There is a thought experiment well-known in philosophy of mind but not particularly elsewhere, in which Frank Jackson imagined ‘Mary,’ a fabulous scientist imprisoned since birth in a black-and-white room. Mary has made her life’s work the study of color and knows all the facts there are to know about color and perception. In two papers, Jackson argued that Mary would learn something, something new, if she were ever freed into the world of color – and thus that physicalism, constituted for him as the thesis that ‘complete physical knowledge is complete knowledge simpliciter’ (Jackson 1986: 291) is false. If everything in the world is physical, we should be able to describe that world in truth-verifiable propositions.

In this chapter I start from one strand of the conversation Jackson’s initial papers about Mary initiated: perhaps, commentators argued, Mary had complete propositional knowledge, knowledge that color was various things, but she lacked knowledge how to see color. This dichotomy, between knowledge that and knowledge how, has structured much of the discussion of what forms of non-propositional knowledge there might be, to the extent that settling the know how/know that question is sometimes understood to be sufficient to settle the question of whether there is any knowledge that is not propositional. I argue that, indeed, there are forms of understanding and knowledge that are not propositional, and that acknowledging these forms is a central piece of any project working for epistemic justice.

My central argument is that focusing on propositional knowledge as though it is the only form of knowing worth considering is itself a form of epistemic injustice. Such a focus neglects epistemic resources that help oppressed people craft more just worlds. We should not understand epistemic resources as the sorts of things that help us acquire only propositional knowledge (though such knowledge will, for sure, be useful to us). I suggest that there are several forms of knowing useful to the work of redressing epistemic injustice, and that implicit or nonpropositional forms are in ordinary practice intertwined with propositional forms in epistemically salient ways. Grappling with epistemic injustice benefits from attention to the epistemic resources involved in implicit understanding and knowing.

Second, I argue that the use of fictional thought experiments ascendant within conventional philosophy forms a kind of epistemic injustice, reducing the philosophically relevant ‘ingredients’ to propositionally evaluable knowledge and ignoring resistant or difficult-to-say knowledge that might reveal quite a lot about the political stakes of our knowing practices. Taking a more expansive and nuanced approach to our epistemic situation is not only more adequate to the world we
know (and thus epistemically to be preferred); it also offers a richer approach to discovering and redressing epistemic injustice.

Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson have been instrumental in re-starting a conversation about the know how/know that distinction, starting from an argument against Gilbert Ryle’s work in this area (Ryle 1949; Stanley 2011; Stanley and Williamson 2001). They argue that all putative know how is actually a form of knowing-that, resting their account on a thought experiment. They say: ‘a master pianist [call her “Maestra”] who loses both of her arms in a tragic car accident still knows how to play the piano. However, she has lost the ability to do so’ (Stanley and Williamson 2001: 6). Stanley and Williamson offer this example with this brevity and understand it as one good illustration of their claim that Ryle’s account of knowing-how is ‘demonstrably false’: Maestra’s capacities to play are hampered by the loss of her hands, but they take it that our intuitions will tell us that her knowledge of piano playing is intact. Stanley has gone on to substantially elaborate his intellectualist view of know how, which claims that it is, in fact, knowledge-that (Stanley 2010, 2011).

The Maestra example brings together key moves in the intellectualist argument against know how; the case is reprised in an astonishing range of philosophical work on know how. Helpfully for my argument here, this thought experiment shows us both how impoverished standard philosophical views of knowing really are, and how limited and potentially unjust fictional thought experiments can be. Thinking more broadly about the forms of knowing manifest in fictional and real cases of bodily transformation helps us have better accounts of what we should hold in mind in thinking about epistemic justice.

The argument has four parts:

1. When we talk about know how (for example, Maestra’s piano-playing knowledge), there is a far richer story to tell than has been captured so far, and we get one piece of that story through attending to the relation between ability and skill.

