

The Self-Respect of Democratic People

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Abstract: according to Matthew Kramer’s aspirational perfectionism, the state is permitted to provide funding for the arts, sciences, and culture with the aim of securing the warranted self-respect of all citizens. This paper argues that although Kramer is right to think that the state has an important role to play in the economy of recognition, his conception of this role is mistaken. I argue, first, that Kramer’s exclusive focus on *warrant* for self-respect obscures the importance of social phenomena such as stigma, marginalization, and discrimination. Second, I argue that Kramer is mistaken in his reliance on vicarious pride to explain how the various excellences of our fellow citizens provide us with warrant for self-respect. I conclude with a brief sketch an alternative account, according to which the self-respect of citizens of democratic societies is supported by their collective creation and maintenance of just political institutions.

1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with Matthew Kramer’s defense of aspirational perfectionism, in the fourth and final part of his book *Liberalism with Excellence*.² According to this view, the state is permitted and sometimes required to pursue a variety of perfectionist policies. The legitimate aim of such policies, however, is not to develop and refine the artistic, cultural, or moral sensibilities of individual citizens, but to develop the kinds of

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² Matthew Kramer, *Liberalism with Excellence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). References to the book are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

excellences in society that provide all citizens³ with warrant for self-respect. Since warranted self-respect is a primary good, the state is under a duty of justice to promote the warranted self-respect of all citizens. Consequently, the aspirational perfectionist society might subsidize the arts, the sciences, and culture generally, all in the name of justice.

I share Kramer's interest in the proper role of a political society in what we may call the economy of recognition—the ways in which the members of a political society, justifiably or not, respect and esteem themselves and one another. I do not, however, share Kramer's conception of this role. First, I will argue that Kramer's focus on the cultivation of societal excellence as a means to provide *warrant* for self-respect obscures the state's role in protecting citizens against social processes, such as stigmatization, discrimination, and marginalization, which can undermine the justification of citizens' self-respect. Second, I will argue that Kramer does not provide an acceptable account of why the presence of various excellences in a political society provides all citizens of that society with warrant for self-respect. Finally, I will propose an alternative picture of the relationship between societal excellence and individual self-respect: citizens are provided with warrant for self-respect insofar as societal excellences are the result of the democratic exercise of political power by the citizens as a collective body. Unlike Kramer's aspirational perfectionist view, this alternative picture reaffirms the demands of public reason.

2. The Aspirational Perfectionist Argument

³ The relationship between citizenship and membership in a political society is fraught with difficulties. For the purposes of this paper, I will proceed under the pretense that "citizen" can be used to refer to all members of a political society.

In simplified form, Kramer's aspirational perfectionist argument for state funding of the arts, sciences, and culture is this:

- (1) Warranted self-respect is a natural primary good.
- (2) Self-respect includes both recognition self-respect and appraisal self-respect.
- (3) From (2) (and supporting considerations): the excellence of one's fellow citizens provides warrant for self-respect.
- (4) From (2) (and supporting considerations): the excellence of one's fellow citizens is necessary for the full warrantedness of one's self-respect.
- (5) State funding for the arts, sciences, and culture can promote excellence in individual members of a society.
- (6) From (1), (3), (4), and (5): a just society is permitted, and sometimes required, to exercise political power to fund the arts, sciences, and culture as a means to promote the warranted self-respect of all citizens.

In this section, I will say a few things about the central notion of self-respect, and about the significance of this argument for the distinctiveness of aspirational perfectionism, compared to edificatory perfectionism and political liberalism.

Kramer's discussion of the nature of self-respect takes John Rawls's conception of self-respect or self-esteem as its starting point:

"We may define self-respect (or self-esteem) as having two aspects. First of all [...], it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of the good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions" (1999, 386).

In light of the distinction drawn by David Sachs between self-respect and self-esteem,⁴ and by Stephen Darwall between recognition respect and appraisal respect,⁵ Rawls's conception may seem to be a jumble of quite disparate ideas. Having recognition respect for oneself as a person consists in giving the authority or standing to oneself that one is due simply in virtue of being a person.⁶ As a brief aside, note that Darwall thinks that we can have recognition self-respect not only as persons, but also in various contingent capacities or roles.⁷ I might have recognition respect for myself as a philosopher, say, or as a Dutch citizen, by giving those facts appropriate standing or authority in my deliberation and conduct. This point is not taken on by Kramer, who writes of recognition respect entirely in moral terms. Appraisal self-respect, by contrast, consists in a positive evaluation of oneself based on character-related excellences.⁸ Kramer uses the phrase in a more capacious sense to refer to a favorable attitude towards oneself based on any good-making feature, character-related or not, and to a favorable attitude towards one's projects, ambitions, achievements, and abilities themselves (302).

