts as admiration-worthy growth is hard to determine without reference to others, meaning the comparative element cannot be avoided. Second, I turn to the suggestion that an agent could deserve appraisal respect simply for exercising good will, regardless of outcomes. I show that this strategy introduces a new epistemic challenge: it is often unclear whether an action truly stems from good will. Moreover, even if we could somehow determine when an agent acts out of good-will alone, not all acts are likely to be praiseworthy. Like other kinds of actions, exercises of good will can be deserving of appraisal respect only when they exceed the difficulty threshold. And often the actions of others will be the only source of credible evidence for where the threshold may lie, thus retaining the possibility of the tragedy. Finally, I examine the strategy of granting deserved appraisal respect for the achievements of others within one's group. I argue that if individuals could receive such respect without having contributed to those achievements, the condition of competent causation—typically required for an action to be appraisal-worthy—would have to be relaxed. But removing this condition comes at a cost: if individuals are granted deserved appraisal respect for achievements they didn't competently cause, it becomes unclear how that respect could support their confidence in the value of their own ends and abilities. Without this link between deserved appraisal respect and individual self-confidence, the moral value of appraisal respect itself becomes

questionable. After considering these three strategies, I conclude that even under otherwise just social institutions, the possibility of the tragedy being materialised cannot be eliminated.

In conclusion, this thesis explores how people's vital moral interest in maintaining a secure sense of self-respect—and in relating to others as social equals—should shape the design of social institutions, particularly workplaces. It argues that an ideal workplace would eliminate status hierarchies and enable all employees to engage in complex, meaningful tasks, while still meeting the organization's goal of producing valuable goods and services. The thesis also acknowledges a tragic possibility: that some individuals may struggle to secure their appraisal self-respect, even under ideal institutional conditions. However, this does not justify inaction in the current context, where workplace status hierarchies are rampant, and many workers are stuck in low-skill, repetitive jobs with limited opportunities for deserved appraisal respect. The papers point to some concrete policies that could help restructure workplaces to be more socially egalitarian and supportive of people's appraisal self-respect. The specific policies best suited to achieve these goals will, of course, depend on particular details of the contexts in which they are implemented, and would benefit from further research.

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