

ON AN APPARENT ASYMMETRY IN ATTITUDE DESERT

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ABSTRACT: It is possible for persons to deserve evaluative attitudes such as admiration and disdain. There is an apparent asymmetry between positive and negative attitudes, however. While the latter appear to be subject to what I will call a "control requirement," the former do not appear to be so subject. I attempt to explain away this asymmetry by appeal to pragmatic factors.

1. This paper is about deserving to be the object of evaluative attitudes. Such attitudes can be either positive or negative. As an example of a positive attitude, I will use *admiration*; as an example of a negative one, *disdain*. These two attitudes might not be simple mirror images of one another, but they will serve as paradigmatic examples. The question that will concern me is whether attitude desert is subject to what I will call the "control requirement." On the face of it, there is an asymmetry here, in that negative attitudes seem to be subject to such a requirement, while positive ones are not. At any rate, disdain apparently is and admiration apparently is not.

What is the control requirement? W. Sadurski states it as follows (1985, p. 122): "desert should not be based on things and facts which are beyond a person's control and for which he can claim no credit." (It is not clear whether Sadurski meant for his formulation to apply to attitude desert, but we can ignore that question here.) In line with Sadurski's formulation we can frame the requirement as a necessary condition on being deserving: a person can deserve a certain attitude (positive or negative) only if the basis of that desert is something over which the person had control. That is how I will understand the requirement in this paper.

Let us now illustrate the supposed asymmetry I mentioned. I turn to the case of disdain below. As far as admiration is concerned, though, one might think the control requirement does apply to it after all, as there is a question about what counts as being within a person's control. Clearly the requirement rules out that a person could deserve admiration merely because of his intelligence, for instance, but it is also controversial that that is a proper ground for admiration. But what about remarkable achievements — like Einstein's, say — that would not have been possible but for a certain amount or kind of intelligence? Unlike mere innate talent, these achievements are the result of something the person *did*. And I take it is fairly uncontroversial that they make people deserve admiration.¹ To circumvent this difficulty, and to indicate why it is not really a very serious one, we could strengthen the control requirement in a natural way, to make it apply also to *comparative* judgments of desert. Einstein, it seems,

¹ To be sure, not entirely uncontroversial. For dissent, see Roemer (1993, p. 163n18).

deserves *more* admiration than some hack scientist who accomplished less. The explanation for this difference in achievement, we might assume, is simply inborn talent; in particular the two scientists made the same degree of effort. Accordingly we could strengthen the requirement so that it implies the following: One person could not deserve more of something than another if the only difference in the bases of their respective deserts is something over which neither has control. I at least am inclined to doubt that admiration desert satisfies the control requirement if the latter be understood in this stronger way. But I also suspect that many will hold that disdain desert does satisfy even that stronger requirement.

It is worth pointing out here that it is possible to state the asymmetry, or at least one very much like it, in terms of praise and blame. In a well-known discussion, J. J. C. Smart (1961) did just that. On Smart's view, praising is just a form of positive grading: to praise someone or something is just to say that that person or thing does well on some pertinent scale of assessment.² Blame, by contrast, is not simply a form of evaluation. It is applicable only to persons, and as the concept of blame is typically used, to blame someone is to imply that the person is responsible for whatever it is in a rather strong way, supposedly incompatible with determinism. This last claim is of course highly controversial, but Smart's treatment of praise and

² I simplify Smart's view here, for he also says that there are two senses of 'praise', of which I have described only the weaker. In the stronger sense, praise is "the opposite of blame" (p. 69). He does not explain what that amounts to, but it is likely that praise in that purported stronger sense is appropriate only for things that are under the control of the target of the praise.

blame at least points to the plausibility of there being some sort of asymmetry between positive and negative attitudes along the lines I have described.

