

Epistemic Injustice and the Problem Of Novelty: Identifying New Tools with Audre Lorde and  
Hannah Arendt

By

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To my amazing wife, Maria, for all of her love and support

And

To my dear friend, Geoff, the very best interlocutor, and friend

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## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

For Books by Hannah Arendt:

- EU*        *Essays in Understanding*, edited by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994)
- THC*        *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958)
- LOM*        *Life of the Mind* (Harvest / Harcourt, Inc., 1976)
- MDT*        *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968)
- RJ*         *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003)
- LPP*        *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, edited by Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

For Books by Audre Lorde:

- SO*         *Sister Outsider* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2007)
- CWAL*      *Conversations With Audre Lorde*, edited by Joan Wylie Hall (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004)
- Zami*      *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1982)

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## CHAPTER 1

### Identifying Multiple Epistemic Resources

*“For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support.” – Audre Lorde*

#### Introduction

In this chapter I propose to begin a conversation between two unlikely interlocutors – Audre Lorde and Hannah Arendt – on a topic neither of them ever explicitly addressed: epistemic injustice, or, “being harmed in one’s capacity as a knower” (Fricker, 1). I contend that these queer pairings of writers and topics converge in rich and unexpected ways, revealing a fecund path toward what has recently become known as “epistemic justice.” The works of Hannah Arendt and Audre Lorde have been plumbed for their ethical and political insights. There exist impressive literatures on both writers. However, an extended comparison of their work has, to my knowledge, never been attempted. Surely there are many reasons for this “lacuna,” but, as I will argue, a lack of similarities between what Lorde and Arendt wrote is not one of them.

I will allow that the similarities between these two thinkers are not readily apparent: arrange their persons, their biographies, and/or their works side-by-side and few will initially make the comparison. And yet, when viewed through the lens of the burgeoning young field of social epistemology, similarities leap to the forefront. Since the phrase “social epistemology” didn’t officially enter into the philosophical lexicon until the early 1980’s,<sup>1</sup> it’s not a wonder that neither of their corpuses has yet been subjected to extended analyses of their shared socio-epistemic virtues. However, when viewed from the standpoint of the social epistemologist, Lorde

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<sup>1</sup> Although work in this field has a much longer history, it was not subsumed under the heading “social epistemology” until the late 1970’s/early 1980’s.



and Arendt appear as natural predecessors to the movement from traditional epistemology to social epistemology.

Within the field of social epistemology the ever-growing literature on the problem of epistemic injustice has significantly been influenced by Miranda Fricker's 2007 groundbreaking work, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Fricker's outline of the problem of epistemic injustice has invigorated recent debates centering on the ethical and/or political aspects of everyday epistemic practices. Following current trends that I hope ultimately to call into question, we will appeal to Fricker's work in framing the basic structure of the problem of epistemic injustice; and let it serve as our guide to better understanding what might constitute an effective response to the problem.

By placing our imaginative conversation between Lorde and Arendt into Fricker's framework we will begin to see how certain key aspects of their works, which have always resisted categorization, might be viewed as socio-epistemic in nature. While Fricker's framework can serve usefully as our way into the problems upon which we will bring Lorde's and Arendt's socio-epistemic insights to bear, it can no more contain those insights than conventional categories of thought can: Arendt's and Lorde's work will challenge the very framework that brings the socio-epistemic nature of it to light. Nonetheless, there is good reason to begin with Fricker's overall account of the problem of epistemic injustice, particularly with regard to Fricker's proposed solution to the problem.

As helpful as Fricker's work has been to a large number of social epistemologists doing some excellent work on the problem,<sup>2</sup> and even though we too will rely on it as our introduction

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, José Medina's expert handling of several of the more challenging aspects of the issues Fricker raises in his book-length contribution to these discussions in his recent work, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. Additionally, numerous recent articles and commentaries on the problem of epistemic injustice that

into it, we will ultimately part ways with Fricker's approach. Contesting Fricker's account at even very basic levels, we will soon find ourselves in need of offering a radically changed framework for understanding the deeper contours of the problem of epistemic injustice. This renewed outlook on the problem will open up alternative, more effective, approaches to combatting it.

I contend that the recent widespread adoption of Fricker's framework within the field of social epistemology has led to a problematic overemphasis on the epistemic responsibilities of only those socially and politically privileged epistemic agents most likely to bear the guilt of the ethico-epistemic harm of silencing. It is in an effort to correct for this misdirected focus on the perpetrators of the harm of epistemic injustice that I argue in favor of taking another look at a particular approach to the problem that has been all too quickly dismissed in recent literature. Inspired by the works of Arendt and Lorde, my approach begins with taking seriously the epistemic responsibilities of silenced and/or oppressed speakers in any given testimonial exchange.

Most social epistemologists adhering to almost any aspect of Fricker's overall framework tend to agree at least on this much: surely it is the perpetrators of the harm of epistemic injustice who should be held most responsible for the work of combatting it. In part, I agree. To place the responsibility for overcoming any injustice on the shoulders of those suffering from it seems, *prima facie*, a rather unreasonable and ethically dubious thing to do. Not only does it smack of victim blaming, it appears also to allow the perpetrators of the injustice blissfully to ignore their

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directly reference Miranda Fricker's groundbreaking work have recently emerged from such influential figures as Charles Mills ("White Ignorance and Hermeneutical Injustice: A Comment on Medina and Fricker," *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 3, no. 1 (2013): 83-43), Elizabeth Anderson ("Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions", *Social Epistemology* 26, no. 2 (2012): 163-173), and Linda Martín Alcoff ("Epistemic Identities" *Episteme* 7, no. 2 (2010): 128-137), just to name a few. Fricker's work has further ignited conversations among many newer scholars to the field, indicating that her influence will likely continue to be felt for some time.

harmful behavior and to continue engaging in it with impunity. Nonetheless, and for reasons that will become clear, I will in fact endorse a view that emphasizes the ethico-epistemic<sup>3</sup> responsibilities of the victims of epistemic injustice and downgrades the importance of the contributions of the perpetrators of the harm. Following Lorde and Arendt, I am skeptical of approaches that over-emphasize the possible benefits of appealing to the perpetrators of the harms of epistemic injustice to recognize their ethico-epistemic vices and exchange them for ethico-epistemic virtues. To be clear, I'm all for such conversions – I just don't believe that maintaining the focus on the epistemic practices of the perpetrators of the harm of epistemic injustice is particularly beneficial to the cause of overcoming it. I aim instead to focus on those voices repeatedly being silenced in unjust epistemic exchanges.

As we will see, this redirected focus on responsibility for overcoming silencing bears significantly on all aspects of the problem of epistemic injustice. As we shift our focus from the ethico-epistemic responsibilities of privileged hearers to the ethico-epistemic responsibilities of underprivileged or oppressed speakers attempting to engage in knowledge conveying practices, we will at the same time effect a fundamental shift in our understanding of the problem of epistemic injustice as a whole. This shift in thinking about the whole of epistemic injustice will, as noted, call us to reconstruct the very framework within which we have come to understand it. It will also call us to rethink many other aspects of the problem in the new light of the, now reconstructed, framework of epistemic injustice. Ultimately, this “hermeneutic circle” of understanding has no end. Importantly though, it does have a very particular beginning: it begins *in media res*, or, in the midst of things.

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<sup>3</sup> As Fricker explains, the harms of epistemic injustice, as well as the virtues she extolls as effective in combatting those harms are “hybrid in kind: both intellectual and ethical” (6, 124). I will adopt Fricker’s account of the hybridity of the harms of epistemic injustice, and refer to them as “ethico-epistemic” throughout this work in order to highlight this hybridity.

## A Brief Note on the Method

The structure of this hermeneutical approach to epistemic injustice, wherein the examination of a part of the problem occasions a re-examination of the whole of the problem, which in turn sheds new light on *other* aspects or parts of the problem, will find several counterparts in this work. We will not trouble ourselves with searches for the origins of the phenomena to be discussed, but will instead jump in “mid-stream,” so-to-speak. These jumps into the midst of the issues to be addressed will not be entirely haphazard. We will always begin with a part and proceed to the whole, which is another way of saying that our theory will be derived from our facts. However, it’s worthwhile to remember that the facts with which we begin are only salient to us because of the underlying theoretical commitments we hold. In other words, there are no “pre-theoretical” facts of the matter to be revealed here, there are only facts that appear in the mode of *dokei moi* or “it seems to me” as a particular socially/ politically/ economically situated epistemic agent.<sup>4</sup>

Questions concerning the origins of the theoretical commitments with which we approach the facts we choose to foreground will at times be addressed in this work; but it will be important to remember that whatever ontological and/ or metaphysical implications these questions and/or their answers may seem to suggest, ours is not a search for fixed foundations – be they historical, theoretical, political, or otherwise. Ours is not a foundationalist approach. Although we will not shy away from origin stories, following Lorde and Arendt, we will look to them only for clues on how best to understand and confront present predicaments, not to pinpoint the moment of their conception. In other words, we will, in a very real sense, *give testimony* to certain historical facts

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<sup>4</sup> As we will see, this methodological approach, wherein we attempt to derive theory from experience, mirrors both Lorde’s and Arendt’s approaches to problems that are ethico-epistemic in nature. This fact will prove crucial to the task of identifying they ways in which their works go beyond what Fricker offers in her groundbreaking work.

by placing them within a context – be it a theoretical framework, narrative or story<sup>5</sup> – which will (re)create the framework/ narrative/ story, and shed new light on other aspects of it.

Given the situated starting point within which Lorde and Arendt contextualize their theoretical concerns, and the fact that ours will be a hermeneutical approach to the problems they address, I would like to suggest that there are many compelling reasons not to attempt neatly to separate their written works from their personal biographies. If we fail to take into account the interplay between the personal histories of these thinkers and the social and political contexts within which they wrote we fail to take seriously the works themselves, which repeatedly emphasize the need for such contextualization. Therefore, as we commence with the conversation we will imaginatively engage in, we will find ourselves (re)constructing pertinent parts of each writer’s experiential journeys as embodied thinkers.

While we will draw heavily on the testimony of both authors in this enterprise, it’s important to recognize that we are ourselves engaged in an act of epistemic agency throughout this work. We are *making sense* of Lorde’s and Arendt’s written works through many lenses, including the lenses of their own life stories; but that sense will ultimately be a product of our own creation. To that end, I want to invite the reader to join me on a journey in which we will

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<sup>5</sup> Theoretical frameworks, narratives, and stories all carry importantly different connotations; however the common thread between the three that bears significantly on our discussion is the fact that they all offer a context within which ethico-epistemic judgments can be made. As will be further clarified, one of the primary functions of the types of frameworks with which we’re here concerned is to provide a measure against which epistemic agents and their testimony (in the form of truth claims, for example) can be critically judged. It is this functional aspect of theoretical frameworks, narratives, and stories I want to highlight here. However, functional definitions are only one type of definition among many. Viewed from the standpoint of, for instance, the literary critic, the thread tying theoretical frameworks, narratives, and stories can appear rather frayed if not completely broken. While a significant goal of this work is to unearth and investigate the ways in which theoretical frameworks, narratives, and stories can function similarly, I am not suggesting that the similarities between them that we will here investigate hold across all possible ways of defining or using these words.

fashion meanings from the work and lives of these two powerful and innovative thinkers; meanings that, while shared, call each of us to take personal responsibility for.

We will not here purport to speak for Lorde or Arendt but only for ourselves, acknowledging that the meanings we formulate throughout this journey are, though shared, in many ways our “ownmost” creations. I submit that although they are articulated within and limited by specific social/ economic/ political contexts in many ways, ultimately no one can take responsibility for the unique and creative work of our hearts/ minds/ hands but our own selves – even if we owe a debt of gratitude, or for that matter, a “debt” of resentment (for not all of one’s inherited contexts are positive), for these personal productions to others. And on that note, I’d like to pause and reflect for a moment on some of the historical works that paved the way for Fricker’s work to thrive.

### **Some of The Historical Underpinnings of the Problem of Epistemic Injustice**

While Miranda Fricker’s account of the harms of epistemic injustice did, in many ways, carve out the theoretical space within which some very lively discussions and important work on the problem have been able to thrive, it’s instructive to remember that Fricker is drawing upon an existing cache of ideas originated in theoretical works from across the socio-political spectrum. Even though she did impressively draw together many seemingly disparate strands of thought into a cohesive theoretical framework from within which to address the problem of epistemic injustice, Fricker did not actually identify any new problems, neither did she coin the terms she used to address them.

I point this out not to detract from the importance, or even novelty,<sup>6</sup> of Fricker’s work, but as a modest corrective to the rather sparse historical framework within which she places the

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<sup>6</sup> Since I include rearrangements of existing facts or ideas in the definition of “novelty,” (more on this to come) Fricker’s work is indeed, on many counts, novel.

problem of epistemic injustice. As presented, it seems all-too-easy to surmise that Fricker herself both identified the problem of epistemic injustice, and offered its first systematic solution. However, not only did the two theorists at the heart of this critique of Fricker's account of epistemic injustice both identify and address the problem long before she did, so too did many earlier theorists within the traditions from whence they hail.

The groundwork for addressing the problem of epistemic injustice was laid long ago by many who will likely never receive due credit for their work, but also by some feminist theorists who are quite easy to identify and credit. Audre Lorde, who offers a uniquely powerful voice on the topic, fully acknowledges her debt to those Black feminist theorists who came before her and paved the way. Within the Black feminist tradition, for instance, the compelling question Sojourner Truth put to the Ohio Women's Rights Convention back in 1851, "Ain't I a woman?" and the entire speech within which she asked it, can easily be construed as an early, powerful plea for epistemic justice. As she effectively picks apart the specious arguments against women's suffrage one-by-one, Truth performatively argues for Black women's right to have their voices included in meaning-making practices such as those that define the meaning of concepts like "women."<sup>7</sup>

More recently, Bell Hooks<sup>8</sup> and Patricia Hill Collins<sup>9</sup> have repeatedly and often explicitly addressed multiple aspects of the problem of epistemic injustice throughout their careers. Both

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<sup>7</sup> In responding to a clergyman who had argued against women's right to vote based on their supposed weaknesses and helplessness, Truth famously points out that, "Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place!" and drives her point home with the repeated refrain, "And ain't I a woman?" "Look at me! Look at my arm!" she demands, "I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?"

<sup>8</sup> From her earliest book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, in which she challenges the epistemic hegemony of "the white face of reason," to her recent account of the credibility deficits suffered by Black women teachers in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, Bell Hooks has eloquently and often addressed the problem of epistemic injustice.

Hooks and Collins mounted challenges to traditional epistemic categories of thought and addressed ethico-epistemic questions relating to, for instance, the role that prejudices might play in credibility assessments (Hooks), and in judgments regarding the value of certain knowledges (Collins). These are just a few of some of the more high-profile historical examples of examinations of the problem of epistemic injustice within Black feminist thought.

Hannah Arendt, a German-born Jewish theorist who worked on an impressive range of topics, was able to draw on both German and Jewish traditions, and, for that matter, German-Jewish traditions, in her work on the problem of epistemic injustice. Arendt offers a provocative account of both the ethical and the epistemic resources and agency of Jewish “pariahs,” one that owes much to the German Sociologist Max Weber, who referred to European Jews as a “pariah people.” In her 1944 essay on “The Jew as Pariah,” Arendt explores the ways in which “the concept of the pariah as a human type – a concept of supreme importance for the evaluation of mankind in our day,” has “endured from Salomon Maimon in the eighteenth century to Franz Kafka in the early twentieth” (“The Jew as Pariah”, 100).

Arendt outlines several Jewish “types” in this essay, including Heinrich Heine’s *schlemihl*, Bernard Lazare’s “conscious pariah,” and even Charlie Chaplin’s<sup>10</sup> “grotesque portrayal of the suspect” (“The Jew as Pariah”, 100-01). But, for Arendt, each of these types ultimately fall into two overarching archetypes: those who embraced their outcast status, the pariahs, and those who attempted to deny or flee from it, the parvenus.<sup>11</sup> In marking out this

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<sup>9</sup> See Patricia Hill Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought*, particularly chapter 11, “Black Feminist Epistemology,” (pgs. 251-272) for more.

<sup>10</sup> Although, as Arendt notes, “Chaplin has...declared that he is of Irish and Gypsy descent,” she explains that, “he has been selected for discussion because, even if not himself a Jew, he has epitomized in an artistic form a character born of the Jewish pariah mentality” (“The Jew as Pariah”, 101).

<sup>11</sup> Arendt’s lifelong preoccupation with contrasting what she sees as the ethical and epistemic advantages that accrue to Jewish pariahs, and the ethical and epistemic deficits suffered by the Jewish Parvenus began with her earliest work on the life of the Jewess Rahel Levin Varnhagen. Varnhagen’s extensive



distinction between pariahs and parvenus, Arendt was concerned with addressing the ethico-epistemic virtues of pariahs, and the ethico-epistemic vices of parvenus.

Arguing that self-conscious acceptance of their status as “outsiders” provides Jewish Pariahs unique insights into both ethical and epistemic concerns, Arendt champions their ability to resist blindly accepting mainstream interpretations of what constitutes just ethical and epistemic practices. Unconcerned with maintaining any semblance of belonging to “respectable” society, Pariahs, Arendt insists, are free to think and to judge for themselves, appealing to whatever ethico-epistemic criteria they find fit. Parvenu’s, on the other hand, owing to their overriding desire to assimilate themselves into mainstream society, regularly fail adequately to determine ethico-epistemic judgment criteria of their own. Arendt argues that this leaves them susceptible to committing the same ethical and epistemic injustices that mainstream actors might. Writing in the wake of the atrocities committed by Hitler’s Nazi regime, whose actions, as Arendt controversially argued, the mainstream German public – including those “most respected members of respectable society” – either failed to resist, or even in certain instances helped to facilitate, the stakes of these ethico-epistemic distinctions could not have been higher for her (RJ, 42-3).

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correspondence with the various Jewish intellectuals who frequented her famous *Salons* has seen renewed interest since Barbara Hahn’s encyclopedic, six volume edition, *Rahel – Ein Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde*, has made it infinitely more accessible to scholars. The impact that Arendt’s studies on Varnhagen had on her entire corpus are difficult to overstate. Throughout her writings Arendt never relinquished the lens through which she viewed Varnhagen’s life – which focused almost entirely on Varnhagen’s ability to overcome her parvenu tendencies in favor of finally embracing her status as a Jewish pariah (see, Barbara Hahn’s insightful “*Im Schlaf bin ich wacher*” *Die Träume der Rahel Levin Varnhagen*, Frankfurt: Luchterland, 1990, for more on this). As the political theorist Judith Shklar explains, “Arendt deeply identified with Rahel as their common world was coming to an end, but she was also quite critical of Rahel’s moral cowardice and her frantic assimilation that ended in baptism, when she married Varnhagen. It was as if Arendt were warning herself not to lapse into Jewish self-hatred. Heinrich Heine eventually saved Rahel from this blight, as Arendt learned to save herself” (Shklar, “Hannah Arendt as Pariah”, 362). Shklar’s assessment of Arendt’s “severe judgment” of “German Jews for many of their own troubles” remains a subject of some, surprisingly long-lasting and yet still very heated, debate, but her conclusion that Arendt’s “return to this theme over and over [came] often at considerable cost to herself and others” is surely on target (ibid, 363).

These examples illustrate the point that work on the problem of epistemic injustice has a long and rich lineage. These two thinkers' roots go much deeper than I've briefly outlined here. Though they draw on vastly different resources, all of them are, in Lorde's words, "ancient...and deep" (SO, 37). Ignoring the historical insights we can glean from within these traditions would only cripple our work on this, as it turns out, rather hoary problem. And so, as noted, we begin *in media res*, or, in the midst of things – each of us bearing the marks of the various traditions that have most impacted us, as do our main interlocutors on this journey.

### **A Final Note on the Method**

This brings me to a final note on the method I will use throughout this chapter. Although the conversation I hope to begin is indeed a conversation between Hannah Arendt and Audre Lorde, we will spend scant time on their works in this chapter. Rest assured, ample time will be allotted to excavating Lorde's and Arendt's insights into the problem of epistemic injustice in the coming chapters. But we will spend the bulk of this chapter introducing the problem of epistemic injustice itself; drawing heavily on Miranda Fricker's influential account of the problem. Before we delve into Fricker's work, we will explore some of the underpinnings of the movement from traditional epistemology to social epistemology, taking Patricia Hill Collins as our guide. This brief review of the motivations behind the recent shift from traditional to social epistemology will help lay the groundwork, both for situating Fricker's work within its historical context, and for beginning to identify how the problem of epistemic injustice has come to inhabit the center of so many recent debates within the field of social epistemology.

### **Part I: The Turn from Traditional to Social Epistemology**

In her germinal work, *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins explores some of the underpinnings of what would become known as the field of social epistemology by challenging

widely accepted definitions of traditional epistemology. Collins begins rather un-controversially by explaining how, “Epistemology constitutes an overarching theory of knowledge...It investigates the standards used to assess knowledge or *why* we believe what we believe to be true” (252). But she continues with this more controversial disclaimer: “Far from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why” (252). Collins’ introduction of power relations into the study of knowledge marks her point of departure from what are now often considered to be “traditional” epistemological approaches; from there she begins laying some of the groundwork for what she terms “Black Feminist Epistemology.”<sup>12</sup>

In calling her work a new epistemology instead of a new methodology or epistemological paradigm, Collins is both aligning herself with, and creatively challenging, the works of other pioneers like Sandra Harding<sup>13</sup> and Lorraine Code<sup>14</sup> who, in the early 1980’s, began to contest the univocity of the study of knowledge by introducing what they, and others alongside them, termed “feminist epistemology.” The claim that there can be a new type of epistemology, or even multiple epistemologies, flies in the face of traditional epistemology, for no matter how heated exchanges between epistemologists might become, disputes over such things as the nature of knowledge and /or the most reliable procedures for obtaining it have largely been considered intermural. This is not to suggest, however, that there haven’t been deep cracks in the foundations of ‘traditional epistemology’ from the beginning. We will review a few of these shortly.

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<sup>12</sup> See esp. chapter 11 of Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought*, entitled, “Black Feminist Epistemology.”

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Harding’s 1982 *Feminism and Methodology* (Indiana University Press).

<sup>14</sup> Code’s 1981 article “Is the Sex of the Knower Epistemologically Significant?” in *Metaphilosophy* (12: 267-276) was, for instance, one of the earliest works of feminist epistemology.

Although Harding's and Code's work builds upon earlier challenges posed to traditional epistemic practices – recall, for instance, Sojourner Truth's contributions to these discussions mentioned above – since they explicitly rejected many of the core commitments of traditional epistemology while yet situating their work within the overall field of epistemology, it was considered quite groundbreaking nonetheless. Early feminist epistemologists like Harding and Code aimed to shatter what was left of the veneer of the, supposedly singular, unified body of work known as 'epistemology' when they introduced feminist social and political concerns into the study of knowledge.

But before feminist epistemologists got very far along in the project of articulating the ways in which feminist epistemology differed from traditional epistemology, early Black feminist epistemologists like Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins began to contest the characterization of what was being termed *feminist* epistemology. They pointed to the ways in which the epistemological issues being articulated as “feminist” often failed to account for many of the epistemological questions and concerns of *Black* feminists. Collins, drawing on Crenshaw's work that challenged mainstream epistemic paradigms,<sup>15</sup> boldly began laying the foundations for what she termed “Black Feminist Epistemology” in order to correct for these lacunas.

