



# Intellectual arrogance: individual, group-based, and corporate

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## Abstract

In the article I argue that intellectual arrogance can be an individual, collective and even corporate vice. I show that arrogance is in all these cases underpinned by defensive positive evaluations of epistemic features of the evaluator in the service of buttressing its illegitimate social dominance. Individual arrogance as superbia or as hubris stems from attitudes biased by the motive of self-enhancement. Collective arrogance is underpinned by positive defensive attitudes to a one's social identity that seeks to maintain its unwarranted social dominance. Finally, corporations are arrogant when their attitudes are the aggregation of the arrogant dispositions of its managers or when these corporations have inherited structures and policies that are defensive of its illegitimately dominant social status.

**Keywords** Intellectual arrogance · Vice epistemology · Group vices · Hubris · Superbia · Social identity

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No one likes jerks, entitled white men, or greedy corporations. Societal disapproval of these individuals, collectives, and institutions is generally voiced by using vice terminology.<sup>1</sup> They are all characteristically described as being arrogant. Managerial hubristic arrogance is often held responsible for corporate greed (University of Delaware, 2015). The expression “white arrogance” is typically used to refer to the presumptions of entitlement and superiority that are remarkably common among whites and especially white men (Applebaum, 2017; Cherry, 2020). Further, when people

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<sup>1</sup> In this essay I use ‘collectives’ to refer to social groups whose members share some social feature which may or may not be part of members’ identities. Right-handed people, white men, or black women are examples of collectives. I use ‘institution’ and ‘corporation’ to refer to social groups with specific policies and charters, whose members often occupy different roles, such as CEO or treasurer. Universities, governments, and private firms are institutions (Ritchie, 2015).

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are tagged ‘arrogant jerks’ the arrogant appellation feels pleonastic. We can explain why these different cases fit the label ‘arrogant’ by assessing what they may have in common.

Jerks disrespect other people; they behave as if social norms of courtesy did not apply to them. Entitled white men think they are the centre of their world; they behave as if the role of others was primarily to service their needs. Greedy corporations take unreasonable risks that primarily damage other people’s interests; they behave as if they did not need to account for their actions. These brief descriptions highlight some analogies between the comportments of individuals, collectives and corporations that might warrant evaluating these behaviours as arrogant. In every case, the entity to which arrogance is often attributed behaves as if it were entitled to some privileges or exemptions even though it is not.<sup>2</sup>

These similarities alone do not warrant the conclusion that arrogance as a vice has individual, collective and institutional incarnations. It is wholly possible that even though collectives and corporations can behave in an arrogant-like manner, it is only individuals that can properly be said to be arrogant. This conclusion would be further supported by the observation that arrogance is a character or personality trait. Individuals alone possess this psychological feature; the attribution of personality or character to collectives and institutions is purely metaphorical. If this is right, arrogance—including intellectual arrogance—is an exclusively individual vice. Its attribution to collectives and corporations should be taken as a mere *façon de parler*.

In this article I argue that the conclusion that intellectual arrogance is best thought of as an exclusively individual vice is premature. Instead, I propose that given the plausible assumption that arrogance is underpinned by attitudes (Tanesini, 2021), we can develop a unified account of intellectual arrogance as a vice of individuals, collectives and institutions. According to this view intellectual arrogance is a disposition to behave in superior, entitled, and irresponsible ways that is grounded on a cluster of self-directed attitudes that function to defend an entity’s positive self-conception by gaining or maintaining an illegitimate social status or dominance.

The article is structured as follows. In Sect. 1 I offer an account of two kinds of individual arrogance: superbia and hubristic arrogance. I briefly detail their manifestations and summarise the evidence in favour of an account of these character traits as stemming from defensive attitudes to epistemic aspects of the self. In Sect. 2 I focus on group-based arrogance. I supply a dual account of the arrogance that pertains to members of dominant social groups that mirrors the duality of individual arrogance. I also make the case for an account of group-based arrogance as underpinned by defensive attitudes to institute or preserve the unwarranted dominance of one’s social identity. In Sect. 3 I turn to corporate arrogance. I argue for the view that institutions can be intellectually vicious when they have attitudes that exhibit the kind of defensive features that are also characteristic of individual arrogance. In Sect. 4 I conclude by highlighting that the ability to offer a unified account of arrogance at individual, group-based and institutional levels is an explanatory advantage of theories of vices

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<sup>2</sup> The idea that arrogance, in some of its most common manifestations, is primarily about the arrogation of unwarranted entitlements is not new. It has been defended by Robert Roberts and Jay Wood (2007) and by Robin Dillon (2021).

in terms of attitudes over accounts that think of them exclusively in terms of beliefs or as personality or character traits.

## 1 The arrogance of individuals: superbia and hubristic arrogance

In this section I offer a brief characterisation of arrogance as a psychological feature of individuals. My focus is on intellectual arrogance. I identify two overlapping clusters of behaviours and emotional orientations as characteristic of two forms of intellectual arrogance. The first is superbia which is typical of individuals whose self-esteem largely depends on being better than other people. The second is hubristic arrogance which is a type of hyper-autonomy that is characteristic of those who think of themselves as being invulnerable and wholly self-reliant. Subsequently, I supply empirical and theoretical considerations in favour of the view that arrogant comportment is underpinned by arrogant attitudes. These are summary evaluations of aspects of the self that serve the function of defending self-esteem.

Although this article concerns intellectual arrogance, I do not take this epistemic or intellectual vice to be wholly separate from arrogance as an ethical failing. Rather, as is evident from what follows, I presume that intellectual arrogance is simply arrogance in the epistemic domain. Intellectual arrogance, for instance, is a characteristic of those who act as intellectual jerks. They behave as if they knew it all (Lynch, 2019). They patronize, and condescend to, other people whom they treat as their intellectual inferiors. In short, for the purposes of this article intellectual arrogance is an aspect or component of arrogance as an ethical vice. Using the framework of attitudes that I introduce below one may say that intellectual arrogance is underpinned by a cluster of attitudes that is part of the larger cluster that grounds the manifestations of arrogance proper.