Does Rawls have recognition self-respect, appraisal self-respect, or some combination of both in mind? Since his conception includes being convinced of the value or worth of one's plan of life or conception of the good, it is naturally understood to include an element of appraisal self-respect. It also includes a person's sense of his own value, which may be read as referring to a form of recognition self-respect—a

⁴ David Sachs, "How to Distinguish Self-Respect from Self-Esteem," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10 (1981), no. 4, 346-122.

⁵ Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88 (1977), no. 1, 36-49, and *The Second-Person Standpoint* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁶ Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," 38; *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 123.

⁷ Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," 38.

⁸ Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," 41.

person's sense of his own standing simply as a person. The third element, confidence in our abilities, is a bit harder to place. It seems to capture a sense of oneself as an efficacious agent, which doesn't neatly fit into either category. In response to this complexity, Elizabeth Brake argues that Rawls's overall view is best construed as being concerned with recognition self-respect rather than with appraisal self-respect,⁹ and Gerald Doppelt argues that Rawls *should* have been exclusively concerned with recognition self-respect.¹⁰ Against these views, Kramer argues, first, that Rawls's conception of self-respect is best interpreted to include appraisal self-respect, and, second, that Rawls is correct in thinking that a just political society has a significant role to play in supporting citizens' appraisal self-respect.

I agree with both of Kramer's claims. I don't agree, however, with one of his main reasons for parting ways with Rawls's critics at this point. Kramer argues that appraisal self-respect includes recognition self-respect. The relevant relationship is described in numerous ways: appraisal self-respect encompasses (303), comprehends (303), always involves (304), is partly constituted by (305), or cannot exist in the absence of (306) recognition self-respect. Kramer's argument for this is that a person with some level of appraisal self-respect positively values, or cares about, at least some of her projects. To value or care about one's projects entails that when others wrongfully and thoroughly prevent one from pursuing those projects one responds with at least some degree of indignation or resentment. To be disposed to respond with indignation or resentment to being wronged by others is constitutive of recognition self-respect (Kramer 2017, 303). The problem with this argument is that indignation and resentment are specific reactive attitudes. Consequently, valuing or caring about things does not

⁹ Brake, Elizabeth, "Rereading Rawls on Self-Respect: Feminism, Family Law, and the Social Bases of Self-Respect," in Ruth Abbey (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of John Rawls*, (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013), 57-74.

¹⁰ Doppelt, Gerald, "The Place of Self-Respect in a Theory of Justice," *Inquiry* 52 (2009), no. 2, 127-154.

presuppose that one responds to interference with indignation or resentment. When confronted with the wrongful and thorough interference with my aims and plans, I could respond in many ways—I could get angry, for example, or be afraid, sad, hopeful, despondent, and so on. Any of these would show that I value my projects, but they do not involve or entail the distinctive reactive attitudes associated with recognition self-respect.

In the end, Kramer's conception of self-respect is as follows: "(1) a secure conviction in the valuableness of one's own way of life with one's conception of the good and (2) a solid degree of confidence in one's ability to realize one's conception of the good in many if not all its aspects" (322). The second aspect diverges sharply from Rawls's second aspect—Rawls is concerned with the ability to act on one's intentions, where this is undermined by such factors as weakness of will; Kramer is concerned with the ability to carry out one's plan of life, where this would be threatened by, for example, a lack of material resources. The main focus of both Kramer's and my own discussion is the first element, however, so I will leave this difference aside.

Kramer's overall argument, as presented above, is concerned with the justification of state funding for the arts, sciences, and culture. The argument for such funding is merely an example of a more general proposed justification for a variety of perfectionist policies. The distinctive feature of the resulting aspirational perfectionist view is that state promotion of various kinds of excellence is aimed at providing all members of society with grounds for self-respect. State support for any particular person's artistic, scientific, or cultural contributions is only a means to this end. By contrast, edificatory perfectionists hold that it is permissible for the state to promote various excellences in society with the aim of "refining the experiences and sentiments" (349) of the potential consumers or producers of artistic, scientific, and cultural goods. The argument also shows how aspirational perfectionism parts company with political liberals and their ideal of public reason. The aim or purpose of

aspirational perfectionist policies is to promote the warranted self-respect of all members of society. Self-respect is a primary good, so this is an entirely acceptable aim for a politically liberal society to have. On Kramer's view, however, public reason does not just require the neutrality of the aims of the exercise of political power, it also requires the neutrality of the means employed to further those aims (18-24). In the case of state funding for the arts, sciences, and culture, the chosen means will not pass the test of neutrality. Whatever the specific means are—funding for art museums, concert halls, universities, public festivals, etc.—people can reasonably, though perhaps incorrectly, deny that the funded activities constitute genuine excellences, and that the resulting achievements provide warrant for self-respect.¹¹