Since then we've seen multiple iterations of feminist epistemologies, epistemologies of ignorance, Black feminist epistemologies, etc. And while each of these fall under the rubric of social epistemology, what we're calling 'social epistemology' is no more univocal than are they – what we have are actually social epistemologies. As Collins helpfully explains,

Distinguishing among epistemologies, paradigms, and methodologies can prove to be useful in understanding the significance of competing epistemologies. In contrast to

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<sup>15</sup> See Crenshaw's “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, Violence Against Women of Color” *Stanford Law Review* (1985) Vol. 43: 1241.

epistemologies, *paradigms* encompass interpretive frameworks such as intersectionality that are used to explain social phenomena. *Methodology* refers to the broad principles of how to conduct research and how interpretive paradigms are to be applied. The level of epistemology is important because it determines which questions merit investigation, which interpretive frameworks will be used to analyze findings, and to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put. (252)

On the importance of ‘the level of epistemology’ Harding and Code et al agreed with Collins and other black feminist epistemologists. Finding many of their epistemological questions discarded as not ‘merit[ing] investigation’, their choices of interpretive frameworks questioned, and the uses to which they aimed to put ‘any ensuing knowledge’ regularly degraded by mainstream epistemologists, early feminist epistemologists set out, not to reform traditional epistemology, but to create an entirely new epistemology. They concerned themselves with questions about how one’s gendered “standpoint” could affect the type of knowledge she might produce, how it might color her epistemic judgments, and vivify certain political goals, for instance. What these early feminist epistemologists largely failed to ask, among other things, was whether and how the standards used to assess what counts as knowledge and why might differ between white women and Black women. What might the role of experience, for instance, play in the credibility assessments of white women versus Black women?

As Collins explains, “For most African-American women those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus lived experience as a criterion for credibility frequently is invoked by U.S. Black women when making knowledge claims” (257). As Collins perceptively notes, however, even if those early feminist epistemologists and the pioneering Black feminist epistemologists who challenged them had *shared* in the assessment that lived experience should outweigh “book learning” as a criterion for assessing one’s credibility, the fact that not all experiences are equally valued might still

preclude white feminists from seeking out Black feminist voices – no matter how experienced. Collins, expanding on Crenshaw’s insights, points out, for instance, that, “knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions...has been so essential to U.S. Black women’s survival,” that it is often highly prized among Black women in the U.S. (257). Thanks to their different experiences in the world, white women in the U.S. may not easily perceive the value of this type of knowledge, and therefore never care even to seek out those experienced epistemic agents who might credibly speak to such issues.

Just as Collins suggests, differences of opinion over, 1) ‘which questions merit investigation’, 2) ‘which interpretive frameworks will be used to analyze findings’, and 3) ‘to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put’ amount to differences in epistemologies. And although they may in many ways be quite substantial, the distance between the various social epistemologies on these questions begins to appear rather navigable when compared to the gulf that separates them from traditional epistemologies. What Harding, Code and Collins all agreed on was that whatever criteria might be used to determine ‘which questions merit investigation’, ‘which interpretive frameworks will be used to analyze findings,’ and ‘to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put’, it won’t be impartially or apolitically determined. It will, just as with all epistemic criteria, be determined by socially, economically, and politically situated epistemic agents who can be swayed by any number of factors generally eschewed as “non-epistemic” throughout the history of Western epistemology: power relations, prejudices, socio-economic inequalities, and the like. This means that epistemic practices, no matter how theoretical, are still social phenomena, and the study of epistemology is, whether recognized or not, a social study.

## **Part II: A Taxonomy of Epistemic Injustice – Miranda Fricker’s Neo-Aristotelian Framework**

Miranda Fricker’s important contribution to the long history of theoretical work centering on the social aspects of everyday epistemic practices, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, takes much of what Collins’ and others before her had to say about the social, political, and ethical aspects of our epistemic practices as given. Hoping first to clarify what she sees as the somewhat nebulous ethico-epistemic concerns raised by Collins et al, Fricker begins by offering a simple taxonomy of what she identifies as the domain of “epistemic injustice,” and proceeds methodically through to the enumeration of various genera and species of the problem. This reconstruction of the problem of epistemic injustice aims at yielding clearly identifiable epistemic vices, vices which Fricker associates with particular instances of epistemic injustice that exemplify what she deems to be central cases of the two main forms of epistemic injustice her work addresses: testimonial injustice, and hermeneutical injustice. Once identified, Fricker offers a set of ethico-epistemic virtues capable of effectively combatting the ethico-epistemic vices present in the central cases of both forms of epistemic injustice.

As we can already begin to see from her focus on vices and virtues, Fricker’s self-identified “neo-Aristotelian” approach to the problem of epistemic injustice relies, not only on methods of categorization reminiscent of that great categorizer Aristotle, but also on a distinctly neo-Aristotelian conception of virtue ethics, applied to the realm of epistemology. Finding both “Anglo-American epistemology” and Anglo-American ethics ill equipped to address “Ideas with a politicizing portent for how we think about our epistemic relations – ideas such as that epistemic trust might have an irrepressible connection with social power, or that social disadvantage can produce unjust epistemic disadvantage,” Fricker seeks to identify an alternative approach that takes both ethics and epistemology into account, and finds it in *virtue epistemology*

(2). Attempting to engineer a hybrid approach capable of addressing both ethical/ social /political and epistemic concerns, Fricker explains, “I hope to show that virtue epistemology provides a general epistemological idiom in which these issues can be fruitfully discussed” (2).

While I take issue with both her reconstruction of the problem of epistemic injustice and her preferred method of addressing it, ultimately I find in Fricker’s work a useful starting point for our excursion into the problem. Fricker’s explicit adoption of an Aristotelian “form of moral cognitivism in the virtue ethical tradition which advances the idea of moral perception,” for instance, provides particularly fruitful ground for a reconsideration of what constitutes epistemic injustice, or ‘being harmed in one’s capacity as a knower’ in the first place (71). The intimate connection between knowledge and perception was a concern of both Hannah Arendt’s and Audre Lorde’s. While Fricker is right to attribute many of the harms of epistemic injustice to failures in ethico-epistemic vision, without the aid of Arendt’s and Lorde’s insights into the nature of the link between knowledge and perception, Fricker’s account founders on several counts.

Fricker fails adequately to address the ways in which novel knowledges might be perceived and begin to enter into our everyday epistemic practices, for instance. As we will see further in the coming chapters, both Lorde and Arendt move decidedly beyond Fricker’s account of the problem of epistemic injustice. They both, for example, exploit the nature of the link between knowledge and perception in ways that can capture how such epistemic phenomena as novel meanings, unique epistemic concepts, and even new knowledges might come to be perceived and subsequently understood. In identifying the key role that moral perception plays in the problem of epistemic injustice, Fricker’s work provides an excellent entry into a discussion of the ethico-epistemic import of Arendt’s and Lorde’s socio-political writings.



It is Fricker's ability to highlight such key aspects of what constitutes the problem of epistemic injustice, coupled with her emphasis on identifying the potential pitfalls into which any intervention into epistemically unjust practices may stray, that recommend her groundbreaking work on epistemic injustice as a fruitful starting point for our intervention into current debates surrounding the problem of epistemic injustice. We will spend the greater portion of the remainder of this chapter elucidating Fricker's account of the problem of epistemic injustice, focusing primarily on her preferred "solution" to it. Fricker's defense of the virtue epistemic framework she employs is perhaps most illuminating in its identification of the challenges that any adequate solution to the problem of epistemic injustice must address. We will therefore, in some detail, explore Fricker's self-identified motives for championing the neo-Aristotelian, virtue-epistemic framework she used to situate both the problem and its solution. But before we begin our examination of Fricker's response, let's start with a brief overview of her account of the problem itself.

### **The Two Forms of Epistemic Injustice**

Throughout her work, Fricker attempts to "bring to light certain ethical aspects of two of our most basic everyday epistemic practices: conveying knowledge to others by telling them, and making sense of our own social experiences" (Fricker, 1). In drawing our attention to the ethical aspects of these epistemic practices, Fricker hopes to clarify the ways in which they are disrupted in cases of epistemic injustice. She identifies two primary forms of epistemic injustice that correlate to the basic everyday epistemic practices listed above:

...testimonial injustice occurs when prejudices cause a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word; hermeneutical injustice occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences. An example of the first might be that the police do not believe you because you are black; an example of the second might be that you suffer sexual harassment in a culture that still lacks that critical concept. (1)

Fricker's example of testimonial injustice, 'that the police do not believe you because you are black,'<sup>16</sup> serves to illustrate what Fricker calls "the central case of testimonial injustice... [which occurs wherein] a speaker suffers in receiving deflated credibility from the hearer owing to identity prejudice on the hearer's part" (4). In the case of testimonial injustice, it is the group identity of the knowledge giver and not the supposed dubiousness of the content of her testimony that leads to her unfair credibility assessment. When certain epistemic agents are deemed less trustworthy than others, not because of the poor quality of their testimony, but instead due to identity prejudices against them, testimonial injustice occurs. Fricker further clarifies, "We might say that testimonial injustice is caused by prejudice in the economy of credibility," and concludes, "Thus the central case of testimonial injustice can be defined...as identity-prejudicial credibility deficit" (Fricker, 1,4). It is important to note that "the economy of credibility" from whence the prejudice in question is drawn is presented as *the* singular economy, and not one economy among a plurality. It is from this singular economy of credibility that the hearer in the above example presumably draws his identity-prejudicial negative credibility assessment.

Fricker contends that the "primary form of epistemic injustice [is] testimonial injustice" (4). Owing ostensibly to its primacy, Fricker spends the greater part of her book elucidating the harms of testimonial injustice, and scant space on the secondary form of epistemic injustice: hermeneutical injustice, which, recall, occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone 'at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences.' The women who suffered sexual harassment before the term "sexual

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<sup>16</sup> Although I find this example problematic in a number of ways, starting with the fact that some members of the police force *are* Black, a fuller critique of it here would lead us too far astray from our current focus, which is to outline Fricker's account of the problem of epistemic injustice. Although it is surely the case that racial prejudices all-too-often play a major role in the unjust ethico-epistemic interactions between police and Black folk, there are important ways in which we will begin to trouble this overly simplistic example in the fourth and final chapter of this work. (See pages \*\* for more.)

harassment” even existed, for instance, suffered also from a hermeneutical injustice, on Fricker’s account: they experienced the sexual harassment while at the same time not being able to make sense of it.<sup>17</sup> In cases of hermeneutical injustice, one’s inability to make sense of her own social experiences, Fricker explains, “stem[s] from a gap in collective hermeneutical resources – a gap, that is, in our shared tools of social interpretation” (6). In this case, what’s important to note is that the ‘collective hermeneutical resources’ in which the gap appears is, like ‘the economy of credibility,’ a singular collective consisting of ‘our shared tools.’

Hermeneutical injustice differs from testimonial injustice in several ways, on Fricker’s account. Most importantly, hermeneutical injustice is structural, whereas testimonial injustice is perpetrated on a one-to-one basis by individual interlocutors, themselves each responsible for their own ethico-epistemic prejudices. Fricker is careful to point out that, owing to its structural

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<sup>17</sup> In detailing the features of this example, Fricker compellingly relates the story (originally told in Susan Brownmiller’s memoir about the early days of the feminist movement) of Carmita Wood, single mother of two, suffering from what came to be known as sexual harassment. Wood had been repeatedly sexually harassed by a “distinguished professor” in Cornell’s department of nuclear physics, where she worked as a lab assistant. Eventually developing physical pains that she understood as related to the psychological stresses that she had been under, Wood finally gave up on devising ways to avoid her aggressor and quit her job. She was subsequently denied unemployment benefits because she had left “voluntarily.” It was not until Wood tried to explain her experiences to other women at Cornell, *all* of whom (staff and students alike) had experienced similar issues that she had the opportunity to come to grips with the character of her experiences. Together, the group decided to push back and fight Wood’s unemployment insurance decision. They further arranged speak-outs in order to break the silences surrounding the phenomenon of sexual harassment – but before they could articulate their arguments, or identify the content of their speak-outs, they needed to *name* the problem they wished to address. They knew that it wasn’t quite sexual ‘intimidation’ or ‘coercion’ or ‘exploitation’, but they were also determined not to call it something so benign as unwanted ‘flirting’. It was certainly more than that. When they finally arrived at the right moniker, there was an instantaneous, unanimous agreement among them: the target of their fight was *sexual harassment*, two words never before put together in such a way as to describe the widespread phenomenon occurring across the country. Once named, they quickly formed a movement around it, ultimately leading to the laws prohibiting sexual harassment that (still to disquieting degrees of success) we have in the U.S. today. In the language of Fricker’s framework, what Carmita Wood suffered alongside her experience of sexual harassment was *hermeneutical injustice*, wherein the gap in hermeneutical resources left out the name and concept of sexual harassment, rendering her understanding of her experiences in some important ways, unintelligible even to herself. (See pages 149-162 of Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* for more on this story.) Note: I will take issue with some of the assumptions Fricker makes in detailing this example in the coming pages (see pgs. 23-26).

nature, there is no individually identifiable perpetrator of the harm of hermeneutical injustice. Detractors of her theory may object that where there is no perpetrator there can be no injustice, but Fricker is well prepared for this objection; arguing that there is more to hermeneutical injustice than mere “epistemic bad luck” by pointing out that “it is no accident that the cognitive disadvantage created by this gap impinges unequally on different social groups” (6).

Fricker argues that the harms of hermeneutical injustice accrue most often to those epistemic agents who are socially /politically /economically underprivileged or oppressed, for it is most often the meanings of their experiences that fail to appear in the ‘collective interpretive resources’. Fricker identifies this group, whose meanings regularly fail to appear in the collective interpretive resources, as “*hermeneutically marginalized* – that is, they participate unequally in the practices through which social meanings are generated on the basis of their group identities” (6). This marginalization is an actual ethico-epistemic harm and not mere bad luck insofar as it results from social and political structures heavily influenced and maintained by relations of power, wherein those in powerful positions uphold the status quo in myriad ways that work together to institute and perpetuate the marginalization that systematically excludes certain epistemic agents from meaning-making practices.

### **The Nature of the Relationship Between the Two Forms of Epistemic Injustice**

When it comes to the nature of the relationship between these two forms of epistemic injustice, Fricker’s account is woefully underdeveloped. Her taxonomy of epistemic injustices is elegantly simple, and involves a rather straightforward hierarchy: testimonial injustice is the ‘primary’ form of epistemic injustice, and therefore that with which she is primarily interested in explicating. Hermeneutical injustice is a background injustice operating in some shadowy form at the structural level, on which she exerts few resources. But, as Fricker points out, the common

denominator between them is clearly the social groups within which *both* forms of epistemic injustice are most likely to appear: those socially, politically, and economically underprivileged or oppressed groups, whose testimony is unfairly pre-judged and whose meanings fail to appear in the collective interpretive resources.

While it seems that there is much more to be said about the relationship between testimonial and hermeneutical injustices, Fricker goes no further than to briefly acknowledge their “deep connection” in a single aside in her one, rather anemic chapter on hermeneutical injustice, she notes:

The primary harm of (the central case of) testimonial injustice concerns exclusion from the pooling of knowledge *owing to identity prejudice* on the part of the hearer; the primary harm of (the central case of) hermeneutical injustice concerns exclusion from the pooling of knowledge *owing to structural identity prejudice* in the collective hermeneutical resource. The first prejudicial exclusion is made in relation to the speaker, the second in relation to what they are trying to say and/or how they are saying it. The wrongs involved in the two sorts of epistemic injustice, then, have a common epistemic significance running through them – prejudicial exclusion from participation in the spread of knowledge. (162, emphasis mine)

After acknowledging that at the heart of *all* epistemic injustice lies what Fricker calls ‘identity prejudice,’ or “prejudices against people qua social type,” manifesting in ‘prejudicial exclusion from participation in the spread of knowledge’, Fricker all but draws her discussion of the relationship between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice to a close (4).

While the above acknowledgement points to the facts that both testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice 1) stem from the same source: identity prejudices, and 2) result in a significant form of shared harm: ‘prejudicial exclusion from the participation in the spread of knowledge’, it also clarifies some important differences between the two forms of epistemic injustice. First, it highlights the fact that the prejudicial exclusion involved in testimonial injustice ‘is made in relation to the speaker,’ whereas the prejudicial exclusion involved in

hermeneutical injustice is made ‘in relation to what they are trying to say/ how they are saying it.’ Second, it identifies the source of testimonial injustice as ‘the hearer’ and the source of hermeneutical injustice as ‘structural inequalities.’

What I want to highlight here is the following fact: the prejudicially negative *credibility* assessments involved in testimonial injustice are made *by* hearers *in regards to* certain speakers, and the negative *intelligibility* assessments involved in instances of hermeneutical injustice are made *by* both speakers and hearers *in regards to* the testimony of, once again, certain speakers. Although, as Fricker notes, the hearers, in cases of hermeneutical injustice, may well assess the intelligibility of hermeneutically marginalized speakers as less than optimal, what constitutes the primary harm of *hermeneutical* injustice is the fact that hermeneutically marginalized speakers can’t make sense of *their own* social experiences, *even to themselves*. Fricker highlights this aspect of hermeneutical injustice when she refers to it as “an asymmetrical cognitive disadvantage” that accrues mainly to the hermeneutically marginalized (161). Fricker is careful to point out that the asymmetry of this ‘cognitive disadvantage’ is not the fault of the hermeneutically marginalized, but instead results from the harm of hermeneutical injustice. Because it limits the hermeneutically marginalized from contributing equally to meaning-making practices, the ‘gap in the collective hermeneutical resources’ that hermeneutical injustice creates is one that “prevents [the hermeneutically marginalized] in particular from making sense of an experience which it is strongly in their interests to render intelligible” (7).

I find these and other descriptions of hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents throughout Miranda Fricker’s work in many ways troubling. Fricker refers to hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents as not only, ‘cognitively disadvantaged,’ but also “cognitively disabled,” “cognitively and expressively handicapped,” and indicates that they often find themselves “struggling to make [themselves] intelligible” (151,159, 170). To be clear, Fricker not only places no blame on those hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents for their ‘disablement,’ she further stresses that because both the hermeneutically marginalized and the hermeneutically privileged are drawing from the same, singular ‘collective hermeneutical resources,’ the hermeneutically privileged *share* in each of these ‘disadvantages,’ ‘disablements,’ and ‘handicaps.’ She even takes pains to point out that, for instance, in the case of Carmita Wood, whose experience of sexual harassment we reviewed earlier, “the lack of proper understanding of women’s experience of sexual harassment was a collective disadvantage more

or less shared by all” (151). Fricker further clarifies that, “harasser and harassee alike are cognitively handicapped by the hermeneutical lacuna – neither has a proper understanding of how he is treating her” (151). However, at this point, I want to object.

It may well be the case that both ‘harasser and harassee’ had trouble fully appreciating the level and /or the nature of harm being committed against Carmita Wood at the time it was committed; but if nothing else is clear from her story it must be appreciated that Ms. Wood at least grasped *something* of the level and nature of the harms she suffered. I expect that most women who suffered from sexual harassment prior to the time that it was labeled as such understood much more than Fricker allows about their own experiences. I also expect that in their cases there was some kind of evidence that might have supported their objections to such harassment if indeed they were ever able to *speak* them.

In the case of Carmita Wood, the evidence supporting the claim that she understood something of the nature of her victimhood seems substantial. First, as Fricker explains, Wood “went out of her way” to avoid her aggressor, then suffered “stress...[that] brought on a host of physical symptoms” (150). Fricker continues, “Wood developed chronic back and neck pains. Her right thumb tingled and grew numb. She requested a transfer to another department, and when it didn’t come through, she quit” (150). And upon return from her trip to “Florida for some rest and recuperation,” Wood attempted to speak of her experiences with other women, who, “to a person, every one of [them] – the women on staff, Carmita, the students – had had an experience like this at some point” (150).

Now I’ll readily grant that the hermeneutical injustice at play in this case served to hamper Carmita Wood’s attempts to speak of it to others, but I disagree with the way in which Fricker characterizes the hermeneutical injustice that occurred. What I want to suggest is that

though there are ‘gaps in collective interpretive resources’ that impinge unequally on the hermeneutically marginalized and the hermeneutically privileged, *there exists more than one set of collective hermeneutical resources*. Whether or not the gaps in one affect the others is up for debate; my point here is to suggest that *these* are the kinds of debates we should be having, not debates over who was more or less ‘cognitively disabled’ by the gaps in only the *mainstream* collective hermeneutical resources.

But for the record, I submit that it is almost *always* the socially, politically, and economically *privileged* epistemic agent who suffers most from the kinds of ‘cognitive handicaps’ of which Miranda Fricker speaks. Fricker’s blind spot as to the existence of *alternative epistemic resources* is simply stunning, as is her description of the ways in which “social power has an unfair impact on collective forms of social understanding,” which is to suggest that we:

...entertain the idea that relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experiences ready to draw on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible. (148)

As José Medina convincingly argues, with respect to “the hermeneutical gaps that emerge from structures of oppression and identity prejudices...Not only are the privileged subjects not exempted from the hermeneutical harms, but they are in fact *more negatively affected* in some areas of their experience” (Medina, “Hermeneutical Injustice and Polyphonic Contextualism” 213). In other words, on Medina’s account, Wood had a much higher chance of possessing an ‘appropriate understanding’ of her experiences ‘ready to draw on’ as she made sense of them than did her harasser. I think Medina is entirely right in this assessment. And of Fricker’s suggestion that the hermeneutically marginalized experience their lives ‘through a glass darkly,’



Medina makes short work. In a direct reference to Fricker's claim he suggests that it is in fact "the powerful who tend to have 'some social experiences through a glass darkly,' enjoying precarious interpretive resources (if any at all), as seems to be the case in the phenomenon of white ignorance" (213, emphasis in original).<sup>18</sup>

Although there is much more to be said in regards to the plurality of both testimonial and hermeneutical resources, we will leave our in-depth analyses of the multiple 'economies of credibility' and 'collective hermeneutical resources' that might exist for the coming chapters. Audre Lorde and Hannah Arendt offer invaluable insights into the possible contours of such resources, and into the kinds of ethico-epistemic riches we might expect to find there. As we will further explore in the next section of this chapter, because she failed to offer an account of these alternative epistemic resources, Fricker, far from offering a *solution* to the problem of epistemic injustice, has unknowingly and unintentionally offered instead yet another instance of it.

### **Challenging Fricker's Monological Intervention**

Had she further explored the complex relationship between testimonial and hermeneutical injustices with an eye for the ways in which those hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents suffering from the harms of both forms of epistemic injustice experienced them, Fricker might have seen that there is not one pool of epistemic resources constituting a single reference point wherein all of our 'collective hermeneutical resources' lie. There are instead many pools offering a variety of resources from within which various epistemic agents can draw the meanings by which they understand their lives. Structural injustice entails many harms, but it does not destroy

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<sup>18</sup> Medina's reference to 'the phenomenon of white ignorance' is anything but beside the point here, see Charles Mills' *White Ignorance*, as well as his "Comment on Medina and Fricker" in *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, (2013) Vol. 3, No. 1, 38-43 for more on this. I will return to Mills' account of white ignorance in chapter three in order to flesh out some of the key differences between Fricker's concept of hermeneutical injustice and Mills' account of white ignorance (see pgs \*\*).

the “social imaginaries”<sup>19</sup> of underprivileged or oppressed groups entirely. All epistemic agents, by virtue of the fact that they inhabit a pluralistic socio-political world, have access to more than one social imaginary.

And this multiplicity of collective hermeneutical resources, or social imaginaries, entails a multiplicity of economies of credibility from within which a plurality of epistemic agents may draw the strength to testify to the meanings found in their group’s social imaginaries. That is to say, however devastating the effects of epistemic injustice might be to those epistemic agents suffering from it, its effects are never totalizing. However denied or ignored from within mainstream epistemic practices, there are resources available to those epistemic agents attempting to give voice to meanings not yet imagined in mainstream social imaginaries, and not yet valued in mainstream epistemic economies.