Valerie Tiberius and John Walker (1998) characterise arrogance as a trait that includes beliefs about one's own superiority to other people accompanied by a sense of entitlement. According to this view, the arrogant person thinks that others owe them a special kind of deference. They believe that others should service their needs. They also think that their alleged superiority warrants exemptions from the rules (e.g., of politeness) that properly constrain others' behaviour. In short, arrogant individuals arrogate special privileges or exemptions for themselves on the basis of their alleged superiority. These are entitlements that they do not possess irrespective of whether their belief in their superior abilities is at least partly accurate.

Tiberius and Walker think of arrogance as partly constituted by false beliefs about the propriety of some interpersonal behaviours inferred from beliefs about one's own alleged superiority. In my opinion, this emphasis on belief is not wholly on target. Plausibly arrogance does not require genuine belief in one's alleged superiority. Without wishing to enter complex debates about the nature of belief, it would seem minimally necessary for some mental state to count as a belief that it predicts behaviour in a wide range of circumstances, and that it is the sort of thing that the subject would be prepared sincerely to assert (cf., Levy, 2022, ch. 1). If that is so, belief in one's superiority is not necessary for arrogance since at least some arrogant people sincerely deny that they think of themselves as superior. They might even occasionally entertain doubts

about their abilities. Nevertheless, they act in superior ways, and often feel superior. These feelings and behaviours could be indicative of arrogance despite the absence of full belief in one's superiority. Of course, there are arrogant people who believe that they are superior. My point here is that, *contra* Tiberius and Walker, such a belief is not necessary.

It is even more implausible to think that the disrespectful behaviour characteristic of arrogance stems from beliefs that such behaviour is warranted by one's alleged superiority. Whilst some arrogant individuals might genuinely believe that other people's function is to service the needs of the arrogant person, many would take umbrage at such attributions. There is no reason to think that their denials would be tantamount to lies. Hence, although Tiberius and Walker are right that arrogant individuals act in entitled ways, they are wrong if they presume that the behaviour stems from genuine beliefs about entitlement.

In what follows I argue that at the root of arrogance primarily lie attitudes, understood as summary evaluations of their formal objects, rather than beliefs. However, to make the case for an attitudinal framework it is helpful first to dig deeper into the kind of comportment and emotional orientations that typify intellectual arrogance. Tiberius and Walker (1998) convincingly argue that arrogant people are full of themselves, are know-it-alls, and act in superior ways. Tiberius and Walker also note that arrogant individuals often explode in anger if other people do not put the interests of the arrogant person first (Tiberius & Walker, 1998, p. 381). Tiberius and Walker do not, however, sufficiently highlight another equally prominent aspect of arrogant behaviour. Some arrogant people need to win at all costs. In the process they do not shy away from humiliating and intimidating other people. In the intellectual domain, we are all familiar with individuals who treat every discussion as an adversarial context with winners and losers. They are never interested in figuring out the strengths of the point of view they do not share or in understanding which position is genuinely superior. Instead, they are only concerned with winning the argument. Hence, they do not hesitate to adopt intimidatory techniques. They also often become extremely angry if the other person does not back down.<sup>3</sup>

This need to win at all costs is characteristic of superbia. This is the kind of arrogance that afflicts those whose evaluations of self-worth are wholly dependent on bettering other people. It is typified by Trump-like characters who do not hesitate to humiliate others in the pursuit of self-glorification. These individuals do not value their own abilities for their objective merits. Instead, they only value them as indicators of their superiority. To some extent, everyone gauges their strengths and weaknesses by comparing themselves to others (Corcoran et al., 2011; Suls et al., 2020). But it is possible to rely on these comparisons with a view to gain accurate beliefs about the extent of one's abilities. It is equally possible, however, to use these comparisons primarily to feel good about oneself and to boost one's ego (Corcoran et al., 2011). When one compares oneself with others to these self-enhancing ends, one does not value one's abilities for their intrinsic features. Instead, one primarily values the subsequent boost

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that there is no place for adversarial argumentation in philosophy. It is possible to present objections to another viewpoint in a calm and cooperative manner that is interested in seeing the superior account prevail. My criticism is directed at those who are solely interested in winning arguments, because winning makes them feel good about themselves.

of one's own self-esteem. But, since one can secure this boost only by comparing oneself favourably to others, the person who is driven by the need to enhance one's sense of self-worth is prepared to do others down, to humiliate and intimidate them to secure one's superiority.

If the considerations above are on the right track, there is a kind of arrogance that depends on feeling superior to others, on seeking to keep them down, on hampering their abilities, to feel good about oneself. But if this is the case, the person who suffers from superbia is extremely defensive since other people's successes are a threat to the self-esteem of the arrogant individual. It would thus make sense that this person is prone to anger since anger is an aggressive response to a perceived slight, including a threat to social status (Tanesini, 2018).

However, not all individuals whom we might wish to evaluate as arrogant fit the mould of the person constantly in need to boost their sense of superiority by diminishing those around them. There is also a different kind of arrogant individual. Such a person shares the sense of self-importance and superiority of the individual who suffers from superbia, but—in addition—is aloof and standoffish. It is typified by the character of Mr Darcy in Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* (2020). In their arrogance, hubristic individuals appear to think of themselves as invulnerable and hyper-autonomous or wholly self-reliant. These people possess the hubris of irresponsible risk-takers. They also act as if they do not owe anything to anyone. Sometimes they seem to think that their successes are wholly due to their own abilities, and never also to luck, privilege, and the assistance offered by other people.<sup>4</sup> These individuals are a law unto themselves. As such they behave as if they were unaccountable. Often, they give the impression that they genuinely believe that a view must be true simply in virtue of being theirs (Lynch, 2019; Tanesini, 2016). In short, these individuals behave as if they were the measure of all things. They adopt an evaluative stance according to which they and their needs are of supreme importance. It is because of their adoption of a stance that befits Gods, rather than humans, that these individuals think of themselves as invulnerable, and wholly autonomous, and of their needs as being of supreme importance and deserving to be serviced by others.<sup>5</sup>