3. Stigma and the Normative Assessment of Self-Respect

I now turn to two challenges to Kramer's argument. The first of these is concerned with claim (1): warranted self-respect is a natural primary good. I will not argue that (1) is false, but that Kramer's exclusive focus on warranted self-respect leads to an overly narrow conception of a political society's proper role in the economy of recognition.

My discussion here will be exclusively concerned with the appraisal component of self-respect; the attitude of self-respect includes a positive evaluation of oneself based on one's particular abilities, achievements, or projects. Kramer claims that warranted self-respect is a primary good; self-respect as such is not. A political society has a role to

¹¹ I am not convinced that political liberalism is committed to what Kramer calls neutrality of means and ends. Instead, political liberals should endorse a properly specified principle of neutrality in justification. Bracketing considerations about the scope of application of principles of public reason, neutrality in justification is also in tension with state funding for particular artistic, scientific, and cultural pursuits on grounds of self-respect. This is because even though the aim of such policies, the promotion of warranted self-respect for all, is publicly acceptable, there is always a need for a supporting premise—that such and such pursuit provides warrant for self-respect—which is not publicly acceptable.

play, then, in the promotion of citizens' warranted positive evaluation of their various abilities, achievements, and projects. Kramer's main reason for thinking that warranted self-respect, rather than self-respect as such, is a primary good is that without warrant, self-respect is not a genuine good at all: "a person scarcely becomes better off ethically by harboring a more and more grossly inflated sense of self-respect that is more and more at variance with the facts of his talents and accomplishments and general standing" (324). I doubt that this point is best put in terms of what makes a person better off ethically—it is not clear to me that thinking of opportunities for income and wealth as primary goods commits us to the idea that having such opportunities makes us better off ethically—but the general idea is clear enough. In addition, Kramer's focus on warranted self-respect helps him avoid a number of objections to the idea that the state has a role to play in the support of citizens' self-respect. Since warrant is an ethical or normative concept, Kramer's argument is not held hostage to fortune the way an argument based on empirical conjectures would be (309). The account is not committed to the objectionable view that providing people with aberrant self-respect is a way for a political society to fulfill its duty of justice (311).¹² "Self-respect monsters" do not have a claim on a disproportionate share of resources (312),¹³ and although the promotion of sterling achievements of others might depress our self-respect as a matter of psychology, such responses are typically unwarranted (360-61).

When is self-respect warranted? The closest we get to an answer to this question from Kramer is in the form of a description of unwarranted self-respect: "insofar as his sense of self-worth does deviate from an accurate apprehension of his own merits, it is unwarranted" (324). It seems then that a person's self-respect, insofar as the appraisal self-respect component is concerned, is warranted insofar as the person's positive

¹² See Brake, "Rereading Rawls on Self-Respect," 62, for this objection.

¹³ See Brake, "Rereading Rawls on Self-Respect," 62.

evaluation of himself is based on an *accurate* conception of his own good-making features, such as his merits, talents, abilities, and achievements. Stated more generally:

Warrant: if *S*'s appraisal self-respect is a positive evaluation of *S* based on good-making feature *X*, then *S*'s appraisal self-respect is warranted insofar as *S* actually has feature *X* and *X* is a genuine good-making feature of *S*.

This understanding of warrant fits well with various other passages (for example, on 324, 361, and 367), and with Kramer's overall discussion, which is concerned with the state's role in bringing about the existence of such grounds for self-respect.

Understood in this way, the notion of warrant is fact sensitive but not evidence sensitive. A person who has a genuine good-making feature, however, may have strong evidence that she does not have the feature in the first place, or that the feature is not good-making. I may have strong but misleading evidence, for example, that I wrote a philosophy paper I didn't in fact write, or that having written that philosophy paper is a good-making feature of me even though it isn't. In such cases, I will say that my self-respect, in light of this evidence, is *justified*, despite the lack of warrant. The reverse is also possible, where I esteem myself for having written a philosophy paper I did in fact write, and which it is a genuine achievement to have written, but where I have strong but misleading evidence against either of these claims. In those cases, my appraisal self-respect is warranted but unjustified. Stated generally:

Justification: *S*'s appraisal self-respect based on feature *X* is justified insofar as *S* has evidence to believe that *X* is a good-making feature of *S* in the way that *S* takes it to be.