The harms of epistemic injustice are not neutralized by the presence of alternative epistemic resources from which hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents can draw the meanings that sustain and make sense of their lives. The fact that one has alternative hermeneutical resources available to her (and again, I submit that we *all* have multiple social imaginaries from which we draw the meanings of our lives) does not mean that she doesn’t suffer when her credibility or epistemic agency has been prejudicially negatively assessed by those appealing primarily to mainstream social imaginaries. This is especially true when one has a vested interest in being perceived as credible or as a capable contributor to meaning-making

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<sup>19</sup> Originally coined by Cornelius Castoriadis, this useful term, “social imaginary,” is now employed by many social epistemologists working on epistemic injustice to refer to the kinds of pooled hermeneutical resources to which Fricker here refers. (See Medina, Alcoff, et al.) Although Fricker shies away from using this particular phrase thanks to its complex “psychoanalytic roots,” (Fricker, 38) I find it a helpfully descriptive concept, in part *because* of its complex psychoanalytic roots, which help explain how unconscious biases can be internally conflicting and yet impact our judgments – ethical, epistemic, and otherwise.

practices from within mainstream social imaginaries.

Fricker had nothing to lose by acknowledging the existence of multiple social imaginaries, for there remains a serious ethico-epistemic harm being committed and requiring imaginative and thoughtful responses. So what was it that caused Fricker to hold to such a rigidly monological account of the problem of epistemic injustice? To answer this question we must investigate Fricker's preferred response to the problem of epistemic injustice in some detail.

### **Part III: Miranda Fricker's Virtue-Epistemic Response**

In this section we will review Miranda Fricker's response to the problem of epistemic injustice in order to flesh-out her primary motivations for offering the particular solutions she chose. Although I will, as indicated, ultimately reject Fricker's proposed solution to the problem of epistemic injustice, I do find her elucidation of the motivations she had for formulating her response in the way that she did quite compelling. In fact, I submit that any adequate response to the problem of epistemic injustice must take these motivations just as seriously as does Fricker's. And so, in the name of identifying the important issues that any alternative account must address, let's review Fricker's response to the problem of epistemic injustice.

As noted earlier, Fricker considers testimonial injustice to be the "primary form of epistemic injustice," and she therefore not only begins with it, but spends the greater part of her book on it, offering only one slim chapter on hermeneutical injustice at the end of her book (EI, 4). Fricker's motivations for offering a non-inferentialist, virtue epistemic response to the problem of epistemic injustice as a whole is therefore almost entirely tied up with the ways in which identity prejudices, which, recall, lie at the heart of *both* forms of epistemic injustice, impact *testimonial* injustice. Although much more needs to be said about the problem of hermeneutical injustice and the ways in which identity prejudices impact it, for now we will

follow Fricker in focusing on the problem of testimonial injustice in order to identify her reasons for offering the non-inferentialist, virtue-epistemic solution that she chose.

We will return to the problem of hermeneutical injustice towards the end of our critique of Fricker's response to the problem of testimonial injustice. As we will see, Fricker's failure fully to flesh out the complex nature of the relationship between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice is what led to her problematic under-theorization of the mechanism whereby epistemic agents can begin to overcome the negative impact that the prejudicial images in their social imaginaries can have on their ethico-epistemic judgments. Fricker ultimately offers an anemic account of epistemic resources, one that falls in line with her overall epistemological commitments which include, most problematically, a commitment to a universal and univocal conception of reason that all-too-narrowly delimits the boundaries of what counts as a rational speech. I argue that my more robust account of epistemic resources, which includes *multiple* pools of 'collective hermeneutical resources' and 'economies of credibility', better appreciates the nature of the relationship between hermeneutical and testimonial injustice. Since the seeds of Fricker's failure to fully flesh out this relationship were sown in her handling of her solution to the problem of *testimonial* injustice, we will now turn our attention to it.

### **Identity Prejudices at the Testimonial Level: Perception v. Belief**

Since the problem of testimonial injustice finds its genesis in identity-prejudices that have hardened into inveterate practices of prejudicially *perceiving* certain speakers as unreliable testifiers, Fricker argues that any solution to the problem must begin by addressing prejudicial *perceptions* instead of prejudicial *beliefs*. There is much appeal to this approach: first, it acknowledges how difficult it is to combat identity-prejudices given their tendency to operate at a non-doxastic level. Identity prejudices wouldn't be *prejudices* (pre-judgments) if they relied on

beliefs formed by identifying and articulating conceptual categories of ‘credible’ and ‘non-credible’ under which various types of speakers could be subsumed.<sup>20</sup> For Fricker, the fact that credibility assessments are often predicated on non-doxastic *perceptions* instead of doxastically mediated *beliefs* helps clarify why the problem of testimonial injustice can appear to be so intractable. She explains:

If we think of a social stereotype as an *image* which expresses an association between a social group and one or more attributes, and which thereby embodies one or more generalizations about that social group, then it becomes clearer how its impact on judgment can be harder to detect than that of a belief with the same content. Images are capable of a visceral impact on judgment, which allows them to condition our judgments without our awareness... This is most starkly illustrated when the influence of prejudicial images from the social imagination persists in a hearer’s pattern of judgment even where their content *conflicts* with the content of her beliefs. (36-7)

In other words, one can hold entirely non-prejudicial beliefs and yet still *act* on unconscious biases informed by prejudicial perceptions that contradict those beliefs, resulting in epistemically unjust behaviors.

In these cases, there is no merit in attempting to bring the perpetrator of the harm to embrace non-prejudicial beliefs about how best to perceive her interlocutors, for she already embraces them. And yet she may continue to behave in epistemically unjust ways thanks to the unreflective, prejudicial images found in her social imaginary, which can impact her behaviors on an unconscious level. This non-doxastic reconstruction of the problem of testimonial injustice highlights one of the main challenges to any account of epistemic injustice that takes the problem

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<sup>20</sup> Although Fricker does acknowledge that there are certainly instances of testimonial injustice that involve prejudicial stereotypes that are “in part doxastically mediated,” she chooses to focus “chiefly on the operation of prejudice at the non-doxastic level” (EI, 36). She offers the following reasons for this approach: first, she argues, “concentrating on beliefs would lead us to underestimate the incidence of testimonial injustice,” and second, since it is “significantly harder reliably to filter out the prejudicial stereotypes that inform one’s social perceptions directly, without doxastic mediation... the more philosophically interesting prospect is that we may very frequently do it [commit testimonial injustices] in spite of them” (EI, 36). As we will see later in the chapter, Fricker returns to the question of how prejudicial perceptions and those ‘in part doxastically mediated’ bear on the question of ethico-epistemic justification or verification.

of prejudices seriously. It also leads to Fricker's identification of an important hurdle for her account to overcome: if prejudicially negative credibility assessments often result from non-doxastic dispositions and not from the improper application of a set of rules by which one categorizes epistemic agents as 'credible' or 'non-credible,' then how is one to determine whether her credibility assessments of speakers are justified? In other words, how can a non-inferentialist response to the non-doxastic problem of testimonial injustice yield epistemic assessments that are *critical*?

### **Testimonial Sensibility Training**

As noted, Fricker turns to a quasi-Aristotelian 'virtue epistemic' framework in order to craft her solution. Drawing an analogy between "a virtuous agent's ethical sensibility [and an ethico-epistemically virtuous agent's] well-trained *testimonial sensibility*" (71, emphasis in original). She explains, "The idea of a *testimonial sensibility* is introduced as a form of rational sensitivity that is socially inculcated and trained by countless experiences of testimonial exchange, individual and collective. This real-life training instills in the virtuous hearer empirically well-grounded habits of epistemically charged social perception, and thus reliable perceptual judgments of speaker credibility" (5, emphasis in original).

Just as Aristotle's 'virtuous man' (sic) is the one who habitually acts virtuously, thereby cultivating a virtuous ethical sensibility that allows him to perceive the world virtuously, so Fricker's 'virtuous hearer' is the one who habitually *listens* virtuously, thereby cultivating a virtuous *testimonial* capacity that allows her to perceive epistemic agents and their testimony in a virtuous manner. Fricker concludes, "The analogy points us to a way of philosophically substantiating the idea that credibility judgments can be perceptual, and I suggest that we have here what the epistemology of testimony cries out for: a model for non-inferential judgment"

(72). On this account, the responsible epistemic agent's main duty in regards to the problem of testimonial injustice becomes the cultivation of a 'well-trained testimonial sensibility' that can inform non-prejudicial perceptions grounded in habits of virtuously perceiving epistemic agents.

Relying on the parallel she draws between a virtuous moral agent and a virtuous epistemic agent, Fricker insists that, "The virtuous hearer does not arrive at her credibility judgment by applying pre-set principles of any kind, for there are none precise or comprehensive enough to do the job. She 'just sees' her interlocutor in a certain light, and responds to his word accordingly" (75-6). Fricker notes, "In advancing the idea of a testimonial perceptual capacity analogous to the virtuous person's moral perceptual capacity, I have been invoking the Aristotelian notion of moral training. But I need to say a little more about how this notion applies to the testimonial side of the parallel" (81).

In regards to the training of one's testimonial sensibility, Fricker relies on an interpretation of cognition that does not neatly separate it from affective content, which she also draws from the analogy between Aristotelian virtuous moral agency and virtuous epistemic agency:

...the more Aristotelian conception of emotion allows us to represent the hearer's feeling of trust or distrust, or any other feelings associated with a particular empathetic engagement, as making a positive contribution to her epistemically loaded perception... When it comes to epistemic trust, as with purely moral trust, it can be good advice to listen to one's emotions, for a virtuous hearer's emotional responses to different speakers in different contexts are trained and honed by experience. (80)

Of course, the experience that counts in this case is that of the virtuous epistemic agent, who has already developed a virtuous testimonial sensibility, one "that is socially inculcated and trained by countless experiences of testimonial exchange...[which has instilled] in the virtuous hearer empirically well-grounded habits of epistemically charged social perception, and thus reliable perceptual judgments of speaker credibility" (5).

Fricker also acknowledges the persistent existence of the converse of such virtuous socio-epistemic habits of perception, namely, that there are empirically grounded habits of epistemically charged social perception that are trained by social experiences that are anything but virtuous, leading to *unreliable* perceptual judgments of speaker credibility. These vicious habits are, of course, just what lead to the problem of testimonial injustice in the first place:

So far we have focused on the idea of the well-trained sensibility, but it is well to remember the source of bad training that is of central interest to our project: prejudice, and most particularly prejudicial stereotypes... We need a conception of human beings as formed by the attitudes of their time yet capable of taking a critical stance towards those attitudes, and so we need a more historicist and more reflexive conception of ethical training than we find in Aristotle. (81-2)

It is here, where her account of virtuous epistemic agency attempts to move beyond the analogy she draws with Aristotle's virtuous moral agency, that Fricker begins to wrestle with the ancient epistemic problem of justification, or verification, – in this case, of one's credibility assessments.

The problem Fricker here identifies is that if the prejudicial images existing in one's social imaginary were the only possible source of "input" into a hearer's ethico-epistemic perceptual judgments, then there would be no mechanism whereby a hearer might be prompted to exchange their ethico-epistemically 'vicious' behaviors for more just ones. Although she fails to prescribe the proper solution to the problem, Fricker does at least acknowledge that she must attempt to move beyond the Aristotelian model and offer a more 'reflexive conception' of ethico-epistemic training. For unless there is some as-yet-unexplained catalyst that might prompt a hearer to *reflect* on her prejudicial perceptions, allowing her to *perceive* them *as* ethico-epistemically vicious, then there is no hope that she will ever attain, or even begin to seek out, the kind of ethico-epistemic virtues that Fricker champions.



### **Historicism and Reflexivity: Moving Beyond the Aristotelian Model**

Turning towards her ‘more historicist’ approach Fricker explains, “There have always been prejudices (think of Aristotle on slaves and women), but the prejudices that may be in the air at any given time change with history” (EI, 81-2). As Fricker’s parenthetical aside attests, historical prejudices might *not* change so very much ‘with history’. However to her point about the reflexivity that her account of ethico-epistemic judgments requires, she next observes, “Ethical sensibility is given its first form by our being inculcated into the attitudes of the day. But we are soon in a position to criticize these attitudes, and so we may, social pressures permitting, come to distance ourselves from any given commitment. Historicism brings responsibility for who we are” (EI, 82). In regards to ethico-epistemic responsibility, Fricker asserts that although one’s particular ethico-epistemic “inheritance” is determined by forces beyond the purview of any individual epistemic agent’s capacity to change it, one’s response to that inheritance is not. According to Fricker a virtuous testimonial sensibility is forged by one’s critical responses to her particular ethico-epistemic historical inheritance.

While I find Fricker’s appeal to ‘historicism’ as the bringer of ethico-epistemic responsibility and agency misguided, her appeal to a more contextualized, historical account of how epistemic agents might come to reflect on their own ethico-epistemic prejudices is a welcome move. I agree, for instance, with her claim that “One develops an ethical sensibility by becoming inculcated into a historically and culturally specific way of life – or, as Alisdair MacIntyre puts it, an ethical ‘tradition’” (EI, 82). I further agree that a “responsible hearer’s sensibility can mature and adapt in the light of ongoing testimonial experience” (84). What I want to reject is Fricker’s claim that the kind of “cognitive dissonance” that might prompt the ‘maturation’ and ‘adaptation’ of one’s testimonial sensibility arises solely out of the clash

between one's individual and her (singular) social "streams of input...in that order" (EI, 82).

Ironically, Fricker insightfully diagnoses exactly what her non-inferentialist, virtue-epistemic response to the problem of epistemic injustice will need in order to make sense of how virtuous epistemic agents may come to perceive their epistemic judgments as either just or unjust: some form of *dialectic* that can provide what Wittgenstein aptly refers to as epistemic "friction."<sup>21</sup> Sadly, thanks to her rigidly monological framework, the only potential interlocutors she discovers when surveying her all-too-homogeneous ethico-epistemic landscape are the epistemic players "I" and a woefully under-defined "we." The only partners Fricker finds available for the kinds of dialogues that might serve as a catalyst for an epistemic agent to reflect critically on her socially inculcated testimonial sensibility are one's self, and a group to which this self in dialogue, and apparently every other epistemic agent on the planet, belong, in this case, a remarkably nondescript group Fricker refers to as simply "the ethical community" (82).

### **An A-Social Social Epistemology?**

There is a curious tension that runs throughout Fricker's book in regards to her handling of the social aspects of social epistemology. She clearly endorses the view that membership in a social group bears significantly on one's socio-epistemic experiences, and acknowledges that there are a variety of different types of social groups, some much more ethico-epistemically privileged than others. Fricker further recognizes the key role that *dissonance* plays in an epistemic agent's ability to identify areas in which critical reflection on one's epistemic practices is warranted – it's what supplies the epistemic friction about which Wittgenstein speaks. However, the ways in which an epistemic agent's experiences of ethico-epistemic dissonance come about remain problematically under-theorized in Fricker's account.

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<sup>21</sup> See *Philosophical Investigations*, § 107.

Though there are a variety of epistemic agents who come from a wide array of social, political, and economic backgrounds included in Fricker's analysis, the fact that she has accorded them all only one social imaginary from which to draw their meanings, and one economy of credibility by which to measure their knowledge claims, leaves her with a very narrow range of ethico-epistemic differences that can actually be accounted for. And it is in the differences that are so vast that they cannot even be detected that the lion's share of epistemic injustices occur: when a hearer simply cannot imagine, for instance, that the speaker before her might be either a credible testifier or a competent meaning-maker. We will further review the ways in which Fricker's account erases these kinds of differences toward the end of our critique. For now, let's return to Fricker's handling of how epistemic agents come to reflect critically upon their own social imaginaries.

### **Forming the Critical Link: An Aristotelian Retreat**

Although she earlier declared that she must move beyond the analogous Aristotelian account of virtue ethics in order to address the problem of justification for one's epistemic judgments, Fricker quickly retreats to the Aristotelian analogy for aid in constructing her account of justifying or evaluating epistemic judgments. She asks,

What of our ability as hearers to form a critical link with this great passive inheritance that conditions the credibility judgments we make? Here again the task is to identify an analogy with the ethical case. I have said that an individual's testimonial sensibility is in the first instance passively inherited. But once light has dawned for a hearer... (83)

But Fricker doesn't follow this up with an adequate explanation as to whence this light originated or how it came to such a fortuitous dawn (83).

As I noted earlier, on Fricker's account testimonial sensibility is, like its Aristotelian counterpart, moral sensibility, informed by "two distinct streams of input: social and individual – in that order" (82). Fricker describes the social stream of input as "a passive social inheritance,"

and characterizes the individual stream as “a sometimes-passive-sometimes-active individual input from the hearer’s own experience” (83). She contends that “Together the individual and collective streams of input are what explain how our normal unreflective reception of what people tell us is conditioned by a great range of collateral experience – our informal background ‘theory’ of socially situated trustworthiness” (83). As to whether and how the ‘critical link with this great passive inheritance that conditions the credibility judgments we make’ comes about, Fricker has all-too-little to say. She simply refers the reader back to her original “analogy with the ethical case,” which she formulates thusly:

Ethical responsibility demands that the individual generate an appropriate critical link between the traditional moment in which she gains her primary ethical socialization and the experiences that life offers her – experiences which may sometimes be in tension with her ethical socialization so as to prompt critical reflection on the sensibility which she has otherwise simply inherited. The epistemic socialization through which virtuous hearers gain their testimonial sensibility has a similar structure. (82)

I suppose this means that something like “Ethico-epistemic responsibility” *demands* that a hearer ‘generate an appropriate critical link’ between the two streams of input that generate her testimonial sensibility.

Apart from the fact that she is invoking the supposed ‘demands’ of disembodied “entities” like ‘Ethical responsibility’, ‘Ethico-epistemic responsibility’, and finally (as we will see below), simply ‘responsibility’,<sup>22</sup> (and we will return to these ‘entities’ and their supposed ‘demands’ shortly) there are several other problems with Fricker’s account of how an epistemic agent might come to reflect critically on her own testimonial sensibility. Although Fricker allows that, “It takes a special feat of self-consciousness to be alert to...prejudice in one’s thinking, let

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<sup>22</sup> Although Fricker attempts to justify such appeals to various kinds of disembodied ‘responsibility’ by drawing a parallel between moral perception, which she asserts is both “intrinsically motivating” and “intrinsically reason-giving,” epistemic perception, since I find all arguments in favor of the view that moral perception is intrinsically motivating suspect, I find Fricker’s drawing of this parallel as evidence that ethico-epistemic perception is also ‘intrinsically motivating’ to be unconvincing (80).

alone to correct it” she suggests that, “once light has dawned for a hearer, she will come to find that sometimes her experiences of testimonial exchange are in tension with the deliverance of the sensibility she has passively taken on, in which case responsibility requires that her sensibility adjust itself to accommodate the new experience” (38, 83).

Note the tentativeness with which Fricker, who otherwise confidently makes her claims throughout her book, outlines how this ‘dawn’ *might* break for a hearer (Although this is a hypothetical example, I find Fricker’s suggestions about what ‘might’ take place more circumspect than usual here):

Her experience of politicians might, for instance, be that there are proportionally just as many female politicians she respects as male politicians she respects. And she might notice a certain cognitive dissonance between her beliefs on the one hand – her belief, for instance, that women are the equal of men in political life – and the spontaneous deliverances of her testimonial sensibility on the other – a sensibility which time and again leaves her not quite taking women’s political word as seriously as men’s. As she reflects on her judgment processes, she might detect the influence of a traditional stereotypical image of women as not cut out for political life, even while her own experience has led her to believe that stereotype to be mere prejudice.

At this point, what I want to know is how this particular (hypothetical) ‘hearer’ was ever able to originate a belief – for instance ‘that women are the equal of men in political life’ – that *contradicts* the testimonial sensibility that is her social inheritance, which ‘leaves her not quite taking women’s political word as seriously as men’s’ in the first place.

The images populating one’s social imaginary are, on Fricker’s account, that which enable her to “see [her] interlocutors in epistemic colour” (71). The hearer perceives her interlocutor as, for instance, non-credible, because her “perceptual capacity...[is] informed by a background ‘theory’ (body of generalizations)...of the competences and motivations of this or that social type in this or that context” (71). But if a hearer’s perceptual capacity is so informed, then wouldn’t her experiences be ‘coloured’ by this inherited ‘background theory’ or ‘body of

generalizations’ in such a way as to render her ability to perceive her experiences *only by the lights of that ‘background theory’ or ‘body of generalizations’*? If so, and Fricker has not yet identified any alternative way to interpret this, then the woman in the above example would never have been able to originate the belief that is supposedly so at odds with the ‘spontaneous deliverances of her [inherited] testimonial sensibility’, namely ‘that women are the equal of men in political life’.

Let’s consider Fricker’s suggestion that her hypothetical epistemic agent might experience a situation wherein she respected ‘just as many female politicians...as male politicians’. If the ‘spontaneous deliverances of her testimonial sensibility’ contain ‘traditional stereotypical image[s] of women as not cut out for political life’, then – because she has only this one (corrupt) social imaginary to draw on – our epistemic agent would be left to surmise that her experience of respecting just as many female as male politicians must represent either an exception (she just happens to have encountered a disproportionate number of ‘respectable’ female politicians), or worse, a moral and /or epistemic *failing* on her part (she is *incorrectly* perceiving certain female politicians as ‘cut out for political life’). The ‘epistemic colour’ in which she would see female politicians as ‘not cut out for political life’ would render any alternative interpretation of her experiences either 1) incorrect or unreliable, or 2) incoherent.

The point is, since experiences don’t come packaged with their own ‘inherent’ meanings inscribed on them, one’s experiences alone cannot trigger her to reflect critically on her own testimonial sensibility. Further, without some sort of radical intervention (and Fricker has closed off one of the most important possible resources for such an intervention by insisting that there is only one pool of collective hermeneutical resources for all epistemic agents to draw on), seldom do people in relatively safe circumstances like the Ivory Tower or, perhaps Connecticut, question

their entire framework of understanding. If they experience something that seems at odds with their social streams of input, they will simply explain it away – according to the lights of that ‘body of generalizations’ upon which they have come to rely. They have a vested interest in calling their anomalous experiences “exceptions,” “mysteries,” or “miracles,” based on their ‘background theory’ of how the world works. Again, meanings are not *intrinsic* to experiences, which means that even the most bizarre of experiences won’t necessarily (or even probably) trigger an epistemic agent to begin to reflect critically on his or her socially inculcated testimonial sensibility. In a world as homogeneous and insulated as the one Fricker’s account constructs (it’s not quite Connecticut, but close), I submit that this kind of reflection simply will not occur.

Fricker’s austere account of epistemic resources offers no explanation as to how the kinds of experiences that might cause epistemic friction could ever be perceived as something other than what one’s ‘spontaneous deliverances of her testimonial sensibility’ – or *prejudicial* perceptions – indicate that they are. In other words, since her epistemic landscape is so sparse and homogeneous, there simply are no experiences an epistemic agent could have that could pierce through the armor of her ‘background theory’, ‘body of generalizations’, or understanding of the world, in such a way as to prompt her to recalibrate her understandings. Unless there are *alternative* interpretive resources by which any given epistemic agent might begin even to perceive her experiences as contradicting her corrupt inherited ‘background theory’ that colors her ethico-epistemic perceptions so poorly, then Fricker’s account of rehabilitating one’s testimonial sensibility cannot even get off of the ground. However there is more to Fricker’s account than what we’ve thus far examined.

### Unconditioned Conditioners: Fricker's Ethico-Epistemic Universalism

Throughout our reconstruction of Fricker's response to the problem of testimonial injustice we've made an assumption that Fricker has not: we've assumed that there are no "unconditioned" influences on an epistemic agent's ethico-epistemic judgments, perceptual or otherwise. However on Fricker's account there are certain "capacities" that every human being possesses: an "emotional cognitive capacity," or *empathy*, for instance, and a "capacity of reason" so central to being human that it, "lends humanity its distinctive value" (80, 68, 44).

Both empathy and reason are assumed to be universal and univocal, their meanings so obvious as to not merit much reflection, for Fricker. Since, on this account, there are *unconditioned* cognitive capacities that help people make reliable credibility assessments – they reliably *feel* that their interlocutor is trustworthy, or they reliably *reason* that they are – Fricker surmises that all that's left to do in order to trigger the kind of cognitive dissonance that might prompt an epistemic agent to reflect critically upon her unjust ethico-epistemic behaviors is to put her prejudicially corrupted 'social stream of input' in conversation with her unconditioned and therefore *uncorrupted* 'individual stream of input'.