The clusters of behavioural dispositions, affects, and beliefs characteristic respectively of superbia and hubristic arrogance are partly overlapping but they are also distinct. A predisposition to anger, for instance, is only typical of superbia whilst hubris is usually associated with coolness and aloofness. This difference in emotional orientation points to another significant contrast between superbia and hubris. The

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<sup>4</sup> My distinction between superbia and hubristic arrogance cuts across Dillon's distinction between unwarranted claims arrogance and status arrogance (Dillon, 2021). The first concerns claiming goods and privileges to which one is not entitled; the second is characteristic of people who think that they are better than others. In my taxonomy both superbia and hubris are about status and involve the arrogation of entitlements.

<sup>5</sup> This is also why we think of people who show no concern for others when they jump queues or obstruct aisles in the supermarket with their trolleys as arrogant. They consider their ease and convenience as more important than the needs of others. It is true that these individuals behave in this manner because they give no thought to others' interests. They are not consciously motivated by considerations of social status. However, being in a position to give no thought to others' needs is a marker of perceived social status. Employees, for instance, need to take into account the interests of their employers. Employers have more room for ignoring the needs of their employees. Thus, thoughtless arrogant behaviours are predicated on implicit presumptions of social status and function to sustain some kinds of social dominance.

first exhibits the kind of fragility that for Aristotle (2007) and Nussbaum (2016) is characteristic of ‘status anger’. This is anger in response to a perceived slight concerning one’s social status. Such anger might at times be fitting but is always indicative of a perception that one’s social status is fragile because it can be diminished. Hubris instead is exhibited in behaviours which are displays of invulnerability and coolness. As such hubristic arrogance is manifested in a sense of superiority that is more secure. I return to these points in Sect. 2 where I show that social identity theory predicts that individuals who strongly identify with a socially dominant identity exhibit different behaviours and attitudes depending on whether their dominance is widely perceived as stable and legitimate or as unstable and illegitimate.

I have argued that superbia and hubristic arrogance are distinct. However, they have sufficient commonalities to justify treating them as different flavours of the vice of intellectual arrogance. More specifically, those who exhibit the features that are characteristic of superbia and/or hubris consciously or unconsciously assume that they are superior to most of those who surround them because they are more intelligent, smarter, or cleverer. They also presume that this alleged superiority warrants entitlement to special treatment. That is, those who suffer from superbia and/or hubris do not merely feel superior to other people, they also normatively expect their alleged superiority to be recognised by others by way of treatment that befits their alleged status. They possess this expectation partly because these individuals do not intrinsically value knowledge or intelligence. Rather they value having superior social status (social dominance) because occupying an elevated social position makes them feel good about themselves. Feeling intellectually superior, and being acknowledged as such by way of special treatment, are means to the goal of self-enhancement or heightened self-esteem.<sup>6</sup> There is empirical evidence that individuals whose self-esteem is high but unstable because defensive exhibit the range of behaviours and emotional orientations that are associated with the two kinds of arrogance that I have identified in this section. Individuals whose explicitly measured attitudes to the self are defensive are prone to boasting (Olson et al., 2007), to self-enhance (Bosson et al., 2003); to anger (Schröder-Abé et al., 2007). They respond arrogantly to threats (McGregor et al., 2005). They are extremely defensive (Haddock & Gebauer, 2011, p. 1280). Hence, they react badly to negative feedback by derogating the views of out-group members (Jordan et al., 2005). In addition, they suffer from a tendency to overestimate the extent to which other people agree with their views (McGregor et al., 2005). They are more prone to self-deception than those whose high self-esteem is secure (Jordan et al., 2003). Finally, they also exhibit high levels of prejudice toward members of other ethnic groups (Jordan et al., 2005).

This empirical evidence, combined with the reasons offered above against a belief-based account of arrogance, offers support for the view that arrogance is underpinned by defensive attitudes to features of the self, such as intellectual abilities. Attitudes

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<sup>6</sup> A reader might wonder whether superbia and hubris are the only distinctive kinds of arrogance. I wish to remain neutral on this point. Roberts and West (2017) offer a taxonomy of varieties of pride (a standard translation of superbia) including self-conceit, pretentiousness, and selfish ambition. My aim here is to identify and characterise two varieties rather than to argue that they exhaust the conceptual space of arrogance. I have selected superbia and hubris partly because they have been subjected to sustained study in the classical Greek and Christian traditions (Dillon, 2013).

in this context are not understood as attitudes to propositions. Hence, they are not beliefs, desires, or wishes. Instead, they are summary evaluations of their objects. They can be thought of as likes, dislikes or preferences. Thus, for instance, a positive attitude to one's ability to solve crossword puzzles is an evaluation in positive terms of this ability. Attitudes as evaluations can be classified according to the functions they serve. Social psychologists often offer a motivational account of these attitude functions (Levin et al., 2000; Marsh & Julka, 2000). So conceptualised, attitudes are formed and sustained to fulfil some specific need. Relevant needs include the need for accuracy, to enhance self-esteem, to express one's values, and to fit in (Maio & Olson, 2000). These needs motivate the formation and preservation of attitudes.