The normative assessment of self-esteem is not limited to considerations of warrant, it also includes considerations of justification. The distinction between warrant and justification runs parallel to the distinction between truth or accuracy on the one hand, and justification on the other, with regard to the normative assessment of belief. In

many cases, we are interested not only in whether beliefs are accurate or true, but also in whether they are supported by the available evidence.

Returning to the proper role of a political society in the promotion of self-respect among citizens, we are now in a position to ask whether justification is a component of the relevant primary good. Some of the arguments that speak against the view that the state should support citizens' self-respect even when their self-respect is unwarranted also speak against the view that the state should promote the justification of citizens' self-respect when unwarranted. Such state action would aim at deluding its citizens, and would conflict with demands of publicity. My claim, then, is not that the just state promotes justified self-respect instead of warranted self-respect, but that it promotes justified and warranted self-respect.

The first remark to make in favor of this view is that it does not fall prey to the other objections mentioned above. Justification is a normative notion just as much as warrantedness is. Consequently, identifying the justification of self-respect as a legitimate state concern does not place our political philosophy on such a precarious basis as the deliverances of psychology or the social sciences. It also does not follow that the state cannot fulfill its duty of justice by supplying aberrant self-respect, and we do not give ground to self-respect monsters.

Second, the addition of a concern with justification allows us to properly capture a key feature of Rawls's treatment of self-respect. In both *A Theory of Justice* and in *Political Liberalism*, Rawls emphasizes the idea that a person's self-respect, and especially their sense of their own worth and the value of their plan of life, depends on the esteem or affirmation of others. In *A Theory of Justice*, he writes that one of the circumstances that support our sense of our own worth is "finding our person and deeds appreciated and confirmed by others who are likewise esteemed and their association enjoyed".¹⁴ In

¹⁴ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised Edition*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 386.

Political Liberalism, he writes that “our sense of our own value, as well as our self-confidence, depends on the respect and mutuality shown by others”.¹⁵ These claims play a central role in Rawls’s employment of considerations of self-respect in his justification of the two principles of justice and their ordering.

If our conceptual resources only allow us to interpret these claims as either claims about the conditions of warrant for self-respect or as claims about the psychology of self-respect, it is hard to resist thinking of them as instances of Rawls’s “indulgence in empirical conjectures” (309). After all, it is difficult to see why being esteemed by others is a necessary condition for having the kind of good-making features that warrant a positive self-evaluation. Further, unless we are willing to think of being esteemed as itself an estimable quality, it is hard to see how the esteem of others even contributes to warranted self-respect. Of course, the approval of our fellow citizens may have indirect effects on warrant: their encouragement may inspire us to achieve various excellences which in turn provide warrant for self-respect. This indirect relationship is not, however, what Rawls had in mind in these statements. Kramer mentions this Rousseauvian feature of Rawls’s views on self-respect (for example, on page 336), but, not surprisingly, it plays no significant role in his argument. On Kramer’s view, “a person with a warranted sense of self-respect will have attained that sense positively by reference to what she is and does” (361), and, so it seems, not by reference to what others think of what one is or does.

The notion of justification allows us to capture Rawls’s emphasis on mutual respect and esteem without having to think of it either, implausibly, as a condition of warrant, or as a matter of brute psychology.¹⁶ Our self-esteem depends on the esteem of others in the sense that the esteem of others provides us with evidence that we have various good-making features, and, more importantly, with evidence that various

¹⁵ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 319.

¹⁶ I would also think of Rawls’s language of “excusable envy” in this way.

features of ours are indeed good-making. Praise for one's philosophical work will not make that work any better or worse, but if such praise is received from those competent to assess one's work, it provides evidence for the conviction that it is to one's credit to have written it. Conversely, even if one has various talents, achievements, or abilities which provide genuine warrant for self-esteem, if one is subjected to constant and persistent disapproval or disregard by one's social environment, this can render one's self-esteem unjustified or irrational. In this sense, the esteem of others supports our self-esteem, and the disesteem of others undermines it, as a matter of justification, not just as a matter of human psychology.