Fricker explains that because stereotypes, which can carry either a positive or a negative valence, are a "proper part – indeed, an essential part – of credibility judgments...it is only when the stereotypes are prejudiced that something alien – a counter-rational current of identity power – has entered in" (71). According to Fricker this 'alien...counter-rational current of identity power – has entered in' at the *social* level, where the structural influences of 'identity power' inevitably corrupt one's social imaginary. Fricker assumes that one's *individual* 'stream of input' – into which, presumably, nothing 'alien' has yet entered in – retains its inherent ability to render unconditioned (or at least non-alien-corrupted) emotional and rational cognitive deliverances.



These individual, unconditioned cognitive deliverances are what constitute the differences between one's unconditioned individual stream of input and the *conditioned* cognitive deliverances of her social stream of input. They allow for the kinds of cognitive dissonance upon which Fricker's account of the mechanism whereby an epistemic agent might be prompted to critically reflect upon her ethico-epistemic perceptions relies.

Since the viability of Fricker's entire account of the problem of epistemic injustice and its possible solutions relies on the claim that there exist universal, univocal, unconditioned cognitive capacities, further investigation into this claim is warranted. We will further explore the claim, its implications, and possible alternative accounts in the next chapter. However at this point it's important to note that even though hers is a non-inferentialist response to the problem of epistemic injustice, Fricker's account does, at least in part, rely on an epistemic agent's capacity to make ethico-epistemic *reflective judgments* capable of overcoming her prejudicial perceptions. Fricker asserts, for instance, that, "testimonial responsibility requires a distinctly *reflexive* critical social awareness. The hearer must factor into his net credibility judgment the likely impact on his spontaneous perception – and if possible the impact on the speaker's actual performance too – of the relation of identity power that mediates between himself and the speaker" (91).

Although she indicates that this 'reflexive critical awareness' need not always be "a matter of conscious, deliberative reflection," the fact that ours is a non-ideal social world leads Fricker to acknowledge that in order to possess the virtue capable of overcoming the epistemic vice of testimonial injustice, which Fricker rather telegraphically calls "the virtue of testimonial justice," some level of reflexive awareness will be required (91). She notes, "Full possession of the virtue...in a climate that has a range of prejudices in the social atmosphere, requires the hearer to have internalized the reflexive requirements of judging credibility in that climate, so

that the requisite social reflexivity of her stance as hearer has become second nature” (97).

As we can see, Fricker’s non-ideal approach is sensitive to certain ethico-epistemic, historical contingencies. However, as we can also see, her historical contextualism only goes so far. Not only does Fricker appeal to supposedly universal, unconditioned cognitive capacities, her approach aims also to “honour the universalist trajectory of moral psychology and language” by taking as given the notion of moral absolutes. While she acknowledges the unlikelihood that any individual epistemic agent or even any historical community could ever attain the virtue of testimonial justice “with respect to every prejudice that may suggest itself,” Fricker nonetheless asserts that one can achieve “exceptional moral judgments” with regard to her particular historical situation. When one is able to make morally virtuous ethical judgments even when the resources to make them are, due only to historical contingency, lacking in her particular historical circumstance, she has made an ‘exceptional moral judgment’, according to Fricker (97).

Fricker’s assertions here rely on the notion that, regardless of whether or not one has access to them in her present historical circumstances, there are moral “facts of the matter.” Even so, she urges caution in leveling moral blame toward epistemic agents of the past whom we might now – by the lights of our own current historical circumstance – regard as exhibiting poor moral judgment. She asserts that, “one cannot be blamed for failing to do something if one was not in a position to access the reason to do it” (100-01). In other words, because there may be just moral judgments that are beyond the moral capacities of a particular historical community to render, those epistemic agents living within them who fail to make those kinds of just moral judgments are not morally culpable, but instead suffer from a case of moral bad luck.

However, when it comes to the epistemic side of this parallel, Fricker asserts that, “it

could not be controversial to assume that epistemic subjects considered as such possess in their actual set of motivations some general motivation to truth...for all may agree that, in general, any epistemic subject will have a reason to get at the truth” (102). This means that *epistemically* speaking, historical contingencies offer no cover, for *every* epistemic agent is, on Fricker’s account, ‘in a position to access the reason to’ act in ethico-epistemically just ways. At this point Fricker’s sensitivity to context has all but disappeared as she makes appeals to exactly the kind of supposedly non-specific, universal subject who has inhabited the center of traditional epistemology for centuries – an ‘epistemic subject considered as such’, and ‘any epistemic subject’ *in general*.

### **The Immediate and Ultimate Ends of the Hybrid Virtue of Testimonial Justice**

Fricker considers testimonial justice to be a *hybrid* virtue, one that is at once ethical and epistemic. She acknowledges that although its “ultimate ends” will differ according to context – “considered as an intellectual virtue...its ultimate end will be truth” and “considered as an ethical virtue...its ultimate end will be justice,” – she insists that its “immediate end” is always “neutralizing prejudice in one’s credibility judgments” because neutralizing prejudices in one’s credibility judgments is required for both the intellectual goal of truth and the ethical goal of justice (122). Its hybridity notwithstanding, Fricker contends that although the ethical goal of justice may be occluded by historical circumstances beyond the control of any individual epistemic agent, the intellectual goal of truth is never similarly beyond the pale.

This leaves a certain open-endedness to moral questions in Fricker’s account, for we can never be sure how proximate the historically specific moral goals in our sights might be to the trans-historical moral goal of justice writ large. However on the epistemic side, no such open-endedness exists, for on Fricker’s account the trans-historical goal of truth is always within sight.

This leaves Fricker willing to allow a certain level of moral relativism in her account – at least insofar as she allows that, “judgments of blame may be out of order across even quite small historical distances” – but rejecting any such relativism on the epistemic side out-of-hand (106).

This global rejection of epistemic relativism is key to understanding just why Fricker failed even to consider the possibility that there might be *multiple* ‘collective hermeneutical resources’ and ‘economies of credibility’ from which various epistemic agents might draw the meanings and knowledges by which to make sense of their lives. For if there are equally viable yet multiple epistemic resources, meanings, and knowledges, then it seems that the supposedly unconditioned, univocal, and ‘always within sight’ epistemic goal of truth must not be so very unconditioned, univocal, or always within sight. If there exist multiple viable knowledges then there exist multiple viable truths. And if *truth* is not accepted as the unconditional and univocal goal of an unconditioned, univocal reason, then Fricker is left grappling with the problem of relativism at the epistemic level, a possibility that she finds rather abhorrent.

Although I reject Fricker’s characterization of truth as unconditioned and univocal, I am not suggesting that we endorse either moral or epistemic relativism. What I propose instead is to reject the dualisms that Fricker has embraced, particularly in regards to the possibilities of epistemic certainty vs. skepticism about knowledge. Fricker’s worry is that if there are no trans-historical, unconditioned human cognitive capacities like empathy and reason delivering trans-historical, unconditioned univocal truths, skepticism about knowledge would inevitably result because all truth would then be relative to the particular historical circumstances that conditioned it. But this worry is based on several false dichotomies, themselves the result of a faulty conception of the nature and goal of reason. What I propose, therefore, is nothing short of a revision of Fricker’s concept of reason. Following Hannah Arendt, I will offer an account of

public reason that is pluralistic by virtue of the fact that it is a plurality of actors, or epistemic agents, who contribute to it in the ongoing “conversation” of politics.<sup>23</sup> Since this conversation is *continually* ongoing and never closed, my account of public reason frames it as always in the process of being created and recreated.

### **Public Reason: a Universalism Which is Not One<sup>24</sup>**

While the *epistemic* problem of justification does, just as Fricker, along with traditional epistemologists, suggests, rely on “the authority of reason,” since, on my account, reason is never a static, closed category, the authority it entails is always limited spatio-temporally. The

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<sup>23</sup> Arendt’s account of what constitutes “the political” or even the *polis* is notoriously difficult to pin down. In suggesting that the problem of epistemic injustice is a “political” one, I am following Arendt’s assertion that, “Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition” (THC, 3). As Arendt clarifies, “The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be. “Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*’: these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly. The space does not always exist...[it] comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action” (THC, 198). We will return to this suggestion in chapter three, and follow up on Arendt’s all-too-brief discussion of the problem of access to public realms. As she notes, “This space does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them – like the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the laborer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world – do not live in it” (THC, 199). This thorny issue will require more reflection than is offered in the insights shared by Hannah Arendt.

<sup>24</sup> This subtitle, as well as the main thrust of my argument here, is drawn from Linda Zerilli’s review of Ernest Laclau’s *Emancipation(s)* entitled, “This Universalism Which is Not One.” This is a case wherein the meaning of a phrase depends on which word within it takes the emphasis: in our case as with Zerilli’s, the emphasis should be placed on the word “One.” It’s not a, ‘Universalism Which *is not* One’ – isn’t a universalism, that is. It’s instead a ‘Universalism Which is not *One*’. This is not an ideal approach – I’m not at all suggesting that what’s universal is an ideal. I’m simply suggesting that, as with judgments of taste, political judgments aim at *generating* agreement through universal rhetorical appeals as to what might constitute a ‘good’. To be clear, the ‘good’ is not universal, it’s only the rhetorical appeal that is: it attempts to persuade others to agree by claiming that all of one’s interlocutors, at a particular time and place and in regards to a particular ‘good’, *ought* to agree with its, highly contextualized, particular judgment. The universalism of the appeal is limited to the spatio-temporal ‘universe’ of any given “language-game,” as Wittgenstein would have it, at the time and place the language-game is being played. It attempts to impinge only on those actively involved in the game that is being played – *all* of the players, that is. We will return to this ‘universalism’ in the following chapters in order to further explore both its plural aspects, and its political limitations.

authority of public reason comes from the authors of it – those who join in conversation together to discuss what seems reasonable to call “true” – and lasts only as long as their conversation does. It is defined whenever those in conversation stop to, as Arendt puts it, “think what we are doing,” but it is never defined once and for all (THC, 5). In other words, when it comes to public reason the kind of consensus by which our ethico-epistemic judgments are justified or evaluated is the *goal* rather than the starting point of our ethico-epistemic endeavors. This means that our ethico-epistemic judgments can never be final, and the conversations that create the always open-ended public reason against which they are judged are never-ending.

Since the content of ‘the rational’ is, on this account, never “filled in,” as it were, beforehand, then what counts as rational speech can never be defined before the conversations in which it is created occur.<sup>25</sup> The process whereby such defining occurs is called *reflection* – or sometimes its just called *thinking*. Either way, what it leads to is a *reflective judgment* wherein those prejudicial perceptions that arise from the prejudicial images in one’s social imaginary are reflected upon and ethico-epistemically judged. What prompts this kind of reflection are, just as Fricker suggests, experiences with cognitive dissonance that arise from moments of dialectically-induced ethico-epistemic friction. But on Fricker’s account, this friction comes from the dialectic

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<sup>25</sup> I owe this particular insight to Linda Zerilli’s excellent essay on the differences between Hannah Arendt’s and John Rawls’ accounts of “public reason” entitled, “Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment: Farewell to Public Reason,” wherein she argues that Rawls’ “method of avoidance” leads him to offer a “highly constrained idea of public reason” (8). Zerilli convincingly argues that, “To reclaim judgment as a practice of democratic citizenship, we need to think about the reasonable as something other than a mode of political speech, and a way of engaging fellow citizens, that is based on the method of avoidance” (9). Rawls’ ‘method of avoidance’ aims to avoid what he calls “comprehensive claims,” the kinds of claims that appeal to one’s ‘comprehensive’ reasons – including both *public* and *private* ones – should be avoided in public deliberation. Rawls wants to limit what counts as acceptable public debate by limiting it only to what is “reasonable” public discourse – that which “can be reasonably justified to others” (PL, 61). But as Zerilli points out, “Unshackled from the constraints of public reason, the reasonable might also be understood as a form of making political judgments and claims that generates agreement on matters of common concern by enlarging our sense both of what so much as counts as a common matter and who counts as a political speaker” (9). It is this Arendtian-inspired conception of reason which I will endorse.

between one's individual and her social "streams of input," and on my Arendtian-inspired account it arises out of the dialectic engagements between significantly different others (82).

What an epistemic agent offers in conversation with others is an account of her *knowledge*, which is comprised of the images within her social imaginary which are coloring her perception in a particular way. And because she is in conversation with others who *differ* from her, the knowledges or perceptions that they have to offer present additional images, *new* images that our epistemic agent will need to reconcile with the images already existing in her social imaginary. In determining whether to accept or reject these new images, epistemic agents must appeal to the authority of public reason as their guide. What public reason offers is a shared background framework against which new images are perceived as either 'credible' or 'non-credible'. This shared, public reason constitutes, in other words, one's *understanding*. But this understanding is, as noted, always a work in progress. As Arendt explains, "Understanding, as distinguished from having correct information and scientific knowledge, is a complicated process which never produces univocal results. It is an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world" (EU, 307-8).

While there is much more to say about this distinction that I'm beginning to draw between knowledge and understanding, we will leave most of it for the coming chapters. At this point, suffice it to say that while there are many issues that beg for further explanation, like the question of how one gains access to these consensus-building 'conversations' in the first place, what we can at least begin to see here are the contours of a basic distinction that needs further exploration. In discussing one's *perceptions*, including those images that one 'beholds' in her social imaginaries, Fricker is addressing questions of *knowledge*, and in discussing *reason*,

which is, on Fricker's account, the standard according to which ethico-epistemic judgments are made, she is addressing questions of *understanding*.

This distinction – between knowledge and understanding – lies at the heart of my critique of Fricker's overall account of the problem of epistemic injustice. As we will see more clearly in the following chapter, it maps on to the distinction between testimonial and hermeneutical forms of injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs whenever an epistemic agent prejudicially negatively assesses the *credibility* of another's *knowledge* claims, and hermeneutical injustice occurs whenever an epistemic agent prejudicially negatively assesses the *intelligibility* of her own or another's background *understanding* of the world. Because Fricker focused almost entirely on the problem of testimonial injustice with an eye toward arriving at a just and final, or *closed*, rational consensus instead of focusing on ways in which to incorporate new knowledges coming from within the diverse understandings of others, she failed fully to flesh out the nature of the complex and intimate relationship between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. It was this failure that ultimately led her to the monological, epistemically unjust, non-inferentialist, virtue-epistemic approach that characterizes her response to the problem of epistemic injustice as a whole.

The details of my dissatisfaction with Fricker's response will be further explained in the coming chapters, but it begins with the concern I've already identified as primary. As one insightful reviewer points out, Fricker's non-inferentialist, virtue-epistemic solution to the problem of epistemic injustice leads her to offer a:

fundamentally asymmetrical [account of it]: with respect to the victim Fricker offers detailed ethical and psychological investigations into the various forms of harm; with respect to (possible) perpetrators, she puts forward ethical-epistemological demands. This division of perspectives has the – no doubt unwanted – effect of portraying the victim as invariably passive and the perpetrator alone as holding all the keys to an improvement. (Kusch, 173)



Because she limited the hands that hold the ‘keys to an improvement’ to only those of the socially, politically, and economically privileged epistemic agents most often perpetrating the harms of epistemic injustice, Fricker effectively erased the multiple and varied voices of hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents offering unique solutions to the problem of epistemic injustice from her account. It is with this concern in mind that we look to alternative approaches of the problem of epistemic injustice.

#### **Part IV: Toward An Alternative Account of Epistemic Resources**

Audre Lorde and Hannah Arendt each suffered the harms of epistemic injustice in various ways and to different degrees, but in their writings there exists a firm commitment to epistemic justice that manifests itself in their exhortations to ethico-epistemically harmed subjects to claim epistemic responsibility for themselves and thereby cultivate a sense of epistemic agency. These exhortations come in an array of different varieties throughout their works, and some are much more socially, culturally, and racially sensitive than others. But all rely on the belief that our epistemic practices are intimately tied to our ethical practices, and, because they are sufficiently pluralistic, all are able to take seriously the voices of those ethico-epistemically harmed subjects attempting to break the silences imposed on them. Fricker’s work highlights Lorde’s and Arendt’s shared concern for ethico-epistemic injustice by offering an insightful example of the ways in which this concern can be cashed out in the language of social epistemology. For this I am truly grateful. At the same time, Fricker’s work sheds new light on the remarkable similarities in Lorde’s and Arendt’s responses to the problem of epistemic injustice, but in this regard, as noted, Fricker’s work diverges significantly from theirs.

Following Lorde and Arendt, I would like to suggest that keeping the focus solely on those epistemically privileged hearers perpetrating the harms of epistemic injustice serves mainly

to exacerbate its harms. It underwrites and extends the silencing effects of epistemic injustice on those underprivileged or oppressed epistemic agents in its apparent assumption that such epistemic agents simply lack the ability to offer meaningful contributions toward the goal of epistemic justice. It was Fricker's failure to offer an account of the ethico-epistemic resources available to underprivileged or oppressed speakers that led her to overlook their important contributions to the problem of epistemic injustice. By identifying only those epistemic resources from within which mainstream epistemic agents supposedly draw the meanings that make sense of their lives, Fricker unwittingly upholds the notion that they alone possess the power effectively to combat epistemic injustice.

Drawing on Lorde's and Arendt's conceptual work, I will counter Fricker's framework by offering a thoroughly pluralistic account of the epistemic resources available to underprivileged or oppressed speakers; resources that Fricker's account overlooks entirely. I will argue that those subjects who are hermeneutically marginalized within mainstream epistemic practices can draw from these alternative resources both the meanings and the strength needed to fund the, at once both resistant *and* creative, ethico-epistemic practices that can begin to overcome the epistemic injustices from which they suffer. We will focus on the epistemic responsibilities of underprivileged or oppressed epistemic agents not in order to suggest that it is their responsibility to teach socially, politically and economically privileged epistemic agents how to cultivate epistemic virtues, but instead to expand the horizons of all who are engaged in epistemic practices by increasing the number and type of their pools of epistemic resources.

Because there have been many ethico-epistemically harmed epistemic agents who have in fact *already* addressed the problem of epistemic injustice, there *are* "other" epistemic resources available, offering "other" tools with which to, as Audre Lorde would have it, "dismantle the

master's house...[and] enable us to bring about genuine change" (112). Change toward epistemic justice is still the goal of this inquiry, but we will no longer "define the master's house as [our] only source of support" (Lorde, 112). Instead, we will investigate other "houses" – other social imaginaries and all of the meanings they carry within, and other "tools" – other words and ways of speaking and revealing ourselves and our meanings. It is my hope that this engagement with multiple social imaginaries will help foster the kind of Kantian "enlarged mentality" (Arendt, KPP, 74) that, whether explicitly drawing on Kant or not, both Arendt and Lorde invoked in their work. It is this reflective work, culminating in the kinds of informed judgments that alone can overcome prejudices, that can engender the kind of epistemic justice that Fricker and other social epistemologists seek.

## CHAPTER 2

### Diagnosing The Relationship Between Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustices – A Therapeutic Approach

*“Is my understanding only blindness to my own lack of understanding? It often seems so to me.”*  
- L.W., *On Certainty*

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter we examined the ways in which Miranda Fricker’s non-doxastic reconstruction of the problem of testimonial injustice led to her problematic non-inferentialist, virtue-epistemic solution to the problem of epistemic injustice as a whole. However the question remains: how does this non-doxastic reconstruction of the problem of *testimonial* injustice relate to Fricker’s handling of the problem of *hermeneutical* injustice? How might the perceptual failures involved in instances of testimonial injustice, for instance, differ from those involved in instances of hermeneutical injustice?

As explained in the previous chapter, in cases of testimonial injustice, it’s the hearer who pre-judges, or as we’ve most recently construed it, *perceives*, the speaker in a certain light: the hearer *sees* the speaker *as*, for instance, belonging to a social group whose members he is prejudicially predisposed to perceive as non-credible. And in the case of hermeneutical injustice, it’s both the speaker and the hearer who pre-judge, or as we can now render it, *perceive*, the speaker’s testimony in a certain light: both the speaker and the hearer *see* the speaker’s testimony *as*, for instance, unintelligible speech, because they are prejudicially predisposed to perceive it as unintelligible, on Fricker’s account.

What’s importantly different about these two forms of prejudicial perception is the fact that the prejudicial perceptions that inform *credibility* assessments, resulting in testimonial injustices and the prejudicial perceptions that inform *intelligibility* assessments, resulting in hermeneutical injustices aim at two very different ethico-epistemic goals: knowledge, on the one

hand, and understanding, on the other. In order better to grasp just how the prejudicial perceptions involved in hermeneutical injustice differ from those involved in testimonial injustice, we will need to further flesh out this distinction between knowledge and understanding. To that end, we will begin with a new taxonomy of epistemic injustice which will lead to a clarification of the distinction between knowledge and understanding, and then proceed to see how our clarification sheds new light on the differences between the kinds of identity-prejudicial perceptions that drive testimonial injustice, and the identity-prejudicial perceptions that lead to hermeneutical injustice. This will lead to a substantially revised account of both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

Once outlined, our revised, thoroughly pluralistic account of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice will stand in stark opposition to Fricker's monological approach. This chapter will draw to a close once the turn toward more pluralistic approaches to the problem of epistemic injustice has adequately been motivated. Leaving the more reconstructive work to our Arendtian and Lordian-inspired approaches to the problem of epistemic injustice to chapters three and four, this chapter will be dedicated mainly to clearing the ground for these interventions. On that note, let's begin with a new taxonomy of the problem of epistemic injustice that aligns with what will be our revised understanding of the distinctions between knowledge and understanding, and testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

### **Part I: A New Taxonomy of Epistemic Injustice**

The first thing to notice about these two activities – knowing and understanding – is that they both rely on some form of sense experience (perceptions, for instance) and some form of meaning-making activity (theoretical frameworks, stories, or narrative accounts, for example). Since even single-celled organisms like amoebas or paramecia are capable of some forms of

sensory ‘perception’ (the amoeba responds to light and the paramecium responds to heat), but (as far as we know) lack the capacity either to construct, or draw on, existing theoretical frameworks, stories, or narrative accounts of their sensory inputs, we would not attribute either knowledge or understanding to them.<sup>26</sup> Beings capable of both sensory inputs and meaning-making are beings that are potentially capable of knowledge and understanding: their sensory inputs provide the raw material for their *knowledge*, and their meaning-making activities provide the fodder for their *understanding*.<sup>27</sup> However there is no knowledge without understanding and there is no understanding without knowledge. To see how this interdependence works, I propose that we begin to outline a new taxonomy of the problem of epistemic injustice, focusing on the question of how one arrives at the kinds of judgments that are capable of overcoming the problem: *reflective judgments*.

It will be important to remember throughout our reconstruction of the process involved in forming reflective judgments that although we will be breaking the process down into six discrete steps, it’s not the case that these steps always occur in an orderly, sequential fashion. Many of the steps involved in arriving at reflective judgments overlap with each other in various ways – at times happening sequentially, and at other times happening concurrently, for instance. Further, because they form a hermeneutical circle of understanding, step six will lay the foundation for step one, which means that there is always already more “happening” in step one than we can say “up front,” before we’ve reviewed the six-step process in its entirety. In fact,

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<sup>26</sup> The nature-writer/ essayist Annie Dillard refers her readers to the work of Donald E. Carr on this point. Carr “points out that the sense impressions of one-celled animals, unlike those of more complex species such as ourselves, are *not* edited for the brain” by poignantly noting that, ““This is philosophically interesting in a rather mournful way, since it means that only the simplest animals perceive the universe as it is”” (Pilgrim At Tinker Creek).

<sup>27</sup> While this group may not extend to the “lowly” (but apparently all-seeing) amoebae, I’m perfectly willing to accept that it may well extend beyond the human race alone. But to further explore this possibility would be to go well beyond the goals of this dissertation.

because they often do not occur in an “orderly,” sequential fashion, there is always already more happening in each of the six-steps we will review than what’s being articulated in each individual step.