2. However, the effect of losing her arms on her ‘Maestra-ness’ (thus described) is more complex even than an expanded account of our skilled abilities. Her life, including important aspects of her epistemic life, is changed more deeply than it would have been had she lost all the pianos in the world, for example. We benefit from an account of what more would be lost, and I offer such an account through enriching the categories we might use to understand Maestra’s knowledge. All of us partake in forms of knowledge that include propositional knowledge and skilled capacities; we also engage affective knowing, knowledge by acquaintance, tacit knowledge, and more.

3. Attending to the social and political features of bodily transformation through the stories of real people who live with acquired disabilities gives us a richer picture of the philosophical stakes and effects of this life experience. Rather than the usual thought experiments in which philosophers imagine brutal scenarios for fictional women – life imprisonment in black-and-white rooms for brilliant scientists studying color or catastrophic car accidents for brilliant pianists – we ought to attend to these complex political and interpersonal aspects of consciousness in theorizing knowledge.

4. Understanding the forms of knowing manifest in more adequate accounts of what is at stake in experiencing bodily change and disability opens corollary space for better understanding of epistemic resources.

Standard philosophical narratives iterate and re-iterate pervasive patterns of epistemic injustice, both in the tunnel-vision focus on propositional knowledge that is used to discount forms of knowing that cannot be put into truth-verifiable claims, and in the artificial and impoverished
focus on thought experiments that actively bracket out much experience relevant to non-dominantly situated knowers. A richer account of forms of knowing and a richer attention to people's lived experiences in the world helps us identify, analyze, and redress epistemic injustices.

1. Know how and ability

Moving beyond Maestra's case offers us more interesting epistemic terrain than the distinction between knowledge how and knowledge that can encompass. There are some things one can say about even that narrow question, however, that are more adequate than what Stanley and Williamson give us. Stanley closes his 2010 article with a reassertion of the claim that 'knowing how can be defined in terms of propositional knowledge.' He writes:

One would only think that there is a tension here only if one antecedently identified knowing how to do something with having certain dispositions or abilities. But knowing how to do something is not simply a matter of having certain dispositions. It is a matter of having the right propositional knowledge; of knowing the right answer to the question 'How could you do it?'

(Stanley 2010: 29)

This raises the questions of how, in Stanley's view, we ought to understand abilities, their distinction from dispositions, and the relationship between ability and propositional knowledge.

Absent a compelling argument for why we ought to see ability and knowing how as different in relevant ways, the argument that knowing how is a species of propositional knowledge is of considerable technical interest, but less able to speak to the questions that motivate consideration of skillful activity and corollary accounts of know how. In other words, when Ryle and others write about know how, they are interested more in the question of what it means to know how to do something and less in the question of how people talk about knowing how to do something. Stanley and affiliates give a good account of the latter, but no account of the former. There is interest, of course, in giving accounts of how people talk about how to do things – and this is what Stanley treats. But there is also justifiable interest in what it is to know how to do something and not just talk about it.

Alva Noë's critique of the intellectualist approach is useful here. First, as Noë points out, you can be unable to exercise an ability in at least two ways.¹ You may simply lack the ability in question (I, for example, do not know how to play the piano). Or, circumstances might not allow you to exercise an ability that you might be able to practice (you might know how to play a piano but have no piano around). Noë thinks that the loss of Maestra's arms is comparable, 'in the relevant sense', to the loss of her piano, explaining the intuition one might have that she does still know how to play the piano although she cannot now do so. Second, he points out that there are degrees of know how, just as there are variations on what someone knows propositionally about something like piano playing. Know how can wax and wane based on many factors – time, physical condition, practice. As many musicians report, failing to practice a skill affects one's ability to do it in ways that are complexly physical, emotional, conceptual, and practical. Noë offers us the physical aspect of this kind of linkage of know how and ability, noting that temporal considerations should be important to how we think about Maestra's capacities for piano-playing: the longer it has been since she played piano at the expert level, the less likely she is to be able to play at that level were her arms magically returned to her. Further, in the case of amputees, 'defeference of hand-related cortical areas leads to cortical reorganization, a reorganization which may destroy the brain-basis of the relevant practical knowledge' (Noë 2005: 6). Finally, the relations
between knowing how and knowing that might be sufficiently intertwined that there isn’t an easy distinction between them. Noë argues: ‘Possession of abilities enables us to detect significance where there would otherwise be none. In this way, the body, the world and our practical knowledge open up a meaningful realm of experience to us’ (Noë 2005: 8). Following Noë and others, we can see that it may be important – if we are interested in thick, accurate accounts of knowledge – to think about meaning and experience as well. As I will argue, the meaning of experience matters to how we understand the question of epistemic justice.

