**Democratic Equality as Non-Subordination**

**Sebastian Quiroz**
**Department of Political Science**
**McGill University, Montreal**

**July 2022**

A thesis submitted to McGill University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

# Contents

# Abstracts

## English

This thesis aims to develop a new conception of egalitarianism, namely, democratic equality as non-subordination. It makes two primary claims. First, by focusing on developing a negative conception of egalitarianism, it argues that egalitarians ought to be primarily concerned with opposing subordination, which is a particular kind of hierarchy significantly marked by political arrogance, where political arrogance is understood as the institutional or structural unwillingness to take input or critique from agents who are not ranked highly on that hierarchy. Second, it develops two potential accounts of the disvalue of political arrogance, and thereby subordination, following two different theorists. First, it develops B.R. Ambedkar's account of caste and democracy, arguing that caste is a form of hierarchy that due to its political arrogance, destroys the bonds of society that it needs to function. For Ambedkar, then, political arrogance is destructive of the kind of communication and exchange necessary in democratic societies. Second, it develops W.E.B. Du Bois's account of race and democracy, arguing that racist exclusion of Black citizens from democratic life was epistemically dangerous, because it prevents societies from accessing all possible sources of knowledge and thereby limits our capacity to imagine the possibilities of democratic politics. In developing both of these theorists' accounts, this thesis aims to provide a pluralist account of subordination as an institutional vice, such that egalitarians of different stripes can come together to oppose it.

## Français

Ce mémoire vise à développer une nouvelle conception de l'égalitarisme, notamment, l'égalité démocratique comme non-subordination. Il avance deux arguments principaux. Premièrement, en se concentrant sur le développement d'une conception négative de l'égalitarisme, ce mémoire soutient que les égalitaristes devraient s'intéresser principalement à l'opposition à la subordination, qui est un type particulier de hiérarchie marquée par l'arrogance politique, où l'arrogance politique constitue un refus institutionnel ou structurel d'accepter l'apport ou la critique d'agents qui ne sont pas bien classés dans cette hiérarchie. S'inspirant de deux théoriciens différents, ce mémoire développe deux arguments potentiels qui dévalorisent l'arrogance politique et par conséquent, la subordination. Premièrement, il développe les arguments de B.R. Ambedkar sur la caste et la démocratie, démontrant que la caste est une forme de hiérarchie qui, en raison de son arrogance politique, détruit les liens de la société dont elle a besoin pour fonctionner. Donc, pour Ambedkar, l'arrogance politique détruit le type de communication et l'échange d'idées qui sont nécessaires pour le fonctionnement de la société démocratique. Deuxièmement, il développe l'argument de W.E.B. Du Bois sur la race et la démocratie, suggérant que l'exclusion raciste des citoyens noirs de la vie démocratique est dangereuse au niveau épistémique, car elle empêche les sociétés d'accéder à toutes les sources possibles de connaissance et limite ainsi notre capacité d'imaginer de nouvelles perspectives politiques. En développant les arguments de ces deux théoriciens, ce mémoire vise à fournir une notion pluraliste de la subordination comme vice institutionnel, afin que les égalitaristes de différents point de vue puissent s'unir pour s'opposer à la subordination.

## Acknowledgements

A thesis that takes arrogance as a central problem of political life ought to begin with its own expression of humility.

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of many people; to each, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude.

To the faculty members who have taught me at McGill and who have helped me learn and grow along the way. To Kristy Ironside, who showed me the importance of thinking historically and the joys (and challenges) of doing so. To Arash Abizadeh, who consistently made the case for analytical rigor and always encouraged me to be more precise. To Will Roberts, who showed me what it really means to read a text slowly, carefully, and closely. To Jacob Levy, whose dedication to the history of political thought finally made me see its centrality to my own thinking. And finally, to my supervisor Catherine Lu, whose help made this thesis possible in the most literal sense and whose conversation has made me an immeasurably better political theorist.

To the members of the Student Fellowship in the Research Group on Constitutional Studies. The conversations we have had — be it on Zoom, in the Ferrier kitchen, in the Faculty Club, or (finally) the RGCS library — have shown me that questions of political theory can be found even in the most unlikely of places. I would be remiss not to mention both Will Roberts and Jacob Levy again here, for their leadership of the Student Fellowship.

To the Yan P. Lin Centre for sponsoring a series of talks and events which have continued to spur my political imagination and have allowed me to connect with scholars with whom I would not have been able to connect otherwise.

To the many friends, both new and old, who have supported me when I had doubts and who often had the (dis)pleasure of hearing me ramble on about theoretical questions, both related to my thesis and beyond it. It would take a whole thesis to name all of you and all that you have helped me with but know that you are deeply appreciated. I hope to have been half the friend you all were to me.

Finally, and above all, to my family, near and far, who have provided a home wherever I find myself. Un agradecimiento especial a Andrés, Martha e Ymma (te cuento como familia) que hicieron hasta lo imposible para que Montreal sea un hogar para mí como es para ustedes. Gracias a mi madre, a mi padre y a mi hermana por siempre estar ahí para apoyarme y por ser ustedes. Pase lo que pase…

To all of you and many more who made this thesis possible, my thanks will never be enough to express my gratitude for you.

## 1    Introduction

How should we think about equality as a political ideal? Although many theories of

egalitarianism develop equality as a positive ideal, this thesis will explore equality as a negative

ideal.[1] My approach takes as a starting point that we live in societies marked by various forms of

injustices that political ideals such as equality aim to combat or address. Iris Marion Young, for

instance, has argued that justice ought to be focused on opposing what she calls the "five faces of

oppression:" exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.[2]

As a result, her theoretical project centers *in*justice, as opposed to a positive conception of

justice. Similarly, though perhaps more narrowly, Judith Shklar has highlighted a particular

consequence of "putting cruelty first:" "negative egalitarianism."[3] On her account, centering

cruelty highlights the ways in which equality ought not to be conceptualized as a "positive

good." Drawing on the work of Montesquieu and Montaigne, she argues for "a purely negative

egalitarianism, rooted in a suspicion of the paltry reasons offered to justify not merely inequality,

but its worst consequences."[4] Equality, then, ought to be conceptualized negatively and ought to

---

[1] Almost all of the literature on equality develops both components to a certain extent, but as I see it, they focus on developing the positive ideal. For some key statements in egalitarian theory, which I will refer to in somewhat more detail below, see Kok-Chor Tan, "A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 11 (2008): 665–90; Richard J. Arneson, "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare," in *Equality: Selected Readings*, ed. Louis P. Pojman and Robert Westmoreland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 229–42; G. A. Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," in *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Michael Otsuka (Princeton University Press, 2011), 3–43; Ronald Dworkin, "What Is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (1981): 283–345; Philippe van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should Be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20, no. 2 (1991): 101–31; Elizabeth Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?," *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999): 287–337; Elizabeth Anderson, "Equality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund, 2012, 40–55; Jonathan Wolff, "Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 2 (1998): 97–122; Samuel Scheffler, "What Is Egalitarianism?," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2003): 5–39.
[2] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference: With a New Foreword by Danielle Allen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 39–40.
[3] Judith N Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), 28.
[4] Shklar, 28.

really be about "a fear of the consequences of inequality, and especially of the dazzling effect of power."[5]

My thesis aims to develop negative egalitarianism.[6] Specifically, I am interested in developing an account of objectionable inequality as subordination. I will argue that subordination is a particular kind of hierarchy among agents or social positions that is marked by political arrogance, where political arrogance is understood as the institutional or structural unwillingness to take input from certain agents or social groups. My contention in the thesis will be that egalitarians ought to be primarily, even if not exclusively, concerned with combatting subordination. Equality as a political value should be conceptualized negatively as non-subordination.[7] Importantly, this is not a brand-new conception of equality. As I will show, this account is drawn primarily from two figures in the history of political thought, B.R. Ambedkar and W.E.B. Du Bois. Moreover, some contemporary democratic theorists have developed highly participatory conceptions of democratic justice not dissimilar from mine. Iris Marion Young, who I have already mentioned, is one such theorist.[8] My account is not meant to supplant hers or any other such theorist's accounts. Rather, it is meant to provide another version of said account, more explicitly grounded in two theorists whose contributions to democratic theory are insightful, if often underappreciated.

The plan of the thesis is as follows. In section 2, I will explain why I develop a conception of negative egalitarianism by locating this thesis within debates surrounding the concept of democratic or relational egalitarianism. In section 3, I explain in more detail why

---

[5] Shklar, 29.
[6] Though in a different direction than Shklar perhaps had in mind.
[7] Similar to conceptualizing freedom as non-domination or non-interference.
[8] Young was a prolific writer and theorist but the two main works in which she develops a participatory democratic theory are Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

exactly egalitarians ought to be focused on opposing subordination and develop my conception of subordination. Subordination, as I suggested above, is understood as a hierarchical relation marked by political arrogance, such that agents who are subordinated are not able to critique those who are not subordinated or, in many cases, actively subordinating them. I develop the democratic egalitarian's account of social hierarchies in connection to the account of political arrogance I develop, arguing that what makes these hierarchies possible and objectionable is political arrogance.

In section 4, I develop B.R. Ambedkar's account of caste as an explanation for why political arrogance is objectionable. Specifically, I draw on his arguments regarding fraternity and democracy to show that political arrogance is wrong because of the detrimental effects it has on the functioning of a society. Arguing, with Ambedkar, that societies can be understood as existing in communication, by which he means that societies are defined by the constant exchange of ideas within and across social groups, I show that political arrogance is wrong because it blocks the kind of communication that must exist for a society to function. However, I raise a concern raised by liberal pluralists that accounts of fraternity are premised on dangerously misleading conceptions of society. While I provide an answer to that account, I suggest that because it is a powerful critique, we ought to look to another source for the potential disvalue of political arrogance.

In section 5, I turn to W.E.B. Du Bois to do so. I develop Du Bois's epistemic account of democracy. In short, he argues that democracy is important because it is the only system of government which can appropriately tap into all the sources of knowledge that would be necessary for the state to bring about justice for all its citizens. This epistemic claim is essentially a claim against arrogance: in denying the right to vote and participate to Black citizens, white

citizens were arrogantly assuming that they could make up for the knowledge that only Black citizens have access to, the knowledge of what it feels like to be oppressed. That is, only they have the knowledge that is associated with their particular standpoint. I conclude the thesis with a brief summary and some promissory comments about what kind of political institutions can be useful for combatting subordination.

## 2    Why *negative* egalitarianism?

Much of the current literature on egalitarianism focuses on the debate between luck egalitarians and democratic or relational egalitarians. This thesis begins with the assumption that the luck egalitarian position falls to the critiques made by democratic egalitarians, such as Elizabeth Anderson.[9] I will focus on Anderson because she provides the most influential account of the democratic egalitarian view. As such, I start from a position of sympathy with democratic egalitarians, who hold the view that equality is about the quality of the relations in which we stand with other persons. The account can be broken into two components, which we will call the positive and the negative components.[10] Positively, democratic egalitarianism requires that we institute equal relations with our fellow democratic citizens. As Elizabeth Anderson suggests, "egalitarians seek a social order in which persons stand in relationships of equality. They seek to live together in a democratic community, as opposed to a hierarchical one."[11] Negatively, egalitarians oppose hierarchy.[12] Breaking it up in this way allows us to do two things. First, it helps us to see some of the perils associated with over-emphasizing the positive component.

---

[9] For some authoritative statements of luck egalitarianism, see, Tan, "A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism"; Arneson, "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare"; Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice"; Dworkin, "What Is Equality?"; van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should Be Fed."

[10] This distinction is drawn from a presentation given by Samuel Bagg at a conference entitled "The Politics of Egalitarianism." Recorded version can be found at https://youtu.be/EPSJ99pKz3g?t=12676.

[11] Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?," 313.

[12] Anderson, "Equality," 40–41.

Second, it allows us to develop and expand upon the negative component of the democratic egalitarian's account, which I develop in section 3.

Anderson argues that to properly institute the positive component of democratic egalitarianism we need a metric to determine if in fact agents stand in equal relations with one another. Specifically, her view leads us to the claim that people "are entitled to the capabilities necessary for functioning as an equal citizen in a democratic state."[13] The use of a sufficiency criterion combined with a capabilities approach, however, opens the argument up to an internal critique and an external critique.[14]

The internal critique is about using capabilities instead of another metric, such as functionings or (like Rawls) primary social goods. The problem with this kind of account, Jonathan Wolff contends, is that by focusing on capabilities, we have to bring in assessments of who lacks functionings, such as labor power, and decide if the lack of functionings is due to choice, which Anderson suggests does not merit subsidy, or due to lack of capabilities, which does merit subsidy.[15] Her argument requires that we look into the capabilities of the agents in question, in a way that forces her to share luck egalitarians' "endorsement of conditional benefits."[16] It forces her to look *into* the agent in question in a way that could plausibly be considered disrespectful.[17] At the very least, it renders the argument open to the charge of inconsistency, as that is the kind of "looking into" that she charges the luck egalitarian of wrongfully engaging in.[18]

---

[13] Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?," 316.
[14] Jonathan Wolff, "Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos Revisited," *The Journal of Ethics* 14, no. 3 (2010): 348–49.
[15] Interestingly, this is similar in structure to the luck/choice principle.
[16] Wolff, "Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos Revisited," 348.
[17] See Ian Carter, "Respect and the Basis of Equality," *Ethics* 121, no. 3 (2011): 538–71 for another argument to this effect.
[18] Wolff, "Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos Revisited," 348.