There is, nonetheless, good reason to break this process down into its discrete parts in order better to understand just what’s involved in the formation of reflective judgments. As I will argue, the difficulties we encounter in coming to better appreciate just what’s involved in the formation of a reflective judgments are mirrored in the difficulties we encounter in coming to better appreciate the ways in which the “fixity” of our knowledge claims are challenged by the fluidity of the meaning-making practices within which those knowledge claims are made and according to which those knowledge claims are measured. When we make a knowledge claim, even if we expect that we might soon have to revise it, we aim to state *what is the case*, as it appears to us at the time we claim it. But when we try to state the meaning of the knowledge claims we make, we tell stories that *move* – they unfold in space and time. Meanings are made and re-made on a regular basis. Since their substance is our knowledge, or ‘what is the case, as it appears to us’ at a particular space and time, meanings rely on those knowledges to be durable enough to hold for at least a time (sometimes, just until the end of a story we might happen to be telling, sometimes much, much longer).

Arendt explains that, “Knowing certainly aims at truth, even if this truth, as in the sciences, is never an abiding truth but a provisional verity that we expect to change against other, more accurate verities as knowledge progresses” (LOM, 61). However no matter how provisional the truths that comprise our knowledge claims might be, there is some measure of fixedness to the claims themselves. Again, Arendt: “For our desire to know, whether arising out of practical or purely theoretical perplexities... leaves behind a growing treasure of knowledge

that is retained and kept in store by every civilization as part and parcel of its world. The loss of this accumulation and of the technical expertise required to conserve and increase it inevitably spells the end of this particular world” (LOM, 62).

Since the ‘knowledge that is retained and kept in store by every civilization’ is ‘part and parcel of its world’, if we don’t ‘hold’ our knowledges, we lose our world. On the other hand, we must accept that often times (and perhaps always, since this seems always to be a possibility) our knowledges are only *provisional* – regardless of whether they are the ‘provisional verities’ of the sciences, or the more stately truths that we “hold to be self-evident,” such as the equality of all human beings. If we don’t accept this, then we are dogmatists, stubbornly holding our knowledges above revision come what may. If we do accept it, we are tossed into the moving world of our time-bound storytelling holding onto knowledges that may well move at a much slower clip. This leaves us forever coming to grips with the incongruities that result from the (even if only *provisional*) “fixity” of our knowledge as it is conveyed in the fluidity of the time-bound practice of making meanings out of that knowledge, or making sense of it. In other words, our stories make a sense of our knowledges, but in so doing they may well alter the meanings of those knowledges – leaving behind newly minted knowledges for future stories to weave together into new tales that will again alter the substance of their substance – or our knowledges.

As we delineate the six-step process involved in forming reflective judgments, it will be important to keep in mind these incongruities, as they are mirrored in the six-step process. In some ways, to break this process down into its discrete parts is to do violence to it – for it simply is not the case that we come to know and understand in such a rigid, mechanistic way as our six-step process may seem to suggest. However since we often learn to tell stories, or *make sense of* our knowledges in exactly such ways – we learn that the elements of storytelling include a



sequential relating of a conflict, climax, and conclusion, for instance – I want to further explore the incongruences that arise between our explanations and our truths, or our meanings and our knowledges, and not shy away from these often puzzling incongruities.

One *can* – as will be evidenced in what follows – make sense of the process involved in forming reflective judgments by breaking it down into its discrete parts. While this may not capture certain aspects of that process, it is one way among many in which to render it. And I believe that we can learn much from this kind of linear thinking, even in the face of its rather glaring shortcomings. We will return to this point towards the end of this chapter. For now, let’s outline the six-step process involved in forming reflective judgments.

### **The Six-Step Process Involved in Forming Reflective Judgments**

Thus far we’ve identified two of the six steps required in order for one to form a reflective judgment: first, one needs to receive sensory inputs (i.e. perceptions), and second, one must be able to draw on existing socially inherited meaning-making activities. But there are four additional steps along the way to forming a reflective judgment. What’s needed thirdly is what Fricker calls a ‘perceptual judgment’, wherein one puts her sensory inputs into “conversation” with her inherited social meanings in such a way as to render her sensory inputs meaningful and her inherited social meanings knowledge conveying. Fourth, an epistemic agent must be able to *re-present* her sensory inputs in a “de-sensed” form in her imagination.<sup>28</sup> Fifth, an epistemic agent must associate meanings with her mental representations of sensory inputs, which, as we will see, calls for an *articulation* of one’s mental representations in a meaningful way. These articulations lead to, finally, step six: another ethico-epistemic *judgment* of some kind – which, as in step #3, requires a “conversation” of sorts. In this secondary conversation, the players are

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<sup>28</sup> We will return to this step in order to further explain what these ‘re-presenting’ and ‘de-sensing’ activities have to do with epistemic injustice. See pages 19-21 of this chapter for more on this.

one's mental representations of her sensory perceptions, which are formed in step #4; the meanings to which she attaches them, which are formed in step #5; and her initial 'perceptual judgments' from step #3 – all of which are rendered in her imagination, then reflected upon and subsequently reflectively judged. These six steps are all that are required for one to arrive at a reflective judgment.

As we will see, Fricker's account of the problem of epistemic injustice includes each of these six steps; however she does not single them out in such a way as to render them fully visible or intelligible. A more detailed review of each step will reveal some of the fundamental and yet faulty assumptions upon which Fricker's account relies. We will offer a corrective for these missteps; looking primarily to Hannah Arendt's final, unfinished work *The Life of the Mind*, for aid in both diagnosing and reconstructing Fricker's account. We will begin with step one: perceptions or sensory inputs, and see what Fricker has to say about them. But as will soon become clear, Fricker jumps from step to step. In order to cover them all methodically, we will need to focus on them one-by-one in our Arendtian-inspired and Lordian-inspired revisions to Fricker's assessment of each of their roles in the problem of epistemic injustice. Since Fricker's analyses of the problem of epistemic injustice are, as we have seen, mainly focused on the problem of testimonial injustice, we will again begin with it, focusing at this point on the role *perceptual judgments* play in testimonial injustice. We will pivot to the problem of hermeneutical injustice in our revisions to Fricker's account in order to flesh out just how hermeneutical injustices and testimonial injustices relate one to another.

Since the six steps one must traverse in order to arrive at a reflective judgment are part of a hermeneutic circle of understanding, step six, which is the formation of an ethico-epistemic *judgment*, will become the scaffolding upon which step one begins. However there are two

different kinds of ethico-epistemic judgments contained in our six-step process, and it will be important to be able to distinguish between them. The perceptual judgments formed in step #3 are *pre-judgments*, prejudicial perceptions of, for instance, certain speakers as non-credible. The perceptual judgments that form step six in our six-step process are *reflective judgments*.<sup>29</sup> In order to distinguish the pre-judgments involved in step #3 from the reflective judgments involved in step #6, we will label them *preliminary judgments*, and call the other, reflexively informed judgments, *reflective judgments*.

Since these two types of judgment result in two distinct forms of both knowledge and understanding, we will need also to distinguish between the kinds of knowledge and understanding involved in perceptual judgments— *implicit knowledge* which is informed by the sensory inputs received in step #1, and *preliminary understanding* which is informed by the social meanings inherited in step #2 – from the kinds of knowledges and understandings that result from *reflective judgments* – *explicit knowledge* which is informed by the mental representations of one’s sensory inputs formed in step #4 and *reflective understanding* which is informed by the meanings articulated in step #5.

To recap: our six-step process leading to reflective judgments involves the following steps:

- 1.) The reception of sensory inputs.
- 2.) The ‘inheritance’ of social meanings.
- 3.) The formation of a *preliminary judgment* (or what Fricker calls a ‘perceptual judgment’), wherein one unreflexively associates her sensory inputs from step #1 with social meanings from step #2 and thereby forms *implicit knowledges* and *preliminary understandings*.
- 4.) The re-presentation of sensory inputs in de-sensed form in the imagination.

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<sup>29</sup> As will become clear – reflective judgments are, like preliminary judgments, ‘perceptual’. In both cases what’s perceived is an image in the mind, which is compared, not to “the real world,” but to one’s particular, socially, politically, economically (etc.) influenced apprehension of appearances through one’s sensory organs. As mentioned in the previous chapter: there are no “pre-theoretical facts of the matter” to be revealed here. Only facts that appear in the mode of *dokoi moi* – the “as it seems to me.”

- 5.) The association of meanings with the mental representations formed in step #4 in the form of *articulations*.
- 6.) The formation of *reflective judgments* – wherein one reflects upon her preliminary judgments formed in step #3, the mental images formed in step #4, and the articulations made in step #5 and then judges whether or not they need altering in accordance with the situation that confronts her at the time she reflects upon them, which results in *explicit knowledges* and *reflective understandings*.

### **The First Three Steps**

In regards to one’s initial, pre-reflective perceptions – those perceptions that are ‘affectively loaded’ and /or ‘theory-laden’ perceptions, Fricker recommends caution in using the “idiom of ‘theory’ and ‘theory-ladenness’” to describe them (73). At this point, when characterizing one’s unreflective ‘seeing as’, Fricker notes that such theoretical language is not quite fitting, “for neither the morally virtuous agent nor the epistemically virtuous hearer comes to her perceptual judgment (a moral judgment and a credibility judgment, respectively) by applying generalizations to the case confronting her” (73). In other words, an initial perceptual judgment, or in our terminology, a *preliminary judgment*, is non-doxastically mediated – for it involves no belief formations – and non-inferentially “applied,” to the situation confronting an epistemic agent at the time she makes the preliminary judgment. As Fricker explains, “although some relevant generalizations or principles are surely formulable (and invaluable in contexts where the shift to a more reflective mode of judgment is called for) the virtuous subject does not arrive at her perceptual judgment by way of obedience to any codification of the endlessly complex norms implicit in her judgment” (73).

Fricker is engaging here with the first three of the steps involved in our six-step process leading to explicit knowledge and reflective understanding: she is attempting to determine how it is that the sensory inputs from step #1 become associated with the generalizable ‘background’ meanings in step #2 in the formation of perceptual judgments, or as we have rendered it,

*preliminary judgments*, in step #3. If this were an *inferential* process, then an epistemic agent would simply apply whichever “rules of inference” she had been taught in regards to assessing the credibility of others to her sensory inputs and inherited social meanings in order to arrive at a *belief* about the credibility of the speaker before her. If she had been taught, for instance, that the inability to look another in the eyes when testifying was generally indicative of dishonesty, then whenever she was confronted with a speaker whose gaze could not meet her own, she would adjust her credibility assessment downward. In these cases the hearer *infers* that the meaning “dishonest” should be associated with the sensory inputs that confront her – the visual impression of a speaker whose gaze cannot meet her own – in forming her judgment, which would result in a belief.

Since this happens *non-inferentially*, Fricker characterizes step #3 quite differently.

Drawing once again on her Aristotelian analogy, Fricker explains:

According to the kind of cognitivism that grows out of the virtue tradition in ethics, the virtuous agent is marked out by his possession of a capacity for moral perceptual judgment. He is someone who, thanks to a proper moral ‘upbringing’ or (as I would prefer) a proper moral socialization, has come to see the world in moral color. When he is confronted by an action or a situation with a certain moral character, he does not have to work out that the action is cruel or kind or charitable or selfish; he just sees it that way. (72)

Although the virtuous moral agent’s ability to “just see” an action *as* ‘cruel or charitable or selfish’ cannot occur absent his ‘proper moral upbringing /socialization’, which has served to populate his social imaginary with non-prejudicial images for him to draw on, without a ‘cognitive’ intervention in the form of a *perceptual*, or in our language, *preliminary*, judgment on his part, he will fail to connect the predicates ‘cruel or kind or charitable or selfish’ with the ‘action or situation’ confronting him. Fricker continues,

Now this kind of perceptual judgment is spontaneous and unreflective; it involves no argumentation or inference on the agent’s part. The virtuous agent’s perceptual capacity

is accounted for in terms of a sensitivity to morally salient features of the situation confronting him. In the testimonial case, the parallel suggestion is that the virtuous hearer's perceptual capacity be understood in terms of a sensitivity to epistemically salient features of the situation and the speaker's performance.

The hearer's perceptual capacity is, in other words, informed by his moral and epistemic socialization, which directs him to see certain moral and epistemic 'features of the situation and the speaker's performance' as 'salient'.

If the hearer has been taught, for instance, that trustworthiness is an important feature to look for when determining a speaker's credibility, he will automatically look for "various social cues that relate to trustworthiness – cues relating to the sincerity and competence of the speaker on the matter at hand" (72). These social cues come in the form of images: the hearer knows what sincerity and competence in a speaker look like because he has inherited a model of sorts in the form of a stereotype – which, as Fricker explains, can have either "a positive or negative valence" (31). If the 'situation in confronting him' is a speaker whose aspect closely approximates the model image of sincerity and competence in the image of the stereotype our speaker has internalized, then he will perceptually judge the speaker as a credible testifier.

It's important at this point to remember that the stereotypical images that inform a hearer's perceptual credibility assessments are part of what populate his *social imaginary*. As Fricker explains, "prejudices typically enter into a hearer's credibility judgment by way of the social imagination in the form of a prejudicial stereotype" (4). Since one's credibility assessments draw on the ethico-epistemic resource Fricker calls 'the economy of credibility', it follows that one's economy of credibility is filled with images coming from one's social imaginary. In other words, one's social imaginary is, through its influence on one's economy of credibility, the source of the prejudicial images or stereotypes that inform her credibility assessments, which can be either positive or negative.

Because this process of reading social cues and perceptually judging speakers accordingly involves no appeals to “advance rules” detailing how to assess the credibility of speakers – which is to say, because it’s *non-inferential* – Fricker asserts that virtuous hearers are freed to “adapt and rework” their “thinking to identify [the] diverse contexts liable to confront [them]” (73). As I indicated in the previous chapter, I have some reservations about the extent of this supposed “freedom from...dependence on advance rules” (73). I worry, for instance, that no matter how large the cache of images in one’s social imaginary, if it does not contain *any* images of, say, speakers who are at once Black and credible, then it seems that no matter how closely a Black speaker’s testimonial performances might approximate the model image in one’s social imaginary in terms of embodying the ‘cues relating to the sincerity and competence of a speaker on the matter at hand’, her testimony will nonetheless be prejudicially negatively assessed.

In other words, a hearer’s ability to respond sensitively to the ‘diverse contexts liable to confront’ her will require more than just ‘freedom from dependence on advance rules’. No matter how free from advance rules an epistemic agent might be to preliminarily judge the credibility of a speaker, the fact that her social imaginary, which is what funds ‘the economy of credibility’ from which an epistemic agent draws her credibility judgments, is, as Fricker fully recognizes in her discussion of hermeneutical injustice – which we will turn to in a moment – impoverished, means that there are certain limits to the ways in which she can respond to the ‘diverse contexts liable to confront’ her.<sup>30</sup> This worry is not sufficiently addressed in Fricker’s work; a lacuna we will need now to address.

The preliminary judgments we’ve been discussing involve steps 1-3, but we’ve been focusing on the ways in which the perceptual judgments formed in step three relate to the

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<sup>30</sup> As we will see, there is a crucial link between both forms of epistemic injustice, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, that is formed at the level of the social imaginary, which funds *both* one’s ‘economy of credibility’ *and* her ‘collective interpretive resources’.

problem of *testimonial injustice*. While it is true that the sensory inputs from step #1 are always already “affectively loaded,” or “theory laden,” which means that they are always already *meaningful*, it’s important to pause for a moment to reflect on the meanings to which those sensory inputs are attached: the ‘inherited’ social meanings from step #2 (72). This will require us to explore the ways in which the preliminary judgments formed in step #3 relate to the problem of *hermeneutical injustice*.

Hermeneutical injustice occurs when the meanings that a hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agent needs to draw on in order to make sense of their social experiences are lacking in ‘the collective hermeneutical resources’. As I indicated above, ‘the economy of credibility’, from which an epistemic agent draws in making her *credibility assessments* is funded by the social imaginary. Crucially, ‘the collective hermeneutical resources’ from which an epistemic agent draws in making her *intelligibility assessments* is *also* funded by the social imaginary. The social imaginary is then, that which forms the critical link between testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. I propose we further investigate the nature of this link, and then return to our six-step procedure for forming reflective judgments to flesh out just how it impacts one’s ethico-epistemic judgments.

### **The Critical Link Between Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice**

There is an important link between one’s ‘economy of credibility’, which informs testimonial injustice, and her ‘collective hermeneutical resource’, which informs hermeneutical injustice, that needs to be fleshed out at this point. As we’ve seen, one’s economy of credibility is funded by images coming from her social imaginary. These images are, as noted, *stereotypes*, which, as Fricker explains, are “*widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes*” (30, emphasis in original). Stereotypes involve making “generalization[s]



about a given social group” which can be “more or less strong” insofar as, on one end of the spectrum, the generalizations are universal (“all women are intuitive”), and on the other they are very diluted (“many women are intuitive”) (31). What I want to point out here is that one’s set of ‘collective hermeneutical resources’ is *also* impacted by stereotypes, which are not simply images but images of ‘a given social group’ associated with ‘general attributes’, which means that they are *meaningful images*. And the “place” where meanings and images collide is the social imaginary, which forms the critical link between the two forms of epistemic injustice we’ve been exploring: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.

We’ve seen that hermeneutical injustice occurs when there is a “gap in collective interpretive resources [that] puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (1). On Fricker’s account, when, for instance, “extant collective hermeneutical resources can have a lacuna where the name of a distinctive social experiences should be,” a hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agent attempting to give voice to those experiences for which there is no name can suffer an “acute cognitive disadvantage” (151). Because, according to Fricker, there is only a single set of ‘collective hermeneutical resources’ for apparently *all* speakers in any given community to draw on, the hermeneutically marginalized are not the only ones who suffer from a ‘cognitive disadvantage’ when there are gaps in them. On Fricker’s account, “the lack of proper understanding” of social experiences which occurs when there are no hermeneutical resources with which to make sense of them creates “a collective disadvantage more or less shared by all” (151). However, this ‘cognitive disadvantage’ is “asymmetrical” insofar as it impacts only hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents in an *unjust* way (151).

The reason that the gap in the collective hermeneutical resources is only an injustice for

the hermeneutically marginalized is because 1.) the experiences they wish to understand but cannot due to the gaps are ones that are, “strongly in their interests to understand,” and 2.) by virtue of their hermeneutical marginalization they are systematically excluded from “participation in the spread of knowledge,” which means that they have little hope of ever repairing the gaps of their own accord (151, 162). In the case of Carmita Wood,<sup>31</sup> for instance, her inability to make sense of her own social experience with sexual harassment caused her extreme emotional distress – on top of suffering from the harassment in the first place, Wood was “left deeply troubled, confused, and isolated” because she could neither share her experience with others nor understand it herself.

“Women’s position at the time of second wave feminism,” which is when Wood’s experiences with sexual harassment occurred, Fricker explains, “was still one of marked social powerlessness in relation to men; and, specifically, the unequal relations of power prevented women from participating on equal terms with men in those practices by which collective social meanings are generated” (152). In Wood’s case, the fact that she could not equally participate in ‘those practices by which collective social meanings are generated’ meant that 1.) her hopes of “filling” the hermeneutical gaps were slim, and 2.) left with no way meaningfully to voice her objections to it, Wood was left open to being subjected to continued sexual harassment.

There are many ways in which one can suffer from hermeneutical marginalization, and many reasons why one might belong to one or another hermeneutically marginalized group, on Fricker’s account. Because social subjects “have more or less complex social identities,” one might be marginalized in some respects but not others: she may, for instance, be hermeneutically marginalized as a woman, but not as white. “Sometimes,” Fricker continues, “a person’s

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<sup>31</sup> See pages 20-25 of chapter one for a detailed account of ‘the case of Carmita Wood’.

marginalization will be an effect of *material power*, so that their socio-economic background” puts certain jobs, like “a well-paid job in a large corporation with a macho work ethic...out of their reach” (154, emphasis mine). However, “Sometimes it will be an effect of *identity power*, so that part of the explanation why they do not have those jobs is that there are prejudicial stereotypes in the social atmosphere that represent them as unsuitable, and which negatively influence the judgments of employers” (154, emphasis mine). Often, Fricker notes, “it may be a mixture of the two,” and she concludes therefore that, “Hermeneutical marginalization need not be the result of identity power as well as plain material power, but it often will be” (154).

Fricker defines social power as “a capacity we have as social agents to influence how things go in the social world,” and indicates that it works in myriad ways and on several levels (9). By defining social power as a ‘capacity’, Fricker is asserting that it “exists even while it is not being realized in action” (10). Although she finds this “an unproblematic metaphysical point,” she admits that it is “not without dissenters,” pointing to Foucault’s claim that ‘Power exists only when it is put into action’ as an example of such dissent (10). Fricker dismisses Foucault’s claim about the transiency of power, suggesting that her readers should also “reject the claim...because even in the context of Foucault’s interests, the idea that power is not a capacity but rather pops in and out of existence as and when it is actually operative lacks motivation” (10). Because this point will become important later – once we embark on our discussion of imagination and its relationship to social power – I want at this point at least to mention that among the objectors to Fricker’s claim that power can be passively held and “stored up,” is Hannah Arendt. We will follow Arendt in her assertion, echoed in Foucault’s work, that, “power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies, like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization” (THC, 200). However Fricker’s main point about social

power in general is that it can be exercised by particular agents, but “can also operate *purely structurally*, so that there is no particular agent exercising it” (10).

When it comes to *identity power*, which, as we’ve seen, is operative in the ‘central cases’ of both forms of epistemic injustice, what Fricker is eager to highlight is the fact that its effects go beyond matters of “purely practical co-ordination” (14). As she explains,

[T]here is at least one form of social power which requires not only practical social co-ordination but also an *imaginative* social co-ordination. There can be operations of power which are dependent upon agents having shared conceptions of social identity – conceptions alive in the collective social imagination that govern, for instance, what it is or means to be a woman or a man, or what it is or means to be gay or straight, young or old, and so on. Whenever there is an operation of power that depends in some significant degree upon such shared imaginative conceptions of social identity, then *identity power* is at work. (14)

In what Fricker refers to as an example of the “central case of hermeneutical injustice,” the case of Carmita Wood, it was identity power manifesting itself in the form of ‘prejudicial stereotypes in the social atmosphere’ that rendered Wood a hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agent. This hermeneutical marginalization is what set the stage for her to suffer hermeneutical injustice. As Fricker explains, although “No agent *perpetrates* hermeneutical injustice – it is a purely structural notion. The background condition for hermeneutical injustice is the subject’s hermeneutical marginalization” (159). The “dormant...hermeneutical inequality that exist[ed]” in Wood’s “situation of hermeneutical marginalization erupt[ed] in injustice...when [her] actual attempt at intelligibility [was] handicapped by it” (159).

Importantly, identity power also plays an important role in testimonial injustice. As Fricker argues, “identity power is an integral part of the mechanism of testimonial exchange because of the need for hearers to use social stereotypes as heuristics in their spontaneous assessments of their interlocutor’s credibility” (16-17). And as we saw above, “prejudices typically enter into a hearer’s credibility judgment by way of the social imagination, in the form

of a prejudicial stereotype – a distorted image of the social type in question” (4). Taken together, these two statements mean that, just as Fricker suggests, “The influence of identity prejudice in a hearer’s credibility judgment is an operation of identity power” (28). The identity prejudices that ‘enter into a hearer’s credibility judgment by way of the social imagination in the form of a prejudicial stereotype’ are then the result ‘operation[s] of identity power’ which negatively influence a hearer’s credibility judgments by corrupting her economy of credibility, causing *testimonial* injustice.

