Introduction

The question posed in the title of this essay is part of a more general question, namely, how best to situate the concept of “epistemic injustice” within the contested terrain of competing traditions called “normative ethics.” As is well known, while differing normative theories might readily agree that some action is wrong, they may nonetheless differ vigorously as to why, with utilitarians emphasizing harmful consequences, virtue ethicists emphasizing a vicious character, and Kantians emphasizing the usurpation of one’s standing as free and rational, to name just three amongst many possibilities. In light of this, a preliminary strategy for locating epistemic injustice on the normative map presents itself in the form of the question: what background ethical commitments do we assume when we critique epistemic injustice as, precisely, unjust? However, a cursory glance at the literature reveals the complexities involved in answering this question. In the short period since the publication of Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice*, a range of normative approaches to the distinctive wrongfulness of unjust epistemic practices have been adopted, with Fricker herself synthesizing multiple traditions, including Kantian, virtue-theoretic, and social contract elements within her own account.

Significant discussion has focused on elaborating the many harms that unjust forms of silencing, ignorance, and false belief generate, thereby operating implicitly with a roughly consequentialist set of assumptions concerning epistemic injustice’s wrongfulness. This focus on the local and reverberating harms and losses of epistemic injustice – the loss of epistemic confidence, the marginalization of entire populations from hermeneutical practices, the creation of structural blockages in the circulation of knowledge, and the social suffering generated thereby – has been especially productive for large-scale systemic critiques of dysfunctional socio-epistemic practices (Fricker 2007: 46–51). Yet at the same time it has been a recurrent theme that the wrongfulness of epistemic injustice is “not just a matter of bad consequences,” to put it with Sally Haslanger (2014: 120). There is a deeper intrinsic indignity at work in various forms of epistemic injustice, as in, for example, unjustly downgrading one’s trustworthiness via testimonial injustice or the forms of racial domination supporting and supported by what Charles Mills calls “epistemologies of ignorance.” In fleshing out these claims, both explicit and implicit appeals have been made to Kantian notions of dignity, personhood, moral equality, and other “pro-Enlightenment” ideals (Mills 1997: 129; Fricker 2007: 133–142). Finally, there has been a persistent emphasis on
the importance of epistemic and ethical virtues in correcting conditions of epistemic injustice. While virtue epistemology in the past has emphasized the kinds of virtues speakers should adopt (such as accuracy and sincerity), work on epistemic injustice has brought increased attention to virtues applying to hearers (e.g., critical openness, humility), oppressed groups (e.g., what José Medina calls “meta-lucidity”), as well as entire institutions (most notably in Elizabeth Anderson’s discussions of the virtue of “epistemic democracy”) (Fricker 2007; Medina 2013; Anderson 2012). Already in this brief sketch we see resources drawn from each of the three most influential traditions in normative ethics: utilitarianism, Kantianism, and virtue ethics. Add to this various influences that do not fall neatly within these three traditions, such as feminist ethics, critical race theory, pragmatism, discourse ethics, and beyond, and the thought of disentangling this complex network of normative assumptions quickly becomes intimidating. Nevertheless, any critique of epistemic injustice will, at least implicitly, assume some notion of moral truth, as Mills affirms when he writes that epistemologies of ignorance generate “not merely ignorance of facts with moral implications but moral non-knowings, incorrect judgments about the rights and wrongs of moral situations themselves” (2007: 22). This, in turn, implies commitments to some normative ethical theory or other. In light of the myriad approaches one might take towards the question of the wrongfulness of epistemic injustice, it is perhaps not surprising that Fricker’s own account in Epistemic Injustice works by synthesizing rather than choosing between these options.

In this essay I navigate a course through these various normative ethical theories. In sections 1 through 3, I examine the wrong of epistemic injustice by discussing, respectively, (1) its harmful consequences, (2) its standing as an epistemic and ethical vice, and (3) its standing as a degrading objectification of a rational subject. Taking each of these models in turn allows us to illuminate how each of the three most influential strands of mainstream normative ethics – utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and Kantianism – could address the question of the wrongfulness of epistemic injustice. In Section 4, I defend an approach that, though massively influential in its own right, is not usually grouped amongst the standard normative ethical theories, namely, Hegelian recognition theory. I find that a multipronged conception of the wrongfulness of epistemic injustice as involving harm, vice, objectification, and misrecognition is required. My motivating thought is that examining these four approaches to the question, “What’s wrong with epistemic injustice?” helps us locate the concept of epistemic injustice within the broader discipline of normative ethics.