The external critique lies in the use of a sufficiency metric — the idea that agents are entitled only to the capabilities *necessary* to functioning as a democratic citizen. Wolff argues that it's not obvious that all the things we believe we are entitled to are directly related to our roles as citizens or that adequate levels ought to be defined only or even primarily with regards to what is "necessary to act as a citizen."[19] We do not, for instance, have a right to clean air and water as a result of our status as citizens. However, Anderson later widens the scope of the sufficiency condition in order to respond to this concern.[20] But by expanding it the way she does, Wolff claims, she is ultimately unable to be precise in which the relevant capabilities are.[21]

This shows why focusing on the positive aspect of a conception of egalitarianism is not precise enough, as Wolff's critique suggests. Anderson's broadening of the relevant capabilities leads us to vagueness which causes the theory to lose its "critical edge."[22] However, theorists of negative ideals — like Shklar and Young — show us that this need not worry us. A theory can be imprecise in its positive prescriptions without losing its critical edge if it is clear about the kinds of ills or wrongs that it opposes. That is, a theory can still be critical even if it is negative in its orientation. This critique, because we are focusing on developing a conception of negative egalitarianism, inadvertently shows us exactly why we have good reason to develop such a conception.[23]

---

[19] Wolff, 349.
[20] Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?," 317.
[21] Wolff, "Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos Revisited," 349.
[22] Wolff, 349.
[23] A quick note: democratic egalitarianism seems to fall to the concern that it can't adequately address global or transnational inequalities. See, Tan, "A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism," 689. I think that my conception of negative egalitarianism responds to this well and I briefly suggest how in the conclusion.

### 3    Subordination as political arrogance[24]

Egalitarians oppose hierarchy. But what in particular about hierarchies is objectionable? Or, what kinds of hierarchies are objectionable? As I discuss below, not all hierarchies are necessarily objectionable. As such, I argue that the best way to understand egalitarians' opposition to some forms of hierarchy is to focus on the concept of subordination. This section provides the main theoretical explanation of the concept of subordination. In short, subordination ought to be understood as a hierarchical relationship between agents marked by political arrogance. The section proceeds as follows. First, I develop my concept of political arrogance. I start by defining arrogance broadly and explaining how it applies to political institutions. Specifically, I claim institutions can be correctly described as virtuous and vicious, such that the vice of political arrogance can be applied to institutions. I then explain how political arrogance is related to subordination. I connect subordination to the social hierarchies that democratic egalitarians oppose and explain how these hierarchies are themselves constituted (in part, at least) by political arrogance. In doing so, I make the argument that egalitarians who oppose these hierarchies ought to be oriented to combatting political arrogance.[25]

---

[24] This section was significantly re-worked after comments from William Clare Roberts on an earlier draft.

[25] My account of political arrogance has clear resonances with epistemic injustice, as defined by Miranda Fricker. In her words, epistemic injustice is "a kind of injustice in which someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*." See, Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20. Italics in original. Amandine Catala expands on this concept by developing an idea of "hermeneutic domination," where the subordinated epistemic standing of minority social groups leads to "putatively collective understandings" that are actually just the majority's understandings. See her "Democracy, Trust, and Epistemic Justice," *The Monist* 98, no. 4 (2015): 427–28. Similarly, Charles Mills develops the concept of "white ignorance," where white racism and white supremacy have and continue to shape the very concepts through which we perceive the world. For Mills, these concepts become resistant to critique based on the lived experiences of Black people. See his "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 13–38. Both Catala and Mills point to the ways that these forms of injustice can be implicit and those who benefit from these injustices might not be aware of it. Further research into the connection between epistemic injustice and political arrogance is needed, but beyond the scope of this thesis.

### 3.1    Arrogance: Personal and Political

To understand properly how subordination entails political arrogance, we ought to understand what arrogance is, more broadly speaking. By arrogance I mean an unwillingness to be exposed to critique.[26] When we use the concept of arrogance, we generally speak of individuals as being arrogant or behaving arrogantly. As such, if I were to say that Susie is an arrogant person, I would be making a claim about her character, or the kind of person she is. Generally, we would say she behaves in a haughty or uncompromising way, refusing to listen to others or simply avoiding input from others.[27] Moreover, there seems to be an implicit claim about the agent's obstinacy: if we say an agent is unwilling to be exposed to critique, then we are implicitly saying that the agent is, at worst, knowingly so (they actively think they know better and do not need the input of other agents) or at best, negligently so (they have not taken the time to reflect on their behaviors and character traits, such that they are not aware that they are behaving arrogantly).

Political arrogance can be understood in different ways. One way is as arrogance that appears in political contexts. That is, personal arrogance (arrogance as a vice of the person) shows up, for instance, when an agent's unwillingness to be exposed to critique shows up in the context of their friendships, while political arrogance shows up when that same agent's unwillingness shows up when they are speaking at city hall when deliberating with citizens about a policy or public project. Ultimately, while the context in which it appears is different, the actual vice is the same: in both cases it is the agent showing an unwillingness to be exposed to

---

[26] Much of the following is influenced by Luis Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan: Rights, Diversity, and Trans-State Democracy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 34–40, though I expand on his view and develop it further.
[27] Cabrera, 39.

critique from other agents. There are situations in which this could very well relate to subordination but this is not the primary way in which I understand political arrogance.

Political arrogance is a sort of institutional vice. Luis Cabrera, for instance, argues that political institutions can be oriented towards or against certain vices or virtues. He argues that when an institution is oriented towards arrogance, for instance, it means that that institution is "conducive to" political arrogance.[28] This conception makes intuitive sense: institutions can play a critical role in fostering or preventing certain kinds of virtues and vices within a political society. Cabrera argues that political vices are those vices which political institutions can be said to foster. Moreover, political vices are the kinds of vices that, in turn, damage democratic institutions. State institutions can and do play a significant role in the advancement or hindrance of agents' vices or virtues. These institutions, he argues, "will not guarantee that all participants adopt a disposition" towards or against the relevant virtues or vices, but they facilitate and encourage that adoption.[29] As we will see, Cabrera is right to point out that institutions can be conducive to political arrogance. But this seems insufficient. To say that institutions are merely conducive to individual virtues and vices is to neglect that institutions can be evaluated, independent of the effect that they might have on individuals' behavior.

Indeed, institutions themselves can be appropriately described as having virtues and vices. John Rawls, for instance, says that "justice is the first virtue of social institutions."[30] A virtue of an institution is a metric by which we can assess such an institution, such that we ought to shape our institutions to fulfill that virtue. Justice being the primary virtue of social institutions means that it is the primary metric by which we assess a social institution. If a social institution

---

[28] Cabrera, 39.
[29] Cabrera, 39.
[30] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

is unjust, then no matter what else may be said positively about that institution (e.g. efficient), it must be abolished or reformed.[31] This sense of institutional virtue is, of course, the inverse of what I mean by institutional vice. An institutional vice is a similar metric, but it is one we want to reduce or, if possible, eliminate. In keeping with the negative orientation of my broader argument, we ought to be primarily oriented towards reducing or eliminating these kinds of institutional vices.

We can think of institutional vices in three different ways.[32] We can call the first cultural-dispositional. This form of institutional vice is most closely associated with the personal form of vice discussed above. However, the key conceptual difference lies in the relationship between institutions and individuals: institutional vices can directly cause individuals to exhibit that vice. It causes agents to internalize that vice.[33] This is clearest when we look at broader social structures and not simply institutions like the state.[34] Social structures shape who we are in a deep way. Iris Marion Young, for instance, talks about the "thrownness" of the subject: agents are shaped by the particular contexts and structures they come into being.[35] This is not to say that they can't reflect on and revise their given commitments, beliefs, and attitudes, but rather to say that what these are is limited by the historical context. Like parts of our identities, our dispositions and beliefs are going to be given to us by the social context in which we find ourselves. So social institutions and structures which display certain kinds of vices could give us a strong reason to internalize that vice as permissible.

---

[31] Rawls, 3.

[32] It's important to note that these are not meant to be mutually exclusive. That is, vices can have up to all three forms of expression in any given case.

[33] Much in the way that Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004) argues the colonized internalize the violence perpetrated on them by the colonizer.

[34] Though, of course, institutions like healthcare, prisons, and schools can have a deep effect on our sense of self and our psychological identity.

[35] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 46.

The second way to think about institutional vices is to think of them in consequential-effective terms. That is, we can think of an institutional vice in terms of the effects it has on societies and individuals; in terms of the consequences it brings about. In this case, we are primarily interested in the effects that institutions can have on the permissibility of a vice. That is, the rules that constitute an institution can have the effect of permitting or facilitating agents to act in line with that vice. To clarify, we can look to virtue again. Institutions can express the kinds of character traits or principles that the society (and by extension, the individuals that compose it) value. Rawls says something like this. He views justice as a sort of regulative principle, where the principles of justice regulate the institutions and as a consequence, they are "regulative of [citizens'] conduct toward one another."[36] Social institutions, when virtuous, can at least indirectly cause individuals to also behave virtuously. Conversely, states that are shaped by or display institutional vices can have the adverse effect of instilling the personal version of these vices in their citizenry.

Institutional vices can also serve, if inadvertently, as regulative principles of behavior, in the sense that they determine the minimum standard of rightness within that society. That is, institutional vices can signal to citizens that the personal version of that vice is permissible and acceptable within that society. This is not to say that all citizens will behave at this minimum standard nor that they believe this minimum standard to be the right one. Indeed, many citizens might condemn the behavior of their co-citizens for not going above and beyond. But there does seem to be a close link between institutional vices and the vices that the citizens display. Institutional vices are vices insofar as they have this effect.

---

[36] Rawls, 451.

Finally, we have political-social vices. By this, I mean the kinds of vices that we can say properly apply to institutions themselves. Using Rawls's example of justice as the first virtue of social institutions, if institutions do not meet the principles of justice he lays out, for instance, we can say that they exhibit the vice of injustice. In this case, we have political-social injustice: the institutions themselves can be described as unjust. Rawls uses the language of well-ordered societies, so we can say societies whose institutions fail to be just are not well-ordered.

This distinction might be made clearer once we see how it works in the case of a particular institutional vice, political arrogance. First, political arrogance can be cultural-dispositional. Recall institutions (and social structures, more broadly) shape individuals. If this is true for any deep sense of self, *a fortiori*, it must be true for psychological beliefs and attitudes. As a result, if we live under social structures and institutions shaped by political arrogance, then at least some individuals will be shaped by the social structures in such a way that they end up arrogant themselves. A clear example is Jim Crow America, which was closely tied with individual racist attitudes. Even if Reconstruction efforts had been successful in shaping political institutions in such a way that they were no longer political arrogant (more on that below), plenty, if not the vast majority, of people would have come to be in a society that was deeply politically arrogant. It would not be a surprise, then, if racism would still stick around, so to speak, even if there had not been politically arrogant institutions after the Civil War.

Moreover, politically arrogant institutions are also those institutions that effect citizens that are more likely to behave as arrogant persons or display arrogant traits. This is consequential-effective political arrogance. We can say that exclusionary institutions are politically arrogant because they permit and facilitate those agents who are included from ignoring critique by those who are excluded. They develop the habits and patterns of behavior

that are associated with this kind of personal arrogance. Returning to the Jim Crow example, racist individuals at all levels of governance became accustomed to being able to ignore critiques from Black U.S. Americans such that their pre-existing unwillingness to engage with critique was reinforced.[37] The key difference between this form of political arrogance and the cultural-dispositional form is the role institutions play. In the consequential-effective form, institutions have a signaling effect: they indicate, intentionally or not, that political arrogance is an acceptable mode of behavior or attitude. The cultural-dispositional form works at a deeper level. It shapes the underlying identity and beliefs of an agent, often in a more implicit, and perhaps pervasive, way.

Finally, we have the political-social of political arrogance, which exists when the rules of institutions as such are shaped such that some members of a given society are shielded from critique. One clear example here is exclusion from participation in political life. Historically, this was how Jim Crow laws in the United States operated, at least in part. In actively blocking Black U.S. Americans from voting and participating in public life, political institutions in the U.S. allowed white U.S. Americans to ignore or disregard the critiques launched at them by Black citizens.[38] This is not to say that had Jim Crow laws not existed, racism would have disappeared, as I suggested above. Rather, it is to say that institutions can be and often are highly capable of restraining agents. My sense here is that if institutions had genuinely allowed for critique, racist individuals would have must less room for movement and would have been much less likely to able to institute their preferred policies.

---

[37] This is, of course, Cabrera's understanding. As I suggested above, Cabrera is interested in political arrogance insofar as institutions can be said to be structurally oriented towards political arrogance (or against it). Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan*, 38–39.