2. Epistemic features beyond and entangled in ability

Noë argues that practical knowledge, along with our embodied situation in the world, opens a meaningful realm of experience. But what does it mean to have a meaningful realm of experience open to us? What do we know in the space of that opening? Answering this question requires us to think about epistemically salient aspects of Maestra’s knowledge that are not encompassed by the know how/know that binary, or, indeed, by the concept or fact of having the ability to do something.

My sister is an opera singer. It is evident in her use of her voice as an instrument – and its development over time – that she has a complex, rich relationship to being a singer. One part is simply what we call ‘knowing how to sing’ – a skill that she has spent years working on developing. Complexly related to her developing the skills associated with singing has been her development as a singer: someone who loves a particular kind of music, who is conversant in its masters and its forms, who understands the social practices of being a singer, who moves through the world with an appreciation of vocal sound, whose apprehension of sound itself is related to being a singer, and who projects herself into the future in terms of her self-understanding as a singer. Among other things, this means that she looks forward to singing in particular contexts, learns languages in order to sing them more fluidly, appreciates dating people who like music, and writes convincing fiction about people and music (Shotwell 2015). Much of her life is organized around music. All of these aspects of her life are complexly intertwined with a racist, classist scaffolding that implicitly render some people (white, middle-class) as appropriate subjects for opera. Body shaming and monitoring is rife in opera worlds, producing as if by accident opera singers who are not disabled, who are reasonably thin, and who are conventionally attractive. There are substantive epistemically relevant social features involved in the praxis of being a singer.

Surely my sister is different from Maestra in degree more than kind. Maestra, as defined, is a ‘master pianist.’ My sister is a still-developing opera singer. But presumably Maestra’s relationship to the piano and to herself as a piano player would involve similarly complex habits, affects, tacit knowledge, and more. It is this complex of things – manifesting at the level of what I call her ‘implicit understanding’ – that would be thrown into relief in the context of an accident sufficiently violent to cause her to lose her arms. We can distinguish five different sorts of understanding at play here, though perhaps there are more. First, there is a level of propositional knowledge, through which Maestra thought and thinks about music, musicians, technique, history, and so on. Propositional knowledge is amenable to what is often understood as the ‘traditional account’ of knowledge – claim-making activity about the world that is truth-verifiable. When did Mozart live? What is the key of this sonata? What time does the concert start? This aspect of her understanding of playing the piano may indeed be relatively intact regardless of the availability of pianos or of arms to play them. There are at least four kinds of implicit understanding also in play, however, and these would be far more violently wounded in this accident than her propositional knowledge: first, her ability to execute the skill in question – in this case, to actually
Forms of knowing and epistemic resources

play the piano; second, her socially-situated embodiment as someone who moves through the
world as a master piano player; third, her potentially propositional tacit or distal knowledge; and
fourth, her affective or emotional understanding (see Shotwell 2011, 2015).