In what follows I will argue that the supposed asymmetry I mentioned is spurious. We need to divide attitudes into two categories, roughly corresponding to the two I in effect identified above, and treat these separately. The first category includes attitudes towards actions, or at least actions that involve significant effort or skill. The second category includes mere abilities, as well as actions that do not involve any particular effort or skill. In cases of the first category there is an apparent asymmetry, but I will attempt to explain it away by appeal to pragmatic factors. In cases of the second type, however, there is not even an apparent asymmetry, as I have already suggested. To the extent the control requirement applies to these cases it applies to admiration and disdain as well. I will deal with the two categories in order. An essential element of the way I have chosen of handling the apparent asymmetry is the fact that attitudes like admiration and disdain are appropriately aimed at what I call "judgment-sensitive attitudes." I will return to this point in section 3.

I will be making the following background assumption, already suggested: an attitude is undeserved just in case the evaluation constitutive of it is false.³ It is perhaps not apparent that an attitude is always constituted

³ It is true that many philosophers are unwilling to say that evaluations can be true or false in any straightforward sense. I do not want to get into this matter here. Alternatively it is possible, and not uncommon, to talk about attitudes or emotions as "fitting" rather than true, though the difference is none too clear. See D'Arms &

by an evaluation that can be true or false; but if it is not, neither is it apparent that it makes sense to speak of that attitude itself as deserved or undeserved. The assumption is actually tautologous. The evaluation constitutive of disdain, for instance, is simply that the target of the attitude deserves or is worthy of disdain — which I take to be tantamount to the target's being in a certain way (comparatively) low in value.⁴ Further, the constitutive evaluation could be false in one (or both) of two ways. On the one hand it could be false because the ground of the attitude does not in fact apply to the target. Suppose I disdain someone for his stupidity. Then the evaluation constitutive of my attitude is false if he is not in fact stupid. On the other hand the constitutive evaluation could be false because the ground

Jacobson (2000) and Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) for relevant discussion. It is particularly important, as these papers make clear, to distinguish the conditions under which an attitude is fitting from those under which it is morally (or otherwise) appropriate to hold it, let alone express it. In particular, moral propriety is not relevant to whether the target of the attitude deserves that attitude. Another point: I use the term 'evaluation' here, rather than 'value judgment', because an attitude does not (or not necessarily) involve or include a judgment, in the proper sense of that term. I refer the reader to D'Arms & Jacobson (ibid.) — among numerous other sources — for further discussion. Again we may ignore the details.

⁴ This formulation is deliberately vague. It appears that the value in question could be of different types. For example, I may disdain or feel contempt for someone's words on account of their stupidity, or their lack of rhetorical panache, or their disingenuousness or for many other reasons. It is unclear at best that the value judgment involved in these various attitudes is at bottom always the same.

does not justify the evaluation. Presumably, if my attitude towards the stupid person involves the evaluation that he is a person of lesser worth, it is false, and so he does not deserve my disdain. If we combine our tautologous assumption with the control requirement, we find that the evaluation involved in an attitude like disdain could be true of a person only if the basis of that evaluation is something within the person's control. If the evaluation is false due to its falling foul of the control requirement, its falsehood must be of the second sort just defined. In other words, the control requirement must be a necessary condition on the ground's justifying the evaluation. Take the case of disdain for stupidity again. The fact that a person cannot help being stupid does not make him any less stupid. So if the evaluation involved in disdain for stupidity is supposed to be false simply on account of its failing the control requirement, this falsehood cannot be due simply to the fact that its ground fails to apply to its object. Hence, if we accept the control requirement on disdain, we do so because we think that the fact that a person cannot help being stupid, say, means that his stupidity does not justify holding him to be of less value than others.

Let me add a few words about my use of disdain as an example of a negative attitude. The choice is not an entirely felicitous one, yet it is hard to find a better alternative. The natural suggestion is *contempt*, which is certainly closely related. However, talk of contempt has a tendency to call to mind a controversial type of attitude, involving an uncompromising negative moral evaluation of a person as a person, or of his character, and I

am looking for something broader.⁵ Admittedly talk of disdain may carry similar unwanted connotations, and to the extent it does my use of the term is unfortunate. I definitely want a notion that we can unproblematically apply to actions as well as persons, and perhaps more widely still. At any rate I will assume that disdain is so applicable. What I really want, I suppose, just is the mirror image of admiration, but I am not sure what that would be. Disdain seems to work as well as anything does.