[38] There is also a sense in which the institutions themselves became resistant to critique, such that by preventing Black Americans from actively participating institutions themselves did not change. I think my account thus far can account for this, if only because institutions do not simply change of their own accord or by some historical world-spirit, but by the actions of persons, acting individually or collectively.

Political arrogance, then, is an institutional vice in these three ways. First, institutions are themselves closed off to critique from agents who are substantively and formally excluded from the political process. Second, institutions can either indirectly cause individuals to be arrogant (by signaling that it is acceptable to behave as such) or, third, directly cause them to be so (by shaping them in such ways). This gives us a clear picture of what political arrogance is and how it might operate, at least in principle. I want to emphasize that it is not the case that in practice, these three forms are mutually exclusive or that they do not reinforce each other. Indeed, it might be the case that all three are always present and political arrogance (and institutional vices more generally) can be understood to be multi-faceted. This typology is not meant to be a clear-cut set of distinctions but an analysis of the different ways political arrogance can manifest. I now turn to the question of why wrongful subordination ought to be understood in such terms.

### 3.2    *From Political Arrogance to Subordination*

Above, I used the example of Jim Crow to explain some of the conceptual work that political arrogance is doing and how we might apply that concept to a real-world scenario. I also did this because Jim Crow is quite obviously a case of subordination. In Jim Crow America, Black citizens were undoubtedly subordinated to white citizens in virtually every area of public and private life. In doing so, I was aiming to begin to create a picture of the close connection between subordination and political arrogance. I now want to explain that connection in more detail.

Subordination, in its most basic sense, refers to a relationship between two agents, whereby one agent is in some way put below another agent. It is a hierarchical relationship, whereby there is some characteristic or metric by which one agent holds a higher rank than the other. Moreover, all hierarchies display relationships of subordination. Hierarchies, on this

account, are non-moralized. In other words, we can identify a hierarchy without making any reference to a particular theory of the good or of the right. Consequently, since subordination and hierarchy are co-extensive, then we have a non-moralized conception of subordination.

However, it is not obvious that we ought to accept a concept of hierarchy as non-moralized. Generally, in view of our commitments to the equality of persons, we might assume that social hierarchies are at least *prima facie* objectionable because they are necessarily contrary to the demands of equality.[39] In other words, we might think that we have good reasons to object to hierarchy in any given case unless shown evidence or argument to the contrary in that particular case. Indeed, Elizabeth Anderson argues that egalitarians focus their critique on three broad classes of social hierarchies. The first is what she calls a hierarchy of domination or command. In this hierarchy, those who are lower on the hierarchy "must obey the commands of their superiors and ask their permission to exercise various liberties."[40] Given that most, if not all, adults are capable of autonomy and self-government, we are entitled "to reject systems in which others wield unaccountable power over them."[41] Individuals who are capable of governing themselves – of having a will that is under their own control – ought to be able to actually govern themselves.[42]

The second hierarchy democratic egalitarians object to are hierarchies of esteem. In these hierarchies, subordinated individuals are represented as "proper objects of dishonor, contempt,

---

[39] I am following Elizabeth Anderson, "Equality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund, 2012, 42 in using the concept of "social hierarchy." She argues that social hierarchies are "durable group inequalities that are systematically sustained by laws, norms, or habits." I use the terms "social hierarchy" and "hierarchy" interchangeably.
[40] Anderson, 43.
[41] Anderson, 45.
[42] That individuals have the mental and psychological capacities to govern themselves is an empirical claim. However, it seems to be a fairly plausible claim about individuals in our world. If it is an accurate assessment, which I will assume it is, then it seems that the denial of the exercise of that capacity is objectionable. See also, Anne Phillips, *Unconditional Equals* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

disgust, fear, or hatred on the basis of their group identities and hence properly subject to ridicule, shaming, shunning, segregation, discrimination, persecution, and even violence."[43] This, again, can best be exemplified by the treatment of Black people in the United States during Jim Crow. White people treated Black people with less esteem than they did other white people. Egalitarians argue that all human beings can claim a certain dignity and a treatment that comes along with that dignity. As such, hierarchies of esteem are objectionable because they necessarily violate that claim to dignity-based treatment.[44]

Finally, democratic egalitarians object to hierarchies of standing. Hierarchies of standing exist when those who are higher up in the hierarchy are taken more seriously in deliberation and in the standard operation of social institutions. Those of higher rank, Anderson notes, have more privileges and rights than those who are of lower rank. Agents who are of lower rank are usually not given the standing to make claims against those who are of higher rank. Additionally, their interests are not taken into consideration because their voice is not taken into consideration.[45] The objection to this lies in the fact that "all human beings have a basal claim to equal moral considerability."[46] Jim Crow America also demonstrated denials of equal standing. Black people in the United States were denied equal rights to vote, through discriminatory laws, that prevented them from being able to make claims against white people. Their claim to equal moral considerability was denied by institutional design.

If we think that all social hierarchies can be reduced to these three, then it might be the case that the concept of hierarchy is actually moralized: each of these three hierarchies refer to either a theory of the right or a theory of the good such that we cannot identify that hierarchy

---

[43] Anderson, "Equality," 43.
[44] Anderson, 45.
[45] Anderson, 43.
[46] Anderson, 45.

without, at the same time, making a normative claim about that social relationship. But, we might think, these are only the set of *objectionable* hierarchies.[47] Clearly, not all hierarchies fit into these three categories. For instance, the relationship between teacher and student (perhaps only in ideal circumstances) is hierarchical: there is one person who is ranked higher in some way than the other. Part of this hierarchy is constituted by the fact that teachers can wield not-insignificant amounts of power over their students and because of the contexts in which we find ourselves in, often do wield that power, even if unintentionally.[48]

How does this relationship fit into Anderson's three categories? A good teacher operating within a decently shaped academic context cannot be said to be in a hierarchy of command with their students, for they are accountable to their students, or at least to the school and parents. Second, students taught by such a teacher will not be subject to a hierarchy of esteem and indeed a good teacher will help combat hierarchies of esteem that might exist amongst their students. However, hierarchies of standing could be present because in at least some cases, teachers are taken more seriously in deliberation than students are. For instance, this might be present when teachers are given control over pedagogical methods or curricular content. In this case, even though the teacher's decisions in these realms will be in view of the interests of the students, it's not necessarily the case that the students have the standing to make claims against the teacher if they disagree with the content or methods. We generally believe that we ought to defer to teachers on matters such as these.

---

[47] Jonathan Wolff, "I—The Presidential Address: Equality and Hierarchy," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 119, no. 1 (2019): 1–23 points to some of the difficulties in critiquing hierarchies.

[48] Thomas Wartenberg, *The Forms of Power: From Domination to Transformation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 142–46. Even Paulo Freire's dialogic model of education still exhibits some hierarchical features, seeing as there still needs to be an agent who leads or comes to the classroom with more knowledge. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, ed. Myra Bergman Ramos, Donaldo Macedo, and Ira Shor (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

This example can lead us to three possible conclusions. One is to maintain that all hierarchies are necessarily objectionable and that these three kinds of hierarchies do not cover all kinds of hierarchies. The second option is to accept that not all hierarchies are objectionable and only the ones covered by these three categories are objectionable but that each of these three is objectionable.[49] Finally, we can say that no hierarchy — covered by Anderson's typology or otherwise — is necessarily objectionable and that hierarchies need to display a particular wrong-making feature that makes them objectionable. The problem with the first is that we end up objecting to a series of other hierarchies which we generally believe are not objectionable. Setting aside the teacher-student relationship for a moment, the relationship between parents and their children is another example of a relationship that exhibits hierarchical features but is, under certain circumstances, not objectionable. Finally, even egalitarian and liberatory social movements exhibit (or perhaps ought to exhibit) some amount of hierarchical organization.[50] The point in highlighting this is to suggest that hierarchy, even on a radical democratic account, is not always or necessarily objectionable.

Our second option, that specifically these three kinds of hierarchy, as defined by Anderson, are objectionable, is similarly concerning. Returning to our teacher-student example, we see a clear hierarchy of standing. And yet, I think we would want to resist the idea that such a hierarchy is wrong. Teachers are often better placed than students to determine what the curricular needs of their classrooms are, as well as the pedagogical methods necessary to satisfy those needs. This could be due to a series of reasons — training, education, expertise, or experience, to name a few — but whatever the reason, it remains the case that we have good

---

[49] It is, of course, possible that these three kinds of hierarchies do not exhaust the list of kinds of hierarchies *and* that there are some hierarchies that are objectionable and some that are not. This might be true but for our purposes here, I will limit myself to discussion of these three hierarchies.

[50] Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3/4 (2013): 231–46.

reasons for maintaining this kind of hierarchy. As such, we are left with our third option: no hierarchy is necessarily wrong; it depends on whether or not any given hierarchy can be said to have a wrong-making feature.

I want to argue that the necessary wrong-making feature is political arrogance. Two hierarchies — of esteem and of standing — are the most likely to display this feature, such that we can critique them with an egalitarian conception of non-subordination. Let's look closely at each in turn. Generally speaking, hierarchies of standing are the clearest form of a hierarchy that displays political arrogance, as we have defined it.[51] Recall that political arrogance is the institutional variant of the unwillingness to be exposed to critique. Within hierarchies of standing, as we saw above, agents who are of lower rank are not given standing to make claims against those who are of higher rank when they ought to have such standing. When hierarchies of standing exist, institutions are shaped such that those at the bottom of the hierarchy are unable to present criticism or engage with those at the top. In this case, we have a very clear relationship between this hierarchy and political arrogance. That said, I want to emphasize the boundaries of this claim: as I suggested with the example of the teacher-student relationship, some hierarchies of standing will be permissible, if not desirable. The reason is that in the cases of permissible hierarchies of standing those at the bottom of the hierarchy are denied the right to critique because they do not, in fact, have that right. As I suggested in that example, students do not have the same rights to determine curricular goals and pedagogical methods as teachers do, so denying them the right to do so does not wrong them. How we determine who does have that right is a

---

[51] Indeed, Luis Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan: Rights, Diversity, and Trans-State Democracy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 38 goes so far as to define political arrogance as the denial of others' equal standing to provide input.

question I cannot answer in full in this thesis, although Sections 4 and 5 go some distance in resolving this issue.

What about hierarchies of esteem? These seem to be more distantly related, at best. Indeed, one could say that actually the concern with indignity that hierarchies of esteem is tracking is not related to political arrogance. Dignity, on this account, is primarily about the kind of treatment that we can demand of others and not about critique. However, it seems to me that hierarchies of esteem can be best understood in terms of either consequential-effective or cultural-dispositional political arrogance. Recall that in both of these cases, I referred to the way that politically arrogant institutions (political-social political arrogance) can shape agents into politically arrogant agents, either by signaling to them attitudes and behaviors expressive of arrogance are acceptable or by unconsciously shaping them into politically arrogant agents. When consequential-effective and (especially) cultural-dispositional political arrogance are present in a society, hierarchies of esteem are bound to form: agents who benefit from political arrogance will learn, implicitly or not, that they are able to treat others as if they are not worthy of equal treatment.

A concrete example might help clarify this. Jim Crow was an example of all three forms of political arrogance. I have already discussed how political arrogance operated in its political-social form during this time period. In its other two forms, it fostered and nurtured harmful beliefs in white U.S. Americans about the kinds of treatments that Black U.S. Americans were due. In doing so, it created an environment where the kinds of harms that hierarchies of esteem point to — "ridicule, shaming, shunning, segregation, discrimination, persecution, and even violence" — are accepted and made the norm.[52] Lynching, for instance, was a well-documented

---

[52] Anderson, "Equality," 43.

form of violence used against Black people that was deemed acceptable by many white people and many state institutions.[53] Again, this is not to say that we can reduce racism and its associated ills solely to this kind of political arrogance. Instead, I want to suggest that political arrogance is a constitutive part of a hierarchy of esteem, even if there are other parts.

It seems, then, that hierarchies of standing and esteem are wrong when (and only when) they display political arrogance in some way. Let's return, then, to hierarchies of domination or command. Hierarchies of domination seem to be concerned with being under the power of others. But if that is true, we have good reasons to object to a freedom-centered account of that problem, namely, that domination misses the core of the idea of being under the power of others.[54] Nonetheless, as we are concerned primarily with equality here, hierarchies of domination, at their core, are at best obliquely related to the relationship of equality.