First, then, consider having the ability to play the piano at all—or, especially, to play well. This
kind of embodied ability is one of the central things a fictional Maestra must have possessed,
practiced, and developed as part of her being a master pianist. As anyone who knows a serious
musician knows, active practice is central to making the movements and habits of making music
fluid and expert. These habits are not entirely non-conceptual: teachers can communicate prop-
sitionally how to change musical habits. Among other things, learning to make music well
involves bodily practices that are consciously practiced and shifted. Integral to playing the piano,
then, is the complex social-physical practice of piano playing. Skilled understanding, know how,
involves the capacity to enact a practice; developing such an ability using arms and then having
to transform a piano-playing practice is one way I regard the loss of her arms as importantly
different than the loss of an available piano. Even in a world in which someone with a real hatred
for pianos and a lot of resources destroyed every extant piano, one can imagine Maestra ‘playing’
on a fake piano painted on her kitchen table. One can imagine her using her understanding of
pianos to construct new, furtive pianos for backroom concerts. Her own skilled understanding
of piano playing would not be fully engaged without an actual piano, but there would be the
potential to enact it. There are important ways that her experience of not having her arms is
not similar to not having a piano ready to hand. The fact that these two ways of being unable to
exercise a capacity are different in relevant ways requires us to think about skilled knowledge as a
key piece of Maestra’s identity. With varying degrees of ability, all of us develop know how as a
key form of knowledge practiced in our everyday life.

Second, consider the idea of a category of understanding that is currently tacit but poten-
tially propositional. If a central part of Maestra’s becoming a master pianist involved developing
embodied skills enacted in a world, another piece is a process of evolving subjectivity—her
incorporated and assumed history as a master pianist. Most musicians develop their musical abil-
ity in conversation with understanding and internalizing potentially propositional knowledge,
which Michael Polanyi and others have termed ‘tacit knowledge’ (Polanyi 1967, 1969). This kind
of knowing would include discovering the history of a particular piece of music, the style of the
composer, how to relate to the audience as she played, and how to carry herself as ‘Maestra.’ Most
of these ways of being could be articulated and described, but in order for someone to enact them
in everyday life, they must go without saying. Tacit, potentially-propositional knowledge is that
form of knowing that has come, over time, to go without saying. It is perhaps most perceptible at
points of change—after an accident that has transformed the possibilities for a master pianist to
exercise her skill, perhaps key points of her tacit knowledge would come into explicitness, while
others would remain implicit.

Finally, consider the involvement of affective understanding with Maestra’s piano playing
ability. Why do we as listeners enjoy seeing someone play music live? Why do musicians work
perhaps unreasonably hard in order to play music? Perhaps we can imagine what losing arms
would mean to someone whose identity is deeply tied to the particular use of them. My con-
tention, then, is that grief, confusion, anger, loss, along with other complex emotions for which
we do not have names, would attend Maestra’s loss of her arms, and that the braiding together of
these emotions with the other forms of implicit understanding I have laid out is important to the
kind of epistemic story we tell about her. Although I think it is important to schematize different
sorts of implicit understanding, in order to avoid the kinds of wooly evocations of a category for
everything-that-is-not-now-in-words, Maestra’s case shows us that separating out these sorts of
knowing is, ultimately, a conceptual experiment. To get at what that experience would really be
like, and how all these forms of understanding would be involved, it is useful to turn to examples from ‘real life,’ or at least from beyond the realm of thought experiments.

3. Experiencing profound bodily change

It is a truism in disability theory that all of us will have bodily experiences currently identified as disabled – this is the subtext of the Maestra anecdote. But what counts as profound change does not have to be socially identifiable as disabled experience to illuminate the socially and politically important aspects of forms of knowledge beyond the propositional. Consider actor Julie Andrews, of The Sound of Music and Mary Poppins fame. Andrews lost much of her singing range during surgery to remove polyps from her vocal cords, a relatively common but unpredictable condition that interferes with singing. Her case substantiates the argument I’m making for a more multi-layered account in thinking about knowledge. Growing up a performer in a musical family, by fifteen Andrews was the primary financial support for her mother, her alcoholic, abusive step-father, and her siblings. She says about her voice, ‘I had a kind of freak, four-octave voice that I could sort of do all sorts of calisthenics with it.’ After the surgery that destroyed this range, Andrews says: ‘I’ve got about five good bass notes. So if you wanted a rendition of “Old Man River,” I can manage it. But the amazing thing is, it was quite devastating. And I was fairly depressed for a while. And then, it was either stay that way for the rest of my life, or get on and do something’ (CBSNews 2009).