When identity power plays a role in hermeneutical marginalization, as we have seen, ‘prejudicial stereotypes in the social atmosphere’ are to blame; which means that one’s ‘collective hermeneutical resources’ are corrupted whenever stereotypical images from her social imaginary enter into her *intelligibility* assessments, causing *hermeneutical* injustice. So we can now conclude that prejudicial stereotypes existing in one’s social imaginary fund *both* one’s ‘economy of credibility’ *and* her ‘collective hermeneutical resources’, which means that *prejudicial stereotypes existing in one’s social imaginary and reinforced by social identity power are the root cause of both forms of epistemic injustice.*

Before we return to our six-step procedure for arriving at reflective judgments, I want to pause for a moment to reflect upon Fricker’s account of the “alien counter-rational current of identity power” that we’ve been discussing (71). As we saw in the previous chapter, and will continue to more fully flesh out later in this chapter, Fricker’s responses to both forms of the problem of epistemic injustice rely on methods of ameliorating their negative effects. Although she offers glimmers of hope for the possibility of actually eradicating certain negatively prejudicial stereotypes in ‘the collective social imaginary’ through the widespread cultivation of just testimonial sensibilities, these are presented as hopeful by-products of the virtues of

testimonial and hermeneutical justice that she hopes to engender. Fricker aims not to eliminate negative stereotypes, but to *correct for* them.<sup>32</sup>

In offering ethico-epistemic virtues capable of correcting for negatively prejudicial stereotypes, Fricker puts forth personal virtues aimed at neutralizing personal epistemic vices and structural inequalities manifesting in ethico-epistemic harms (i.e. “alien counter-rational currents of identity power” manifesting in negatively prejudicial stereotypes) instead of actually cultivating a more virtuous socio-political ethico-epistemic climate. As will become clear, our approach diverges significantly from hers in this respect. At this point what I want to point out is the fact that Fricker’s entire project hinges on the assumption that neutralizing prejudices is the best way to combat the problem of epistemic injustice. The unspoken premise of this project is that, left to our own “natural” devices, human beings are basically ethical and rational creatures. If we are, for the most part, ethical and rational, Fricker theorizes, then the removal of all “alien counter-rational” forces will return us to our “native” state. And in our native state, Fricker assumes, we will more or less fare well when it comes to behaving in ethically and epistemically just ways. This rather Rousseauian faith in the nobility of our native ethico-epistemic powers is what led Fricker to recommend the particular virtue-epistemic response to the problem of epistemic injustice that she did.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Fricker explains early on that the ethical-intellectual virtues that she hopes can “improve our lives as both subjects and objects of knowledge” are “corrective ethical-intellectual virtues” (7). That she presents the possibility of actually eradicating certain negatively prejudicial stereotypes in the collective social imaginary as ‘hopeful by-products’ of these ethical-intellectual virtues can be seen most clearly in regards to *testimonial injustice* on pages 40 and 84-97, and in regards to *hermeneutical injustice* on pages 169-175.

<sup>33</sup> Fricker asserts that the virtue of testimonial justice can be held in a “naïve form” wherein “someone was brought up in a relevantly prejudiced society but whose native capacity for unprejudiced social perception remained sufficiently untouched,” explaining that if one’s “native perceptual capacity has somehow escaped the prejudicial corruptions of the day” she will hold the virtue naïvely (93). Although she later concedes that, “the State of Nature, minimally social though it remains, contains both sufficient social identity concepts and sufficient practical pressures to produce some basic identity-prejudicial

As we turn to review the next three steps required for an epistemic agent to arrive at a reflective ethico-epistemic judgment, it will be important to bear these fundamental assumptions of Fricker's in mind. As will become clear, our response to the problem of epistemic injustice is not predicated on any kind of faith in the overall ethico-epistemic prowess of humankind in the State of Nature. We are not seeking a return to nature, or any other kind of ethico-epistemic Garden of Eden. Ours is the path of the fallen with no hope of a virtuous return. But as we will see, our faithlessness in regards to humanity's "native" ethico-epistemic virtues is more than made up for in our fundamental optimism towards the power of a plurality of human beings striving together to create a better, more just, ethico-epistemic socio-political world.

### **The Next Three Steps (Steps 4 – 6) To Arriving at Reflective Judgments**

When it comes to the next three steps involved in our six-step process of forming reflective judgments, the effects of these unjust, negatively prejudicial stereotypes can be mediated. What allows for these mediations is the fact that an epistemic agent can "shift into a more reflective mode of judgment" (73). As we saw in chapter one, Fricker acknowledges that although one's "individual testimonial sensibility is in the first place inherited...once light has dawned for a hearer she will come to find that sometimes her experiences of testimonial exchange are in tension with the deliverances of the sensibility she has passively taken on, in which case responsibility requires that her sensibility adjust itself to accommodate the new experience" (83). Once a hearer has made the 'shift into a more reflective mode of judgment' she

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stereotypes," she stipulates that credibility "markers in the State of Nature are reliable in the main" (117). In allowing that this minimal ethico-epistemic "corruption" occurs even in the State of Nature, Fricker suggests that she has avoided "step[ping] too far in the direction of a rational idealization" in her State of Nature story (117). I wholeheartedly disagree with this assessment, but to further explore the reasons why would be to go beyond the scope of this dissertation. Since we will attempt to avoid sweeping statements about human nature *per se*, and will entirely avoid State of Nature stories, we need not venture further into this disagreement. But it is important to keep in mind the assumptions upon which Fricker's account relies.

will, on Fricker's account, be able to determine that her testimonial sensibility has been "invaded" by "an alien... counter-rational current of identity power," which has been delivering irrational, unjust negatively prejudicial stereotypes to 'the collective social imagination' that funds both her economy of credibility and her collective hermeneutical resources. And, Fricker is sure that, as a rational epistemic agent, the hearer will find it incumbent upon herself to break free from the deleterious effects of the 'alien counter-rational current of identity power' by correcting for its errors when making her credibility assessments and her intelligibility assessments.

Since steps 4 – 6 of our six-step procedure for arriving at reflective judgments are made *after* an epistemic agent has made this "intellectual shift of gear, out of that unreflective mode [that characterizes steps 1-3] and into a reflective, more effortful mode of active critical assessment," there are certain additional requirements that must be met in order for the steps successfully to be traversed (64). Steps 4 – 6 of our six-step process for arriving at reflective judgments detail the move from implicit knowledge and preliminary understanding to explicit knowledge and reflective understanding and require at least the following three things: First, they require an ability to *imagine*, or 're-present sensory inputs in a de-sensed form in the imagination' in preparation for association with the meanings being articulated in step #5. Second, since step #5 involves an articulation in the form of a "conversation," it requires *plurality*, or the presence of at least two interlocutors, even if the conversation is, as Arendt, paraphrasing Socrates, put it, "the soundless dialogue between me and myself" that we call *thinking* (THC, 185). And finally, the move from implicit knowledges and preliminary understandings to explicit knowledges and reflective understandings requires the faculty of *remembrance*. Let's take these three requirements one by one.



## **On the Roles of Imagination, Pluralism, and Remembrance in Forming Reflective Judgments**

Hannah Arendt calls the ability to “make present what is actually absent...the mind’s unique gift...this gift is called *imagination*, defined by Kant as ‘the faculty of intuition even without the presence of the object’” (LOM, 76). Before one can engage in the kinds of dialectic within which she begins to articulate her knowledges and understandings to herself or another, she must “de-sense” her sensory inputs in order to re-present them in her imagination (step #4). Although the object of a sense-impression may remain well within view whenever an epistemic agent begins to reflect upon it in her “mind’s eye,” Arendt suggests that once we begin these reflections, “we have removed ourselves surreptitiously from our surroundings and are conducting ourselves as though we were already absent” (LOM, 78). In other words, even if the object of our reflection is present, we ourselves are in some sense ‘absent’ whenever we reflect upon it. It is in this ‘absence’ from the world of appearances that we engage in the process of *thinking*, during which we “prepare the particulars given to the senses in such a way that the mind is able to handle them in their absence; it must, in brief, *de-sense* them” (LOM, 77).<sup>34</sup>

It would be difficult to overstate the import of this step to the project of arriving at reflective judgments. As Arendt explains,

It is inconceivable how we would ever be able to will or to judge, that is, to handle things which are not yet and things which are no more, if the power of representation and the effort necessary to direct mental attention to what in every way escapes the attention of sense perception had not gone ahead and prepared the mind for further reflection as well

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<sup>34</sup> In speaking of ‘images in the mind’, the ‘mind’s-eye’, and an ‘absence from the world of appearances’ I am speaking metaphorically. As Arendt explains, “No matter how close we are from what is close at hand, the thinking ego obviously never leaves the world of appearances altogether. The two-world theory, as I have said, is a metaphysical delusion although by no means an arbitrary or accidental one; it is the most plausible delusion with which the experience of thought is plagued. Language, by lending itself to metaphorical usage, enables us to think, that is, to have traffic with non-sensory matters, because it permits a carrying-over, *metapherein*, of our sense experiences. There are not two worlds because metaphor unites them” (LOM, 110). We will return to the ways in which metaphor ‘unites’ the so-called “life of the mind” with the “world” in chapters three and four.

as for willing and judging. (LOM, 76)

So thinking, willing, and judging – the topics which would have formed (had she not died before she could write the last section on judging) the tripartite structure of Arendt’s final work, all rely on this ability to “de-sense” sensory inputs and then “re-present” them as a “vision in thought” or a “thought-object” (LOM, 77). They all rely, in other words, on ‘the faculty of intuition even without the presence of an object’, or *imagination*. Since our goal at this point is, like Arendt’s in *The Life of the Mind*, to understand what’s involved in forming reflective judgments, it’s not surprising that this faculty of imagination is just as crucial to our project as it was to hers. Because it is so important for our project, we will return to it once we’ve covered steps 4 – 6 and all that they require. For now, let’s move on to the next requirement.

Interestingly, the second requirement for traversing steps 4 – 6 of our six-step procedure for arriving at ethico-epistemic judgments – ‘the presence of at least two interlocutors’ – *also* importantly engages with the imagination. If the “conversation” within which we begin to associate the prejudicial images from step #3, the mental images from step #4 and the meanings from step #5 is a conversation with ourselves, which, as noted, Arendt calls *thinking*, then one must be able to imagine her “other self” – the self with whom she is in dialogue. Arendt calls this “the Socratic two-in-one [which] heals the solitariness of thought; its inherent duality points to the infinite plurality which is the law of the earth” (187).

Whenever one *thinks* she finds herself in company with herself and striving to arrive at a *consensus* with herself in the form of a reflective judgment. This ‘two-in-oneness’ of the self explains Socrates’ otherwise odd-sounding assertion in the *Gorgias* that, “It would be better for me that a lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of

harmony with myself and contradict me” (*Gorgias*, 482b). What Socrates here points to, on Arendt’s account, is the fact that what “we call *consciousness* (literally... ‘to know with myself’) the curious fact that...I am not only for others but for myself, and in this latter case, I clearly am not just one. A difference is inserted into my Oneness” (LOM, 183).

Recognizing with Husserl that consciousness is always consciousness *of*, or “the thinking ego does not think something but *about* something,” Arendt concludes that, “this [intentional, thinking] act is dialectical: it proceeds in the form of a silent dialogue” (LOM, 187). Arendt insists that although “thoughts do not have to be communicated in order to occur...they cannot occur without being spoken – silently or sounding out in dialogue, as the case may be” (LOM, 99). When the communication occurs between oneself and her “other self,” as in thinking, what our epistemic agent must be able to imagine then, is her “other self.”

However when the communication occurs between oneself and *another*, the imagination is no less engaged. As we earlier discussed, the prejudicial images from step #3 and the imagined images from step #4 must be associated with meanings that arise out of the conversation that occurs in step #5 – so images and the imagination are always a part of dialogues, whether with one’s self or another. And in dialogues, even if the goal is unity, as with Socrates’ quest for harmony with himself in the *Gorgias*, an essential prerequisite is the presence of a *dis-unity* – either in the form of ‘a difference that is inserted into one’s ‘Oneness’ or in the form of multiple interlocutors.

Curiously, when the conversation involves oneself and another, the first thing that is ‘absent’ and in need of ‘being made present’ is, again, one’s self – but in this case it’s one’s self *for others*, which means that its unity has been restored. This singular self is, on Arendt’s account, in a sense, absent from the “public realm” until her thoughts have been spoken there, for

“With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world” (THC, 176). However, as always, Arendt’s emphasis is on *plurality* – in this case the plurality required for speech acts to occur in the first place. For Arendt, “Human plurality [is] the basic condition of both action and speech,” and since there can be no reflective judgment without both something to judge and something to say, plurality is also a basic condition of reflective judgment (THC, 175).

Finally the last requirement needed to complete our six-step process toward arriving at a reflective judgment, which involves the faculty of remembrance, is also closely tied to the faculty of imagination. For Arendt, “thinking always implies remembrance; every thought is strictly speaking an after-thought,” if for no other reason than that, “In order for us to think about somebody, he must be removed from our presence” (LOM, 78). “*Mnemosyne*, Memory, is the mother of the Muses,” writes Arendt, “and remembrance, the most frequent and also the most basic thinking experience, has to do with things that are absent, that have disappeared from my senses” (LOM, 85). Even if, as earlier explained, the one whom we are remembering still stands before us, when thinking of her *we* are somehow ‘absent’, meaning that she has, in a sense, “disappeared from [our] senses” (LOM, 85). Importantly, even though *Mnemosyne* is a muse, Arendt adds the following caveat to all imaginings that are also remembrances: “Yet the absent that is summoned up and made present to my mind – a person, an event, a monument – cannot appear in the way it appeared to my senses, as though remembrance were a kind of witchcraft” (LOM, 85). Remembrance, which is really best considered a form of Imagination, does not “conjure up” exact replicas of the images formed in one’s social imaginary. Remembrance, like imagination, is always in some degree beholden to context: we imagine and remember in the midst of our everyday lives, and according to the particular needs of those lives, no matter how theoretical.

Remembrance differs from imagination insofar as it possesses an additional capacity: if imagination and speech make present what is absent, it's remembrance that makes those presentations *durable*. "Without remembrance...action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they had never been" (THC, 95). But in rendering initial speech acts visible and durable through the speech acts involved in remembrance, one is, as noted, re-presenting them according to the needs of the particular, socially situated circumstances that confront her. These re-presentations, no matter how "faithful," are always *interpretations* of the original speech acts that they recall. In this way Arendt ties remembrance to meaning-making, insisting that, "The meaning of what actually happens and appears while it is happening is revealed when it has disappeared; remembrance... reveals the meaning in the form of a story" (LOM, 133). We will further investigate just how remembrance and meaning-making go hand-in-hand when we revisit the faculty of imagination towards the end of this chapter.

Since, on our revised account of the process whereby an epistemic agent arrives at reflective judgments requires 1) Imagination, 2) Pluralism, and 3) Remembrance, and since reflective judgments are what can overcome both forms of epistemic injustice, it should come as small surprise that we will identify the ethico-epistemic failures involved in instances of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice as failures of imagination, pluralism, and remembrance. Let's turn now to our revised account of hermeneutical and testimonial injustices.

## **Part II: Hermeneutical and Testimonial Injustices As Failures of Imagination, Pluralism, and Remembrance**

When there seems to be no way to interpret one's experiences because their character does not fit neatly into the existing categories of thought in one's collective hermeneutical resources, it's because there has been a failure of imagination – one cannot imagine new

categories of thought and thereby generate new hermeneutical resources in the form of new meanings. Similarly, when there seems to be no image upon which one can draw a just credibility assessment, it's because there has been a similar failure of imagination – one cannot imagine perceiving certain hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents as credible testifiers and thereby generate new testimonial resources in the form of new images for her economy of credibility to draw on. This means that both hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice are the result of failures of imagination. These failures of imagination occur, of course, at the level of imagination, or the social imaginary – where images and meanings collide. However it will be important to remember that these failures at the level of the social imaginary are presaged and followed by failures at the level of one's 'collective hermeneutical resources' and her 'economies of credibility'. We will return to this point shortly.

When it comes to the level of the social imaginary, as Fricker acknowledges,

The social imagination is a mighty resource for social change, and this is significantly due to its capacity for informing thought directly, and thus independently of beliefs that may remain tainted with the prejudices of the day. But where it is the images themselves that are tainted by prejudice, the very same capacity to impinge on judgment directly and without the subject's awareness can render the social imagination an ethical and epistemic liability. The collective social imagination inevitably contains all manner of stereotypes... (38)

A 'stereotype', is, again, a "*widely held association between a given social group and one or more attributes*" (30, emphasis in original). Fricker emphasizes that she is using the word 'stereotype' in a 'neutral' way, which means, among other things, that it can be reliable or unreliable, and can have either a positive or a negative valence.

What I want to emphasize is the fact that the task of drawing an association between a social group and an attribute is an imaginative work of meaning-making. When one associates, for instance, the attribute 'credible' to a particular social group she is, among other things, saying

something meaningful about that social group – that they are credible testifiers, for instance. Fricker later asks us to “think of a social stereotype as an *image* which expresses an association between a social group and one or more attributes” (37). What the image expresses is something about what it means to belong to a particular social group – it expresses a preliminary judgment which simply affirms the relationship between a sensory input and a social meaning as originally learned or ‘inherited’. In other words, stereotypes are *meaningful images*, or what Fricker calls ‘perceptual judgments’ and we are calling preliminary judgments. However, it’s important to note that what is ‘perceived’ in the image of a stereotype is a (meaningful) *mental representation*, not one’s sensory perception of an object in the physical world. This mental representation exists in the form of a stereotype, or a meaningful image, in ‘the collective social imagination’.

I submit that the social imaginary is the source of both forms of epistemic injustice: if there is a hermeneutical lacuna in one’s collective hermeneutical resources, it’s because there is a *meaningful image* lacking in her social imaginary. This lack at the level of the social imaginary leaves a corresponding gap in one’s collective hermeneutical resources. And if one’s credibility assessments are prejudicial, it’s because either there is no meaningful image in her social imaginary of speakers who are at once hermeneutically marginalized *and* credible, or there are *prejudicial* meaningful images in her social imaginary “coloring” her credibility assessments in an unjust manner. But as Fricker suggests, the social imagination is also “a mighty resource for change” (38). In fact it seems as though one might best approach the problem of epistemic injustice as a whole by focusing squarely on social imaginaries and working to help populate them with meaningful images that are more epistemically just in order to combat both forms of epistemic injustice. This would include both revising and reevaluating the meaningful images held there, and adding new meaningful images to it.

And in fact, this is more or less<sup>35</sup> what Fricker attempts to do: since it's the social imaginary that is corrupt and causing both forms of epistemic injustice, Fricker recommends that hearer's cultivate a *testimonial sensibility* that is just. This just testimonial sensibility is, on Fricker's account, a "form of rational sensitivity that is socially inculcated and trained by countless experiences of testimonial exchange, individual and collective," and "instills in the virtuous hearer empirically well-grounded habits of epistemically charged social perception, and thus reliable perceptual judgments of speaker credibility" (5). The 'virtuous hearer' cultivates this just testimonial sensitivity by learning to correct for "the influence of prejudice in her credibility judgments" (5).

Although Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustice is, as previously indicated, all-too-sparse, it is the cultivation of a just testimonial sensibility that also serves to remedy hermeneutical injustice on Fricker's account. She suggests, that when it comes to making more just – or at least less *unjust* – intelligibility assessments, for instance, "Pro-active listening... does seem the kind of thing that one's testimonial sensibility could be trained to trigger spontaneously... It may only be in respect of some virtuous responses, then, that the virtue of hermeneutical justice can be possessed in spontaneous form" (173).

The one with a just testimonial sensitivity will, in other words, only *correct for*, not eliminate the influence of prejudicial images *in her social imaginary* in making both her credibility assessments and her intelligibility assessments. And because one's social imaginary funds both her economy of credibility and her collective hermeneutical resources, this correction in one's social imaginary will result in corrections to her economy of credibility and her social imaginary, ultimately leading to less unjust credibility assessments and intelligibility

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<sup>35</sup> As will soon become clear, Fricker does not find testimonial sensibility capable of generating new meaningful images. We will focus on this issue of generating new meaningful issues shortly.



assessments. But I submit that this move to remedy both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice via a direct intervention at the level of imagination represents an illegitimate jump to the level of the social imaginary. It is based on the erroneous assumption that epistemic agents possess the autonomous ability to manipulate their social imaginaries by some form of sheer ethico-epistemic will and without any “outside” intervention. But social imaginaries simply don’t work like that.

Fricker’s premature jump to the level of the social imaginary further incorrectly assumes that the kinds of ethico-epistemic dissonance that might trigger such interventions can be made without the involvement of a plurality of significantly different others, others *appealing to a plurality of social imaginaries*, with whom to ethico-epistemically engage. And finally, it misrepresents the radically open-ended nature of *thinking*, which, “can never be stilled” on Arendt’s account, and can never decide once and for all what constitutes a just testimonial sensibility, or any other thing, for that matter – for what counts as a rational sensitivity, and even what counts as *rational* can never be a closed matter – not even on *Kant’s* account. As Arendt explains, “In the privacy of his posthumously published notes, Kant wrote: ‘I do not approve of the rule that if the use of pure reason has proved something, the result should no longer be subject to doubt, as though it were a solid axiom’; and ‘I do not share the opinion...that one should not doubt once one has convinced oneself of something. In pure philosophy this is impossible. *Our mind has a natural aversion to it*’” (LOM, 88, emphasis in original).

Since what counts as rational speech is never predetermined, prior to any particular speech act, Fricker’s claim that one can cultivate a just testimonial sensibility simply by correcting for ‘alien...counter-rational’ prejudices is entirely spurious. Because she assumes that the unjust stereotypes in one’s social imaginary are only unjust because they have been corrupted

by ‘alien, counter-rational’ *social* forces, Fricker is confident that removing these social influences from one’s social imaginary will leave behind a more “pure” – that is, a *non-social* – imaginary resource for individual, rational epistemic agents to draw on. Incredibly, Miranda Fricker’s entire project, which purports to be a project in the line of *Social Epistemology*, rests on epistemic agents’ abilities to *remove* the social influences from their otherwise “just” individual imaginations. To say that I object to this line of thinking is quite the understatement. But the question remains: if Fricker’s path towards addressing the harms of epistemic injustice is not a viable one, what other paths are available to us? We will attempt to address this question as we now turn toward our proposed response to the problem of epistemic injustice.

### **Three Pathways Toward Altering the Meaningful Images in One’s Social Imaginary**

The images that populate one’s social imaginary may indeed be mediated – if this were not the case then we would forever be doomed to epistemic injustice. But there are three distinct ways in which one might set about to meliorate one’s social imaginary: 1.) the hermeneutic track – which involves offering new *meanings* in the form of stories, narratives, or theoretical frameworks, with which to populate one’s ‘collective hermeneutical resources’ 2.) the testimonial track – which involves offering new images in the form of artworks, metaphors, or other forms of poetic language, with which to populate one’s ‘economy of credibility’ and 3.) the social imaginary track – which involves attempting directly to manipulate the *meaningful images* in one’s social imaginary. As we will see, Hannah Arendt takes the first path and Audre Lorde takes the second. And as we’ve seen, Fricker takes the third. I submit that only the first and second of these paths are viable.

The first path – the hermeneutic track of Arendt’s – takes the task of coming to an *understanding* that can be shared with others to be the primary goal of one’s discourse. The

second path – the testimonial track of Lorde’s – takes the task of revealing of *knowledges*, both to oneself and to others, to be the primary goal of one’s discourse. Both of these paths employ the faculty of the imagination, but crucially, in a kind of inverse reflection of Plato’s Cave parable, both begin and end in the so-called “real world.” Fricker’s path understandably jumps right to the root of the problem – which, after all, really is in one’s social imaginary – parallels Plato’s Cave parable insofar as its “middle ground” is the “real world,” but its origin and conclusion lie squarely in the realm of “invisibles,” as Arendt puts it – which in this case is the social imaginary.

### **A Non-Eternal Return: On the Linguistic and Temporal Aspects of Imagination and Remembrance**

To better see just how and why only Lorde’s and Arendt’s paths are viable, and Fricker’s is not, I propose that we return to our earlier discussion of the faculty of the imagination and remembrance and further flesh out just what employing it involves. But brace yourselves: there is no easy way linguistically to render the realm of “invisibles.” As it turns out, one of the most difficult things to “wrap one’s mind around” when it comes to the imagination is the way in which one’s linguistic utterances can “carry” (*metapherein*) the images held there across multiple boundaries, the most important of which, at least for our project, are *temporal* boundaries. In discussing the faculty of the imagination and its relationship to epistemic injustice, we will be focusing on two of the most oft discussed and yet still least understood topics ever to find their way onto the pages of philosophical treatises written within the Occidental tradition: language and time.

