

16. Fricker 2007: Epistemic Injustice

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I. Epistemic Injustice

Fricker is interested in the notion of *epistemic injustice*. Not simply injustice involving epistemically-relevant goods (like education).

Rather, a kind of (systematic, societal) wrong that is done to someone in their capacity as a knower. At least three kinds (Fricker talks only about the first two):

- *Testimonial injustice*: identity-based prejudice leads person to give too little credibility to someone's testimony.
- *Hermeneutical injustice*: a gap in collective interpretive put some groups at a disadvantage for making sense of their own experiences. (Remember Mills on ideology.)
- *Contributory Injustice* (Dotson 2012): willful ignorance of the interpretative resources constructed by a marginalized group that prevents dominant group from understanding. (Think Mills.)

E.g. police not believing someone because they're Black.

E.g. women in workplaces before "sexual harassment" was understood as a concept.

E.g., perhaps, resistance to the idea of systemic racism.

Methodology: like Mills, goal is to bring our social-situatedness to epistemology, with the goal of developing resources for understanding societal problems.

II. Social Power

Fricker understands social power as the ability to control a person (or group's) actions.

- Can be active or passive.
- Can be agential or purely structural.

Identity power is that which is exercised against someone because of their social identity.

E.g. traffic cop gives parking-law-violators tickets; vs. gives only Black people tickets.

Traffic cop: ticket, vs. being nearby.

Traffic cops' discretion. Vs. system to keep a group of people from voting.

Q: Could this really happen without agential power being exercised?

Fricker is interested in how patterns of testimonial injustice can enact unjust patterns of identity-based social power.

III. Testimonial Injustice

When someone testifies that p is true, the amount of *credibility* you give them is proportional to degree to which their testimony shifts your opinion about p .

- Think in terms of degrees of belief. If, conditional on Bill saying telling you that q , you boost your confidence in q a lot, then you give Bill a lot of credibility (about q).

Not about outright belief or disbelief, but about degrees of trust.

$P(q|Bill\ says\ q) \gg P(q)$.

- If, conditional on Jill telling you that q , you hardly boost your confidence in q at all, then you give Jill little credibility (about q).

$$P(q|Jill\ says\ q) \approx P(q).$$

Fricker: your epistemic duty is to match the credibility you give them to the amount of evidence that they are telling the truth.

Too much? → **credibility excess**

Too little? → **credibility deficit**

When you don't match this properly, you're at risk of committing testimonial injustice.

E.g. same statement made by people with different accents.

She argues at length that while credibility excesses *can* cause harm, they are not the central case.

Central case of testimonial injustice: a *systematic, identity-based, prejudicial credibility deficit*.

- *Prejudicial*: credibility deficit is due to an ethically bad process.
- *Identity-based*: the credibility deficit tracks the *person*, rather than the statement.
- *Systematic*: the credibility deficit tracks the person across many spaces.

Innocent mistakes.
Epistemic mistakes.

Maybe *anyone* saying q would be given a credibility deficit.

E.g. philosopher of science disbelief vs. gender discrimination.
Persistent vs. systematic.

Extreme example: Tom Robinson, from *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Q1: Given Fricker's goal, are these the right restrictions to impose for the "central case"?

Goal: use socially-situated epistemology to reveal problematic dynamics of social power.

- Is this the right notion of "credibility deficit"?
- Need it be "prejudicial" in this sense?
- Need it be identity-based?
- Need it be systematic?

Q2: Suppose we buy that epistemic injustice is commonly perpetrated against marginalized groups. What does that mean for our beliefs and patterns of trust going forward?

References

Dotson, Kristie, 2012. 'A cautionary tale: On limiting epistemic oppression'. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 33(1):24–47.