Notice a few things about this example: First, like many successful musicians, Andrews’s voice gave her an identity, a way of being, and a set of social relations that attended that doing. Her voice grounded her, provided money to her family, and offered a way out of an abusive family situation. Second, her voice was something extraordinary: she could do things with it that very few singers can, and this capacity opened forms of life to her that exceeded the financial and practical effects of being a successful singer. Finally, the loss of the kind of voice she had was sufficiently devastating that she characterizes herself as needing to make a life-choice – to ‘stay that way’ or ‘get on and do something.’ The issue is not, or not primarily, whether she still knows how to sing: it is an issue of how to re-construct a selfhood that had been formed around an identity grounded in an ability that was physical, cognitive, socially-situated, affective, and more. Andrews’ amazement at the degree of devastation she felt in the wake of her lost octaves speaks against the two-fold intuition Stanley and Williams expect us to endorse: that in considering the knowledge involved in a profound bodily change, we ought to only bring into mind the possibilities of knowing that and knowing how, and that we ought to reduce the scope of what is considered epistemically salient.

I am suggesting that we look to the example of Andrews to give us a richer account of the effects of a profound bodily change on someone who had shaped their subjectivity around the socially-situated embodiment at issue. Andrews’s experience of the reduction of her singing voice from four octaves to half an octave shows the inexactitude of holding the view that being able to enact an ability is the same as propositional knowledge of a way to do something. This inexactitude constitutes an epistemic injustice because it disregards important affective and life-shaping features of, in this case, singing. Beyond that, we can consider epistemically salient parts of our everyday knowing practices that cannot be understood with a focus on propositional knowledge.

One might argue that focusing on subjectivities grounded in expertise of the sort required to be an accomplished musician obfuscates the understanding at issue here. Consider then an example that may dis-entangle the philosophical issues important here. Claudia Mitchell is a former US Marine who lost an arm in a motorcycle accident. She joins Jesse Sullivan, a former electrical linesman who lost both arms to a jolt of 7200 volts of electricity, as a subject in a $48.5 million
Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) project to improve the functionality of upper body prostheses. Neither Mitchell nor Sullivan are, it is useful to note, experts in the way that the fictional Maestra is; we may not think that their subjectivities were built around the presence of their arms in the ways that Maestra’s subjectivity may have been.

Sullivan has become known as the world’s first ‘bionic man’; he and Mitchell have both had nerves pertaining to their amputated limbs transferred into newly unused muscles – in their cases, arm nerves now occupy some space in their pectoral muscles. With a lot of training and resources, they are able to move prosthetic arms and hands by thought. This process more closely approximates non-prosthetic arm use than any other technology currently available – though, of course, they lack the proprioceptive capacity to convey information about what is touched, lifted, and so on with the prosthetic arm. The New Yorker article about Mitchell’s case concludes with the observation that:

Historically, the demands and rigors of war may have provided the impetus for scientific and medical progress, but domestic life is often where the significant advancements are felt first. In Mitchell’s case, she said that occasionally she now finds herself reclining on the sofa at home, watching television, and will suddenly realize that the arm propping up her head is her left arm.

(McGrath 2007: 45)

That she can forget that her left arm is prosthetic – that it has been come ‘ready-to-hand’ in Heidegger’s sense – complexly involves the ways that forms of implicit knowing receded into the background when everything is ‘working well.’ There is much we don’t know about Mitchell’s process of becoming able to forget that her left arm, on which she props her head, is a prosthesis. There are some things to notice, though.