1. Harmful consequences

An elaboration of the many harmful consequences of epistemic injustice in its various forms is a massive topic in its own right. Here I will focus primarily on testimonial injustice, which occurs when a hearer downgrades a speaker’s credibility on the basis of an unfair identity prejudice, as when “the police do not believe you because you are black” (Fricker 2007: 1).

A utilitarian, harm-based approach to the wrongfulness of testimonial injustice is not entirely without historical precedent. As J.S. Mill wrote in his famous critique of the suppression of thought and speech in On Liberty, “the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion” consists in its “robbing the human race . . . of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth” (1977: 229). As Mill goes on to elaborate at length, the wrongfulness of silencing opinion can be appreciated to a huge extent by elaborating the concrete forms of epistemic loss and error generated thereby. Straightforwardly, the hearer misses out on information, and the speaker misses out on the chance to express that information. In turn, anyone who may have benefitted as a result of the sharing of that knowledge also suffers a loss. These more local harms can generate broader deleterious effects, constituting “a moment of dysfunction in the overall epistemic
practice or system” (Fricker 2007: 43). Beyond the epistemic harms and losses generated thereby, Mill might also point out that conditions of epistemic injustice cut us off from knowledge of those “different experiments of living,” those forms of life unlike our own, exposure to which promotes the development of human flourishing (1977: 260–261). Though Mill’s primary concern was institutional censorship and not the forms of prejudice-based silencing Fricker explores as “testimonial injustice,” it would not be difficult to extend the utilitarian critique to the latter.

Indeed, something approximating this is already at work in the notion of “epistemic consequentialism,” an approach in social epistemology that judges epistemic norms according to their tendency to maximize basic epistemic goods, such as relevant true belief. In a way that an ethical naturalist like Mill would have found favorable, it follows from the notion of a “naturalized” social epistemology, according to which epistemic practices manifest themselves through a material, social, and historical base, that these epistemic harms entail concrete practical harms beyond the purely epistemic (Quine 1969; Kornblith 1994). Reliance upon a trusting epistemic community seems to be a minimal condition for the successful realization of just about any meaningful project within the social world, from mere survival to higher-order cultural pursuits. Accordingly, epistemic dysfunctions have deeper effects on human action, work, and collective forms of world- and meaning-making. A consequentialist, harm-based critique of epistemic injustice could thus be developed from an assessment of the impact of these deleterious effects upon general social welfare.

This view seems well-equipped to capture the frequently emphasized point that an exclusive focus on isolated acts of testimonial injustice should be rejected in favor of a view that monitors the wider range of harms reverberating temporally and socially outwards from the initial act (Medina 2013: 33–34). Yet several authors, Fricker among them, have suggested that a sole focus on the harmful consequences of testimonial injustice, no matter how grave, leaves something out of the moral picture (Fricker 2007: 43–46, 129–146; Haslanger 2014: 120–121; Wanderer 2012: 148–169; Pohlhaus, Jr. 2014: 99–114). For the wrongfulness of testimonial injustice seems to involve a form of moral injury done to the speaker that is more than the sum of the harms accrued. Discussing this point, Jeremy Wanderer describes a case of testimonial injustice in which a white beachgoer ignores a black lifeguard’s warnings about a shark sighted in the vicinity (2012: 149–153). Wanderer asks us to suppose that the swimmer’s downgrading of the lifeguard’s credibility is the result of unjust racial bias, a fatal mistake leading to his being gobbled up by the shark. Even if we imagine that the swimmer is the primary (or sole) bearer of harms generated by ignoring the lifeguard’s warning, it does not eliminate the notion that the swimmer did an injustice to the lifeguard by downgrading the latter’s credibility on the basis of racial prejudice. There is a lingering feeling that the swimmer wronged the lifeguard in a distinctly “second-personal” sense, to put it with Stephen Darwall (2006). What Wanderer’s example makes vivid is that the locations of accumulated harms fail to track the locations of perpetrator and victim in such cases, where the perpetrator-victim relation appears to be a second-personal relation irreducible to direct consequentialist analysis. This has led some, Fricker included, to insist upon separating out the “secondary harms” of epistemic injustice (i.e., those epistemic and practical harms that reverberate outwards from the initial act) from the “primary harm” done to the speaker herself (Fricker 2007: 43–51). This idea (to which I will return in Section 3) moves us beyond a merely consequentialist frame.