The argument developed in this section supports an account of individual intellectual arrogance in both of its species as being underpinned by positive attitudes to one's cognitive abilities and to other aspects of one's intellectual character that are motivated by the need to self-enhance, rather than that for accuracy. This motivated character of the process of attitude formation and maintenance in arrogant individuals explains why they often possess an inflated and false sense of their own abilities.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Group-based intellectual arrogance

It is not individuals alone that are sometimes criticised for being arrogant; it is not uncommon to hear this negative evaluation being applied to social identities or to collectives of individuals that possess some social identity. Thus, for example, Marilyn Frye (1983, pp. 66–72) provides a suggestive characterisation of “the arrogant eye” which, she intimates, is essentially a Western male perspective on reality. More recently, Michael Lynch (2021, pp. 252–253) has discussed a phenomenon which he labels “white arrogance” and which he describes as a kind of tribal arrogance (see also, Lynch, 2019). In this section I aim to make sense of the idea that intellectual arrogance can be indexed to a social identity-based group.<sup>8</sup>

In their discussions of arrogance as a feature related to some social identities both Frye and Lynch emphasise the epistemic dimension of arrogance. For Frye, the arrogant perceiver seems himself and his interests as the frame of reference by which everything is to be assessed. From this perspective, all things are the dominion of the arrogant perceiver. She also intimates that the arrogant perceiver arrogates an entitlement to declare that what he finds to be unintelligible must be unreal or at least unnatural (Frye, 1983, p. 71). This is the perspective of someone who appears to think that the facts must be accountable to him, rather than he to the facts. Such a perspective is, of course, delusory. It is also analogous to the point of view adopted by those who because of their hubristic arrogance behave as if they were the centre of the universe.

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed explanation and defence of this account of the nature of individual intellectual arrogance see chapter five of Tanesini (2021).

<sup>8</sup> These groups often are mere collectives of individuals sharing a social identity. They can be thought as social kinds (Ritchie, 2015). Much of what I say about social identities indicating membership of a collective, such as race or gender, could also apply to social identification with a corporation or institution. For this reason, in this section I employ the generic expression ‘social groups’ to refer both to collectives and institutions.

Lynch's characterisation of white arrogance as tribal arrogance highlights features that suggest a dynamic similar to that of superbia. In his view, tribal arrogance consists of a propensity to see the point of view characteristic of members of one's own social group as not being improvable by considering the views or experiences of members of another opposing group (Lynch, 2021, p. 252). Intellectual tribal arrogance is, therefore, rooted in the conviction that one's social group is epistemically superior to another. It would thus motivate the same kind of confrontational and adversarial debating behaviour that, as I have mentioned above, is characteristic of superbia as an individual trait. In Lynch's view this kind of arrogance comes to the fore when the claims at issue are convictions that are central to the tribal social identity. In these cases, the rigidity characteristic of arrogance would be a defensive response to the perception that one's social identity is under threat (Lynch, 2021, p. 252).

One might interpret Frye's account of Western male arrogance and Lynch's views about white arrogance as predicting that individual intellectual arrogance is more widespread among members of some social collectives rather than amidst people who belong to other groups. Thus, Lynch would be suggesting that those whose social identity is tribal are more prone to superbia than those whose identities are less polarised. Frye, for her part, would be asserting that Western men are more likely to be hubristically arrogant than women, and men from non-Western backgrounds. It is not implausible to speculate that, because of unfair and hierarchical social structures, members of dominant social groups are socialised from a young age into becoming entitled. If they enjoy preferential treatment in a wide range of circumstances, it would not be surprising if they came to believe that these privileges are warranted. Further, in societies that are nominally egalitarian, these same individuals might grow accustomed to preferential treatment whilst vigorously denying that the cards are stacked in their favour.<sup>9</sup>

While Frye and Lynch would presumably agree with these claims, I also think that they would wish to say that they do not exhaust the character of group-based arrogance. Their views should not be read as simply asserting that individual arrogance (either in the shape of hubris or of superbia) is, for whatever reason, statistically more frequent among white tribally identified men than among members of other groups. Instead, they appear to be committed to the view that intellectual arrogance is, in some sense to be clarified, baked into some social identities. This kind of arrogance would be analogous to, but not identical with, individual arrogance. In the rest of this section, I spell out what this distinct kind of arrogance might be. Relying on social identity theory (Hogg, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), I identify two kinds of group-based arrogance. The first is akin to superbia and emerges in conditions of social competition when the social dominance of a group is unstable or widely perceived as illegitimate. The second kind is akin to hubris and would emerge when social hierarchies are stable and commonly believed to be legitimate.

However, an initial clarification is in order. The subject of group-based arrogance is the single member of an identity-based social group. In this sense group-based arrogance is a property of individuals rather than of the social groups themselves. It is however a feature that individuals possess because of their identification with the group

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<sup>9</sup> I make these points when discussing individual arrogance as a vice of superiority (Tanesini, 2021).



(be it a collective or an institution). In addition, collective dynamics are often at play in the formation and preservation of this individual psychological characteristic.<sup>10</sup>

Lynch describes tribal intellectual arrogance as being indexed to social identities in two ways. First, the imperviousness to evidence typical of tribally arrogant individuals is restricted to some evidential sources. They only dismiss claims coming from their opponents but might be willing to listen to the views of others who belong to their own tribe (Lynch, 2019). Second, this rigidity to rational update in the light of new evidence is restricted to some claims or theories. These are statements and views that directly or indirectly speak to the tribe's social identity, so that criticisms directed at them are experienced as identity threats (Lynch, 2019; 2021, p. 252). Hence, tribal arrogance combines a sense of superiority toward outsiders with defensiveness about one's own tribal identity. In these regards tribal arrogance would be analogous to individual arrogance.

Lynch characterises tribal intellectual arrogance as an attitude. One might identify it with a subset of the attitudes that underpin individual intellectual arrogance. First, the tribal version of intellectual arrogance would be restricted to attitudes to the self that involve one's social identity, rather than, more generally, all aspects of one's intellectual character. Second, these attitudes are formed and sustained in light of the motivation to defend such a social identity from the threat posed by the existence of an opposing group, rather than more generally from a propensity to view every individual and situation as a potential threat to one's self-esteem.