That said, it does seem plausible to suggest that hierarchies of domination can only occur against a background of inequality; that is, among equals, domination would not be possible. If it is true, then hierarchies of command are interesting to us here as *consequences* of the kind of political inequality I am discussing here. Following Mara Marin, I argue that domination, as developed by Philip Pettit, must be understood within the broader social context in which domination occurs.[55] In short, Pettit understands domination as subjection to the uncontrolled

---

[53] Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 23.
[54] See Niko Kolodny, "Help Wanted: Subordinates," in *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk About It)*, by Elizabeth Anderson (Princeton University Press, 2017), 99–107; Niko Kolodny, "Being under the Power of Others," in *Republicanism and the Future of Democracy*, ed. Geneviève Rousselière and Yiftah Elazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 94–114. Kolodny goes into extensive detail about why freedom-centered accounts (which Anderson's seems to be) run into tremendous theoretical problems.
[55] Mara Marin, "What Domination Can and Cannot Do: Gender Oppression and the Limits of the Notion of Domination" (Unpublished manuscript under review, n.d.), https://maramarin.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/6/6/12662746/domination-genderoppression_maramarin.pdf.

will of another.[56] Pettit often uses gender as a motivating relationship to explain domination.[57] So suppose that agent A is a man and agent B is a woman, such that an agent A dominates another agent B if A can exercise his will in an uncontrolled manner over B. Marin's argument is that in the case of gender relations, this exercise of agent A's power (indeed, the fact that agent A has this power, even if A does not actually exercise such power) is only possible because these agents exist in a context where women are, on the whole, subordinated to men.[58] Because men and women exist against a background of subordination, men are able to exercise dominating power over women, even if it is not true that they always do. Thus, it seems, hierarchies of domination, require the existence of background inequality in order to come about. It is in this way that hierarchies of domination, even if primarily freedom-centered, can be explained and critiqued by egalitarians.

Subordination, and hierarchies along with it, are wrong when they display political arrogance. As we've seen with, each of these hierarchies can display political arrogance — the institutional unwillingness to be exposed to critique. Egalitarians, insofar as they ought to be concerned with combatting these forms of hierarchies, ought to be concerned with eliminating political arrogance or, where that is not possible, mitigating its effects. What's key here is that subordination is only a problem to be concerned about if it is a hierarchical relationship marked by political arrogance. Again, the relationship between teacher and student is likely not going to be objectionably subordinating, because it is not politically arrogant as I have defined it here. There might be subordination in the non-moralized sense that I explained above, but if that is the

---

[56] Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52–58.

[57] Philip Pettit, *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy*, The Seeley Lectures (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–2.

[58] Marin, "What Domination Can and Cannot Do: Gender Oppression and the Limits of the Notion of Domination," 17–18.

case, on those conditions alone we do not have anything to object to. Moreover, seeing as I am focused on social hierarchies, we care about subordination insofar as agents are subordinated others *qua* member in a social group. In Anderson's words, "They create classes of people who relate to one another as superiors to inferiors. Isolated individual inequalities detached from systematic social arrangements may be unfair but do not amount to social hierarchy."[59]

## 4    Ambedkar, Fraternity, and Political Arrogance

I have argued that subordination is a vice of social institutions, and can best be explained as political arrogance, such that agent X is a member of a social group where X is not willing to be exposed to critique or is otherwise shielded from critique by members of agent Y's social group (including agent Y). The key point here is that subordination is marked by political arrogance: where a relationship of subordination exists, there is political arrogance. What reasons, then, do we have to object to political arrogance? For one, it is a vice: it is a defect of character. If we are virtue ethicists, we might say that vices are wrong because they demonstrate a lack of practical wisdom.[60] Alternatively, we might say that vices are those traits that prevent the flourishing of an agent.[61] However, I don't want to rely on a particular ethical conception like virtue ethics to determine the wrongness of political arrogance. Of course, it could very well be true that its status as a vice is a reason it is wrong, but I want to give a more broad-based and potentially ecumenical account of its wrongness. Instead, I argue that political arrogance is wrong because it is undemocratic.

---

[59] Anderson, "Equality," 43.
[60] Cf., Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Linda T. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[61] Cf., Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

This section will develop B.R. Ambedkar's conception of fraternity and democracy in order to provide one potential answer to the question of why institutional political arrogance is wrong. In short, Ambedkar's conception of caste can help us grasp the problems with inegalitarian social institutions that are politically arrogant; that is, institutions that subordinate some groups in ways that are undemocratic. First, I explain how Ambedkar understands caste: he argues that it is a form of "graded inequality." Second, I explain that caste is dangerous because it poses significant challenges to the development and maintenance of a democratic society, destroying the necessary bonds that make such a society functional. Importantly, I argue that this problem is rooted in the fact of the political arrogance of caste: caste makes the critique of the high-caste members by lower-caste members impossible. Finally, I respond to concerns that liberal pluralists raise about accounts of fraternity like Ambedkar's, arguing that his unique account of fraternity can and does accommodate the empirical baseline upon which liberal pluralists rest their critique.

### 4.1    Caste and (the Destruction of) Fraternity

Ambedkar, among many contributions, was a key theorist of caste in India in the early to mid-20th century. His account of caste and the dangers it posed to Indian society are crucial for our purposes here. To begin, we ought to look at what exactly he believed caste to be. He described caste a form of "graded inequality."[62] By this, he meant that each succeeding grade in the caste system had fewer privileges than the previous one did. Additionally, though, each group believes itself to be superior to the one that follows it in the caste hierarchy. As Meena Dhanda has argued, the notion of "graded inequality" shows the inherent devaluation of

---

[62] B. R. Ambedkar, "The Hindu and His Belief in Caste," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, ed. Vasant Moon, vol. 5 (Bombay: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Maharashtra, 1979), 101–2.

members of other, lower castes "with every assertion of caste pride."[63] Similarly, in *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar says that while it is true that caste enslaves all people, "all the slaves are not equal in power….Castes form a graded system of sovereignties, high and low, which are jealous of their status and which know that if a general dissolution came, some of them stand to lose more of their prestige and power than others do."[64]

What is striking about this descriptive account of caste is that it appears to be a moralized account. That is, built into the descriptive account are normative claims about the desirability of caste. For one, it already begins to build up the argument that caste reflects a particular kind of relationship between higher-caste and lower-caste groups of individuals and between those who were included in the system of caste and those who were excluded, the Dalits, members of Indian society who were below the lowest caste ranking.[65] Specifically, we already see a kind of political arrogance that I discussed above, though I will explain this connection in detail below. Graded inequality is a form of objectionable hierarchy, where those at the top are structurally shielded from the critiques of those at the bottom. Specifically for Ambedkar, those who were included in the caste system were all shielded from needing to engage with critiques raised by the Dalits,

More fundamentally, however, Ambedkar viewed caste as a fundamentally undemocratic project, where democracy is best understood as a communicative project.[66] To understand why

---

[63] Meena Dhanda, "IV—Philosophical Foundations of Anti-Casteism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 120, no. 1 (2020): 83.

[64] B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, ed. S. Anand (Verso Books, 2016), 295–96.

[65] It is important to note that Ambedkar himself was a Dalit.

[66] Ambedkar discusses the value of equality but it is not clear that his discussion of equality is on the same theoretical level as our discussion here. Indeed, when Ambedkar discusses equality, he is more concerned with the justification of the equality of the members of different castes, rather than trying to identify why equality is valuable: "Equality may be a fiction, but nonetheless one must accept it as the governing principle." Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 261–63. As Luis Cabrera points out, this account has resonances with some consequentialist accounts of

this is so it would serve us to unpack Ambedkar's understanding of societies, an understanding

that is infused with democratic principles at its core. Societies, for Ambedkar, "exist by

communication — indeed, in communication."[67] In arguing this, he is doing two things. First, he

is rejecting a view of individuals as disconnected or, at least, as perfectly independent as Western

liberals have traditionally claimed. For Ambedkar, humans are social creatures in the deepest

sense: we are always embedded in our social context and as such, through constant

communication with others we are made through society and can in turn remake society.[68]

Moreover, it is through communication that we can come to develop "like-mindedness," which

he thinks is necessary for a healthy society.[69]

Consequently, and second, he is making a claim about how society works. Ambedkar

says the following:

> An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change
> taking place in one part or other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests
> consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact
> with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis. This is
> fraternity, which is only another name for democracy.[70]

---

equality that are present in the contemporary literature. These philosophers argue that political actors ought to
proceed as if humans are equal even though they may not be in fact. See, Richard Arneson, "What, If Anything,
Renders All Humans Morally Equal?," in *Singer and His Critics*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999),
103–28; and Thomas Christiano, *The Constitution of Equality: Democratic Authority and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2008), cited in Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan*; In a different vein, Anne Phillips has recently
argued that we have good reasons to reject the long-standing debate about why we ought to believe all humans are
equal. She argues that any sort of justification of equality — that is about what renders each of us equal to each other
— makes equality conditional on the satisfaction of that justification. For her, it is fundamentally important that we
simply refuse to engage with debates about what renders us equal and rather recognize that equality is a claim and a
commitment we make vis-à-vis other human beings. Phillips, *Unconditional Equals*, 40–41, 57. The point of the
foregoing is relatively minimal. Ambedkar's direct statements on equality are, while interesting in their own right,
part of a tangentially related set of debates about why we ought to believe all humans are equal. Because he
acknowledges that equality is an empirical fiction (though he argues that we still have good reason to accept it), his
account of equality does not get us very far in trying to understand inequality and the reasons we have to object to it,
besides giving us an argument for accepting a baseline of equality.

[67] Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 244.
[68] Arun P. Mukherjee, "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy," *New Literary History* 40,
no. 2 (2009): 348.
[69] This idea is not necessarily meant as strongly as consensus or sameness. I will develop this concept in more detail
below.
[70] Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 260.

In this admittedly long passage, Ambedkar points us to the concept of "social endosmosis." As Arun Mukherjee has pointed out, this is a concept that was originally used by Henri Bergson, William James, and, in the form it came to Ambedkar, John Dewey.[71] In using the term, endosmosis, Ambedkar is operating by way of a metaphor with biology. The Oxford English Dictionary defines endosmosis as "The passage of a fluid 'inwards' through a porous septum, to mix with another fluid on the inside of it."[72] In using this metaphor, Ambedkar is giving us a more concrete picture of society and the means by which it works. As Mukherjee points out, the term endosmosis "conveys fluidity, channels through which groups and individuals in a democracy are linked and are, so to say, irrigated or suffused with the nutrient of each other's creative intelligence. The 'porous septum' is a separator, a membrane that provides for the privacy of the individuals but does not enclose them within impermeable walls."[73] The metaphor of endosmosis, then, gives us a clearer ideal of society.[74] It is able to recognize how persons are, even if distinct, always already socially embedded.

This account raises two questions. First, what value does the concept of social endosmosis provide for us? Social endosmosis suggests that individuals are not ontologically prior. It resists, consistent with our account of cultural-dispositional institutional vices above, the impulse to theorize exclusively at the level of the individual, the individual as a mushroom that just springs from the ground, to use the Hobbesian metaphor. At the same time, however, it does not reduce the individual to being normatively secondary to the group. It is also able to resist the worry by liberals like Rawls that accounts that center groups (like he thinks classical

---

[71] Mukherjee, "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy," 352.
[72] "Endosmosis, n.," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 28, 2022, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61996.
[73] Mukherjee, "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy," 352.
[74] The concept is able to retain the idea of the so-called separateness of persons, such that it does not fall to the problems of aggregation that some consequentialist ethics fall to. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 23–24.

utilitarianism does, as an aggregative moral theory) fail to recognize the plurality of individuals.[75] For Ambedkar, endosmosis "is not used as a metaphor for one-to-one communication at the individual level, but for communication between groups, and, by extension, between socialized individuals representing their group identities."[76] Since our account of egalitarianism is social in this way, Ambedkar's account of social endosmosis can strengthen the social ontology upon which my normative account rests.

This leads to the second question, if in an oblique way. Up until now, it seems that Ambedkar is giving us an ideal of how society ought to operate and working backwards from there. However, I started this thesis by wanting to focus my argument on the development of a negative egalitarianism. How, then, does Ambedkar's project fit in? To answer this, I think it's important to look at the direct genealogy of the concept of endosmosis, which he takes from Dewey. Dewey only uses the word "endosmosis" once, in all of his writings.[77] In that passage, he says the following:

> There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves. And the experience of each party loses in meaning, when the free interchange of varying modes of life-experience is arrested. A separation into a privileged and a subject-class prevents social endosmosis. The evils thereby affecting the superior class are less material and less perceptible, but equally real.[78]

The concept of social endosmosis is used in the midst of a critical argument against class-based inequality. It is, perhaps on its own, a positive concept, but in Dewey's original use, it is used

---

[75] Of course, it appears that Rawls's account also ends up doing the same: in prioritizing impartiality, as Iris Young argues, Rawls inadvertently fails to account for the plurality that he accuses classical utilitarians of ignoring Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 101.

[76] Mukherjee, "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy," 355.

[77] Doing a search through his collected works reveals this to be the case. See, John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953.*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston and Larry Hickman, Past Masters InteLex (Charlottesville: InteLex Corp., 1996), http://library.nlx.com/.

[78] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 84.

only in a critical and negative way: it is used in the process of theorizing an unjust social order and arguing against it.