2. We turn now to a discussion of attitudes of the first category, aimed at particular actions, as opposed to abilities or capacities. If the asymmetry holds, the control requirement applies to disdain but not to admiration. Hence disdain will mostly be at the focus of the inquiry, though I will occasionally have reason to say something about admiration as well. In the process I will take heed of the fact that the evaluation involved in disdain, and indeed many other attitudes, is relative to some standard. Consider, then, part of a scene from the movie *Taxi Driver*. Wizard, an older cab

⁵ One of the few recent discussions of contempt (Mason 2003) stresses this "whole-person" and moral nature of contempt. As Mason admits (*ibid.* p. 247n 30), there are also "localized" forms of contempt with other types of object, such as contempt for someone's philosophical ability. In this category we may also include contempt for a person not qua person but in some other capacity, such as when I feel contempt for a colleague "as a philosopher" (but not necessarily "as a person"). The *locus classicus* of the "whole-person" and moral view of contempt is Kant's treatment in the *Doctrine of Virtue* (p. 463): "To be contemptuous of others...is...to deny them the respect owed to human beings in general."

driver, is expounding his philosophy of life, in a well-meaning, avuncular sort of way, to his troubled young colleague Travis. Unfortunately his remarks are totally irrelevant to Travis' real concerns, of which he is unaware. Part of the dialogue runs as follows:

"WIZARD: Look, a person does a certain thing and that's all there is to it. It becomes what he is. Why fight it? What do you know? How long you been a hack, a couple months? You're like a peg and you get dropped into a slot and you got to squirm and wiggle around a while until you fit in.

TRAVIS: That's just about the dumbest thing I ever heard, Wizard.

WIZARD: What do you expect, Bertrand Russell? I've been a cabbie all my life, what do I know?" (Script by P. Schrader. Available at *The Internet Movie Script Database*, www.imsdb.com)

What interests us about this exchange is the defensive posture Wizard assumes, quite naturally, after having been accused of saying something stupid, an accusation that we may understand as expressive of a disdainful attitude. Can we make sense of his response? First off, Wizard does not seem to be defending himself against the charge Travis actually made, that his remarks were (exceptionally) stupid. On the contrary, his response appears to concede that they were, or at least may have been ("What do I know?"). Wizard's defense, then, must be aimed at something he took Travis' words to imply, rather than those words themselves. His piqued reaction strongly suggests that he takes Travis to *blame* him for making his supposedly stupid remarks, to suggest that he was somehow *at fault*. In

particular, it seems that Travis is accusing Wizard of what we could call "intellectual blameworthiness" — and Wizard finds this blame inapposite.⁶ The reference to Russell gives us a further clue. Wizard seems in his turn to accuse Travis of *unfairness*, in demanding of Wizard, a simple cabbie, the same degree of insight that one might expect from a world-renowned philosopher like Bertrand Russell.⁷ By implication, Travis' comment might have been apt in the unlikely event that Russell had expressed himself in these terms.⁸

Wizard seems to be "going relative." He is saying that his remarks were not intellectually blameworthy, *considering that* they flowed from the lips of an uneducated cabbie. He is asking Travis to apply a certain standard of comparison in evaluating these remarks, a standard appropriate to the context. If Travis had instead been engaged in assessing *The Philosophy of*

⁶ As the context of the film makes clear, there is more to Wizard's reaction than this, but we can ignore that here.

⁷ Wizard's response is a bit of a rhetorical trick, of course. Travis demanded no such thing — and from the fact that it would have been unfair of him to demand Russellian wisdom of Wizard it does not follow that it would have been unfair to demand better than he in fact got.