2. Epistemic and ethical vice

Another reason motivating us to move beyond the consequentialist frame is the wish to give greater weight to the notion that the hearer not only causes various forms of damage and loss, but,
more subtly, adopts a morally untoward stance towards the speaker that reflects a morally deficient character. As Fricker stresses, the root of testimonial injustice lies in an unjust bias that has become second nature, such that the hearer is affectively and culpably resistant to counterevidence. It is thus not surprising that conceptions of virtue and vice have played central roles in discussions of epistemic injustice.

Fricker’s own account bridges virtue epistemology and virtue ethics by arguing that credibility judgments (i.e., judgments concerning a speaker’s competence and sincerity with regard to a particular bit of testimony) may be viewed as complex forms of ethical perception (Fricker 2007: 60–85). Rather than viewing credibility judgments solely as the result of inferences, a virtue-based account urges that we directly perceive speakers as credible or incredible, sincere or deceptive, competent or incompetent. To say that such perception is “direct” is not, however, to say that such perception is unmediated or simply given. Rather, one’s capacity for rightly perceiving the credibility of persons is a developed result, mediated by an upbringing and culture that fosters the “critical openness” exhibited by virtuous hearers (Fricker 2007: 69). With this, credibility judgments are modeled on the Aristotelian notion of phronesis as a perceptual capacity, in a way that shares deep affinities with neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral perception found in John McDowell, David Wiggins, and Martha Nussbaum. 10

Testimonial injustice occurs when counter-rational forms of unfair prejudice and identity power distort one’s perception of others qua informants. Accordingly, it may be viewed as a vice in an Aristotelian sense: a maldevelopment of capacities necessary for human flourishing. This helpfully brings out the sense in which the typical case of testimonial injustice is not simply an isolated instance of unfair credibility downgrading, but the result of a habituated, socio-historically inculcated prejudice distorting the hearer’s judgment. This also usefully accounts for the habituated character of what Mills calls “white ignorance,” which distorts one’s takes on reality not only at the level of reflective judgment and assertion, but more subtly in memory, reflective inference, and low-level perception, given one’s inheritance of, and upbringing within, a racist culture (2007: 23–24; 1998). The problem consists not simply in a one-off wrongful decision on the part of the hearer, but in a flawed epistemic and ethical character. For this reason, Fricker describes the corresponding virtue of epistemic justice as a critical social awareness that is distinctively reflexive in its operation, enabling the hearer to identify the forms of identity power structuring a communicative engagement and to adjust her credibility judgments accordingly (2007: 98).

A worry frequently raised at this point is that a focus on individual virtue can only serve as a partial remedy for epistemic injustice, insofar as the latter is not only a transactional injustice between individuals but also structurally embedded in social institutions and practices. 11 As Elizabeth Anderson puts the point, “the larger systems by which we organize the training of inquirers and the circulation, uptake, and incorporation of individuals’ epistemic contributions to the construction of knowledge may need to be reformed to ensure that justice is done to each knower, and to groups of inquirers” (2012: 165). Interestingly, Anderson takes this to require not that we abandon talk of virtues but that we widen our view to include the notion of institutional virtues. 12 Anderson’s specific suggestions focus on group integration and social equality in fundamental socio-epistemic institutions, particularly education, aiming at the institutional virtue she calls “epistemic democracy” (2012: 172). 13

Nonetheless, there remains the apparent fact that testimonial injustice is not just wrong, but that it wrongs someone. Even if the virtue-ethical account is correct, some account is still needed of the indignity suffered by the speaker herself. In Section 4 I will argue that this is best captured as a failure of recognition. First, however, we should consider Fricker’s account of the indignity suffered in testimonial injustice as “epistemic objectification.”
**3. Epistemic objectification**