All of this would be of little relevance, and would have no significance for the character of just political institutions, if warrant and justification rarely come apart. Kramer notes that incongruities between people's warrant for self-respect and their perception of such warrant are possible, but claims that "there are no grounds for thinking that there is always or usually a discrepancy between the two" (367). This assertion strikes me as cavalier, given the prevalence of social processes which systematically expose individuals to attitudes of disapproval, contempt, and disgust. I'm thinking of social phenomena such as stigmatization, marginalization, and various forms of discrimination. Here is one example of stigma, surrounding unemployment:

"How hard and humiliating it is to bear the name of an unemployed man. When I go out, I cast down my eyes because I feel myself wholly inferior. When I go along the street, it seems to me that I can't be compared with an average citizen, that everybody is pointing at me with his finger. I instinctively avoid meeting anyone. Former acquaintances of better times are no longer so cordial. They greet me indifferently when we meet. They no longer offer me a cigarette and their eyes seem to say, 'You are not worth it, you don't work.'"¹⁷

¹⁷ From Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 28.

To be sure, being unemployed may block certain avenues towards achievements of various kinds, but in many cases, the feeling of worthlessness expressed in this statement is unwarranted. Nonetheless, social attitudes towards unemployment are not rarely such that one may be excused for, if not justified in, failing to maintain the sense of self-respect one is warranted to have. Here is another example, concerning mental health. A 43 year old British man reports:

“I said I’d go to a therapeutic day centre in Kentish Town. . . and all I got back from this was—and how much do you cost Camden Council, you cost the tax payer money, so you sit around at Social Services doing nothing all day and you call that a life.”¹⁸

Here again, if sufficiently widespread, being confronted with attitudes of this kind could produce an excusable, if not justified, gap between actual self-respect and the self-respect one would be warranted in having.

If a political society is under a duty of justice to promote the normatively appropriate self-respect of its citizens, then I see little reason to think that this duty ends with the provision of warrant for self-respect. Self-respect, where unwarranted, does not count as a primary good. But social processes which undermine the justification of citizens’ self-esteem can make an important primary good less available for large groups of citizens. A just society has a role to play in protecting citizens from such processes, or at the very least, in taking care not to unnecessarily expose citizens to such processes. What exactly the appropriate response of a just society is towards say, the stigmatization of unemployment, sex work, mental health problems, disability, or various racial and gender groups is a complex and nuanced issue.¹⁹ It would be a

¹⁸ From Dinos, Stevens, Serfaty, Weich, and King, “Stigma: The Feelings and Experiences of 46 People with Mental Illness,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 184 (2004), 176-181.

¹⁹ For some helpful discussion of these issues, see Jonathan Wolff, “Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1998) 27, no. 2, 97-122, Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), and Véronique Munoz-Dardé, *The Priest, the Liberal & the Harlot: Liberalism and Sexual Desire*, Unpublished Manuscript.

mistake to think that all such self-respect undermining social phenomena are simply absent in a just society. I have no general statement to offer, however, concerning the requirements of justice in this domain. My point in this section is that Kramer's exclusive focus on warranted self-respect obscures these questions from view. In doing so, concerned as Kramer is with the provision of a hearty sense of self-respect for all citizens, he ignores what seems to me a key role of a political society in regulating the economies of respect and esteem.

4. Self-Respect and Societal Excellence

I now turn to my second challenge to Kramer's argument, this time a more direct objection to one of Kramer's key claims. Aspirational perfectionism distinguishes itself from political liberalism by being in favor of various perfectionist policies, such as state funding of the arts, sciences, and culture. The justification of such policies is not, as the edificatory perfectionist holds, the ethical improvement specifically of those who will either produce or consume these cultural goods. Instead, the justification for such policies is that the resulting excellences provide warrant for the self-respect of all members of society. My main target in this section will be claim (3): the excellence of one's fellow citizens provides warrant for self-respect.

The immediate question, of course, is how the excellence of, say, Rineke Dijkstra's photography provides me, as a fellow Dutch citizen, with warrant for my self-respect. After all, Rineke Dijkstra's excellences are hers, not mine. The crux of Kramer's answer is that certain relationships between people are such that the various excellences, merits, and achievements of one person can provide warrant for the self-respect of another. We find such relationships between, for example, friends and family members. It is not altogether clear when exactly a relationship between persons warrants vicarious self-respect, but Kramer's discussion (especially pages 358-59) suggests that the relevant

relationships are those in which the fortunes of the relating parties' lives, or the quality or trajectory of their lives, are partly co-dependent. That is to say, Kramer suggests that if how well my life goes depends in part on how well the lives of my siblings go, then my siblings' various excellences, merits, and achievements provide me with warrant for self-respect. The final step is that the relationship between the members of a single political society is such that how well the life of any individual citizen goes is partly determined by the quality of the lives of her fellow citizens, and by the quality of her society as such. Consequently, genuine excellences, found anywhere in a political society, provide all members of that society with some degree of warrant for self-respect.