Tribal intellectual arrogance would thus be underpinned by attitudes that are the product of motivated cognition (Kunda, 1990). This consists in biased processing of information because motivations other than the desire for accuracy drive the selection of the relevant evidence and contribute to determining the threshold of evidence required for forming the attitude. Individual intellectual arrogance according to the view that I have defended in Sect. 1 is also the outcome of motivated cognition. While in the individual case the motivation biasing attitude formation is ego defence, in the tribal case the motivation is the defence of one's tribal identity. Hence, the behaviours which Lynch describes as tribally arrogant are in essence the compartments identified by Dan Kahan (2013, 2017) as cultural identity-protective cognition. The latter is motivated reasoning that involves the biased processing of information that is potentially threatening to behaviours and attitudes that are central to one's social or cultural identity. Hence, for example, women and people of colour put a higher estimate to the risk posed by guns than some white men (Kahan et al., 2007). These men's estimate would be biased by their investment in possessing a gun, since they consider gun ownership as symbolic of their masculinity.

If this interpretation of Lynch's account of tribal intellectual arrogance, including white arrogance, is correct, he identifies group-based arrogance with an extreme version of in-group favouritism or bias. Intellectual tribal arrogance would thus be grounded on defensive attitudes favouring one's own group and judging it to be better

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<sup>10</sup> In a recent article Keith Raymond Harris (2021) has argued that arrogance can also concern attitudes possessed by group members but targeting the group to which they belong. In my view these cases concern individual attitudes targeting those features of the self that are the basis of one's group membership. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore whether the differences between these two views are superficial or significant.

or superior to others. In this regard tribal arrogance would be intrinsically hierarchical (Lynch, 2019, ch. 1). Whilst Lynch's account identifies a real phenomenon, what he says cannot supply a complete theory of tribal arrogance. He is right to claim that group-based arrogance is underpinned by attitudes motivated by the need to defend social identities and is manifested in an extreme version of in-group favouritism. However, whilst these features might be necessary for group-based intellectual arrogance, they are not sufficient.

Imagine a black person who no longer wishes to talk, or listen, to white people when the topic of discussion is race or racism (cf., Eddo-Lodge, 2017). Imagine that, although this person has adopted this policy after years of futile attempts to engage with white interlocutors, they are also motivated by the need to defend their social identity. As a result, they develop the conviction that white people have nothing to contribute to discussions of race that would improve black people's understanding of the topic. This person might also exhibit in-group favouritism in their behaviour, be prone to disparage white people, and put her loyalty to black people before truth. Therefore, this person would fit Lynch's description of tribal arrogance. Yet, it seems, we would not be inclined to describe this individual as tribally arrogant. Instead, we might more readily attribute to them the vices of close-mindedness and dogmatism. The reason why the label 'arrogant' seems not to fit this person is that they do not make claim to special entitlements.

It is possible, of course, that the label 'arrogant' would be apt in this case but that there are political reasons against using this description. For instance, one might wish to say that since 'arrogant' carries negative connotations we should refrain from applying the term to those who display arrogance in the fight against oppression. Alternatively, one might wish to assert that this individual is arrogant, but that their arrogance is not a failing.<sup>11</sup> Neither response is satisfactory. Both claim that the label 'arrogant' is apt but then add that either we should refrain from using it, or avoid thinking of it as always having negative connotations. However, since the person considered in this imagined example is biased, but does not act as if they were entitled to expect others to service their needs, it is unclear why we would not wish to describe them as close-minded rather than intellectually arrogant.<sup>12</sup>

It should not be surprising that Lynch's account of tribal intellectual arrogance is incomplete. The account is primarily designed to describe cases where two opposing tribes are equally arrogant. His targets are polarised liberal and conservative camps. Whilst Lynch thinks that the liberal tribe is more respectful of the facts than their conservative opponents, he also thinks that both groups are guilty of disrespectful behaviour, and superior attitudes. But there are also cases where cultural identity-protective cognition and in-group favouritism occur within an illegitimate socially hierarchical context. In such circumstances, it is much less plausible to think of both camps as equally arrogant. Instead, arguably in-group favouritism is only arrogant

<sup>11</sup> For example, Dillon (2021) argues that arrogance can be a good feature when resisting subordination.

<sup>12</sup> I hasten to add that in real life black people who have given up talking to some white people on race generally are neither arrogant nor closed-minded. Instead, they are likely to have formed a warranted belief that further engagement is a waste of their time. The person in the imaginary example is instead meant to be biased against the outgroup. That is, their judgments about white people would be motivated by the need to defend their identity as a black person to such an extent that they are prepared to put loyalty ahead of truth.

when it is in the service of preserving the dominance of one social group. When in-group favouritism occurs in the context of trying to level social hierarchies by pulling up one's currently subordinated group it does not seem appropriate to label such behaviour 'arrogant'.

The analogy with *superbia* as a vice of individuals to some extent supports these intuitions. We think of *superbia* as characteristic of those whose self-esteem depends on feeling superior to others. We are inclined to describe as arrogant behaviour that pushes other people down when it stems from this defensive motivation. We are not similarly inclined to characterise as arrogant comportment that takes some people down a peg when it is in the service of puncturing overly inflated egos. That said, the person that seeks to cut down to size those who are full of themselves does not share the motivation of the arrogant. In cases of in-group favouritism, however, members of both groups engage in identity-protective cognition. Hence, the two cases are not wholly analogous. Nevertheless, one might think that the difference in social status among the identities that are being protected makes a difference.