While in the *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar uses it in a positive way, in other places he focuses his argument using endosmosis in a negative way. For instance, the first time we know he uses it is in a presentation to the Southborough Committee on the Franchise in 1919. In this presentation, Ambedkar argued for separate electorates for Dalits, among other points. He argues that physical proximity is neither necessary nor sufficient for the like-mindedness necessary for a healthy society. This was, as Mukherjee points out, necessary to avoid the claim made by high caste Hindus that because they live in close physical proximity to Dalits, they can act on their behalf.[79] Instead, Ambedkar argues, the caste system reduces like-mindedness only to the narrow confines of your own caste. In his words, "But there is a real difference and consequent conflict, between the like-mindedness of the touchable and the untouchables. Untouchability is the strongest ban on the endosmosis between them.[80]" In this argument, Ambedkar makes the point that their unjust placement within the casteist social structure (technically, outside the casteist social structure) grants Dalits the right to a separate electorate. Because caste destroys endosmosis, institutions ought to be shaped such that Dalits can exercise their own political agency.

This is the crux of Ambedkar's critique of caste. Caste is a problem because it destroys the social bonds that make society function. The concept of social endosmosis helps us understand why it is so vital that these social bonds exist. A properly functioning society, on Ambedkar's account, recognizes the individual as an individual and as always already embedded

---

[79] Mukherjee, "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy," 354–55.
[80] B. R. Ambedkar, "Evidence Before the Southborough Committee," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches.*, ed. Vasant Moon, vol. 1 (Bombay: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Maharashtra, 1979), 250.

within her social context. To do so requires the fluctuation between social groups that the metaphor of endosmosis so clearly illustrates. Caste is objectionable because it prevents social endosmosis from happening. It cuts off all communication across caste lines. As Ambedkar says, "Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste."[81]

Importantly, caste is wrong because in destroying the bonds of society it destroys democratic life, both at the political and social level. Recall the conception of social endosmosis: it theorizes a society as always in communication. For Ambedkar this means democratic life. In his words, "Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."[82] He argues that democracy requires two things. First, it requires that attitude of respect and reverence towards co-citizens.[83] Second, democracy requires "a social organization free from rigid social barriers."[84] He goes on, "Democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness, resulting in the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged."[85] In making this claim, Ambedkar is clearly outlining a constellation of ideas: in his larger theory, democracy is closely connected to social endosmosis and equality of status.

### 4.2    The connection to political arrogance

How does this connect with our concern about political arrogance? Ambedkar's critique of Plato's account of the just society, which groups citizens into three kinds of pre-determined

---

[81] Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 259.
[82] Ambedkar, 260.
[83] Ambedkar, 260; B. R. Ambedkar, "Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches.*, ed. Vasant Moon, vol. 1 (Bombay: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Maharashtra, 1979), 222.
[84] Ambedkar, "Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah," 222.
[85] Ambedkar, 222.

social groupings (not unlike the way caste operates), proves illuminating here. He argues that there is a deep problem with "the lumping together of individuals into a few sharply marked-off classes….it is not possible to pigeon men into holes according to class."[86] As Cabrera points out to us, this is essentially an argument about political arrogance: "they [the rulers] presume that it must be correct to categorize individuals by whole class, and…they refuse to consider even very clear evidence to the contrary that some are wrongly categorized."[87] Similarly, in a casteist society, the grouping of individuals into rigid categories wrongly assumes that we can in fact do so and do it correctly. He suggests that even if treatment based on status would be desirable, political actors simply do not have the right kinds of information, both about what capacities individuals actually do or do not have and about what values these kinds of capacities ought to be given.[88]

As we saw, his account of fraternity is closely linked to his account of social endosmosis, in which social groups fluidly interact with each other. Internal to the conception of social endosmosis is not just like-mindedness; indeed, "it is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow men."[89] This kind of attitude is necessary in order to avoid political arrogance. The problem with caste, to reiterate, is that it destroys the public spirit; it destroys social and democratic life. It does so as a result of political arrogance: in breaking down social endosmosis, which Ambedkar considers necessary for a healthy society, it assumes that the rigid social hierarchy of caste is the correct way to organize society and refuses to engage with critique from either inside or outside. Dalits, according to Ambedkar, are unable to challenge this

---

[86] Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 267.
[87] Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan*, 48.
[88] As an interesting note, this is the same kind of objection that Elizabeth Anderson makes of the group of egalitarians she calls "luck egalitarians." See, "What Is the Point of Equality?". However, as Jonathan Wolff has pointed out, it appears that her own account falls to similar concerns, due to using the capabilities approach. See, "Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos Revisited."
[89] Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 260.

social organization, either politically or socially, and so suffer from politically arrogant institutions. The attitude of respect and reverence that Ambedkar connects to social endosmosis is diametrically opposed to the political arrogance he sees encapsulated in casteism.

### 4.3    The liberal pluralist objection

At its core, it appears, this argument is about fraternity and is based on a particular conception of fraternity. But the concept of fraternity is not without its critics. Jacob Levy, for instance, has made a critique of fraternity on liberal pluralist grounds: he rejects the notion that fraternity in contemporary political societies is either possible or desirable.[90] As he suggests, "The inhabitants of a political community are more like strangers who find themselves locked in a very large room together than they are like an extended family or a voluntary association united in pursuit of a common purpose."[91] This critique, at its core, takes seriously the empirical realities of many contemporary states, within which there are not only diverse and competing ideological positions, but there is also significant racial, ethnic and religious diversity. Fraternity, as such, is not achievable because it rests on mistaken assumptions about the nature of society. Moreover, the pluralist account worries that wrongly assuming the kind of unity that the pluralist believes a defender of fraternity must believe in would lead to the wrongful exclusion of outsiders from membership in political society. Levy, for instance, points to the case of Guantanamo Bay: it is not merely exclusion/inclusion for its own sake, but that in assuming a kind of underlying unity, the rights of outsiders are easily ignored.[92]

---

[90] Of course, Levy's argument is not a response to Ambedkar in any immediate way. I take Levy's position as representative of a kind of argument that could be made against someone like Ambedkar.

[91] Jacob T. Levy, "Against Fraternity: Democracy without Solidarity," in *The Strains of Commitment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 107.

[92] Levy, 111.

The first thing to note about this objection is the context in which Ambedkar is operating: India is and has been a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. As such, Ambedkar was fully aware of the empirical reality of diversity and pluralism within political societies. He makes the argument for fraternity with full awareness of this fact. Indeed, he even says as much: "It may not be necessary for a democratic society to be marked by unity, by community of purpose, by loyalty to public ends and by mutuality of sympathy."[93] As Hari Ramesh argues, Ambedkar's admittedly ambitious democratic account is still "grounded in the realities of the possible."[94] Indeed, Ambedkar seems to be providing a direct response to the kind of concern liberal pluralists raise: yes, societies are diverse but at the same time, societies can reach the particular kind of fraternity he defends.

What allows him to make this argument? It appears to me that political arrogance is key here. It allows him to respond to both claims that liberal pluralists make, namely, that fraternity is impossible and that, because it wrongly assumes some kind of national unity, it is undesirable. On the first point, Ambedkar argues that the primary problem with Indian society is caste: it destroys the social endosmosis that makes social and political life possible because it is politically arrogant. Designing institutions that are not politically arrogant, Ambedkar contends, would bring about the kind of social endosmosis that is necessary for a full and flourishing society. Why is this relevant? Because fraternity is nearly co-extensive with social endosmosis for Ambedkar. This means that, on his account, fraternity is not a robust sense of unity or even solidarity; rather, fraternity is a communicative endeavor. It is about creating institutions where members of different social groups can come together and engage is practical political discourse about how their institutions and their society ought to be shaped. Combatting political arrogance

---

[93] Ambedkar, "Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah," 222.
[94] Hari Ramesh, "B. R. Ambedkar on Caste, Democracy, and State Action," *Political Theory*, 2022, 17.

and thereby fostering the kind of fraternity that Ambedkar is interested in is not about creating unity within the political society but about democratic life where social grouping does not rigidly define your place in the social structure.

Ambedkar can also respond to the second objection. Recall that this objection states that emphasizing fraternity in our theory of the state and society can lead and has led to the exclusion of outsiders from political life to the point where individual's basic human rights are violated by the state. Once again, the concept of political arrogance helps Ambedkar here. Cabrera has argued, using Ambedkar's conception of political arrogance, that the state system was we know it is itself structurally oriented towards political arrogance.[95] In short, the concept of sovereignty on which states base their claims to the legitimate exclusion of others has the necessary consequence of wrongfully excluding others from the possibility of critique because the state is understood as the ultimate and final decision-making authority within the territory of the state. Specifically, Cabrera argues that the state system is both vertically and horizontally arrogant.

In the case of vertical arrogance, he argues that there's a fundamental contradiction between the empirical assumptions that the rigid concept of sovereignty makes and the empirical truths of many societies.[96] The power to adjudicate cases of human rights violations, he argues, extends into two spheres. The first is when agents of the state themselves commit human rights violations; genocide, for instance, is a key example of this.[97] The second is when the state has failed to act against rights violations that other social groups commit. As a concrete example, Cabrera points to the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), which was formed in 1998, with the express purpose of documenting the human rights violations that Dalits were

---

[95] Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan*, 132–33.
[96] Cabrera, 134.
[97] Cabrera, 135.

and are continuously subject to. The NCDHR makes the latter kind of claim: the Indian state, even post-independence, has failed and continues to fail to protect the human rights of Dalits.[98] Cabrera identifies that at least in part, this right is grounded in the states' ability to protect the rights of its citizens.[99] In his words, "the presumption that the state is the only actor authorized to judge such claims is based in its role in fulfilling the very task at which it is accused of failing: the protection of individual rights."[100] It seems, then, that the sovereign state system is premised on a faulty assumption. In short, the system of state sovereignty is vertically arrogant because in doing so, it wrongly denies those who experience rights violations the opportunity to challenge the state through supranational or external means.

That might be all well and good and it might even be consistent with the liberal pluralist's objection, such that she accepts this point and still maintains the core of the objection. Implicit in the concern about vertical arrogance are cosmopolitan intuitions about the limits of state sovereignty, especially with regard to human rights violations. States that commit human rights violations or turn a blind eye to them, on Cabrera's view, behave arrogantly when they refuse to let those whose rights are violated challenge the violators at a supranational level. And yet, it still doesn't quite get at the main concern of exclusion because what the argument about vertical arrogance shows is that internal minorities or individuals who see their human rights violated ought to have recourse to external or supranational institutions to adjudicate their human rights violations. It says very little about the rights of external individuals or social groups to either

---

[98] Cabrera, 135–36.
[99] Cf., Anna Stilz, *Territorial Sovereignty: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10.
[100] Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan*, 135.

make claims against the state or to become a part of the society. It appears to me that this is the central concern of the liberal pluralists.[101]

This is where the account of horizontal arrogance comes in. Cabrera argues that the current model of state sovereignty is a model of stewardship: states are "assigned stewardship roles as rights protectors."[102] Consequently, because we each have a supposed steward (we each have a state that behaves as a steward for us), states can summarily reject the claims made by outsiders to different distributional arrangements. As he points out, would-be immigrants and asylum seekers are examples of these kinds of outsiders, noting that "the claims of the latter are based in the most fundamental rights to life and person, and they are particularly urgent in a rights framework."[103] Like the liberal pluralist, Cabrera claims that strong accounts of state sovereignty pose significant problems for minorities and those who are otherwise experiencing rights violations.

Unlike the liberal pluralist, he argues that "if the stewardship system is failing in its primary role of protecting rights, then states' prerogatives to reject rights claims cannot simply be justified by reference to the existence of the flawed stewardship system."[104] However, Cabrera refuses to reject the stewardship system as a whole. Rather, it is that the system of state sovereignty is structurally oriented towards political arrogance in denying outsiders the ability to make claims against particular states of which they are not members. In this way, an

---

[101] As a note, I think the vertical arrogance question is still importantly a part of the response to the liberal pluralist. The case of Guantanamo Bay, of course, emphasizes the relationship between the state and outsiders, but if the concern is that accounts of fraternity emphasize the unity of the polity such that individuals from certain groups see significant rights violations, then there needs to be an argument about why this conception of fraternity doesn't fall to the objection on internal grounds. Jan Werner-Muller's account of populism represents one such account of how empirically false accounts of unity can lead to members of the society to suffer human rights violations. See, Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Of course, the case of the Dalits operates on similar grounds.
[102] Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan*, 137.
[103] Cabrera, 137.
[104] Cabrera, 137.

Ambedkarite can maintain her sense of the value of democratic fraternity, while accommodating a strong concern for the rights of minorities and outsiders.

Tying this all together, we have a clearer sense of why political arrogance ought to be objected to. Ambedkar, in developing his account of political arrogance, shows us that societies marked by institutionalized hierarchies like caste exhibit political arrogance and, consequently, destroy the bonds that make society function. In order to have a functional society, Ambedkar points out, we need to have a robust democratic ethics: by this, the society needs to institute the kinds of interconnectivity across group identity that the concept of social endosmosis attempts to explain. Democracy, both at the political-legal and at the social levels, is necessary for the kind of good society that Ambedkar imagines. The problem with political arrogance, then, is at least in part that it deteriorates the society in which it is found.