As it stands, this argument fails to establish its conclusion. On both Rawls's and Kramer's view, self-respect includes a secure conviction that one's plan of life, or one's conception of the good, is valuable or worth carrying out. As I understand these notions, a person's plan of life and conception of the good does not refer to a person's general understanding of which things are good, or would make their lives go well. Instead, a person's plan of life and conception of the good refers to the projects and aims the person sets out to pursue over the course of their own lives.²⁰ On this view, there may be many things that would make a person's life go well, but which are not part of that person's plan of life or conception of the good. In my case, daily exercise, reading ancient Chinese poetry, becoming a vegan, and retraining as a psychiatrist would likely all make my life go better, but they are not part of my hopefully more or less rational plan of life. If this is right, then even if how well my life goes depends partly on the quality of my fellow citizens' lives, it does not follow that their excellences provide me with warrant for self-respect. If, for example, the fact that Rineke Dijkstra takes excellent pictures makes my life, as a fellow Dutch citizen, better than it otherwise would be, it doesn't follow that this fact provides me with warrant for self-respect. After

²⁰ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 78-80 and 358-365.

all, being the fellow citizen of a great photographer may not be any part of my reasonable or rational plan of life or conception of the good. There is a gap between warrant for the claim that my life is going well, and warrant for the claim that my plan of life or conception of the good is valuable or worth carrying out. Consequently, we have not shown that societal excellence provides warrant for self-respect, even if we accept that societal excellence makes the lives of all citizens go better.

Kramer closes this gap by, over the course of his argument, sliding between warranted self-respect and a number of other ideas. We start with the question of whether the excellences of our fellow citizens can provide warrant for self-respect (352). We then transition, without further explanation, to the question of whether the accomplishments of others can provide warrant for pride (353-357). The discussion then turns from warranted vicarious pride to warrant for feeling good about oneself (356-359). Finally, we are led to consider whether the excellences of our fellow citizens provide warrant for increasing our sense of how well our lives have gone (358-365). Kramer's discussion suggests that he thinks that all these ideas amount to the same thing. This would mean that on Kramer's view, self-respect should be understood not in terms of a specific notion of a person's plan of life or conception of the good, but in terms of a more general idea of what would make their lives go well—a warranted sense of the value of one's way of life or conception of the good *just is* a warranted sense that our life is going well. If we accept this, then the claim that how well our life goes depends on how well the lives of our fellow citizens go does, of course, establish that the excellences of our fellow citizens provide us with warrant for self-respect.

This view involves a significant broadening of the notion of self-respect, and requires a corresponding broadening of our understanding of the primary good of warranted self-respect. On Rawls's view, and Kramer sides with Rawls here (328-333), primary goods are goods it is rational to want more of (rather than less) given any reasonable plan of life or conception of the good. In other words, primary goods are all

reasonable purpose means. The basic liberties and opportunities for income and wealth, for example, count as primary goods because no matter what one's plan of life or conception of the good is, one will need those goods to pursue that particular plan of life or conception of the good. Likewise, the social bases of self-respect count as primary goods because whatever one's plan of life is, one needs a secure conviction in the worth of that particular plan in order to effectively pursue it. On the current understanding of Kramer's argument, a person's warranted sense that her life is going well is also counted as a primary good. What counts as her life going well, and what counts as warrant for the sense that her life is going well, is not, however, in turn governed by her own rational plan of life or conception of the good. For example, the photographic excellence produced by Dutch funding for the arts makes my life go better, and provides warrant for my sense that my life is going well, even if my rational plan of life or conception of the good rejects photography as a worthless and deceitful endeavor. Given this understanding of a warranted sense of my life going well, it is not rational for me to want this regardless of my particular plan of life or conception of the good.

To make Kramer's argument work, we would need to revise our understanding of what primary goods are—we would need to hold that primary goods are those goods that make a person's life go better, regardless of their particular reasonable plan of life or conception of the good. This would make premises and conclusion line up by removing the Rawlsian reference to citizens' rational plans of life or conceptions of the good both from our understanding of self-respect and from our understanding of primary goods. The problem with the resulting reconstruction of aspirational perfectionism is that it is difficult to see how it maintains its nuanced position *vis a vis* edificatory perfectionism and political liberalism. Aspirational perfectionism would hold that the state properly aims to provide citizens with warranted self-respect, that self-respect includes a sense of one's life going well, that warrant for this sense is provided by facts which make one's life going well, and that what makes one's life go

well is not a function of one's own rational plan of life or conception of the good. The result is a straightforwardly perfectionist view according to which the state—as the edificatory perfectionist asserts and the political liberal denies—exercises political power to provide citizens with what is good for them, even if this runs counter to citizens' reasonable plans of life and conceptions of the good.