Those who protect an identity that is socially dominant think and acts in ways that preserve that dominance. Those who show favouritism for a subordinated identity, think and act in ways that seek to reduce social hierarchies. Hence, one might say that members of the first group are in some sense motivated to preserve their privileged position within an unequal structure.<sup>13</sup> It would be this morally dubious motivation that partially explains why their in-group favouritism exemplifies arrogance. When subordinated people favour their identity they think and act in ways that seek to reduce inequality. If they engage in motivated cognition to form and sustain attitudes that favour their group, they exhibit an epistemic failing akin to closed-mindedness. Nevertheless, their biased reasoning does not appear to be a manifestation of arrogance because it aims to undo unfair social hierarchies by boosting the status of those who are currently subordinated.<sup>14</sup>

If these considerations are on the right track, group-based arrogance is not exclusively a function of the defensive nature of group-based attitudes of individual members of given social groups. Instead, the pre-existing social dominance of the group is equally important.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in-group favouritism is a manifestation of arrogance only when the social identity that is being defended is one that is known to be socially dominant. In this sense group-based arrogance is baked into some identities but not

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<sup>13</sup> But they might not themselves think of their motivations in this way.

<sup>14</sup> If this is right, it is not possible for individual members of subordinated social groups to exhibit group-based arrogance. It is, of course, possible that some of them might be individually arrogant. This conclusion is inherent in the idea that arrogance is baked into some social identities but not others. The thought is not implausible if we think, as I do, that group-based arrogance is enabled by structures of systemic advantage and disadvantage.

<sup>15</sup> Note that this claim does not entail the view that one and the same character trait or attitude can be a vice in some contexts and a virtue in others (cf., Kidd, 2020). Instead, in my view, depending on the social context, the superficially same behaviour can stem from partially differing motivations and thus manifest different attitudes some of which underpin virtue and others vice. In the case in point, there is a difference between the motivation to boost the self by shoring up social dominance and that to boost the self by undoing social subordination. Both are instances of the motive to self-enhance but one is in the service of preserving inequity and the other fosters the aim of promoting fairness. Hence, there are differences in the motivational structures that lead to similar behaviours.

others. In what follows I turn to social identity theory to understand how some identities are partly constituted by the kind of attitudes of superiority that are characteristic of *superbia*.

Social identity theory (Hogg, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is a deeply influential social psychological theory about intergroup conflict. It predicts that in conditions of so-called social competition members of social groups manage their identities by discriminating against the out-group and favouring members of one's own social group. Social competition occurs when the boundaries between opposing groups are impermeable while the social hierarchy among them is widely perceived to be illegitimate or unstable.<sup>16</sup> In these circumstances, members of the socially dominant group behave in ways that promote the status quo to protect their positive evaluation of their social identity. In these same circumstances members of socially subordinated groups also manage their social identities by displaying in-group favouritism to boost their positive evaluation of their social identity (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004).

White arrogance in cultural contexts that are nominally anti-racist can thus be conceptualised as underpinned by attitudes to white social identity expressed by behaviours designed to maintain white social superiority whilst disavowing explicit racism. These strategies for the management of dominant social identities are the manifestation of what could be called group-based *superbia*. Social identity theory predicts that in conditions of social competition people's positive social identification is at least in part motivated by the need to enhance self-esteem (Hogg et al., 2017).<sup>17</sup> Thus, in circumstances in which social norms prescribe egalitarian beliefs about race, identification with one's dominant social identity is used to boost one's feelings of self-worth. This boost is, at least implicitly, predicated on taking pleasure in the dominance of one's own social identity while explaining away doubts that such privilege is unearned (Phillips & Lowery, 2018).<sup>18</sup> Thus, both individual and group-based *superbia* consist in positive attitudes to the self because of its individual abilities, or of its social identity, motivated by the need to, at least temporarily, enhance self-esteem and where such enhancement is wholly or excessively dependent on preserving or instituting a dominant social status.

If dominant social identity management in conditions of social competition is the manifestation of group-based attitudes of *superbia*, the strategies adopted in conditions where hierarchy is widely believed to be legitimate exemplify hubristic arrogance.<sup>19</sup> Under these circumstances, provided that the groups are impermeable, members of

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<sup>16</sup> Boundaries between groups are impermeable when a person cannot easily transit from group to another. Race and gender are social identities that constitute groups that are impermeable.

<sup>17</sup> This is the so-called self-esteem hypothesis. The hypothesis is disputed and must be qualified. It only pertains to state (as opposed to trait) self-esteem. This concern feelings of self-worth in a particular moment and due to the specific situation. The hypothesis is also only meant to hold in conditions of social competition (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). The hypothesis would apply to both members of dominant and subordinated groups.

<sup>18</sup> Members of subordinated groups would also rely on positive social identification to boost temporarily their self-esteem but such behaviour could be more indicative of pride than of *superbia* (Tanesini, 2021). However, see Ashton-James and Tracy (2012) for the view that prejudice, when displayed by individuals, is always associated with hubristic rather than authentic pride.

<sup>19</sup> Social identity theory uses the unfortunate label of 'consensual discrimination' to describe these circumstances (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004, p. 826).

social dominant groups exemplify in-group favouritism while members of subordinated groups often derogate their own and exhibit out-group favouritism (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004).<sup>20</sup> Whilst social identity theorists have focused on cases of social competition, in cases where discrimination is perceived as legitimate, the alleged superiority of the dominant group will be reflectively endorsed by members of the group. In these circumstances, these individuals identify with a social identity that is partly constituted by scripts or norms that justify entitled attitudes and the presumption that others have an obligation to put the interests and the needs of members of the entitled group above their own. This sense of legitimate superiority inherited in virtue of one's identification with a privileged social group would make intelligible a range of behaviours characteristic of hubristic arrogance. These would include taking oneself not to have to answer to members of subordinated social groups, thinking of oneself as intellectually superior to them, and perhaps dismissing out of hand the views shared by subordinated individuals.

In conclusion, the accounts of group identification and intergroup conflict offered by social identity theory offer support for the idea that group dynamics and power relations interact with individual psychology to favour the formation and preservation of group-based viciously arrogant attitudes. The account also highlights that conditions of social competition should sustain the attitudes characteristic of superbia, while those of consensual discrimination should produce attitudes that are more typical of hubristic arrogance.