Epistemic objectification is meant to articulate the sense in which testimonial injustice does a direct and intrinsic moral wrong to the speaker by treating her as less than a full epistemic subject. Mirroring Kant’s *Groundwork* distinction between treating a person as an end in itself and a means to an end, Fricker distinguishes between two senses in which a speaker may be treated as an occasion for knowledge: first, as an “informant,” a competent and sincere epistemic agent whose testimony is taken up by others as reason to believe, or at least take seriously, a communicated belief, and second, as a “source of information,” an observable feature of others’ experienced environment from whom information may be gleaned through perception and inference (Fricker 2007: 132). To be treated as an informant is to be treated as an active participant in the epistemic community while to be treated as a source of information is to be treated as any other passive observable object. As Fricker notes, these are not mutually exclusive ways of treating persons, and it is a morally innocent feature of epistemic life to treat others (and ourselves) as sources of information, as when I infer the rain outside from your wet clothes or perceive that I am hungry from my own growling stomach. Fricker’s Kantian suggestion is that treating someone as a source of information takes a turn towards injustice when one is treated as a mere source of information. In laying out his famous “humanity” formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant further distinguished between treating persons as means and treating persons as mere means (2012: 4, 429). Just as my leaning on your arm to steady my balance does not imply that I view you simply as a living bannister, my inferring the weather from the wetness of your clothes does not imply that I view you merely as an epistemic object. It is when I treat you solely as a means, or solely as an epistemic object, that I violate you in your very standing as a rational subject. This degradation from epistemic subject to object is, Fricker argues, precisely the demotion in status that takes place in testimonial injustice.

However, certain instances do not so easily fit the objectification model. The following case illustrates the point: Mr. B, a Bosnian citizen and Muslim, is held without charge in Guantanamo for seven years, where he is subject to interrogational torture. His capture was ordered as part of a preemptive sweep for collaborators in an embassy bomb plot. In fact, however, Mr. B had no part in or knowledge of this plot or related actions. Repeatedly, Mr. B tells his captors that he knows nothing, which only leads to further torture. Mr. B sincerely and competently offers the testimony, “I know nothing,” which is discredited on the basis of prejudicial bias concerning his Muslim identity. While multiple injustices are at work here, it is clear that testimonial injustice is among them. Yet characterizing this as epistemic objectification is misleading for at least two reasons. First, the testimonial injustice at work would not be possible unless the interrogators view Mr. B as the bearer of critical information and so treat him as a competent epistemic subject. Second, as soon as Mr. B’s captors admonish him for being deceptive, they thereby include him within the sphere of potential informants to whom norms of epistemic exchange apply. Mr. B is thus treated as a subject in the dual sense of (1) being the subject of knowledge and (2) being subject to epistemic norms. To be sure, it is nowhere part of Fricker’s account of epistemic objectification that the speaker must be viewed utterly as an object by the hearer in order for the case to count as an offense. Yet the objection here is not just that some degree of epistemic subjectivity persists beyond the degrading effects of testimonial injustice, but that there exist forms of epistemic injustice that structurally depend upon the speaker’s epistemic subjectivity, rendering the objectification model at least one-sided.

In a similar criticism of the objectification model, Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (2012a; 2012b) has pointed out cases of “epistemic exploitation” in which speakers’ claims are not rejected or ignored en masse but are selectively affirmed and denied by the hearer according to how well they confirm the hearer’s existing doxastic commitments. We may imagine a boss happy to lend...
credibility to an employee’s positive testimony about workplace conditions until that testimony includes reports of sexual harassment. Once again, a hearer’s very efforts to epistemically exploit a speaker presuppose as a condition for their success a recognition of the latter’s authority as at least an epistemic “semi-subject” (Pohlhaus, Jr. 2012a: 104). At work here is not objectification per se but a form of asymmetry between subjects that recalls the structure of exploitation described in Hegel’s master-slave dialectic (1977: §§178–196). The master’s desire that the slave recognize the former’s authority cannot be satisfied without recognizing the latter as bearing an authority of his or her own. Thus, we should refine Fricker’s point by clarifying that only some instances of testimonial injustice fit the model of epistemic objectification. The broader range of cases involves a failed relation between persons that I will develop as failures of epistemic objectification.