5. Democratic Self-Respect

In this final section, I will briefly sketch an alternative account of the relationship between political institutions and the self-respect of citizens. Key to this account is the idea of democracy, an idea which plays little role in Kramer's book, but which I believe to be central to a proper understanding of political liberalism and its idea of public reason. I will understand a democratic society to be a society in which citizens, as free and equal persons, jointly exercise political power as a collective body.

The idea that citizens of a democratic society relate to one another as equal persons lends additional support to the idea that political institutions have a role to play in protecting people from processes such as stigmatization, marginalization, and discrimination. Such social processes tend to undermine people's ability to relate to one another as equals—to, as Philip Pettit puts it, look one another in the eye without fear or deference.²¹ This means that citizens have reason to want such social processes limited or counteracted for two reasons. First, all citizens have reason to want the value or worth of their reasonable plan of life or conception of the good affirmed, rather than

²¹ Philip Pettit, *On the People's Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 84. Pettit is here writing of relationships of domination rather than stigmatization, marginalization, or discrimination in particular.

scorned or denigrated, by others. Second, citizens have reason to want their full standing as equal members of political society acknowledged.²²

The idea that in a democracy citizens jointly exercise political power as a collective body supports an alternative account of how societal excellence can support the warranted self-respect of all citizens. Of course, even democratically exercised political power can be and frequently is put to terrible uses, but it can also be employed to realize genuine excellences. I will start by focussing on one such societal excellence: the creation and maintenance over time of just political institutions.²³ Suppose that my fellow citizens and I, through a democratic political process, jointly exercise political power as a collective body and thereby create and maintain a reasonably just political system. We can now think of the societal excellence of justice as providing me, as an individual citizen, with warrant for self-respect because I am a co-creator of this excellence. The societal excellence of justice provides the citizens of a democratic society which achieves this excellence with warrant for self-respect in much the same way that an excellent performance of a symphony provides the members of an orchestra with warrant for self-respect: *we* did this. Where Kramer asks citizens to be proud of the excellences of others because of their co-dependence, my proposal is that citizens are proud of the societal excellences they jointly achieve.

The question is whether we have good reason to think of democracy in such lofty terms, as a system of collective political action by free and equal citizens rather than, say, simply as a system for balancing conflicting interests. Rawls thinks that we do. Here is Rawls on the good of justice:

²² For a helpful account of the relationship between democracy and equal social standing, see Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, chapter 5, and "What is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 (1999), 287-337.

²³ Kramer agrees that the achievement of justice would constitute an important societal excellence (373).

“For whenever there is a shared final end, an end that requires the cooperation of many to achieve, the good realized is social: it is realized through the citizens’ joint activity in mutual dependence on the appropriate actions being taken by others. Thus, establishing and successfully conducting reasonably just (though of course always imperfect) democratic institutions over a long period of time, perhaps gradually reforming them over generations, though not, to be sure, without lapses, is a great social good, and appreciated as such. This is shown by the fact that people refer to it as one of the significant achievements of their history.”²⁴

There are at least two mechanisms at work in the passage to underwrite the idea that just political institutions are a collective achievement. First, the establishment and maintenance of just institutions requires individual citizens to do their part in supporting them, for example, by acting in accordance with the legitimate demands of those institutions. Second, just institutions are created and maintained by democratic means. As he emphasizes in a number of different places, the democratic exercise of political power should, on Rawls’s view, always be conceived of as the joint exercise of the political power by the citizens as a single body.²⁵

Of course, Rawls’s idea that democracy can realize a strong sense of collective political action is itself controversial. I can here only hint at some reasons for accepting it.²⁶ The background is a deliberative conception of democracy according to which genuinely democratic political decisions issue from a deliberative process in which all citizens are equally entitled to participate. Political decisions which have their origin in such a shared process of political deliberation count as joint decisions made by the

²⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 204.

²⁵ See, for example, Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlv, 136, and 214. Rawls emphasizes the idea that the democratic exercise of political power is the exercise of political power by the citizens as a collective body in a number of different places. See, for example Rawls 1993, xlv, 136, and 214.