Group-based individual attitudes are likely to be less stable and more dependent on situations than those grounding individual forms of arrogance. First, we should expect the strength of these group-based attitudes to be influenced by the temporary salience of group membership. More specifically, we would expect people to exhibit the behaviours characteristic of group-based arrogance only when their group membership is salient to them. The extent to which such membership is at the forefront of one's mind is likely to vary depending on individual differences but also especially on one's social environment. If people live in social contexts where they are consistently reminded of their group membership, they might overtime come to identify more strongly (that is, more readily) with their social group. Second, individual commitments to equality should make a difference to behaviour. People might be able to adopt strategies that inhibit prejudicial attitudes that are typically associated with in-group favouritism (Huddy, 2002). Be that as it may, social identity theory indicates that, in conditions of hierarchical social stratification, identification with a socially dominant group involves strategies of identity management that result in attitudes that bear the hallmarks of arrogance, including intellectual arrogance.

The attitudinal account of intellectual arrogance, thus, has the means to explain the phenomenon of arrogance based on membership of a social group. Theories of arrogance as a character trait or a distinctive set of beliefs cannot easily account for group-based phenomena since social identities cannot be fully explicated either in terms of traits of character (since they are not dispositions) or beliefs (since they

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<sup>20</sup> In these circumstances members of socially subordinated groups are expected also to favour the interests of the dominant group. A complementary account of this phenomenon is offered by System Justification Theory (Owuamalam et al., 2018; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004) which is a development of Social Identity Theory.

have an important affective component). Attitudes are better suited to be part of an explanation of the processes of social identification, and their connections to relations of social dominance and subordination.

### 3 Arrogant corporations

Attitudes as evaluations of objects are features of individual psychology. However, their ability to influence behaviour is subject to situational constraints. For example, a white person in a racially unjust society might experience a strengthening of their tribally arrogant attitudes if she finds herself inhabiting an environment where her whiteness is frequently made salient to her in political messages and in the news. By the same token, organizational structures also impact on the individual and group-based attitudes of their members. For instance, an organisation might have structures in place that facilitate the identification of its members with the organisation itself. Thus, organisations often promote the creation of group-based identities among their members. Social identity theory predicts that when the organisation is perceived as being under threat, group discussion among members who experience their organisational identity as salient will give rise to groupthink. In such circumstances group members quickly converge to adopt the view that is prototypical of the group (Haslam, 2004, p. 110). If the prototypical position concerns the preservation of dominance irrespective of fairness, then the mere fact that one identifies with an organisation contributes to the formation of group-based arrogant attitudes that are highly dependent on the salience of organizational identification in the given context. Thus, since corporation and organisations can be a source of social identification they can promote group-based arrogance in the same ways in which identification with collectives can favour tribal attitudes.

In this section, I wish to set these considerations aside to consider whether organizations themselves can be arrogant granted that they can also promote arrogance in their members by making some organizational identities salient. That is, I explore whether arrogance, including intellectual arrogance, can be a purely structural phenomenon rather than merely one that affects individuals either as individuals or as members of social groups, such as collectives. Organizations, corporations or teams are social groups that are structured in some ways. While social groups of individuals who share a social identity can be mere collectives with no joint aims or goals, no division of roles, policies, charters or constitutions, organisations and corporations have some or all of these features (cf., Ritchie, 2015). Because of their goals, and organisational structures, it makes sense to attribute collective intentionality to corporations.<sup>21</sup> For my purposes here, I do not need to take a stance whether this intentionality is an aggregate function of the intentions of some, or all, members.<sup>22</sup> I also do not need to commit to attributing a precise nature of collective intentions as either joint-commitments (Gilbert, 2014) or

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<sup>21</sup> By contrast it only makes metaphorical sense to attribute beliefs and intentions to collectives such as the one comprising all white men.

<sup>22</sup> Summativists or deflationists claim that the intentionality of groups reduces to the intentions of their members. Non-summativists hold that collective intentionality is irreducible.

as we-intentions (Tuomela, 2013). For my purposes it is sufficient that the attribution of attitudes to corporations and organisations is intelligible.

Of course, when philosophers talk about attitudes in this context, they have propositional attitudes in mind including beliefs. Conversely, when psychologists talk of attitudes, they refer to a construct that concerns the psychology of individuals as subject to situational influences including their membership in collectives and organisations. There is, however, no obstacle in principle to the postulation of corporate or organizational attitudes understood as summary evaluations of objects that predict corporate behaviour and that are based on cognitive, affective and behavioural components. For example, it makes perfect sense to say of a given organisation that it has positive or negative attitude to risk, where the attitude is based on behavioural tendencies to risk that are implicit in the structures and policies of the organisation, beliefs about risk that are shared at least among some members with decision-making powers, and shared emotions experienced by at least these same members with an executive role.<sup>23</sup> It is also intelligible to explain corporate actions at least partly in terms of the attitudes of the corporation.

The considerations above give reason to believe that everyday descriptions of some corporations as arrogant are not merely metaphorical but capture some genuine features of these organizations. To make good on this idea, I start by offering some descriptions of the kind of corporate culture, attitudes and behaviours that are often described as arrogant. Subsequently, I argue that these manifestations of arrogance can be traced to attitudes that serve defensive functions seeking to push down competitors and to isolate the corporation from legitimate criticism. These attitudes are criticisable when, in the attempt to dominate, corporations behave in ways that indicate that they do not take themselves to be bound by those moral and legal concerns that, as a matter of fact, apply to them.

Corporations are often accused of being arrogant because of their greed, their culture of secrecy, their breathless risk-taking, their attitudes of intellectual superiority and their unaccountability.<sup>24</sup> Greed is arrogant because it motivates the attempt to appropriate more resources than it is fair. It is thus tantamount to the arrogation of an entitlement. Secrecy, when transparency would be required, and unaccountability, when one is responsible to others for their actions, are arrogant because they are illegitimate claims to exemptions from obligations that one has incurred.<sup>25</sup> Attitudes of intellectual superiority are arrogations of special status and are, for this reason, arrogant. Finally, irresponsible risk-taking is an unwarranted claim to invulnerability which is arrogant especially when it involves a lack of concern for the possible effects

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<sup>23</sup> Emotions are shared when they are experienced as a result of processes of emotional convergence with some other people (Goldenberg et al., 2020).