4. Failures of epistemic recognition

A central thesis of recognition theory is that a positive relation-to-self is dependent upon, and therefore may be undone by, relations with others. According to this thesis, one’s self-worth is developed and upheld through acts of recognition, understood as expressive acts through which individuals and institutions convey acknowledgment of the worth or normative standing of others. The experience of injustice is thus understood as a dissonance between one’s sense of self-worth and the expressive dimension of an act or practice that withholds or denies validation of that worth. We see that this relates directly to the wrongful denial of one’s standing as a knower when we note that “knower” is a normative concept, one that refers not only to what someone is descriptively, but to what roles someone may legitimately assume, in the context of socio-epistemic practices. If “knower” is a value-laden concept in this way, then regarding oneself as a knower is a positive relation-to-self, a way of seeing oneself as bearing worth or normative status. This allows us to connect the experience of epistemic injustice directly to Axel Honneth’s description of the moral injury of misrecognition: “Because the normative self-image of each and every individual human being . . . is dependent on the possibility of being continually backed up by others, the experience of being disrespected carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse” (1995: 132). This is remarkably close to Fricker’s own claims that repeated or severe acts of epistemic injustice work to degrade one’s self-confidence as a knower and, even more strongly, may “inhibit the very formation of self” (2007: 55). Hence, epistemic-injustice-as-recognition-failure may be understood as a withholding or denial of forms of social validation that are necessary for the development and maintenance of the specific relation-to-self involved in regarding oneself as a knower.

We can venture beyond this quite general description by offering an elaboration of the specific kinds of epistemic recognition we may justifiably view as owed to one another. In The Struggle for Recognition, Honneth differentiates between three fundamental modes of recognition: love, respect, and esteem (1995: 92–130). Love refers to those forms of care and attentiveness that express to the beloved that she deserves some degree of support and nurturing from others. Including yet extending beyond intimate familial and erotic relationships, recognition-as-loving-care affirms persons in their neediness and particularity. In contrast to this particularistic form of recognition, respect refers to the conferral of moral worth in a universal, egalitarian sense, as in Kantian respect for persons as ends in themselves or as rights-bearing persons. Finally, esteem refers to the conferral of worth on the basis of a person’s distinctive accomplishments, character, contributions to society, and other praiseworthy attributes. Unlike respect, esteem is indexed to individuality and thus distributed differentially. Love, respect, and esteem each serve as normatively distinct modes
of conferring social validation upon others, whether in their neediness, their standing as a moral and legal equal, or in their unique and praiseworthy contributions to social life.\(^{19}\)

Though it has not been explicitly undertaken in the recognition literature, it would not be difficult to extend this three-part schema of recognition in order to reveal love, respect, and esteem as each bearing a special role in epistemic practice. Indeed, the very fact that social epistemologists like Fricker speak of epistemically distinct forms of “disrespect” and “dishonor” at least implies contrasting concepts of epistemic social validation.\(^{20}\) *Epistemic respect* could refer to an expressive act conveying the acknowledgment of the minimal set of capacities we grant to any knower whatsoever, irrespective of particular expertise, experience, or situatedness (e.g., a minimal capacity for self-reflexiveness, a minimal capacity to offer and ask for justifications, etc.), as well as a minimal set of rights and responsibilities we afford any knower whatsoever (e.g., the right not to have one’s epistemic credentials dismissed on the basis of bad prejudice). *Epistemic esteem* could refer to recognition of more specialized forms of epistemic accomplishment not necessarily shared by others (stemming from, e.g., expertise, a track record of exceptional honesty, or the kinds of situated epistemic advantage highlighted by standpoint theorists). In addition to epistemic respect and esteem, we may even speak of *epistemic love*, referring to those forms of epistemic nurturing and attentiveness that confirm a burgeoning knower’s epistemic trust and confidence, as well as epistemic skills like literacy and communication in early childhood.\(^{21}\) The corresponding form of misrecognition in the case of epistemic love could be termed *epistemic neglect*: one’s wrongful exclusion from the community of knowers as a result of poor or nonexistent learning conditions in early childhood, in particular the relations of care, patience, and attentiveness characteristic of loving care in a broad sense.\(^{22}\)