⁸ The reference to Russell is also significant in that it suggests that what Wizard is reacting to is indeed the suggestion that he performed worse than he might. The point in bringing in Russell, then, would be to signal that even if he had done his very best, he would never have attained the heights of a Russell anyway. Alternatively he is implying that he did OK by the "cabbie standard," i.e., compared to what the average cabbie would have achieved in like circumstances. I will address the relationship between these two interpretations later.

Logical Atomism another, stricter standard would have been in place. Travis' comment is unfair, Wizard is saying, because it judges Wizard, and finds him wanting, by a standard more demanding than is fitting. These remarks lead to two questions. What makes a standard "fitting" or "appropriate"? And why is it unfair to judge a person by appeal to an "excessively demanding" standard? I believe we find plausible answers to these questions in the following line of thought. When we apply a certain standard of assessment to a person, we imply at least this much: that the person is able to do well enough by that standard to avoid deserving blame, and is able to do so by what we would consider a reasonable effort in the context.⁹ On this view there is associated with any standard of assessment of the performance of persons a threshold that any person's performance has to get over in order for him to avoid becoming the legitimate target of blame. This threshold will be located at different places, in absolute terms, for different standards. If a person is in fact not able, with a reasonable effort, to get above the threshold of the standard I am applying to him, then my applying that standard in order to denounce his performance as inadequate is unfair to him. Moreover, my doing so is unfair to him because I am then implying that he could have reached that threshold with a reasonable effort, but did not in fact make such an effort, which if false is (usually at least) an instance of what, following Feinberg, we may call

⁹ But is not just "a reasonable effort in the context" just whatever effort is needed in the context in order to avoid deserving blame? No doubt that is so, which only goes to show that there is no informative general way of specifying the degree of effort required.

"judgmental injustice."¹⁰ Moreover, what makes a standard "excessively demanding" is precisely that the person could not avoid blameworthiness by that standard with a reasonable effort.¹¹

How does the control requirement enter into all this? Remember what it says: a person can deserve a certain attitude (positive or negative) only if the basis of that desert is something over which the person had control. If we interpret Wizard as saying that he does not deserve Travis' disdainful reaction, then the requirement could serve as a possible explanation of that judgment. Wizard can only do his best, and if that does not suffice to meet

¹⁰ Feinberg writes: "A false judgment or belief about a person is unfair to that person if either it is truly derogatory of him or else severely misrepresents him in a way which is fundamental to his own conception of himself" (1974, p. 305).

¹¹ A clarifying remark: my talk here of what Wizard "could have done with a reasonable effort" is not intended to take any stand in the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists. Specifically, I am *not* saying that an expression of contempt, or any other negative attitude, implies that the target of the attitude "could have done better" in any sense incompatible with determinism. There is no conflict if that utterance implies only that the person *would* have done better *if* he had made a "reasonable effort." It seems relatively uncontroversial that at least that much is implied. Somewhat more controversial is the following implication: that the person *would* have made such an effort *if* he had decided to do so. Following Frankfurt (1969), many compatibilists deny that any such condition must be met for the agent to be responsible, and hence a fit object of criticism. Most controversial is this implication: that the person could have decided to make such an effort (given that he did not). In the text, I mean to say no more than that an expression of a negative attitude carries the first of these three implications.

the demanding standard Travis is (allegedly) imposing, he does not deserve the ensuing criticism.

We may have the sense that Wizard's reaction is justified, but I think we can account for that sense in a way that does not presuppose any control requirement on attitude desert. I have just said that in criticizing a person for not living up to a certain standard of evaluation, we *imply* that the person could have lived up to that standard (with a "reasonable effort"). Why is that? The implication, I take it, is pragmatic, and so is the explanation: the implication holds because there is no *point* in criticizing people if they cannot do better anyway (or cannot do as well as is necessary in the context). Pointless criticism violates the Gricean "maxim of relevance," and so there is an implication that the person receiving the criticism is able to profit from it somehow.¹² (Admittedly there *are* relatively frequent occasions when criticism has a point even if the person criticized cannot do better. I will return to the matter shortly.) This pragmatic point also explains why a "control requirement" applies to the expression of negative attitudes like disdain. Granting for argument's sake that the only thing a person can control is the degree of effort he makes, there is a point to criticism only to the extent that it charges a person with having made less of an effort than he was capable of (or less than a "reasonable effort"). My suggestion is that it is this pragmatic implication that accounts for the sense we might have that Travis' reaction is unjustified — given that we believe that Wizard at least made a reasonable effort (if not strictly the best he could have done).