According to Hermann Broch, these two topics simply belong together: “For him what is essential about language is that it syntactically indicates an abrogation of time ‘within the sentence’ because it necessarily ‘places subject and object in a relationship of simultaneity’”

(MDT, 133). Arendt explains that for Broch, the “‘the sole task of language’... is ‘to make cognitive units audible and visible’... Whatever is frozen into the simultaneity of the sentence – to wit, thought, which ‘in a single moment can comprehend wholes of extraordinary extent’ – is wrenched out of the passages of time” (MDT, 133). We will explore this ‘frozen...simultaneity of the sentence’ and the ways in which language ‘syntactically indicates the abrogation of time’ there in order better to apprehend the faculty of the imagination, and the ways in which its ‘comprehend[ed] wholes’ are similarly ‘wrenched out of the passages of time’. And then we will revisit the faculty of remembrance to discuss the ways in which those ‘wholes’ are placed back *into* time.

As noted, Arendt asserts that one cannot even *think* absent the faculty of the imagination, which she describes as occurring in “the gap between past and future” (BPF, 3). Although she is almost painfully aware of the fact that, when discussing such things as “thinking” her language tends toward the metaphysical, Arendt is no metaphysician.<sup>36</sup> However to speak of such things as thinking, she finds, requires a hearkening back to, “what we would call today the ‘metaphysical fallacies’” (LOM, 12). As she puts it,

None of the systems, none of the doctrines transmitted to us by the great thinkers may be convincing or even plausible to modern readers; but none of them...is arbitrary and none can be dismissed as sheer nonsense. On the contrary, the metaphysical fallacies contain the only clues we have to what thinking means to those who engage in it – something of great importance to us today and about which, oddly enough, there exist few direct utterances. (LOM, 12)

Arendt has no designs on reviving metaphysics, and no interest in dismissing its subject matter as “unscientific” and therefore utterly disreputable. Since she finds no other, or perhaps simply no better, way to discuss the topic of thinking, and since she is quite intent on discussing it anyway;

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<sup>36</sup> Arendt’s antipathy to metaphysics can be seen in her declaration that, “I have clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today” (LOM, 212).

Arendt chooses the language of metaphor as most appropriate to the task and forges ahead as best she can. Although she is no poet, Arendt's prose can, at times, be quite beautiful. Still, she wields the language of poetry like the storyteller that she is: drawing novel meanings from dead metaphors. However, at times she ventures into the poetic arts and begins painting startlingly new pictures in language as ancient as philosophy itself. Either way, Arendt's deliverances are often part séance, part new birth.

What Arendt attempts to capture in speaking of the activity of thinking is the fact that it is, "as Heidegger once observed, '*out of order*'. It interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be. All thinking demands a *stop-and-think*. Whatever the fallacies and the absurdities of the two-world theories may have been, they arose out of these genuine experiences of the thinking ego" (LOM, 78). All this is just to say that although Arendt was quite aware of the fact that to speak of a "gap in time" is to speak metaphorically, and that "Applied to historical or biographical time, none of these metaphors can possibly make sense because gaps in time do not occur there," she was also aware of the fact that when it comes to the images one holds in her imagination, or "social imaginary," the semblance that there is a kind of inviolable stasis to them is difficult to shake. Indeed, to think in images is to think in some sort of still pictures, even though thinking itself can never be stilled.

Philosophers, and I include Miranda Fricker in this group, have a tendency to make both more and less of these still pictures than they should. It's not that they mistake metaphor for truth, it's that they mistake truth for the singular goal of thinking. As it turns out, in describing truth as a "mobile army of metaphors," Nietzsche may have said more than he knew; for in Nietzsche's forked tongue these words formed an indictment, and spoke derision. But to call something a metaphor, a truth, or even "Metaphysics," is to acknowledge that even in the "great

blooming, buzzing confusion” of our sense impressions there is a way for that “still small voice” to arrest us (James, 462). I find it striking that in the Biblical passage wherein we find that “still small voice,” what its asking is: “What doest thou here?” (1 Kings, 19:9).

The prophet Elijah, after wandering in the desert for forty days and forty nights, as prophets are apparently wont to do, seeks the voice of God on a mountaintop. What comes instead is a “great and strong wind” that “rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks,” but of course, “the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice...[that] said unto him... “What doest thou here, Elijah?” (1 Kings, 19:11-13).

The Lord God, who surely knows *exactly* what Elijah “doest” there, asks Elijah anyway, “What are you doing here?” The Lord asks, in other words, for a story. And *that* is a picture of the relationship between knowledge and understanding; truth and meaning; Metaphysics and science; poetry and prose. What imagination does is bring these seemingly oppositional things together. Bear with me as we pivot to hermeneutical injustice here. Call it a “pirouette” if you like, for we will turn full circle and come right back to Elijah. But first I have some outrageous-sounding things to assert about the nature of thinking and reason.

What thinking does, when viewed from within a science, a language, a meaning-framework or a story, is to seek truths wherever it can find them. The goal of thinking *within* a ‘collective hermeneutical resource’ is to seek out the still pictures out of which it has been stitched together. One’s collective hermeneutical resource comprises the thread holding these ‘still pictures’ together, and following the thread leads from one picture to the next, forming a

kind of picturesque “thought-train.” But the goal of thinking set free<sup>37</sup> – where it is often called “speculative reason” – is to seek meaning-frameworks within which the truths it has found can be set. The goal of speculative reason is to find a home for its still pictures that don’t fit neatly within one’s existing collective hermeneutical resource, to find a new collective hermeneutical resource wherein they can begin to make some sort of sense. Or, even more radically: to join with others in creating new collective hermeneutical resources so that one’s still pictures may begin to make a *new* kind of sense. These still pictures are bits of knowledge, or what many philosophers refer to as “truths.”

Since the linguistic army within which these truths march *is*, as Nietzsche put it, “mobile,” these still small bits of knowledge, or truths, can appear quite striking when placed or discovered within them. Imagine reading along, moving from still word-to-still word, still sentence-to-still sentence, without giving much thought to the motion of your reading. And then imagine coming across the name of a long lost love, a childhood friend, or some other whose absence makes itself present in the most arresting way. You stop on certain words. You re-read certain sentences. Certain words and certain sentences *make* you stop. Just like certain truths do.

Or, perhaps more pedantically, consider the learning processes we all go through from

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<sup>37</sup> It makes no non-metaphorical sense to speak of thinking “set free.” Thinking always and only occurs within a particular context and its results are therefore always already part and parcel of a meaning-context, theoretical framework, or a ‘collective hermeneutical resource’. That said, there is good reason to speak of a reason that is “speculative” and not simply “regulative.” We will delve into this issue more fully in the next chapter, but for now, suffice it to say that on Arendt’s interpretation of Kant, which we will again follow, Kant makes a very sharp divide between thinking’s *cognitive* capacities and its *speculative* or *rational* capacity. This unique understanding of what constitutes reason was touched on in the previous chapter and, as indicated, will be more thoroughly investigated in the next chapter. At this point, even though we are employing it, a fuller account of the nature of reason would take us too far afield. But to anticipate: our conception of reason draws on the faculty of imagination and brings Kant’s “enlarged mentality” into play. “To think with the enlarged mentality” Arendt explains, “means that you train your imagination to go visiting...” (LOM, 257). One can think of this ability to ‘go visiting’ as a version of reason that is “public,” and therefore “open to all sides” (LOM, 257). So speculative reason is not free in terms of being “free from all meaning-frameworks or sets of collective hermeneutical resources,” it’s instead free in terms of being “free to roam about between these frameworks, even while ‘attached’ more fully to some than others.”

time-to-time. When learning most things there is a right and a wrong answer to many of the questions one has, certain facts or certain truths. We've grown accustomed to seeking them. We are practiced at it; for, beginning when we are very young, we learn to view these answers, facts, truths, as our "prizes" – the reward we get for thinking critically and carefully. Brain scans of thinkers diligently working through cognitive challenges light up like Christmas Trees whenever this precious goal comes within view. Dopamine floods, not just the nucleus acumbens (the "reward center" of the brain), but also the septum, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex, whenever a cognizer cognizes a truth. You know the feeling. The "A-ha" moment, or the calmer but still oh-so-satisfying, "Yes, yes that's it, that's right." You *love* the feeling. Of course you do. We are quite literally "wired" for this search and discovery mission.

The danger for those who take on the mantle of "professional thinker" (and, as Arendt points out, Kant called philosophers *Denker von Gewerke* "not without irony") is that, finding ourselves often quite adept at these cognitive challenges, we begin to lose sight of the reason we sought out these truths in the first place, not to mention losing sight of how /when /where they originated. We've learned to learn too well, and now seek truth as if it were an end in itself. But it's not. We've lost the forest for the trees...But now it seems that I've lost something – the thread, perhaps? For we were on about the task of investigating the faculties of imagination and remembrance, and we wanted to know about them better to understand epistemic injustice, after all. But it seems all I've been doing is mixing my metaphors. So let's begin to resolve some of them. Let's complete the pirouette.

You are the prophet Elijah. (Didn't see that coming, did you?) You are a fugitive, ratted out by Ahab and running from Jezebel for crimes too gruesome even to recount here. You seek the stillness. Truth Itself. Jehovah-El, the *singular* "Lord God of truth" (Psalms, 31:5). Selah. Se



– lah. According to the Amplified Bible “Selah” means “to pause and calmly think of that.” “It is a movement, and a rest,” if you buy into the gnostic gospels (GThom 84). You’ve had your movement, now you want your rest. You look for God on a mountaintop. Mountaintops are generally considered tranquil places. We can picture the Dali Lama perched on a mountaintop in full Lotus position, meditating peacefully. God, being the all-in-all and all, is surely in the stillness. A mountaintop is as good a place as any to pause and calmly listen for a word from The Word. But what you find is not stillness. It’s a wind that ‘rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks’.

Mountains are still, rocks are still, God is still. But it seems that the stillnesses have all been broken. If the wind hadn’t done it, surely the earthquake and the fire would have. Even God has been weathered down into a still, *small* voice. Like an arresting truth, a shiny chunk of knowledge, a picture from which you can’t wrest your gaze. “What are you doing here, Elijah?” State your business plainly, for I AM THAT I AM, and “for me, there is, I am trying to tell you, no time” (Dillard, 69). But *you*, Elijah. You do have time. Heaps of it. Dissertation deadline or no, you do have time. In fact, you have *all* of it. Time is like the wind, or an earthquake, or a fire. These things, whether hurricane-force or campfire-small, are what move you. But I AM She who has no time, and it’s me you’re looking for. Why do you care so much for this still, small *questioning* voice, anyway? What say you, Elijah? Here’s the thing: whatever you answer it will matter *only because you’ll make it matter*. And you’ll do that by telling a story.

It is not the case that truths are not important. They can come in the form of a mountain you’ll never summit, and God help you if there is a nearby boulder in need of a push. Or they can come in the form of a picture in your mind that brings a small smile to your lips *every single time* you conjure it up. Truths matter. Knowledge matters. But only because we time-bound creatures,

for better or for worse, *make* these things matter. “But surely,” you object, “my suffering, my pain, is REAL. Surely it *matters*.” But not hope, joy, pain, sorrow, not even love nor hate, *not even your suffering*, mean a thing without some time-bound creature telling a story about it. “There may be truths beyond speech,” writes Arendt, “and they may be of great relevance to man in the singular, that is, man in so far as he is not a political being, whatever else he may be. Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves” (THC, 4).

Hermeneutical resources are meaning-making resources, helping us better to understand the stillnesses – the truths, the knowledges – that confront us. Helping us to “come to terms with,” or make sense of them. And stories, narratives, and even theoretical frameworks *move in time*, however swiftly or slowly, like the wind or an earthquake or a fire. Pictures in our minds, truths, or any other still thing, are knowledge resources, helping us better to see. But like God in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, the truths are not in your stories – until you a-rest yourself, stop-and-think, then ‘freeze’ in time these ‘single moments[s] [which] can comprehend wholes of extraordinary extent’ by rendering your ‘cognitive units audible and visible’ in the form of a word or a sentence – in other words, until you place them there. And where and how you place your truths makes all the difference in the world.

Audre Lorde, reflecting on the power of language, muses, “Words had an energy and power and I came to respect that power early. Pronouns, nouns, and verbs were citizens of different countries, who really got together to make a new world” (CWAL, 37). And indeed words and sentences, ‘pronouns, nouns, and verbs’ are the building blocks for creating a meaningful world. But Lorde never lost sight of the fact that such world building, though

employing the radical power of the imagination, always occurs in the clash of dialogues between significantly different others, and depends upon

the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences [within which] lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged... Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist. (SO, 112)

And here we come to the crux of my concerns about Miranda Fricker's approach to the problem of epistemic injustice. By jumping into the "fight" at the level of the social imaginary, Fricker aims to *bypass the world*. For Fricker the ideal epistemic agent – the one who can cultivate a just testimonial sensibility – is one in conversation *with only herself and her own 'social inheritance'* in the form of the meaningful images that populate her social imaginary. She is engaged in the cognitive enterprise of autonomously discovering discrepancies between her 'individual stream of input' and her 'social stream of input', and then sovereignly declaring either the one or the other more 'rational'. But rationality and sovereignty, pace Fricker, simply don't mix.

As Lorde explains to the poet Adrienne Rich, in her interview with Rich:

Rationality is not unnecessary. It serves the chaos of knowledge. It serves feeling. It serves to get from this place to that place. But if you don't honor those places, then the road is meaningless. Too often, that's what happens with the worship of rationality and that circular, academic, analytic thinking. But ultimately, I don't see feel/think as a dichotomy. I see them as a choice of ways and combinations. (SO, 100-01)

And Arendt bluntly insists that the kind of autonomy of which Fricker speaks is, by virtue of its claim to sovereignty through reason, patently unfree. "If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same," explains Arendt, "then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very

condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth” (THC, 234). Arendt goes on to explain that only in monological systems, like monotheism, or in one’s imagination, is the equation of freedom and sovereignty even possible. “In polytheist systems, for instance, even a god, no matter how powerful, cannot be sovereign; only under the assumption of one god (‘One is one and all alone and evermore shall be so’) can sovereignty and freedom be the same. Under all other circumstances, sovereignty is possible only in imagination, paid for by the price of reality” (THC, 235).

In contrast to Fricker’s approach, both Lorde’s and Arendt’s approaches begin, as noted, with a thoroughgoing pluralism because they begin, not in the imagination but in the world. We’ve seen now why Fricker’s path – path #3, the social imaginary track – is not a viable option for mounting challenges to the problem of epistemic injustice. And we’ve begun to see how Lorde’s and Arendt’s paths offer far better approaches to the problem. As we continue to outline our Lordian and Arendtian-inspired approaches to the problem of epistemic injustice in the coming chapters, we will distance ourselves even further from Fricker’s monological approach.

## CHAPTER 3

### Counter-narratives of Resistance – Making Meaning By Placing Old Truths into New Contexts

#### *Pearl Diver*

*Full fathom five thy father lies,  
Of his bones are coral made,  
Those are pearls that were his eyes.  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
-The Tempest, I,2*

#### Introduction

In this chapter we will mine some of the writings of Hannah Arendt in order to identify and outline an Arendtian-inspired approach to the problem of epistemic injustice. Perhaps because she wrote before there was a determinate body of work called “social epistemology,” or perhaps because, although she was a very systematic thinker, she often quite intentionally chose not to present her theories systematically, Arendt’s thoughts on the matter are scattered throughout her works. We find them couched in theoretical examinations of politics, thinking, language, responsibility, judgment, etc. Our task is to unearth and gather together these seemingly disparate references into what will ultimately amount to a surprisingly comprehensive (but not *closed*) theoretical approach to the problem of epistemic injustice.

In outlining our Arendtian-inspired approach, we will begin with the problem of hermeneutical injustice and proceed to the problem of testimonial injustice: a wholly intentional reversal of Miranda Fricker’s framework. Our Arendtian reconstruction of the problem of epistemic injustice takes hermeneutical injustice as the primary form of the harm, and testimonial injustice as a subspecies of it. Although we will begin with this reversal of Fricker’s overall framework, we will not leave our intervention into the problem of epistemic injustice at that. Ultimately, what I hope to show is that what’s needed in outlining a more just account of the

problem of epistemic injustice is more than just a reversal of what's considered its primary and secondary forms of harm. What's needed is an account of the ways in which ethico-epistemic judgments *generate* the very standards according to which those harms are judged.

### **Philosophical and Political Reversals of Thought**

To begin with a reversal is, on Arendt's account, hardly revolutionary – for all of Western philosophy and politics hinge on reversals, on Arendt's account. Plato, after all, began with a reversal: “Whoever reads the Cave allegory in Plato's *Republic* in the light of Greek history will soon be aware that the *periagoge*, the turning-about that Plato demands of the philosopher, actually amounts to a reversal of the Homeric world order,” (THC, 292).

Arendt contends that this reversal set a pattern that has dominated Western thought:

[T]he Platonic tradition of philosophical as well as political thought started with a reversal...this original reversal determined to a large extent the thought patterns into which Western philosophy almost automatically fell wherever it was not animated by a great and original philosophical impetus. Academic philosophy, as a matter of fact, has ever since been dominated by the never-ending reversals of idealism and materialism, of transcendentalism and immanentism, of realism and nominalism, of hedonism and asceticism, and so on. (THC, 292)

As radical as each of these reversals of thought appears to be, what concerns Arendt about them is their conservatism. As she argued time and again, reversals of thought fail to break out of the “structural elements involved” in whichever system of thought the reversal sought to overturn (THC, 293).

Continuing with her critique of the limitations inherent in the kinds of reversals with which Western philosophy has concerned itself since Plato, Arendt clarifies:

What matters here is the reversibility of all these systems, that they can be turned ‘upside down’ or ‘downside up’ at any moment in history without requiring for such reversal either historical events or changes in the structural elements involved. The concepts themselves remain the same no matter where they are placed in the various systematic orders. Once Plato had succeeded in making these structural elements and concepts reversible, reversals within the course of intellectual history no longer needed more than

purely intellectual experience, an experience within the framework of conceptual thinking itself. (THC, 292-3)

Arendt finds the kind of “armchair philosophy” involved in the ‘purely intellectual experience’ of reversing systems of thought while leaving their ‘structural elements’ intact not only altogether too conservative, but also too dependent upon illusions of “detached” Archimedean points of view; and, perhaps most egregiously, too individualistic – capable of being made in the solitude of one’s own imagination. She further finds such reversals of thought all-too-common throughout the history of Western philosophy.

Not even Marx, who, in his eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, famously derided the philosopher’s penchant for “only *interpret[ing]* the world in various ways [when] the point is to *change* it,” is immune from Arendt’s critique of the conservatism inherent in theoretical reversals of thought. She complains that in “turning Hegelian dialectic upside down” Marx “is still [working] in the same tradition, the same intellectual game with paired antitheses that rules, to an extent, the famous modern reversals of spiritual hierarchies” (THC, 293). And as for Nietzsche’s “daring” revaluations of all values, Arendt finds his an “inverted Platonism” characterized by a “lack of radicalism...which, by putting things upside down or downside up, still keeps intact the categorical framework in which such reversals can operate” (LOM, 176).

As we begin to review some of the more important ways in which Arendt’s account of the problem of epistemic injustice differs from Miranda Fricker’s, we will see that our Arendtian-inspired reconstruction of the problem of epistemic injustice begins with several reversals of Fricker’s interpretation of the problem. However, though these reversals are often initially presented in the form of certain contested dualisms, they proceed to move beyond those dualisms into creative re-imaginings of the categories of thought used to frame the ethico-epistemic problems Arendt addressed. As we will see, these creative interventions, unlike the

time worn traditional reversals of thought we've been discussing, open up the space for *novel* interpretations of ancient ethical and epistemic problems. But before we begin outlining the reversals with which Arendt begins, and investigating the new concepts and conceptual frameworks she offers, a word on Arendt's innovative method of theoretical investigation is in order.

### **A Note on Arendt's Method**

Although she drew little attention to it, Hannah Arendt, taking Nietzsche as a model of sorts, employed a version of his genealogical method that was rather unique. Had she taken the time to articulate her inventive method, much of the ink spilled in outraged contestations over the many distinctions made in her work may have been saved. As Arendt scholar Lisa Disch notes, "Arendt failed to explain what she herself termed a 'rather unusual approach' ... to political theory because she considered methodological discussions to be self-indulgent and irrelevant to real political problems" (108). Disch understatedly concludes, "She did herself a disservice by this reticence" (108).

Disch extrapolates a "statement of epistemology or method" from Arendt's "scattered remarks" on what she often self-effacingly referred to as "my old fashioned storytelling" (107). In such 'storytelling' Arendt finds a solution to the problem identified in previous chapters as crucial for any response to the problem of epistemic injustice to address: how to arrive at a response to the non-doxastic problem of epistemic injustice that yields epistemic assessments that are *critical*. In outlining her response to the problem of epistemic injustice, Miranda Fricker, recall, insisted that because identity prejudices, which, like all prejudices, are always non-doxastic, underlie both forms of epistemic injustice (hermeneutic injustice and testimonial injustice), the problem of epistemic injustice requires a non-inferentialist solution. In other



words, since *prejudices*, by definition (pre-judgments), don't rise to the level of conscious belief formation, the problem of epistemic injustice cannot be overcome through the formation of proper beliefs arrived at through sound inferential reasoning. Cultivating the virtue of epistemic justice, then, does not rely on, much less require, one's acquisition of the epistemic skill of drawing correct inferences between types of speakers and/or their testimony and the epistemic categories of 'credible' or 'intelligible'. It instead requires a non-inferentialist response.

Fricker, as noted, turns to a virtue-epistemic approach for her non-inferentialist solution to the non-doxastic problem of epistemic injustice – one that entails the cultivation of the epistemic virtue of 'testimonial sensitivity.' On this account a hearer's credibility assessments of a speaker and/or her testimony can remain *critical*, that is, non-arbitrary, non-relativist, and non-prejudicial, by virtue of the fact that they can be measured against what is collectively considered to be a virtuous testimonial sensitivity. What I'm suggesting here is that Arendt has found a better solution to this problem in the form of her epistemological method of 'old-fashioned storytelling.'

On the face of it, the suggestion that critical epistemic judgments can, at times, best be made by the lights of some "good 'ole fashioned storytelling" may (perhaps *should*) strike one as, at best, a bit odd. In discussing this aspect of Arendt's method from a strikingly sympathetic standpoint, Georgetown Law Professor David Luban explains that, "the gap that separates her work from what has come to be the practice of political science in America is a function of a deep difference in methods and goals, rooted in Arendt's understanding of the plight of politics in contemporary civilization" (215). These 'deep differences in methods and goals' result from Arendt's belief that,

Under certain historical circumstances, those she refers to as 'dark times,' even the most ingenious and plausible theories lose their role in human knowledge. Yet this does not

mean that no understanding is possible to us – rather, the role of theories can be assumed, imperfectly to be sure, by ‘ever-recurrent narration,’ frequently the narration of the stories of individual human beings. Eventually, narration can be reified *poetically* (and not scientifically), and this is the closest we can come to a true mastering of the past. (216).

As sympathetic as he is to Arendt’s methodological approach, Luban nonetheless dryly concedes, “The bizarreness of this account need hardly be remarked” (216).