The notion that we owe epistemic respect equally to any knower whatsoever may at first appear perplexing, for the obvious reason that knowers are knowers to varying degrees of competence and sincerity across different areas, implying that no two knowers are “equal” in any straightforward sense. It is not easy to specify a precise list of what goes into the basic normative standing that is confirmed via epistemic respect, yet there is theoretical precedent for the idea. Famously, H.P. Grice (1975) argued for a set of conversational norms derived from a “Principle of Cooperation,” norms which “apply to conversation as such, irrespective of its subject matter,” and which include the imperatives to be informative, be succinct, not assert things we believe to be false, etc. More recently, Nancy Daukas has defended an *epistemic principle of charity*, derived from the thought that “normal practices of epistemic interaction and cooperation require that members of an epistemic community typically extend to one another the presumption that they meet some threshold level of epistemic credibility” (2006: 110). These cautious moves already begin to elaborate the minimal normative standing owed to any knower irrespective of competence or sincerity. It seems fair to assume that this would include, e.g., general prohibitions on associating one’s race with deceptiveness or one’s gender with irrational emoting. There exist further (though contentious) strategies for elaborating thicker notions of the kinds of rights we tacitly attribute to any being we recognize as a knower, by arguing that implicit commitments to such rights are built into our epistemic and communicative practices themselves, as in Jürgen Habermas’ (1990) discourse ethics. Acknowledging some minimal notion of epistemic equality via epistemic respect is, moreover, compatible with simultaneously valuing different knowers differentially according to their epistemic strengths via *epistemic esteem*, a non-egalitarian mode of epistemic recognition indexed to relative competence and sincerity. Hence, my *epistemically esteeming* A more highly than B on a given topic in light of A’s expertise and B’s lack thereof is consistent with my *epistemically respecting* A and B as epistemic equals and, moreover, on par with the demands of epistemic justice.
Acts of testimonial injustice may be described as involving disrespect and disesteem simultaneously or separately. Consider an instance in which a female professor reads her students’ anonymous course evaluations at the end of the semester to find a number of disparagingly sexist comments, including a comment from a student who describes her lecture style as “emoting.” Assuming the professor was lecturing on a topic within her expertise and that the student’s comment about “emoting” has sexist bias at its root, this case may be viewed simultaneously as an instance of epistemic disesteem and epistemic disrespect. It is a form of disesteem insofar as the professor’s unique and hard-won standing as an intellectual authority on this topic fails to be valued by precisely the kind of hearer who is in a position to validate that standing. It is, moreover, a form of disrespect, insofar as associating any knower’s gender with irrational emoting patently violates the minimal normative expectations we hold simply as knowers, expert or not.

So far I have focused on the case of testimonial injustice. We can briefly gesture towards the possibilities for extending this account to other forms of epistemic injustice by drawing some connections to Charles Mills’ notion of an epistemic social contract. On his account, one of the fundamental ways in which white supremacy has both explicitly and implicitly shaped modern society is through a tacit agreement amongst the beneficiaries of racial oppression to a set of norms determining criteria for “factual and moral knowledge” (1997: 17). As a result, an “inverted epistemology” is developed in which social conditions of racial domination create an epistemic milieu that hides from view those very conditions, “producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (1997: 18). Though the world is persistently seen wrongly, the tacit epistemic social contract works to ensure that certain false beliefs will nonetheless be met with epistemic esteem, while disconfirming testimony and experience will be rejected as incoherent. The inverted epistemology Mills describes may thus be understood as an inverted world of epistemic misrecognition, involving excesses of unwarranted epistemic esteem for its beneficiaries alongside a structural proclivity towards epistemic disrespect, disesteem, and neglect for knowers who speak against it.

5. Conclusion

I have explored how four important traditions in normative ethics could treat the wrongfulness of epistemic injustice. The general conclusion we may derive from the above discussion is that a multipronged approach best suits the critical diagnosis of epistemic injustice as simultaneously involving harm, vice, objectification, and misrecognition. As we saw, problems that arise for some of the positions cannot be resolved without reference to at least one of the others. More specifically, however, I have argued that the concept of epistemic recognition is an essential component in our efforts to make explicit the normative underpinnings of the critique of epistemic injustice. When we view “knower” as a value concept that may be conferred or withheld by others, it is not surprising that humans not only by nature desire to know, as Aristotle pointed out, but also desire to be recognized as knowers.
Harm, objectification, misrecognition

Harm, objectification, misrecognition as well as Alice Cray, Adam Gies, Janna van Grunsvjen, Kathleen Kelly, Mahmoud Hassanieh, and the other participants for a stimulating discussion.