¹² See Grice 1975.

Remember my saying that there are two ways in which the evaluation constitutive of an attitude such as disdain could be false, and so in which that attitude could be undeserved. It could be false because the ground of the attitude does not in fact apply to the target. Or it could be false because the ground does not justify the evaluation. What I am suggesting now is that the evaluation involved in Travis' disdainful attitude towards Wizard's remarks is false, if it is, in the first of these two ways. Or, rather, I am suggesting that Travis' *expressing* that attitude implies something which is false in that way — and that is what explains Wizard's reaction (and our endorsing it, if we do). But I also said that the control requirement must be understood so that if an attitude is undeserved on account of violating that requirement, then that must be so because the evaluation involved in that attitude is false in the second of these two ways. Hence our reaction in the Travis and Wizard case does not support the control requirement.

Now, I have just offered an account in terms of pragmatic factors of what is implied by a person's *saying* certain things — i.e., expressing certain attitudes. But there is also a question of what is constitutively involved in these attitudes themselves. If disdain itself, for instance — or at least disdain at someone's action — involves the thought that its target could have done better with a reasonable effort, assuredly that fact cannot be explained by appeal to pragmatic factors. Indeed, if the attitude itself involves the judgment, then the control requirement applies to it. But it does not seem plausible that a disdainful attitude towards an action *constitutively* involves the thought that the target could have done better. If so an attitude towards an action simply would not count as disdain unless it involved that thought. And that does not seem right. A more likely supposition is that we assume that a person who expresses a disdainful

attitude towards someone's action also in fact accepts, but not necessarily, that the target could have done better. But our assuming this might just be a consequence of our assuming that people believe what they say, and so also what is pragmatically implied by what they say.

At this point we might wonder about praise and admiration. What would expression of praise have to be like not to fall foul of the maxim of relevance? To be sure, if the person is already doing his best, praise will not improve his performance anymore than criticism would. However, praise might also have, and perhaps typically does have, other functions as well — and it does seem odd that praise should imply that the person could have done better. Surely praise is unproblematically in place even in situations in which we have reason to believe that the person did his best — indeed, it is particularly appropriate in just such situations. In any case, though, praise does not constitute judgmental injustice, for the speaker is not saying that the person did worse than he should.

Now, the above analysis in terms of pragmatic implication might fit the rather informal case of Wizard and Travis, but certainly not all situations in which we evaluate persons according to standards. For a familiar example, suppose that a certain student does not have what it takes to get a passing grade in my philosophy course no matter how hard he tries. It certainly does not follow that it was inappropriate of me to apply to him whatever standard of grading I in fact applied, that that standard was "excessively demanding." The appropriate response to such a student is not necessarily to lower the standards. Perhaps it is instead to tell him, if not in precisely those words, that he has no business taking a university-level philosophy class in the first place. Furthermore, in failing an individual student, I am *not* implying that he did not do his best, and so am not unfair to him even if

he did. Hence the student could not challenge the grade merely by saying that he could not have done better: my grading did not deny that. In the case of educational standards, then, appropriateness does not entail that *each person* judged according to that standard is able to meet it to an acceptable extent with a reasonable effort. Such standards could not in practice be adapted to fit each individual, and so at times may be useless to a particular individual, just as Wizard would benefit not at all from hearing he was not as clever as Russell. Yet grades can have a point anyway, and appropriateness may still require that a student of *average* ability be able to meet the standard in question (i.e., to get a passing grade) with such a degree of effort.¹³ The grading of students is not an arbitrary activity, but rather fulfills a certain social purpose, which would be frustrated if few or no students were able to get passing grades.¹⁴ By contrast, informal conversations between cab drivers are not governed by an overarching

¹³ Hence the grader might be taken to imply a disjunctive statement about the failed student: *either* he is a student of (significantly) less than average ability, *or* he has not made a reasonable effort. To be a judgmental injustice, both disjuncts of that disjunction would have to be false.