That said, not everyone is convinced by this kind of problem: if we take the liberal pluralist critique seriously, and find that Ambedkar's response would be insufficient, then we are left with a question about the actual disvalue of political arrogance. To clarify, suppose that the liberal pluralist is, in fact, right about the impossibility for political communities to actually have any robust conception of fraternity based on the potential interconnectedness of societies. Does this mean that political arrogance can only be justified under this particular conception of democracy? It seems to not be the case: another contemporaneous thinker operating in a different context can give us a different enough conception of democracy, in which political arrogance still play a role: W.E.B. Du Bois.[105]

---

[105] It might be interesting to note that Ambedkar and Du Bois were both aware of each other and apparently sympathetic with each other's political and philosophical projects. See the letters they wrote to each other. B. R. Ambedkar, "Letter from B. R. Ambedkar to W. E. B. Du Bois," July 1946, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to B. R. Ambedkar," July 31, 1946, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

## 5  Du Bois and the Epistemic Disvalue of Political Arrogance

Turning to Du Bois, I argue that he can provide us with a different conception of the wrong of political arrogance. His is also grounded in a theory of democracy, but Du Bois, I argue, provides us with an epistemic justification of democracy: democracy is valuable because it is the only form of government which can adequately access all forms of knowledge. Moreover, it expands our political imagination in important ways. First, I explain Du Bois's conception of democracy. In doing so, I highlight the epistemic value that Du Bois argues democracy has. Connecting it closely to the value of criticism, I then make two claims. First, Du Bois's democratic theory prioritizes difference and the importance of recognizing difference in bringing about justice for all citizens. Second, it allows us to ground our objection to political arrogance on clearly epistemic grounds. I then show why this ought to be understood as connected to subordination and present some differences with Ambedkar's thought. In doing so, I highlight the potentially ecumenical disvalue of political arrogance.

### 5.1  *Epistemic value of democracy*

Like Ambedkar, Du Bois presents us with an objection to political inequality on fundamentally democratic grounds. Unlike Ambedkar, Du Bois has a different conception of democracy. He begins the argument by developing an answer of what democracy is about: "Democracy is a method of realizing the broadest measure of justice to all human beings."[106] It is merely a tool for bringing about justice.[107] Consequently, he asks us to consider the previous tools or methods to realize the broadest measure of justice to all human beings, and he

---

[106] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, ed. Manning Marable (Verso Books, 2016), 82.

[107] This is already a marked difference with Ambedkar's conception of democracy: Du Bois is giving us an instrumental justification of democracy, where I argued that Ambedkar, though he thinks it can be instrumentally justified, thought that democracy is also intrinsically valuable. At the very least, the fraternity necessary for a good society can only be brought about through democratic means.

categorizes said attempts into three distinct groups: the "benevolent tyrant," the "select few," and the "excluded groups."[108] He takes each method in turn. Benevolent dictators, of course, have great advantages, "when the ruler combines strength with ability, unselfish devotion to the public good, and knowledge of what that good calls for."[109] However, and perhaps obviously to any student of history, finding all of these characteristics in one person is rare and, in any case, the only way to find such a person is through election, for leaving "the selection to force is to put a premium on physical strength, chance, and intrigue; to make the selection a matter of birth simply transfers the real power from sovereign to minister."[110] It follows, then, that we would have to decide who gets to elect said ruler.

Du Bois then explains why the other two methods for bringing about justice, which he thinks are alternative methods for selection, are objectionable.[111] Regarding the method of the select few, he begins to provide the foundations of his political vision. Rejecting the view that aristocracies — literally, rule by the best — fell due to corruption, he argues rather that aristocracies face an epistemic problem.[112] Aristocracies are marked by a problem of ignorance: even the "best and most effective aristocracy" lacks the right knowledge because "in the last analysis only the man himself, however humble, knows his own condition."[113] The method of excluded groups has the same problem: "if a race, like the Negro race, is excluded, then so far as

---

[108] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 82.

[109] Du Bois, 82.

[110] Du Bois, 82–83.

[111] As Paul Taylor, "W.E.B. Du Bois: Afro-Modernism, Expressivism, and the Curse of Centrality," in *African American Political Thought: A Collected History*, ed. Melvin Rogers and Jack Turner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 245–51 notes, Du Bois did seem to have some amount of elitism in his view. In this context, the concern over selecting the right leader can register as elitist. By the end of his career, however, he moves away from this elitism and focuses on the way that expert knowledge can be utilized for the mobilization of the group as a whole.

[112] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 83. Note, of course, that is already present in the description of the ideal "benevolent tyrant." He says that this agent would have to have "knowledge of what [the public] good calls for." See Du Bois, 82.

[113] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 83.

that race is a part of the economic and social organization of the land, the feeling and the experience of that race are absolutely necessary to the realization of the broadest justice for all citizens."[114] So, he argues, all previous methods of bringing about justice for all groups suffer from an epistemic problem: they are not able to tap into and use the knowledge of any excluded group, be it those who are not part of the aristocracy or racialized minority groups like Black U.S. Americans. Democracy is the only method that can.

One concern any epistemic account of democracy has to deal with is with the issue of ignorance: some political scientists and political theorists worry tremendously about the fact that most people in any given polity are not sufficiently educated to exercise political rule.[115] These scholars point to social scientific evidence for the failure of individuals to have well-developed policy preferences. Moreover, they argue, the instability of individual policy preferences demonstrates that any conception of democracy based on some idea of the popular will is going to necessarily lead to bad governance; it will lead to another form of government that does not actually achieve, in Du Bois's words, justice for all citizens.

Du Bois responds to this kind of concern in two ways. The first, he argues, is to re-order the causal arrow. The critic, he points out, argues that "The ignorant ought not to vote."[116] Du Bois implicitly agrees. But flipping the script on its head, he argues that "No civilized state should have citizens too ignorant to participate in government."[117] Thus, it is true that good government is incompatible with ignorance. Indeed, in order to achieve justice for all citizens, government and rulers must have knowledge of how to do so. However, Du Bois does not think

---

[114] Du Bois, 83.
[115] Cf., Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2010).
[116] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 81.
[117] Du Bois, 81.

that this means that this means that we can exclude individuals who are deemed ignorant: rather, it means that the state ought to provide education to all citizens and make it such that no citizen is ignorant. In his words, "education is not a prerequisite to political control — political control is the cause of popular education."[118] The practice of ruling, because of its necessities, makes good rulers. In short, the objection fails because it wrongly assumes that rulership is justified solely or primarily by the actual capacities of citizens. Rather, because rulership requires expansive knowledge and some knowledge is only available to citizens based on experience, we ought to re-shape our society and educational institutions such that all citizens are equally able to rule.

Second, and more interestingly for our purposes, the epistemic requirements are actually quite minimal. Du Bois is actually quite clear about this: it is not necessary for the person who is suffering to know how to end the suffering or correctly identify the solution to her problems. Rather, the sufferer "knows when something hurts and he alone knows how that hurt feels."[119] He continues, saying, "Or if sunk below feeling or comprehension or complaint, he does not even know that he is hurt, God help his country, for it not only lacks knowledge, but has destroyed the sources of knowledge."[120] Du Bois here is making a clear point: democratic rule improves upon previous methods of governing if only because it has a more broad-based set of the sources of knowledge. This is not to say that Black U.S. Americans alone have all of the answers to all of the injustices facing them. It is, rather, a more minimal claim: Du Bois is telling us that because of the social position of Black U.S. Americans, only they know what the problem is. Only they know what oppression feels like.

---

[118] Du Bois, 81.
[119] Du Bois, 83.
[120] Du Bois, 83.

He applies this answer to the case of women, too. Women have historically been subject to continuous exclusion from political life because historically, it was deemed that women were incapable of governing and that the men in their lives would be a good proxy for their interests. But, as he points out, even if that were true it remains the case that only women know what it is like to a woman in a patriarchal society. Again, he makes an epistemic claim: "only the sufferer knows his sufferings and that no state can be strong which excludes from its expressed wisdom the knowledge possessed by mothers, wives, and daughters."[121] Women, for Du Bois, are another excluded group whose knowledge is necessary for proper democratic rule, such that their exclusion from governing means that government cannot fulfill its goal of bringing about justice for all citizens.

So, Du Bois gives us an epistemic conception of democracy. Democracy is justified because it can better tap into sources of knowledge that would otherwise be excluded. Du Bois also gives us a more robust picture of what an epistemic democracy can look like than just the system of government that comes to the right decisions most frequently.[122] Specifically, he says the following: "The real argument for democracy is…that in the people we have the source of that endless life and unbounded wisdom which the rulers of men must have."[123] Part of the value of democracy is in its capacity to continuously and endlessly enlarge our capacity for thought and our knowledge. Du Bois is developing an account of democratic reason that forces us to recognize the partiality of any one particular agent or sector of society and show that the truth of

---

[121] Du Bois, 83.

[122] For arguments to this effect, see, for instance, Aristotle, *The Politics and the Constitution of Athens*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 76; Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 3 (1999): 7–8; Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[123] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 84.

any given agent's claims can only be elucidated in relation to the whole.[124] The basic idea is that

through criticism, the part that understood itself to be a whole is revealed to be merely partial and

then can be reframed as a part of a larger whole. He developed a "new and highly dynamic

conception of 'the whole' in which parts retain their singularity and yet derive their meaning

from their relations with each other."[125]

Du Bois developed this idea early on in his career. In his criticism of Booker T.

Washington's unwillingness to be exposed to critique, Du Bois says, "the hushing of the

criticism of honest opponents is a dangerous thing…. Honest and earnest criticism from those

whose interests are most nearly touched,—criticism of writers by readers, of government by

those governed, of leaders by those led,—this is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of

modern society."[126] This passage is key to understanding some of Du Bois's later thought. Nick

Bromell argues that the key concept here is that of being touched. Specifically, Bromell argues

that throughout his career, Du Bois constantly referred back to the language of being touched as

key to his democratic theory. In his words, "*Touch*…registers Du Bois's commitment to a mode

of thought that does not stop at *theoria* (at looking upon from a disembodied distance) but

actually touches its object and includes it a more complete whole."[127] The key point, for Bromell,

is that criticism is "honest and earnest" when it deals with the object of criticism head on.

This idea connects clearly to my description of the epistemic account of democracy

above. Recall that Du Bois does not believe that those who are deemed insufficient for political

rule need to have clear and precise prescriptions for their ills. The reason for this is that only

---

[124] Nick Bromell, "'Honest and Earnest Criticism' as the 'Soul of Democracy': Du Bois's Style of Democratic Reason," in *A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Nick Bromell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 163.
[125] Bromell, 163. Also, note the conceptual connection to social endosmosis.
[126] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 37.
[127] Bromell, "'Honest and Earnest Criticism' as the 'Soul of Democracy,'" 164.

those who are oppressed can have a real sense of what it is like to be oppressed; similarly, Bromell's Du Bois argues that only those whose interests are touched by oppression can provide meaningful criticism. At its core, Du Bois's theory is that of experiential knowledge: "Democracy alone is the method of showing the experience of the race for the benefit of the future."[128] Because only the oppressed knows her own oppression, that person develops a kind of epistemic privilege. The interests of the oppressed are affected — they are touched, in Du Bois's language — in a way that cannot be accounted for by anyone else. Each person's suffering gives them an epistemic privilege that others cannot access, due to their inability to themselves experience that suffering.

Du Bois gives us an example to clarify this thought:

> [White southerners] assume that white people not only know better what Negroes need than Negroes themselves, but that they are anxious to supply these needs. As a result they grope in ignorance and helplessness. They cannot 'understand' the Negro; they cannot protect him from cheating and lynching; and, in general, instead of loving guardianship we see anarchy and exploitation.[129]

In this passage, Du Bois is clear about the necessity of including the voice of Black U.S. Americans. The problem with assuming that white people know best and that they are correctly motivated to protect the interests of Black people is that white people do not have the same experiences and cannot simply place themselves in the position of Black people. Their interests are not touched by oppression in the same way and so Black people ought to have participatory rights.

### 5.2 Democracy and infinity

Ultimately, this account brings us to draw two upshots from Du Bois's account. The first has two components itself. As Bromell argues, Du Bois's account of the "whole" cannot be

---

[128] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 84.
[129] Du Bois, 85.

represented or delimited; indeed, from the very beginning of my discussion, we already see the concept of infinity built-in to the theory of democracy.[130] Because critique is so central to Du Bois's democratic thought (indeed, he calls it the soul of democracy), the whole is always open to further expansion. There is an infinity to the concept of the truth in Du Bois's thought: criticism "is a mode of thought that continually tries to make room for the differences it encounters by habitually seeking an enlargement of the whole."[131] Consequently, and thus the second part of the first upshot, Du Bois's account of democracy is intimately tied up with imagination. Bromell is clear on this point: "if the democratic *whole* is always open to further revisions and wider inclusion, it is by definition infinite."[132] Thus, democratic rule cannot be guided by reason alone: it must be also guided by imagination.