<sup>24</sup> On greed and secrecy or evasiveness see, for example, van Vuuren (2018). For risk-taking, see among others Thomas (2002). On unaccountability and superiority see, for instance, Lovejoy (2021). By highlighting greed, I do not intend to suggest that it is worse than incompetence. I thus do not take myself to be in disagreement with Boudewijn de Bruin (2015).

<sup>25</sup> One might take issue with the description of corporate tendencies to greed and secrecy as being immoral and therefore illegitimate. It might be argued that these are the dispositions that are required to thrive in hyper-competitive capitalist environments. It is possible to agree with this conclusion and take it to be an indictment of certain forms of capitalism. Addressing these issues is beyond the scope of this article.

that such behaviour has on others. We can thus see why corporations that possess these features are criticised for their arrogance.

We can make sense of the corporate culture, actions and attitudes that are often branded as arrogant as stemming from attitudes understood as summary evaluations of their objects. For example, greed is an extreme positive attitude to money that leads one to seek to get this resource for oneself at all costs irrespective of moral and legal constraints. A culture of secrecy stems from positive attitudes to features and components of the organisation that are perceived as being under threat and thus are concealed from those whose actions might put the valued features at risk. Risk-taking behaviour can be traced back to positive attitudes to risk, whilst a culture of unaccountability plausibly stems from attitudes of superiority.

In the psychological literature the arrogance of corporations is often explained in terms of the arrogant attitudes of their managers and executive officers (e.g., Graham et al., 2013). According to this approach the actions of corporations stem from attitudes that are subject to the situational pressure of intragroup dynamics and of the broader social context. These attitudes can, in a summativist or deflationist spirit, be attributed to the corporations themselves. According to this model, the arrogant behaviours of corporations are predicted by corporate attitudes that are an aggregation of the attitudes of their decision-making officers within a specific situational context. Since the managerial attitudes that are aggregated in this fashion are examples of individual arrogant attitudes of intellectual superiority, of hubris, and of presumption that others' role is to service one's needs, there is a straightforward sense in which corporations can be literally, and not just metaphorically, be said to be arrogant.<sup>26</sup>

The attitudinal framework for vice epistemology, however, also enables non summativist analyses of some forms of corporate arrogance. Consider cases in which corporations develop a culture of secrecy so that they hide facts which they should reveal. A culture of secrecy might be a strategy to avoid accountability (Nguyen, 2021; O'Neill, 2002). It involves dispositions not to leave paper trails, a propensity to obstruct requests for information by supplying it in formats that make it hard to appreciate its significance, but it might also involve the destruction of information, and a disposition to knowingly issue false statements. These behaviours are arguably defensive. They protect the corporation from the hazards of having its workings properly scrutinised. What is being defended is the social and economic status of the corporation itself. Thus, we can make arrogant corporate activities intelligible by interpreting them as the product of corporate attitudes that are defensive of the corporation's social status. These defensive attitudes are arrogant when they serve to buttress the corporation's illegitimate social dominance.<sup>27</sup>

Whilst in many cases a culture of secrecy can be in part traced back to managerial attitudes, one can also easily imagine a corporation whose current executive officers are not arrogant or secretive but have inherited an organizational structure in which no individual has the responsibility to collect and audit the kind of information that the

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<sup>26</sup> Note that this deflationist account is not available to supporters of the view that vices are personality traits since corporations do not literally have personalities.

<sup>27</sup> It would be illegitimate because, for example, it is achieved and maintained by immoral or illegal means.



corporation must disseminate in order to be properly accountable to stakeholders.<sup>28</sup> It is thus possible for a corporation to retain arrogant and secretive attitudes which are implicit in its structures and policies without any of its decision-making officers exhibiting these tendencies. In this case also, a corporation can be said to be arrogant in a literal and not merely metaphorical sense. But the arrogant attitudes are a feature of the inertia of organizational structures and cultures rather than indirectly attributable to its current executive officers.

## 4 Concluding remarks

In this article I have argued that the framework of attitudes, as summary evaluations of objects, helps us to understand how arrogance can be a trait of individuals, of members of social groups, and of corporations. In everyday practice we often criticise individuals, groups and corporations for their arrogance. The attitudinal account, but not its rivals, can explain this aspect of our practice. Accounts in terms of character traits or in terms of belief are not suited for this task because social identities are not traits of character or beliefs but are crucial to explaining individual group-based arrogance. A doxastic account is more promising for institutional arrogance, since beliefs can be non-metaphorically attributed to institutions. Nevertheless, it is unlikely to succeed since some of the practices of secrecy and unaccountability that make corporations institutionally arrogant are rarely jointly accepted or intended by the decision-making members of the relevant institutions.<sup>29</sup>

The attitudinal account is thus at least in this regard explanatorily more powerful than its most common alternatives. This article has only offered a sketch of one corporate vice: arrogance. In doing so it has opened up at least two avenues for further research. First, we need to develop more detailed accounts of corporate arrogant attitudes both as aggregation of managerial attitudes and as non-reducible features of the organisations themselves. Second, we need to investigate whether the attitudinal framework is suitable to explain other vices of groups and corporations, such as, for instance fanaticism (Katsafanas, 2022). These are questions that I hope to address in future work.<sup>30</sup>

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** No conflict of interest to declare.

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<sup>28</sup> This is akin to what Miranda Fricker (2021) has called the institutional vice of inferential inertia that occurs when the institution fails to put together, and see the import of, the bits of relevant information possessed by its various subsections.

<sup>29</sup> This raises questions as to whether motivations are an essential component of corporate vices. I am unable to address this issue in this article.

<sup>30</sup> I would like to thank two anonymous referees for their extremely helpful comments.

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