¹⁴ It is an interesting question whether a system of grading standards so strict that only a few truly exceptional students could even pass is *unfair*, and not just silly or counterproductive. My sense is that many of the students who, despite conscientious effort, would still fall short in such a system *would* complain of unfairness. And if they would not, that would be because they lived in a society in which the recognized purpose of offering instruction in philosophy (or whatever) was very different from its recognized purpose in our society — perhaps to cherry-pick a small Platonic elite of philosopher-kings.

social purpose, and that is what opens up the possibility of interpreting Travis as implying that Wizard has failed to live up to some standard he could have lived up to, had he only tried a little harder.

In practice it will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to know what Wizard could have done if he had tried harder. It will be correspondingly difficult to tell if Travis was unfair. Hence we might be tempted to resort to a model like that suggested by Roemer (1993) and Moriarty (2005).¹⁵ On this model we compare Wizard's performance with that of others of his "type." The idea is to pick out those factors affecting the relevant performance over which we deem that persons lack control, such as innate intelligence, parental attitudes to education etc. Then we sort people who score approximately the same with respect to each of these factors into a type and measure how members of each type perform in the relevant dimension (making insightful remarks about life, say). Differences in performance between members of the same type will then be the responsibility of these persons, for such differences will be due to factors (such as effort) that are within their control. Applying this model to our case, we can reinterpret Travis as implying something like this: Wizard has performed significantly

¹⁵ The "pragmatic theory of responsibility" Roemer develops in his (1993) is not concerned with desert but is easily enough adapted to that purpose. Moriarty provides the adaptation. Also, Roemer's theory is concerned only with comparative judgments of responsibility (and by implication of blameworthiness), and not with whether a given individual is or is not blameworthy *simpliciter*. Roemer (1993) is not as clear about this point as one might wish, but Moriarty (2005, pp. 219f) is quite explicit.

worse than the median member of his type (however understood) would have done in similar circumstances. Judging from his reaction, Wizard does not agree with that assessment, and considers himself the victim of a judgmental injustice.

There is another point here. Wizard seems implicitly to *demand* to be judged by the cabbie standard ("I've been a cabbie all my life"). That fact itself might be thought to tell in favor of the control requirement. Why? Suppose that requirement is valid, and hence (we grant) that the only proper cause of criticism is insufficient effort. And suppose further that the only way of telling how one did in terms of effort is by comparing one to the relevant type. Those facts together would explain why Wizard makes his demand, as well as our finding that demand reasonable, if we do, and these explananda in turn support the explanation as confirming instances. But maybe there are other explanations. In particular we might try explaining Wizard's demand by appeal to his interests. He has no interest in being told that he fails to live up to some exalted standard, as he cannot attain those heights anyway — and of course that is precisely why there is no point in criticizing him for such a failure. Hearing that he did poorly even by the cabbie standard, though, might tell him that there is room for him to improve. If he did do poorly by the cabbie standard, he could likely have done better with a greater effort — or could at least make himself able to do better in the future.¹⁶

¹⁶ One might wonder here what we would say if *Russell* demanded to be judged by the cabbie standard. It does not seem that he should be able to "get away with it."