2 Fricker offers an extensive discussion of what she calls the “secondary harms” of epistemic injustice, which take both epistemic and practical forms.

3 The term is introduced in Mills (1997:18), and given further elaboration in Mills (2007) and Alcoff (2007).

4 Others writing on epistemic injustice and epistemologies of ignorance have also defended realist commitments that include moral objectivity. See, e.g., Alcoff, (2007: 53); Fricker (2010b: 168–9). I discuss and defend these realist commitments in Congdon (2015).


6 For a discussion by way of Quine and nineteenth-century Marxism, see Mills (2007).

7 Recent “genealogical” approaches to epistemology have done work to carefully explore the ways in which socio-epistemic practices emerge out of basic survival needs in a “State of Nature” (where, e.g., the advantages of pooling knowledge about which foods are good to eat, which are poisonous, motivate socio-epistemic development). See Williams (2002) and Craig (1990).

8 Wanderer’s example occurs in a South African context, and so the use above of ‘white’ and ‘black’ is a simplification of the more complex set of social identities at work in Wanderer’s original presentation of this scenario (2012: 150, note 3).


10 See, especially, the first three essays in McDowell (1998); Wiggins (1998); Nussbaum (1990).

11 For different versions of this worry, see Alcoff (2010: 132–134); Anderson (2012: 163–173); and Medina (2013: 79–89).

12 Fricker (2010) has embraced this notion as well.


14 This is a simplified version of the now famous case in the Supreme Court decision, Boumediene vs. Bush, which resulted in the plaintiff’s release after spending 2002–2009 in military custody (Boumediene: 2012).

15 Fricker is explicit on this point: “[T]here will be few contexts in which a hearer’s prejudice is so insanely thoroughgoing that he fails to regard his interlocutor as a subject of knowledge at all” (2007: 134–135).

16 For variations on this thesis, see Honneth (1995); Taylor (1994); Brandom (2007); Butler (2004); and Bernstein, (2015).

17 In the sense just sketched, “knower” is a normative concept in a distinctively epistemic sense. One might object that this does not bring us all the way to the moral normativity required to claim that failure to recognize someone as a knower counts as a moral violation. Yet the necessary bridge between epistemic and moral normativity can be provided in at least two ways: first, by noting the structural necessity that some minimal sense of epistemic self-worth must play within the broader range of activities that constitute a flourishing life; second, by noting that the capacity to be recognized as a knower is a precondition for successfully offering moral testimony, e.g., when one wishes to voice the existence of wrongdoing. Thanks to Mahmoud Hassanieh for pressing this point. I discuss the latter strand of thought in Congdon (2016).


19 Recently, Honneth has suggested adding a fourth form of recognition to his typology which he refers to as “antecedent recognition,” a more basic form of recognition that must already be in place in order for love, respect, and esteem to be possible (2008: 40–52 and 90, note 70). Whether or not this fourth type should be acknowledged does not significantly affect the present discussion, so I leave it aside here.

20 For example: “testimonial injustice . . . deprives the subject of a certain fundamental form of respect” (Fricker 2007:46) and, “When one is wrongfully mistrusted . . . one is dishonoured” (Fricker 2007: 46).

21 Epistemic love could be viewed as extending into adulthood as well with, for example, the practice of extending the “benefit of the doubt” to speakers in special circumstances that warrant it, particularly when basic relations of epistemic trust and confidence are under threat and require repair.

22 For a recent philosophical exploration of epistemic injustice in an educational context, see Haslanger (2014).

23 This kind of example is unfortunately commonplace. Recent empirical studies have confirmed the long suspected fact of gender bias at work in university student evaluations. See, e.g., MacNell, Driscoll, and Hunt (2015).
24 The status of the student as a student enrolled in this professor’s class is important here, since we would deny that just anyone, no matter how far removed from the professor’s classroom, has an obligation to recognize her expertise. The student in this scenario is in a privileged position to either confer or deny recognition in this case.

25 This raises difficult questions concerning the relation between recognition and ideology. See, e.g., Axel Honneth (2007).

References

Harm, objectification, misrecognition