First, it’s unlikely that having the ‘bionic’ prosthetic feels the same as having an arm back, primarily because without meaningful biofeedback apparatus, there is no proprioception involved in even very advanced prostheses. Still, note that in the process of re-innervation, teaching Mitchell to use her arm again is based in a pedagogy appropriate to the domestic: she trains her ‘arm,’ and is trained in its use, by practicing cooking, ironing shirts, and making salad with it – all in a research lab. In more daily ways, she says, the prosthetic ‘has changed my life dramatically . . . I use it to help with cooking, for holding a laundry basket, for folding clothes – all kinds of daily tasks’ (Brown 2006). That these are the kinds of daily tasks this arm is trained for, and, indeed, required for, is significant: Mitchell’s implicit understanding, disrupted and then partially reconditioned in the use of the bionic arm, is thoroughly gendered, raced, and classed. The very availability of the arm to her is situated in a dense webbing of material conditions, which we might not ordinarily think of as important to the epistemic work of being an amputee. DARPA’s research into prosthetics is saturated with complex considerations about what it means for the military to be simultaneously responsible for injuries inviting prosthetic response and also a mover in prosthetics research. We do well to attend to the vast material and epistemic resources that go into war and its ongoing aftermath; the differential distribution of injury and death, as well as of medical resources and prosthetics, should itself be a matter of politically and morally-saturated epistemic concern.

All of this floats, iceberg-massive, under the ease Mitchell finds folding laundry with the prosthetic arm DARPA funds. Her integration of the prosthetic into her daily practice involves a complex of feelings, presuppositions, socially-situated embodiment, skills, and propositional knowledge that we need to acknowledge if we are going to do justice to what’s involved in everyday life. Current research in bioethics and critical disability studies speaks to the experience of acquiring and then living with impairment and socially-shaped disability. One thing the cases like Claudia
Mitchell’s and Julie Andrews’s show is a limitation in the solely linguistic account Stanley and Williamson, and later Stanley, give of knowing how. Inquiring into the epistemic salience of a multi-faceted implicit understanding gives us, I hope, more adequate answers to questions about what Maestra knew – and, indeed, how we all know, even now.

Taking examples from the world proliferates the possibilities for what we can attend to, epistemically, ethically, and politically. In this way, it is understandable that philosophers frequently aim to pare away things extraneous to their main point in order to focus on what is putatively philosophically salient. With a compassionate view toward the difficulties of philosophizing in the actually existing world, let me underline that such paring away will almost certainly participate in unjust social relations. The injustice of proceeding as though the only epistemically relevant part of the ‘Maestra’ case is the know how/know that question is perceptible in attending to actual cases of people experiencing bodily transformations.

4. Epistemic resources and implicit understanding

Heidi Grasswick has productively discussed the ways that feminist epistemologists, in responding to what Miranda Fricker identifies as hermeneutic injustice, have appealed to the need for a meaningful normative stance for knowledge work. As she argues, ethical considerations might be important to epistemic success: ‘Feminist epistemologists are questioning our ability to answer epistemically normative questions without reference to the ethical’ (Grasswick 2014: 236). In similar ways, I next consider how forms of knowing that are not conceptual or propositional may be significant epistemic resources. For the most part, the people thinking about epistemic resources within the context of epistemic injustice focus on concepts and the availability of good or better concepts for adequate knowing. In understanding the epistemic resources knowers draw on in pursuing social justice, we need also to account for forms of knowing that do not take propositional or conceptual form.

In contrast, Kirstie Dotson offers a broader conception of epistemic resources by drawing attention to epistemic systems. As Dotson writes: ‘One’s epistemic resources and the epistemological system within which those resources prevail may be wholly inadequate to the task of addressing the persisting epistemic exclusions that are causing epistemic oppression’ (Dotson 2014: 116). The collective epistemic resources on which we depend to make sense of and engage the world may be both impoverished and harmed by systemic oppression. Dotson clarifies that ‘epistemological systems, here, refers to our overall epistemic life ways. It includes operative, instituted social imaginaries, habits of cognition, attitudes towards knowers and/or any relevant sensibilities that encourage or hinder the production of knowledge. An epistemological system is a holistic concept that refers to all the conditions for the possibility of knowledge production and possession’ (121). I read my above account of implicit understanding as including skills, affect, implicit knowledge, and socially-situated embodiment to be congruent with Dotson’s rendering here of epistemological systems.