There is a complication. Suppose Wizard had instead said "Hey, I never claimed to be Bertrand Russell." The naturalness of this response reminds us that the fairness of Travis' comment depends also on what *claims* Wizard has made for his own insight. Should Wizard publish a book entitled *My Philosophy of Life. Reflections of a Cab Driver*, full of wisdom of the type he lavished on Travis (self-published, one presumes), write pompous letters to the *New York Review of Books* asking why it has not yet been reviewed, and generally put on airs, then we might deny that Travis' put-down was inappropriate. But if Wizard has never claimed to be anything other than a simple cabbie, and generally comes across as an unpretentious guy, his offended reaction makes excellent sense. Now, once Wizard makes his presumptuous claims, when we are to assess Travis' comment it no longer matters whether Wizard could have done better than he did with reasonable effort, or how he stacks up against other cabbies when it comes to making insightful remarks about life.¹⁷ Why is that? In the light of our earlier proposal, the answer closest to hand is this: given that Wizard has made his

Apparently it is anyone's privilege to be judged by a standard more demanding than his circumstances warrant, but never to be judged by a less demanding one.

¹⁷ We should note that this factor is not relevant in the case of the inept philosophy student. It does not matter at all whether he had ever claimed to be able to handle the course. Even if he had been coerced into taking it, failing him would still have been right and proper if his performance were poor enough — and certainly not unfair. The reason is that his claims do not affect the content of the grade, including the implications of the act of grading itself. These are determined by social conventions that take no heed of such claims.

claims, and it is common knowledge between him and Travis that he has done so, it is no longer reasonable to interpret Travis as implying that Wizard has failed to live up to the cabbie standard, or that Wizard could have done better with a reasonable effort. Instead we should take Travis to have implied only that Wizard failed to live up to some more demanding standard, such that Wizard consented to being judged by that standard (or even demanded it). Hence there is no unfairness, for then the implication is true.¹⁸

Now, if Wizard does make his presumptuous claims one might think that Travis' comment was in place for a reason not having anything to do with what he might have been implying. That is, one might think that Wizard was "asking for it" in being so puffed up. The basis for this desert cannot simply be the stupidity of what he said, or his falling short of the cabbie standard, as these factors are present (or not) regardless of what claims he is making. It seems to me that the main basis for this desert, if indeed it exists, is Wizard's having made unjustified claims. For one thing he has implied that his book merits a review in the *New York Review of Books*. Also, by publishing a book he has in a way made demands on others, to take his thoughts with a degree of seriousness they do not in fact warrant. His deserving disdain on account of these things does not exclude his also deserving it for not trying hard enough. But he could be deserving

¹⁸ On the other hand, if Travis does *not* know that Wizard has been making these claims, then he very well might imply a false adverse judgment, and so is being unfair anyway. We might not feel too sorry for Wizard in that case, though, for reasons I go on to discuss in the text.

for these other things even if he did his darnedest (though the latter does seem a mitigating factor).

3. It is now time to consider cases of the second category — that is cases of attitudes towards abilities or actions that do not require effort or skill. Earlier I remarked that, given the control requirement, a person cannot deserve disdain for being stupid (as opposed to doing or saying something stupid). The first thing to note is that the explanation above does not work for cases of that type. When we express disdain or other negative attitudes — ones that involve criticism of some sort — towards aspects of a person for which he is obviously not responsible, there is no implication of the type described. Had Travis simply called Wizard stupid, his remark might still have been unfair (if Wizard in fact is not stupid), but not on account of falsely implying that Wizard could have been less stupid if he had only tried a little harder. There is no such implication for reasons of charity: no one believes that stupid people can help being stupid, and so it is not plausible to interpret anyone as implying that the person under discussion could help this. Yet it would seem to make perfect sense to respond to the expression of such an attitude of disdain by saying something like "But he can't help it," or "That's not his fault," suggesting that the control requirement *does* apply to attitudes like that one. Why is that?