Laurie Balfour makes similar arguments through a literary analysis of *Darkwater*. Balfour's argument comes through a close reading of various essays in the book. Central to her account is the essay "The Souls of White Folk," in which Du Bois revisits some of the key claims he made in his early work *The Souls of Black Folk*. Key to Balfour's argument is this claim about the expansion of the imagination through sustained attention to the conditions of Black citizens.[133] Du Bois, in this essay, compares the plight of Black people to the plight of Belgium in World War I.[134] In doing so, he is then able to pivot quickly to point out the atrocities committed by the Belgian monarchy in Congo.[135] As Balfour points out, this inversion is possible because of Du Bois's social position as a Black man: "To be black, Du Bois warns, is to see through the pretensions of white greatness — in industry, culture, politics, religion. It is to

---

[130] Bromell, "'Honest and Earnest Criticism' as the 'Soul of Democracy,'" 165.
[131] Bromell, 166.
[132] Bromell, 166.
[133] Lawrie Balfour, "Darkwater's Democratic Vision," *Political Theory* 38, no. 4 (2010): 543.
[134] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 22.
[135] Du Bois, 22.

counter American exceptionalism with a perspective that sees racial hierarchy in the United States as part of a global scheme."[136] As in other parts of his work, Du Bois is able to demonstrate the possibilities of the expansion of political knowledge through critiques of whiteness he makes as a Black person. The critique expands our understanding of the world and allows us access to knowledge we would not have, were we to obstinately ignore the critiques.

For this reason, I argued above that Du Bois gives us a broader epistemic account of democracy. It is not just that under democratic rule, we can come to more rational decisions or that we are better able to reason about collective ends. Democratic rule, when properly understood as connected to critique in this way, expands the limits of the possible: it opens politics up to whatever we can imagine. In short, "the imagination is as essential as reason to democratic deliberation or communication."[137]

This first upshot has close connections to the political thought of Iris Marion Young.[138] Young develops a conception of asymmetrical reciprocity, where agents reciprocally recognize each other as agents who are differently positioned relative to each other. In practice, this means that when engaging in communication with you, for example, I am required to

> have the moral humility to acknowledge that even though there may be much I do understand about the other person's perspective through her communication to me and through the constructions we have made common between us, there is also always a remainder, much that I do not understand about the other person's experience and perspective.[139]

Her account is based on the concern that in arguing in favor of impartiality, we fall into a trap of trying to place ourselves in others' shoes. This both practically undesirable, for it can lead to bad

---

[136] Balfour, "Darkwater's Democratic Vision," 547.
[137] Bromell, "'Honest and Earnest Criticism' as the 'Soul of Democracy,'" 168.
[138] A point that Bromell recognizes. See Bromell, 175–77.
[139] Iris Marion Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought," in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 219.

policy outcomes, and ontologically impossible, because how we view policy is itself shaped by our own social positionality.[140] Young's conclusion, then, is that in accepting the necessity of the inclusion of the other in democratic regimes, we come to enlarge our own thinking: "By learning from others how the world and the collective relations they have forged through interaction look to them, moreover, everyone can develop an enlarged understanding of that world and those relations that is unavailable to any of them from their own perspective alone."[141] Like Du Bois, Young is pointing out the necessity and near-infinite benefits of the inclusion of the other: we are all able to gather more information and knowledge about the world around us if we actively include those who would otherwise be excluded.

One concern about this kind of argument is as follows: how plausible is it to claim that we cannot abstract away from the particularity of our own position? If it is in fact true that actually putting ourselves in another's shoes is impossible, it might mean that the quality of political deliberation would be worse than if it were possible. Thus, even if we did include all citizens in deliberation, it would not be much better than excluding some, since the deliberation that would lead to political consequences is not significantly better. As such, it would weaken the claim of those who are excluded, for their inclusion would not give us significant epistemic benefits.[142] Thus, grounding inclusion on epistemic grounds, as both Du Bois and Young appear to do, is not a strong enough justification for inclusion.

This concern seems to miss the point for two reasons. First, if we accept the assumption that "ought implies can," it seems strange to compare what deliberation would look like under possible conditions to what it might look like under impossible conditions. The objection, at least

---

[140] Young, 209 on the issue of bad policy outcomes and; Young, 214 on the ontological impossibility.
[141] Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity," 225.
[142] This objection was raised to me in a previous version of this argument by Professor Arash Abizadeh.

on its surface, does not take issue with the empirical claim about the ignorance that comes with being in a privileged position; rather it objects to what deliberation would look like if this empirical claim where true when compared to what it would look like were the claim false. Structured like this, this seems like a trivial critique. The empirical claim asks us to consider what is possible or impossible given what we know about us as humans: certainly, deliberation might be made better if we were something other than what we are, but seeing as we are not that, this version of the critique does not really show anything interesting or problematic about the account as given.

So the concern must really be about the strength of the claim for inclusion that we can make given the acceptance of the empirical claim. But if this is the concern, again it seems trivial. Nothing about the objection suggests that deliberation would be worse if those who are currently excluded would be included, so at worst, the objection says that there are no epistemic benefits to inclusion but there are also no epistemic harms to inclusion. As such, the objector might continue, we have the burden of proof for inclusion. For one, it seems implausible to say that there would be a net balance of zero epistemic benefit. Consequently, if there is some epistemic benefit to inclusion — even a small amount — then it seems plausible to say that that has to be a better state of affairs than what would be true in the absence of any epistemic benefit that comes from exclusion.

Second, this objection ignores the evidence Du Bois gave us for inclusion, evidence that is consistent with some contemporary writing in democratic theory.[143] The idea is that those who are "touched" by oppression ought to be included because only they actually know their

---

[143] Robert E. Goodin, "Enfranchising All Affected Interests, and Its Alternatives," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35, no. 1 (2007): 40–68; Arash Abizadeh, "Democratic Theory and Border Coercion: No Right to Unilaterally Control Your Own Borders," *Political Theory* 36, no. 1 (2008): 37–65.

suffering. Again, they might not be able to provide clear, concrete corrections to their oppression, but that knowledge of suffering is key for Du Bois. Another way of phrasing it is to say that exclusion requires the included to imagine what it must be like to be oppressed if justice for all citizens is to be fulfilled; setting aside whether or not it is possible for them to do so, it seems odd to say they ought to do so when those who have actually suffered the oppression can relate their experiences to those who either haven't or, in many cases, who are the cause of the oppression.[144]

Ultimately, though, this objection seems to be concerned with the fact that as I have developed it, Du Bois's defense of democracy seems to be an instrumental justification, as opposed to an intrinsic justification of democracy. That is, the objection might be concerned that because Du Bois's account centers epistemic benefits as necessary for democratic inclusion, democratic inclusion might only be justified when these benefits are in fact present. The objector would argue that this seems implausible: citizens ought to be included in democratic processes

---

[144] There is a second version of this objection that states that it seems that it would need to be the case that a significant amount of our social life surrounding entertainment would be impossible; specifically, it seems that the inability to abstract away from our particular position would make the endeavors of fiction and storytelling impossible, or at least morally suspect. This is perhaps less politically salient, mainly because the status of novels and fiction does not strike us as obviously political. That said, I want to provide a quick response to this objection. (Of course, one possible response is along the "ought implies can" lines, where if we cannot produce good fiction as a result of the empirical claim advanced here, we should not do so. I don't explore this line of response here, for fiction and storytelling seem to provide us with a lot of value.) Briefly, I think the objection is right that we should be suspect of any fiction that attempts to abstract away too far from the writer's social positionality. This is not to say that we should get rid of it all, nor that it is impossible for fiction about oppressed individuals to be written by non-oppressed authors. It is to say, however, that we should structurally shape industries that produce fiction and center narrative storytelling to better include voices and the perspectives of oppressed people. The publishing industry, for instance, has made moves towards the hiring of "sensitivity readers," an editor "who reads [a work of fiction] for offensive content, misrepresentation, stereotypes, bias, lack of understanding, etc." See Tanya Ball, "Subject Guides: Writing, Editing, and Publishing Indigenous Stories: Sensitivity Reading," accessed April 6, 2022, https://guides.library.ualberta.ca/c.php?g=708820&p=5049650. The basic idea is that even though we can have non-oppressed people write stories about oppressed people, the inclusion of the voices and perspectives of oppressed people can improve the story and help reduce the proliferation of negative images. Moves like these are, perhaps, the publishing-industry-equivalent to the democratic inclusion argument Du Bois makes.

even if their inclusion does not provide any epistemic benefits, thus providing us with an intrinsic justification of democracy.[145]

This form of the objection, while compelling, is not that concerning to us here. For one, instrumental theories of democracy often focus on the good results that democracies bring. As I noted above, Du Bois's account fits into this category. However, as I have also noted, the epistemic benefits of inclusion are broader than just coming up with the right answer, so to speak. Indeed, for Du Bois, democratic inclusion opens up what we as citizens consider to be possible in the first place. Moreover, our primary concern is not primarily with democracy. Du Bois's democratic theory is relevant to us because it is the institutional and political form of his opposition to political arrogance, which we have identified with subordination. Thus, while it might be useful to think of Du Bois as providing an instrumental justification of democracy (in keeping with contemporary democratic theory), this is only relevant insofar as it can help us understand why subordination ought to of such disvalue to egalitarians.[146]

### 5.3   Epistemic dangers of political arrogance

The second upshot of his account is that political arrogance is epistemically dangerous. Recall his critique of Washington. There, Du Bois said that "the hushing of criticism…is a dangerous thing."[147] Moreover, if we remember the definition I gave of political arrogance — the unwillingness to be exposed to criticism — we already see an implicit connection. It appears that, seeing how we've defined political arrogance, Du Bois is making a critique of political

---

[145] For a good overview of this debate that ultimately argues in favor of both instrumental and non-instrumental values of democracy, see Elizabeth Anderson, "Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-Instrumental Value," in *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Christiano and John Christman (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2009), 213–27.

[146] If the reader remains unconvinced by an instrumental account of the disvalue subordination, I refer them back to the section on Ambedkar, where I discuss a non-instrumental account of the disvalue of subordination.

[147] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 37.

arrogance, even if he does not explicitly say so. Politically arrogant agents and institutions are closed off to critique in ways that damage knowledge production and knowledge reception. In other words, an unwillingness to be exposed to criticism — political arrogance — is dangerous because it worsens the kind of government that we have to live under. Any kind of exclusion from political life, especially the exclusion of those touched by oppression, makes government unable to achieve its stated purpose of bringing about justice to all citizens.

Consider his discussion of majority rule. Du Bois asks, "Has the minority, even though a small and unpopular and unfashionable minority, no right to respectful consideration?"[148] Unsurprisingly, he answers in the negative. He warns us that treating the majority as infallible will lead a society to "a dead level of mediocrity."[149] The fundamental problem that Du Bois raises in this discussion is the same as the one we have raised again and again here: to treat African Americans and women as incapable of political participation — or to assume that white men can paternalistically decide on their behalf — is to act arrogantly. The problem with political arrogance, he instructs us, is that in excluding certain groups from participation in political life, a cannot bring about justice for all.

Du Bois, then, is tremendously helpful in understanding why political arrogance is wrong, on epistemic and democratic grounds. And yet, political arrogance is only explicitly critiqued on democratic grounds; it's not obvious how this relates to inequality as such. It might be helpful here to return to Anderson's three hierarchies: command, esteem, and standing. Each of these, I argued, were present in Jim Crow U.S. The political institutions and structures of the U.S. during Jim Crow were significantly marked by the exclusion of Black citizens due to the social hierarchies which were present at the time. So, we can describe the exclusion of Black

---

[148] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 87.
[149] Du Bois, 89.

citizens as both caused and causing the racial hierarchization of U.S. society. It is caused by the racial hierarchization because, as Du Bois points out to us, the exclusion of Black citizens from political life was justified with reference to this hierarchy.[150] The exclusion played a causal role in maintaining racial hierarchy in the U.S. because the kinds of exclusion to which they were subject "destroyed the sources of knowledge" that Black citizens had and drew on.[151]

Du Bois's critique of political arrogance is quite closely related to an argument about inequality. Because Black Americans were excluded from political life — they were prevented from offering critique and being heard — due to the U.S.'s racial hierarchization of society, we can conceptually link inequality and hierarchy to political arrogance. In the context of U.S. racial politics, then, we see a close link between inequality due to racial hierarchy and political arrogance. Racial hierarchy in the U.S. was closely linked to white Americans' unwillingness to be exposed to critique. This is why inequality, on Du Bois's account, can be best understood as subordination: the kind of knowledge that white citizens had access to was deemed more important, valuable, or, in fact, true than the kind of knowledge Black citizens had. The knowledge of Black citizens was treated as literally subordinate: it was considered of lower rank. Thus, the epistemic subordination relevant here is itself a form of political arrogance. It follows that inequality understood as subordination, because of its close conceptual link to political arrogance, is itself dangerous to democracy and to the fulfillment of the goal of any political system, which is to deliver the broadest justice for all citizens.