²⁶ I provide a more elaborate defense of the idea that democracy can realize a robust sense of joint political rule in Leland and van Wietmarschen, “Political Liberalism and Political Community,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 14 (2017), no. 2, 142-167.

citizens as a collective body, and political power exercised on the basis of such decisions is their shared exercise of political power. If such exercises of political power constitute or produce genuine excellences, then those excellences can rightly be seen by all citizens as their collective achievement.

If this is right, then the idea of democracy provides us with an alternative model for the way in which societal excellence provides warrant for the self-respect of all citizens: each citizen can rightly see herself as a co-creator of the societal excellence of justice, not merely as a co-dependent citizen in a society which happens to be just. This model does not require us to give up the Rawlsian idea that warranted self-respect is tied to each citizen's own reasonable plan of life or conception of the good. The reason for this is that all reasonable citizens are expected to include the achievement and maintenance of just institutions among their aims. Consequently, the democratic achievement of justice is not only a genuine achievement in fact, but is also regarded as a genuine achievement by all reasonable citizens. The democratic achievement of justice, in sum, provides us with an example of a societal excellence which all citizens can rightly regard as their *collective* achievement, and all citizens can regard as a *genuine* achievement consistently with whatever their particular reasonable plan of life or conception of the good is.

Can we extend this alternative model to other societal excellences, beyond the excellence of just political institutions? Political societies can and often do provide funding for the arts, sciences, and culture. As a result, individual citizens may see themselves as participants in the collective enterprise of providing such funding, and perhaps they can also see themselves as co-creators of the scientific, artistic, and cultural excellences which may result. If Rineke Dijkstra has been the recipient of various state sponsored prizes or subsidies, I might think of myself as a contributor to her achievements. So it seems that we can formulate a democratic version of aspirational perfectionism: we simply substitute democratic co-creation for Kramer's co-

dependence. The relevant question here is whether the claim that certain scientific, artistic, or cultural endeavors are genuine achievements can be a democratic reason to fund them. This brings us back to the relationships between democracy and political liberalism, with its ideal of public reason. I understand political liberalism's ideal of public reason to be an ideal of democratic deliberation. As Rawls puts this point: "In a democratic society public reason is the reason of equal citizens who, as a collective body, exercise final and coercive power over one another in enacting laws and in amending their constitution."²⁷ Our political deliberation counts as a genuinely shared or collective process of deliberation in virtue of the fact that citizens conform to the demands of public reason; the exercise of political power based on non-public considerations cannot be the exercise of political power by the citizens as a collective body.²⁸ As already indicated above, I do not think that claims about which artistic, scientific, or cultural endeavors do or don't constitute genuine excellences can count as public political reasons. Moreover, even the general claim that artistic, scientific, and cultural endeavors are genuine excellences is not a public political reason. People disagree, and disagree reasonably, about the particular claims and even the general claim. This means that a genuinely democratic process of political deliberation, regulated by an ideal of public reason, cannot accept considerations of warranted self-respect as a reason for state funding for the arts, sciences, and culture.²⁹ The provision of warrant for self-respect can only be a side effect, not an appropriate aim, of such funding. In sum, democracy can provide all citizens with warrant for self-respect for their participation in the creation and maintenance of just political institutions.

²⁷ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 214.

²⁸ Here again, I provide a much more elaborate defense of these claims in Leland and van Wietmarschen, "Political Liberalism and Political Community."

²⁹ This is not say that political liberalism cannot support funding for the arts, sciences, and culture; there may be various public reasons in favor of such funding, unrelated to considerations of warranted self-respect.

However, the substantial conception of democracy needed for this picture includes an ideal of public reason, and this ideal rules out aspirational perfectionist justifications for the exercise of political power.

This leaves me with one final remark to make. Kramer is concerned that a society which rejects aspirational perfectionism may leave the level of warranted self-respect of its citizens at an insufficiently high pitch (365-366). In this paper, I have sketched an account of how a democratic society that fully lives up to an ideal of public reason can support and promote the justified and warranted self-respect of all citizens. Should we be concerned that such a society leaves citizens' warranted self-respect at an insufficiently high level, since it does not provide funding for the arts, sciences, and culture on aspirational perfectionist grounds? I think we should not. I find it difficult to imagine a more adequate source of warranted self-respect for the citizens of a democratic society than their collective achievement of a society which manages to shield its citizens from destructive forms of marginalization, stigmatization, and discrimination, and which maintains just, or even reasonably just, political institutions.