As my discussion of the fictional example of Maestra and the real examples of my sister, Julie Andrews, and Claudia Mitchell has illustrated, forms of knowledge beyond the propositional should be included as part of knowledge production and possession. Dominant practices of epistemology, focusing on propositional knowledge, are deficient in part because they delimit the scope of epistemic resources. Even liberatory projects such as Fricker’s focus on conceptual resources in pursuing epistemic justice. So, when Fricker articulates testimonial injustice as the case of speakers receiving deflated credibility because of their social position in an unjust world and hermeneutic injustice as the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social
experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization’ (Fricker 2007: 158), she retains a paradigmatic focus on propositional knowledge. Not having the concepts and language to account for an experience, or not having one’s words taken seriously are certainly forms of epistemic injustice. But it is also a form of epistemic injustice to have access to the insufficient epistemic resources expressed in a vision of knowledge confined to language and concepts. Pursuing better worlds benefits from including the rich epistemic resources of attending to our feelings, presuppositions, embodied practice, and skilled behavior as salient to our lives.

In thinking with the thought experiments imagining Mary, or Maestra, we do well to move the question of their knowledge beyond the propositional. What would happen if we understood knowledge—that as perpetually and meaningfully connected to forms of knowledge that include emotion, skill, social situation, embodiment, and more? How would our pursuit of epistemic justice expand if we considered more than the adequacies of our concepts and language to our experience? And what might happen when the examples we take up to think about can speak back to our use of them? This question is significant, because simply attending to cases from the real world does not do away with epistemic injustice, as when people’s experiences are simplified or instrumentalized to ‘make a point.’ Still, I believe that expanding our epistemic accounts to include the rich epistemic resources we draw on in our most everyday knowing practices will be of benefit for work on knowledge, as well as for more just worlds in which to know.

Related chapters: 1, 3, 8, 16, 26, 32, 33, 37

Notes

1 Note that these are forms of being unable to play the piano that seem to be just practical, and do not have much to do with epistemic injustices that could contribute to a lack of piano playing. However, there are substantive social contexts to these seemingly simple circumstances that involve epistemic injustices: not having social access to the potential passion for piano playing, not having the confidence or training, being seen as ‘not the right sort’ to play piano, the prohibitive expense of pianos and the concomitant assumption that people who play piano own a piano and a place to put it, which (given the difficulty of moving and tuning pianos) usually means owning a house.

2 Onora O’Neill’s early engagement with the use of examples in moral reasoning (taking up Peter Winch’s 1972 paper ‘The Universalizability of Moral Judgment’) is important, as she critiques ‘ lurid ’ and ‘ schematic ’ examples while simultaneously rejecting both Wittgensteinian and contemporary analytic ‘ problem-centred ’ moral theorizing. She makes the argument that we need to have both a real assessment of the actual situations in which we find ourselves, as well as a principled approach to moral reasoning (O’Neill 1986). Iris Marion Young’s discussion of Anita Silvers’ work on non-disabled people’s difficulty imagines the lives of disabled people as anything other than tragic, racist appropriations of Indigenous experiences, and other difficulties involved in perceiving accurately across difference (Young 1997: 42–43). In cases like these, we do well to be careful about the epistemic assumptions underlying our thought experiments, because they may well carry along injust implications. Susan Brison observes that philosophers frequently turn to outlandish scenarios of split-brains, teletransporters that destroy an original self, and so on, rather than taking up actual people’s experiences of profound self-transformation, including experiencing the destruction and reconstitution of the self (Brison 2002: 38–39).

References


Stanley, Jason. 2010. ‘Knowing (How)’, Noûs 45.2: 207–238.