*5.4    Comparison with Ambedkar*

It is here that Du Bois is perhaps most different from Ambedkar. Certainly, as I have argued in this section and the previous, both thinkers are interested in political arrogance as a

---

[150] Du Bois, 81–83.
[151] Du Bois, 83.

central concern for democratic egalitarians. For both, it seems that opposition to certain forms of inequality — racial inequality for Du Bois and caste inequality for Ambedkar — is grounded in the opposition to the kinds of relationships that that inequality foments and the attitudes that make this kind of inequality possible. Moreover, the opposition to both forms of inequality rests on the danger that political arrogance poses to societies. But what that danger is differs between the two theorists.

Ambedkar, recall, argued that the political arrogance of caste was dangerous to political society because it threatened to destroy the bonds that made political society possible. In a sense, Ambedkar's critique is a critique regarding the basic foundation upon which political society was built upon. Without social endosmosis, he contended, political society could not properly function: the fraternity necessary for a well-functioning political system would be absent. Du Bois, on the other hand, does not make such a foundational critique. Rather, he argues that the problem with political arrogance is epistemic: the kinds of knowledge that we need in order to secure justice for all citizens would be missing. Moreover, our political imagination would be severely limited.

Interestingly, however, we could import into Du Bois the concept of social endosmosis. The way that critique works for Du Bois parallels the description of social endosmosis: in both cases, the particular is maintained even as it makes contact with the universal. For Du Bois, it is through this constant process of critique and openness to critique that we can constantly revise the universal. Additionally, like Ambedkar's concept of social endosmosis, Du Bois's concept of critique is not homogenizing. Both of these theorists recognize the importance of maintaining

difference within political society: difference allows for the social processes to continue to work as they ought to.[152]

The point of bringing this out is the following. Political arrogance is the kind of disvalue that could potentially be ecumenically opposed. By this, I mean that the wrong of political arrogance can be accounted for in different ways: it could be accounted for in ways that might even be inconsistent with each other. And yet, because it finds opposition for different reasons and in different accounts, it is a disvalue that egalitarian and democratic political agents can organize around in opposing. Both Ambedkar and Du Bois give us different reasons for opposing political arrogance. This might be because they were critiquing different instantiations of political arrogance or because they were operating in different contexts. Regardless of why the critiques are different, on my interpretation, they agree on the wrongness of political arrogance.

Of course, both Du Bois and Ambedkar were active in egalitarian and democratic struggles. More than that, however, their theoretical work is deeply egalitarian and democratic. Political arrogance, then, might not be of disvalue to someone who is either inegalitarian or undemocratic in their own political theorizing. But, seeing as movements for social justice are at least superficially egalitarian and democratic, it could be fruitful to organize around opposition to political arrogance, sidestepping disagreements of why said problem is a problem to begin with.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to develop a new conception of egalitarianism, namely, democratic equality as non-subordination. It has made two primary claims. First, by focusing on developing a negative conception of egalitarianism, it has argued that egalitarians ought to be primarily

---

[152] Cornel West points to Du Bois's Pragmatist roots, making this comparison interesting, seeing as we have already closely looked at Ambedkar's Pragmatist roots. Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 138–50.

concerned with opposing subordination, which is a particular kind of hierarchy significantly marked by political arrogance, where political arrogance is understood as the institutional or structural unwillingness to take input or critique from agents who are not ranked highly on that hierarchy. Second, it developed the account of the disvalue of political arrogance, and thereby subordination, in two distinct directions and following two different theorists. First, it developed B.R. Ambedkar's account of caste and democracy, arguing that caste is a form of hierarchy that due to its political arrogance, destroys the bonds of society that it needs to function. For Ambedkar, then, political arrogance is destructive of the kind of communication and exchange necessary in societies. Second, it developed W.E.B. Du Bois's account of race and democracy, arguing that racist exclusion of Black citizens from democratic life was epistemically dangerous, because it prevents societies from accessing all possible sources of knowledge and thereby limits our capacity to imagine the possibilities of politics. In developing both of these theorists' accounts, this thesis aims to provide a pluralist account subordination, such that egalitarians of different stripes can come together to oppose it.

In keeping with the negative orientation of this thesis, I want to provide merely promissory remarks on how I think this version of democratic non-subordination might look like at the institutional level. Of course, this is done with the acknowledgement of my own partiality, both from my social positionality as a member of the academy but also as only one member of the citizenry which can and ought to be involved in the shaping of our politics. Nonetheless, the argument I have given so far does, it appears to me, provide some direction for how we might think about our politics and political institutions. As such, I want to provide a sketch of what that might look like, always aware, though, that this sketch is but a contribution to a larger deliberative process.

To begin, I want to emphasize both Ambedkar's and Du Bois's commitments to a democratic society. As I made clear in section 4 above, Ambedkar viewed democratic institutions as only a part of what he meant by democracy. Indeed, he believed that in order for a democracy to truly exist, the society needed to be imbued with a democratic ethos, represented by an orientation against political arrogance. Du Bois, though I did not go into detail about this in section 5, seems to have believed the same. In *Darkwater*, for instance, Du Bois seems to argue in favor of a democratized industrial society, asking us, "Must industry rule men or may men rule even industry? And unless men rule industry, can they ever hope really to make laws or educate children or create beauty?"[153] In both cases, the opposition to political arrogance pushes us towards a more open and democratic society, but not just at the level of the state. Indeed, both thinkers implore us to oppose political arrogance at all levels of society.

More than that, however, both Ambedkar and Du Bois ask us to expand our political imagination beyond the national. Recall the discussion of the arrogance of the state system. Part of the argument Cabrera is making there is in favor of global or supranational institutions that can accommodate legal and political challenges to state authority. Specifically, we ought to establish transnational democratic institutions, specifically in the form of global democratic citizenship.[154] Cabrera argues that these institutions ought to be akin to Western-style electoral, constitutional democracies.[155] I am not convinced on this point, both as an institutional design question on its own, but also as an extension of the opposition to political arrogance. Combatting political arrogance, it appears to me, would require significantly more participatory and deliberative politics, politics that cannot be limited merely to electoral and juridical processes.

---

[153] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 91.
[154] Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan*, 140–42.
[155] Cabrera, 68.

Similarly, Du Bois can be read as a proponent of a "transnational cosmopolitanism," as Ines Valdez has.[156] Central to her reading of Du Bois are three main characteristics which make up the transnational cosmopolitanism.[157] First, injustice within a polity cannot be tied to purely domestic processes and is always linked to a larger, more global set of processes: this means that oppressed citizens' grievances cannot be clearly or neatly delimited to one state. Second, communication and interaction across borders can facilitate the development of institutional mechanisms that will create such a transnational cosmopolitanism. Finally, these international and global practices and institutions will change individual consciousnesses, thereby solidifying the progress brought about in global politics. At its heart, though, the account of transnational cosmopolitanism that Valdez attributes to Du Bois is closely connected to the account I gave above, where I centered critique and the infinity of imagination that can come about from it.

These merely promissory remarks are meant to stimulate discourse about how an egalitarianism that is oriented towards opposing subordination and the hierarchies that make it up can lead us radically re-imagine both our world as it is now and what we might imagine in our world as it could be.

---

[156] Inés Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 87–116.
[157] Valdez, 113.

# Bibliography

Abizadeh, Arash. "Democratic Theory and Border Coercion: No Right to Unilaterally Control Your Own Borders." *Political Theory* 36, no. 1 (2008): 37–65.

Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

Ambedkar, B. R. *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. Edited by S. Anand. Verso Books, 2016.

———. "Evidence Before the Southborough Committee." In *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches.*, edited by Vasant Moon, 1:243–78. Bombay: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.

———. "Letter from B. R. Ambedkar to W. E. B. Du Bois," July 1946. MS 312. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

———. "Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah." In *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches.*, edited by Vasant Moon, 1:205–40. Bombay: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.

———. "The Hindu and His Belief in Caste." In *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, edited by Vasant Moon, 5:100–102. Bombay: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.

Anderson, Elizabeth. "Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-Instrumental Value." In *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*, edited by Thomas Christiano and John Christman, 213–27. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2009.

———. "Equality." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, edited by David Estlund, 40–55, 2012.

———. "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999): 287–337.

Aristotle. *The Politics and the Constitution of Athens*. Edited by Stephen Everson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Arneson, Richard. "What, If Anything, Renders All Humans Morally Equal?" In *Singer and His Critics*, edited by Dale Jamieson, 103–28. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

Arneson, Richard J. "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare." In *Equality: Selected Readings*, edited by Louis P. Pojman and Robert Westmoreland, 229–42. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Balfour, Lawrie. "Darkwater's Democratic Vision." *Political Theory* 38, no. 4 (2010): 537–63.

Ball, Tanya. "Subject Guides: Writing, Editing, and Publishing Indigenous Stories: Sensitivity Reading." Accessed April 6, 2022. https://guides.library.ualberta.ca/c.php?g=708820&p=5049650.

Bromell, Nick. "'Honest and Earnest Criticism' as the 'Soul of Democracy': Du Bois's Style of Democratic Reason." In *A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois*, edited by Nick Bromell, 159–80. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018.

Cabrera, Luis. *The Humble Cosmopolitan: Rights, Diversity, and Trans-State Democracy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Carter, Ian. "Respect and the Basis of Equality." *Ethics* 121, no. 3 (2011): 538–71.

Catala, Amandine. "Democracy, Trust, and Epistemic Justice." *The Monist* 98, no. 4 (2015): 424–40.

Christiano, Thomas. *The Constitution of Equality: Democratic Authority and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Cohen, G. A. "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice." In *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, edited by Michael Otsuka, 3–43. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Davis, Angela Y. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003.

Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Free Press, 1997.

———. *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*. Edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Larry Hickman. Past Masters InteLex. Charlottesville: InteLex Corp., 1996. http://library.nlx.com/.

Dhanda, Meena. "IV—Philosophical Foundations of Anti-Casteism." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 120, no. 1 (2020): 71–96.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. Edited by Manning Marable. Verso Books, 2016.

———. "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to B. R. Ambedkar," July 31, 1946. MS 312. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

———. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin Books, 2018.

Dworkin, Ronald. "What Is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (1981): 283–345.

"Endosmosis, n." In *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed March 28, 2022. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61996.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004.

Freeman, Jo. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3/4 (2013): 231–46.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Edited by Myra Bergman Ramos, Donaldo Macedo, and Ira Shor. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Goodin, Robert E. "Enfranchising All Affected Interests, and Its Alternatives." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35, no. 1 (2007): 40–68.

Kolodny, Niko. "Being under the Power of Others." In *Republicanism and the Future of Democracy*, edited by Geneviève Rousselière and Yiftah Elazar, 94–114. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

———. "Help Wanted: Subordinates." In *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk About It)*, by Elizabeth Anderson, 99–107. Princeton University Press, 2017.

Kraut, Richard. *Aristotle on the Human Good*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Landemore, Hélène. *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Levy, Jacob T. "Against Fraternity: Democracy without Solidarity." In *The Strains of Commitment*, 107–22. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Marin, Mara. "What Domination Can and Cannot Do: Gender Oppression and the Limits of the Notion of Domination." Unpublished manuscript under review, n.d.

https://maramarin.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/6/6/12662746/domination-genderoppression_maramarin.pdf.

Mills, Charles. "White Ignorance." In *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, edited by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, 13–38. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Mukherjee, Arun P. "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy." *New Literary History* 40, no. 2 (2009): 345–70.

Müller, Jan-Werner. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

Parijs, Philippe van. "Why Surfers Should Be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20, no. 2 (1991): 101–31.

Pettit, Philip. *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy*. The Seeley Lectures. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

———. *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Phillips, Anne. *Unconditional Equals*. Princeton University Press, 2021.

Ramesh, Hari. "B. R. Ambedkar on Caste, Democracy, and State Action." *Political Theory*, 2022, 1–31.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Rev. ed. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Scheffler, Samuel. "What Is Egalitarianism?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2003): 5–39.

Schumpeter, Joseph A. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Sen, Amartya. "Democracy as a Universal Value." *Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 3 (1999): 3–17.

Shklar, Judith N. *Ordinary Vices*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984.

Slote, Michael. *Morals from Motives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Stilz, Anna. *Territorial Sovereignty: A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Tan, Kok-Chor. "A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 11 (2008): 665–90.

Taylor, Paul. "W.E.B. Du Bois: Afro-Modernism, Expressivism, and the Curse of Centrality." In *African American Political Thought: A Collected History*, edited by Melvin Rogers and Jack Turner, 235–59. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Valdez, Inés. *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Wartenberg, Thomas. *The Forms of Power: From Domination to Transformation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

West, Cornel. *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

Wolff, Jonathan. "Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 2 (1998): 97–122.

———. "Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos Revisited." *The Journal of Ethics* 14, no. 3 (2010): 335–50.

———. "I—The Presidential Address: Equality and Hierarchy." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 119, no. 1 (2019): 1–23.

Young, Iris Marion. "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought." In *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, edited by Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

———. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

———. *Justice and the Politics of Difference: With a New Foreword by Danielle Allen*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Zagzebski, Linda T. *Divine Motivation Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.