I respond as follows. The proper objects of admiration and disdain and many other attitudes, positive and negative, are what, following Scanlon (1998), I will call "judgment-sensitive attitudes." These are attitudes in a

wide sense, including actions (or the intentions behind those actions).¹⁹ They are characterized precisely by the fact that we hold their possessors *responsible* for them, in the sense at least that they are appropriately held to account for having them: it is always in place to ask persons to defend their judgment-sensitive attitudes. In this way they differ from mere abilities like intelligence. Rare cases aside it makes little sense to ask someone: "Why are you so smart (or stupid)?" — unless one is simply asking for a causal explanation. If we respond with a "But he can't help it" to an expression of disdain for stupidity, our reaction is a way, albeit rather indirect, of reminding the attitude holder of the fact that such attitudes are appropriately held only towards persons on account of their judgment-sensitive attitudes. The point of the remark is to draw attention to the circumstance that intelligence is not a factor for which a person is responsible.²⁰

¹⁹ It is true of course that we commonly speak of admiration for works of art, and other products of human agency. I am not sure how much a problem this fact poses for the thesis in the text, though. It would be distinctly more troublesome if we could properly be said to admire purely natural phenomena, such as the sun. My sense is that we could not, but I will not press the matter here.

²⁰ Among judgment-sensitive attitudes we also find *beliefs*, and it is noteworthy that the kind of treatment I offered in section 2 for disdain towards actions is applicable also to disdain towards beliefs. For example, suppose I feel, and give expression to, my disdain for a person who rejects the theory of evolution. It would make sense for someone to respond by defending the target in something like this fashion: "You have to remember that he was brought up in a strictly religious household and has been spoon-fed that stuff ever since he was a little kid." (But my

Moreover, and crucially, there is no asymmetry between positive and negative attitudes here. It is no less true of admiration that it is appropriately held only towards judgment-sensitive attitudes. Hence there is no puzzle to explain. Now, it is common enough for people to say things like "I admire him for his intelligence," so on the face of it there is an asymmetry.²¹ Yet there is more going on here than meets the eye. It is in the nature of intelligence, and indeed most abilities, that it is impossible for us to know that a person possesses it unless he displays it. (On some views there is not even any fact of the matter about whether he possesses it unless he exercises it somehow.) Hence what makes us admire the person need not be the intelligence itself, as opposed to those intelligent actions through which that intelligence is displayed. Moreover, suppose we knew, *per impossibile* perhaps, that someone has the genius of an Einstein even though he has as yet done nothing to show it, would we still admire him, on account of his bare ability? That seems doubtful at best.

sense is that in a case like this it would be going too far to say: "But he can't help it."). The point of the defense is that I am implying something that is false and unfair. It might not be wholly clear what that implication is, but a plausible candidate is that the target has displayed a considerably lesser degree of epistemic responsibility than one might expect, or perhaps less than is standard in his type (the Roemer style alternative).

²¹ One may certainly also simply say "I admire his intelligence," as if the ability itself rather than the person were the object of the admiration. However, there seems little point in separating out two distinct objects here, and I suspect this locution is just a convenient way of expressing admiration for the person on account of his intelligence.

It is also useful to contrast intelligence with abilities (if that is the word) that *are* immediately apparent, such as being very tall. In a discussion of what he calls respect, S. L. Darwall suggests that a person could be "widely admired" for pulling off a feat that becomes possible simply because he is extremely tall, without requiring any particular effort or skill (1977, p. 42). But that seems wrong. I might be *impressed* by seeing someone reach the rim of a regulation basket without jumping, but I will hardly *admire* him for it. Of course, here we are talking about an action, rather than the mere possession of an ability, but the action itself we have stipulated to be trivial. What is impressive about the tall man's performance is not that he can raise his arm above his head, but rather that he can reach the basket rim by doing so, which in turn simply comes from his being so very tall.

We may also observe the following. Even if there is reason to believe that a disdainful speaker is implying that the target could have done better when the latter did something requiring effort or skill, there is *not* reason to believe that he is implying the same when the target did something that did not require either. In a case of the latter type, there is little scope for doing better or worse. In normal circumstances it would be odd to say that someone could have raised his hand over his head in a better way than he did. That action itself is too trivial for such evaluation to make sense. And that is generally true for actions that do not require any particular effort or skill. Hence there is a rationale for placing attitudes towards such actions in the same category as attitudes towards mere abilities, as I have done.

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