It’s ‘bizarreness’ notwithstanding, Luban offers two compelling reasons not to dismiss Arendt’s rather unusual method of ‘old fashioned storytelling’ as an innovative means of arriving at ethico-epistemic understandings. “First is the notion that explanation...is radically time-bound: historical circumstances determine not so much the character of explanation as its very possibility...[which serves to] sever the umbilicus between a timelessly true theory and the circumstances of its origin” (216). This reason aligns well with our approach, which, as indicated in chapter one, begins *in media res*, or ‘in the midst of things’ and aims to offer a contextualized account of the problem of epistemic injustice. Luban’s second reason for championing Arendt’s methodological approach is that it does not demand that “the activity of comprehension” require “the type of personal virtue...[of] scientific detachment, which Arendt, following Droysen, calls ‘eunuchic objectivity,’ the ‘extinction of the self’; nor is the ability required cleverness or intelligence” (216). As Disch puts it, Arendt “argues for a redefinition of validity to be achieved not by abstract, neutral writing but by storytelling from a committed moral perspective” (668).

As much as Arendt disavowed her feminist ‘credentials’ she did, at times, brazenly challenge mainstream perspectives on what counts as a “proper” theoretical approach to ethical, political, and epistemological topics from what can sensibly be described as a feminist approach – even though her practical alignment with feminist causes appears only accidental. Even Arendt understood most mainstream theoretical perspectives to be largely comprised of the opinions of

an overwhelmingly homogeneous group: one that is privileged, white, male, and of European descent. Sadly, most evidence points to the conclusion that this fact seemed only to bother her insofar as it impeded the progress of her own thought.<sup>38</sup> In the case of her radical departure from standard methods of investigating historical and political phenomena, Arendt's challenge to the mainstream, inspired by the difficulties she encountered in thinking through ethical, social, and political problems using existing categories of thought, came in the form of a devastating critique of epistemological absolutism and its dependence on the existence of some kind of supposedly universal, Archimedean "model of impartiality defined as detached reasoning" (Disch, 666).

The common feminist critique of the use of supposedly immutable, universal categories of thought to stand in for what were always very particular, socially, politically, and economically situated articulations of those categories parallels Arendt's epistemological critique

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<sup>38</sup> The dearth of evidence supporting the notion that Arendt harbored any deep feminist commitments may, as most theorists argue, support the conclusion that she simply didn't. I would caution against fully endorsing this conclusion only because I take seriously Arendt's, clearly deep-felt, resistance to anything that might resemble the activities of those she called "Parvenu's." Her strong distaste for the kinds of "social climbing" embodied in her image of the Parvenu led Arendt down some ethically very dubious intellectual paths. Perhaps the most grievous example is her infamous "Essay on Little Rock," in which Arendt, otherwise inexplicably – and even with an explanation, still outrageously – argued against federal enforcement of the Brown v. The Board of Education decision as it played out in Little Rock on grounds that education was a social good; therefore demands to integrate amounted to a desire for social climbing. I believe that this strong tendency to eschew all activities remotely related to Parvenu's may have also underwritten Arendt's disinclination to formulate feminist arguments against patriarchy in public arenas. Additionally, in various letters to friends, and in interviews, Arendt does give some indication that she at least perceives some of the more obvious problems of patriarchy, and finds them, if not oppressive then at least exasperating. Although much more can be said about the reasons why Arendt formed some questionable alliances and sabotaged other, one wants to say, much more 'sensible' – or even more *ethical* ones, such a discussion would go well beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice it to say that Arendt's uneasy alliances and seemingly inexplicable penchant for making adversaries out of those underprivileged or oppressed souls with whom she so often intended to ally, should not quickly be dismissed as evidence of her unequivocal subservience to, or agreement with, corrupt power in the forms of patriarchy, anti-Semitism, and white supremacy. As tangled as were her thought processes on Parvenu's and Pariah's, I honestly believe they were informed chiefly by her loves and her sorrows, not by any supposed depravity on her part. That said, Arendt was rightly taken to task for many of her more grievous pronouncements, which, along with her blatantly apparent obliviousness to certain aspects of her own privilege, generated ample reason to challenge Arendt's work on several fronts. For more on Arendt's complicated understanding of Parvenu's and Pariah's, see Tujia Parvikko's excellent, *The Responsibilities of the Pariah*. For more on the extent of her racial insensitivity, and even the outright racist comments in her work, see Kathryn Gines' powerful, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question*.

of appeals to the supposed universal immutability of certain categorical distinctions. However, Arendt's approach to the first of these supposedly universal categorical distinctions that we will need to investigate caused many feminist theorists to balk at what appeared to be a reversal of *their own* challenge to an important categorical distinction: that between the public and private realms.

### **Part I: An Alternative Account of Epistemic Injustice**

My understanding of Arendt's approach to the problem of hermeneutical injustice begins with a description of what she refers to as the *polis* during times of widespread injustice, epistemic and otherwise. Arendt offers various interpretations of the meaning of the *polis*, but at its most basic, it is, for her, that public place of appearance, where "With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world" (THC, 176). While there are several arenas in which human beings can appear to others, such as one's family, social group, etc., appearing in the *polis* differs significantly from these according to Arendt. Drawing on an ancient Greek conception of politics, Arendt argues, "The rise of the city-state meant that man received 'besides his private life a sort of second life, his *bios politikos*. Now every citizen belongs to two orders of existence; and there is a sharp distinction in his life between what is his own (*idion*) and what is communal (*koinon*)'" (THC, 24).

#### **The Problematic Public / Private Distinction**

While Arendt's 'sharp distinction' between the public and the private has caused much consternation among feminist philosophers arguing, with good reason, that "the personal is political;"<sup>39</sup> avoiding the issues that invariably surface whenever this distinction is deployed will prove impossible for our task. We simply cannot make sense of Arendt's understanding of

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<sup>39</sup> See Carol Hanisch's 1969 essay "The Personal Is Political," one of, if not the, earliest articulations of this slogan of the early feminist movement.

epistemic injustice without first addressing certain aspects of the ways in which she distinguished between the public and the private. Although I have reservations about Arendt's rigid distinction, I'm also sympathetic to her reasons for maintaining it.

Historically speaking the reasons for declaring that the personal is political had everything to do with the problem of dealing with injustices occurring "in the privacy of one's own home," so-to-speak – away from the scrutiny of the public eye, and sometimes tragically beyond the reach of legal protection. Injustices such as domestic violence, for instance, were often considered private matters from which spectators should, in modesty, turn away. Through the powerful regulation of customs and mores, victims of violence in the private sphere of the home were effectively silenced whenever they attempted to air their private grievances in the public realm. Struggling even to gain a hearing for their concerns, women in particular were often left without recourse to legal means of bringing the perpetrators of the harms they suffered to justice. These clearly compelling reasons for defending the abolition the public/ private distinction altogether should not be hastily dismissed. However, on Arendt's account this all-too-common rendering of the distinction gets things turned rather upside down.

As Arendt sees it, injustices occurring in the private realm should *not* summarily be barred from being discussed in the public realm. In a functioning democracy, private matters are seldom denied a hearing in the public realm of discussion/ debate, at least *in principle*.<sup>40</sup> In principle, private experiences can always appear in the public realm in the form of speech acts that describe them to listeners capable of receiving them. Of course *in practice* this is often not the case: as we have seen, capable listeners can be few and far between when public discussions center on the concerns of the hermeneutically marginalized. However, the *practical* failure of the airing of private grievances in public, or at least their uptake, does not arise out of the public/

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<sup>40</sup> There may be some important caveats to this general rule, speech acts that incite violence, for instance.

private distinction itself; it arises instead out of the kinds of epistemic injustices with which we've been dealing.

Those attempting to give voice to their “private” experiences, such as their experiences with domestic violence, are often silenced, not because they dare to discuss private matters in public, but because the matters they wish to discuss are summarily dismissed by mainstream epistemic agents engaging in epistemically unjust practices. There are two equally important parts to this claim that should both be further explicated. First, Arendt insists that making a distinction between public and private realms does not entail that so-called private matters need remain private. In fact, Arendt seeks to maintain the public/ private distinction, not in order to bar private matters from entering into the public realm, but to bar the public realm from encroaching on the private.<sup>41</sup> And she had good reason for concern over the extension of the public realm into all aspects of individual's private lives. As she convincingly argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, once the *polis* gains unfettered access to the private realms of all, the path has been all-too-smoothly paved for totalitarian forms of government.

Second, the silencing that occurs whenever any epistemic agent's credibility is prejudicially negatively assessed results not from the fact that a distinction is being made between the public and the private realms, but from the unjustness of the epistemic practices by which mainstream epistemic agents police the boundaries of what counts as credible testimony and/ or intelligible speech in the public sphere. In other words, the silencing of so-called private matters that occurs in the *polis* is a result of epistemic injustice, not of the public/ private distinction itself. The feminist outcry over Arendt's strict maintenance of the public/ private distinction centers on the ways in which feminist issues are often dismissed as “private matters,”

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<sup>41</sup> Carefully read, I believe that Carol Hanish's “The Private is the Public” essay supports exactly this interpretation of the problems that have historically attended the firm separation of public and private realms.

not important enough to merit inclusion in public debates. But Arendt seeks to maintain this distinction, albeit in a transformed state, not in order to dismiss feminist concerns, or even *any* concern that has historically been deemed a ‘private matter’, as *in principle* politically irrelevant. As we will see, Arendt seeks to maintain the public /private distinct first and foremost in order to protect the only realm within which she is convinced that human beings can experience freedom.

Arendt’s argument is twofold in that she asserts that (1) there are important reasons for maintaining the public /private distinction, and (2) the distinction itself is not responsible for the continued silencing of testimony regarding so-called private affairs. We will need to further flesh-out the first part of Arendt’s argument in order to determine whether the reasons she offers for maintaining the distinction outweigh its possible harms. This will be an important part of our overall approach to motivating our Arendtian-inspired response to the problem of epistemic injustice. But if the perceived harm of the distinction: that it renders the just concerns of certain oppressed groups either invisible or incoherent, is attributable to another cause, namely, epistemic injustice, then calls for its abolition appear to lack motivation. Feminist theorists objecting to Arendt’s commitment to maintaining the public / private distinction are left with the burden of offering an alternative account of the harm of the distinction if they wish to challenge Arendt’s reasons for keeping it. I submit that our energies are better spent battling what I’ve identified as the root of feminist concerns regarding the kinds of unjust silencing occurring in the public realm that motivated calls to abolish the public /private distinction in the first place: epistemic injustice. In this battle, we find an unlikely ally in Hannah Arendt.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Arendt’s notorious disavowal of the early feminist movement remains a sore spot for feminist theorists, myself most definitely included. However misguided her reasons for eschewing and even dismissing the movement, Arendt’s work has been reclaimed by many feminist theorists of late (see, for instance, the numerous essays in Bonnie Honig’s collection, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*), and with good reason. I stand in a long line of feminist epistemologists in these reclamation efforts. This work can be seen, in part, as a contribution to them.

Although she challenged a great many of the categories by which her peers organized and made sense of the world, Arendt was no theoretical anarchist. In fact, she probably created as many categories as she debunked, and the mainstream categories she left intact often took on radically new meanings in her work. This recounting of her handling of the public/ private distinction serves as an example of Arendt's particular method of redeploying meaning. What's so remarkable about the ways in which Arendt accomplished these rearrangements of old categories, along with the inventions of new ones, is the fact that she never settled for mere inversions of existing categories. Perhaps Arendt's greatest accomplishment as a political theorist was her ability to think outside of the logic of sovereignty, and all of the dualisms it implies.

That she accomplished this feat through re-deploying dualisms and reinventing a plethora of commonly agreed upon categories of thought speaks to her faith in the creative power of language, a faith she shared with Audre Lorde. In offering an explanation of her famous line, championed by feminist theorists across disciplines and across the globe, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," Lorde writes:

It means different tools in language, different tools in the exchange of information, it means different tools in learning...It means that we do not require from each other the kinds of narrow and restricted interpretations of learning and exchange of knowledge that we suffered in the universities or that we suffered in narrow academic structures. It means that, while we are functioning in the old power, because we must know those tools, we cannot be ignorant of them, we are also in the process of redefining a new power, which is the power of the future. (151-2)

Arendt's faith in the power of language cashes out in her insistence that a plurality of citizens engaged in public speech acts possess the power to create a meaningful world.

However, since all epistemic agents begin their world-building *in media res*, or, in the midst of things, they must also contend with a world they inherit. Before we further investigate



just how these kinds of ethico-epistemic world-building practices become possible, let's turn first to the world epistemic agents might inherit. In the wake of WWII Arendt found the times in which she wrote to be, borrowing the term from Brecht, "dark times." As David Luban explains, "for Brecht dark times are not merely times of horror but times of confusion in which theory no longer helps us to act...For Arendt as well, 'Dark times'...are as such not identical with the monstrosities of this century...the phrase 'dark times' has an epistemological as well as a valuational meaning...In dark times traditional forms of explanation no longer explain anything" (218). I propose we adopt this ethico-epistemic understanding of what Arendt calls "dark times," and apply it to our own times, for although we are not living in the wake of the monstrosities committed by Hitler's brutal regime, we are living in times of pervasive epistemic injustice.

### **Ethico-Epistemic Dark Times**

For Arendt, the public arena's often harsh light ordinarily illuminates for us what we call "reality": "...our feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness<sup>43</sup> of sheltered existence" (THC, 51). For the most part, this 'darkness of sheltered existence' cannot extend to the shared "space of appearances in which [men] (sic) can show in deed and word, for better and for worse, who they are and what they can do" (MDT, viii). However, during what Arendt, borrowing the term from Brecht, identifies as "dark times;" this extension of the so-called 'darkness' into the public realm is just what occurs.

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<sup>43</sup> The use of the words "dark," "darkness," and "dark times" to denote something negative often carries racist overtones. In this section I will address the works of four authors, Hannah Arendt, Bertold Brecht, David Luban, and David Grossman, who all employ the phrase "dark times" to refer to the climate of ethical and epistemological corruption during Hitler's rule, and all aim to extrapolate lessons and/or meanings from that time that can be applied to past and future times that are similarly corrupt. Although I find the metaphor in many ways problematic, since it isn't being used in overtly racist ways in any of their texts I will use their chosen phrase throughout this section in order accurately to render the authors' meanings.

In the preface to a collection of “intellectual biographies” she wrote on various public figures who lived between 1871 (Rosa Luxemburg) and 1965 (Randall Jarell), bearing the title *Men in Dark Times*, we find Arendt eager to point out that her subject is not the ‘dark times’ themselves, it is rather the men and women who were able to illumine even the darkest of times through their lives and works. She cautions that even though “the historical time, the ‘dark times’ mentioned in the title, is, I think, visible everywhere in this book... Those who are on the lookout for representatives of an era, for mouthpieces of the *Zeitgeist*, for exponents of History (spelled with a capital H) will look here in vain” (MDT, viii).

Within this framework, it is the times themselves that are dark, and what little illumination that exists emanates “less from theories and concepts than from the uncertain, flickering, and often weak light that some men and women, in their lives and their works, will kindle under almost all circumstances” (MDT, ix). I propose that we adopt this framework as an analogous inversion of Fricker’s epistemological framework from within which to consider the problem of epistemic injustice. According to Fricker, light from ‘theories and concepts,’ by which we usually make *inferential* judgments, is, as in Arendt’s account, lacking. For Fricker this need not be a problem: so long as epistemic agents can make virtuous non-inferential judgments, then all is well. Based on numerous references to politics in what she would call “ordinary times,” I submit that Arendt would agree with this assessment. But in times of widespread injustice, epistemic and otherwise, “when the chips are down,” so-to-speak, Fricker’s and Arendt’s accounts diverge significantly.

For Fricker, the ‘gaps in the [singular] hermeneutical resources’ ‘darken’ or obscure the meanings by which hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents can make sense of their lives. This makes inarticulateness a property of the public speech acts of hermeneutically marginalized

speakers, who struggle to express meanings eclipsed by “the hermeneutical darkness...[in their] minds...wrongfully preventing [them] from understanding a significant area of [their] social experience, thus depriving [them] of an important patch of self-understanding” (Fricker, 149). On this account, unintelligibility is an epistemic hurdle for these same epistemic agents to overcome within their testimonial exchanges with mainstream epistemic agents in the public realm. But on Arendt’s account, *speaking from the vantage point of a hermeneutically marginalized subject*, in ‘dark times’ what has become obscured are a whole host of meanings, first and foremost those that make adequate sense of the lives of mainstream, or *privileged* epistemic agents.

According to Arendt the, once meaningful, proclamations made in the public spaces have succumbed to the inarticulateness of what has become everyday public discourse – that of mainstream and/or privileged epistemic agents. Their words have become “jargon” or “the highly efficient talk and double-talk of nearly all official representatives who, without interruption and in many ingenious variations, explain away unpleasant facts and justified concerns” (MDT, viii). This account makes inarticulateness a property of the speech acts of *mainstream* epistemic agents, those hermeneutically privileged epistemic agents who follow the ‘official representatives’ whose meaningless speech they have adopted. Once public spaces become inundated with such speech, once mainstream epistemic agents have adopted it wholesale – in other words, once it becomes the habit of the many – the times become inarticulate and “dark” because the public space between human beings has lost its meaningfulness.

In speaking of the particular social, political, and epistemic injustices present in the infamously “dark times” of the rule of the Third Reich, Arendt notes, “All this was real enough

as it took place in public; there was nothing secret or mysterious about it. And still, it was by no means visible to all, nor was it at all easy to perceive it” (MDT, viii). While I’ll concede that any analogy to the Third Reich is bound to be fraught, I would argue that the difficulties in perceiving epistemic injustices during Hitler’s reign arose from the same sources as the difficulties in perceiving epistemic injustices in present day mainstream epistemic exchanges, wherein epistemic injustice is pervasive. As the writer David Grossman, in his essay, “Writing in the Dark,” explains,

[In times of] trauma, a disaster situation, on a society and on a nation as a whole... [citizens respond with] apathy, cynicism, and above all despair...[which] can fuel a distorted reality for many years, sometimes generations...we suspend our moral judgment and...give up on understanding what we ourselves think...protect[ing] ourselves...with a little indifference, a little repression, a little deliberate blindness. (Grossman, 22-24)

On Grossman’s account, difficulties in perceiving injustices arise when large sections of the public become so traumatized by the unjustness of the reality that confronts them that they turn away from it in a variety of defensive movements aimed at blunting the force of the trauma, from suspending moral judgments, to indifference, and even to deliberate blindness.

The primary vehicle used to achieve these defensive postures is, as Grossman proceeds to point out, language. Language is, for Grossman as for Arendt, a double-edged sword: it is a tool used both to reveal and to conceal *meanings*. Its concealing power becomes dominant in ‘dark times’ for reasons Grossman eloquently identifies: “human language’s natural richness and its ability to touch on the finest nuances of existence can be truly hurtful in a state of conflict because they constantly remind us of the exuberant reality that we have lost, of its complexities and subtleties. The more hopeless the situation seems the shallower the language becomes, the more public discourse dwindles” (25).

In this ‘dwindling’ of public discourse, clarifying linguistic utterances are traded for “a series of clichés and slogans...jargon...shrewd language designed to tell audiences the most palatable story...erecting a barrier between everything the state does...and the way its citizens choose to see themselves” (Grossman, 24). These, in Hobbes’ colorful phrase, “abuses of language” serve not only to protect and numb, but also to maintain the status quo – for who would object to such a benign, non-confrontational world as described in the clichés of the unreflective? Any attempt even to articulate such objections in the public realm would likely appear nonsensical.

To put the problem in Arendt’s language, it’s the ‘highly efficient talk and double-talk’ of the officials and their followers aimed at explaining away ‘unpleasant facts and justified concerns’ that both creates and maintains the ‘dark times.’ Such double-speak, on our Arendtian-inspired account, lies at the heart of hermeneutical injustice – for it obscures meanings that are in the interest of hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents to render visible. But this hermeneutical injustice results from what Arendt calls “credibility gaps” – gaps in the credibility of the hermeneutically privileged – it does not result from the unintelligibility of the speech of the hermeneutically marginalized, as Fricker suggests.

As Arendt, clearly extrapolating lessons for other ‘dark times’ from the dark period of Hitler’s reign, explains:

When we think of dark times and of people living and moving in them, we have to take this camouflage, emanating from and spread by “the establishment” – or “the system,” as it [has been] called...into account. If it is the function of the public realm to throw light on the affairs of men by providing a space of appearances in which they can show in deed and word, for better and worse, who they are and what they can do, then darkness has come when this light is extinguished by “credibility gaps” and...by speech that does not disclose what is but sweeps it under the carpet, by exhortations, moral and otherwise, that, under the pretext of upholding old truths, degrade all truth to meaningless triviality. (MDT, viii)

As we can see, in Arendt's case it is the credibility of "the establishment" that is in question, not its resisters. And far from being the result of an ethico-epistemic vice on the part of the hermeneutically marginalized, this negative credibility assessment of "the establishment" reflects a reasoned, reflective judgment based on experiential evidence that is in principle, available (even if not fully perceived or understood) to all who enter the public realm. Nonetheless, this negative credibility assessment is indicative of the presence of an epistemic injustice – but it's not a *testimonial* injustice, it's a *hermeneutical* injustice.

On this much, Arendt's and Fricker's accounts align: when confronted with a public realm permeated by untrustworthy words and clichés, hermeneutically marginalized subjects will indeed encounter difficulties in having their testimony understood by mainstream epistemic agents. They further agree that these difficulties may not result from the unreliability or unintelligibility of their testimony. Arendt's view diverges significantly from Fricker's in her insistence that in 'dark times,' *from the point of view of the hermeneutically marginalized subject*, the dissonance that arises between their speech and that of 'the [epistemic] establishment' results from the fact that the *epistemic establishment's speech is untrustworthy*, or non-credible – that it 'does not disclose what is but sweeps it under the carpet... [ultimately] degrad[ing] all truth to meaningless triviality.' And it's this 'degradation of truth to meaningless triviality' on the part of the 'epistemic establishment' that constitutes the hermeneutical injustice suffered by the hermeneutically marginalized.

Hermeneutical injustice occurs when the 'camouflage, emanating from and spread by 'the establishment' – or 'the system' causes 'gaps in collective hermeneutical resources' that extinguish the light that the public realm throws on 'the affairs of men by providing a space of appearances in which they can show in deed and word, for better and for worse, who they are

and what they can do'. As Arendt explains, the 'darkness has come when this light [of the public realm] is extinguished by 'credibility gaps' – the credibility gaps produced and maintained by 'the [ethico-epistemic] establishment' whose 'speech...does not disclose what is but sweeps it under the carpet, by exhortations, moral and otherwise, that, under the pretext of upholding old truths, degrade all truth to meaningless triviality'. Since we take our bearings in the world by telling stories that can help make sense of the 'truths' – the facts as they appear to us – what we lose when those truths are 'degraded...to meaningless triviality' is our ability to make sense of the world – to appear in public through meaningful speech acts. At base hermeneutical injustice causes what Arendt calls a "loss of world" (MDT, 13).

## **Part II: World-Building In Dark Times**

In contrasting the point of view of the hermeneutically marginalized with the point of view of the hermeneutically privileged, Arendt is offering a "standpoint theory" of sorts. However, it's not a standpoint theory of *truth*, but *meaning*. In calling it a theory of meaning I do not mean to imply that the view Arendt endorses follows any of the so-called "traditional" epistemological theories of meaning – although it is related to them. The theory of meaning to which I refer I take largely from Hannah Arendt's unfinished final work, *The Life of the Mind*, wherein Arendt aimed, not to articulate a full-blown theory of meaning as such, but only to investigate the phenomenon of *thinking*. Arendt was particularly interested in what had, during Hitler's reign, become what she considered to be the widespread problem of *thoughtlessness* as embodied, most consummately in the figure of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, but also, more controversially, in the wider German public.

What Arendt found so "banal" about the evil of Eichmann<sup>44</sup> was its source in

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<sup>44</sup> See Arendt's famously controversial work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* for more on this.

thoughtlessness, as evidenced in the “cliché-ridden language [Eichmann] produced on the stand” (LOM, 4). She notes, “It was this absence of thinking – which is so ordinary an experience in our everyday life, where we have hardly the time, let alone the inclination, to *stop* and think – that awakened my interest [in Eichmann]” (LOM, 4). Arendt ties this phenomenon of thoughtlessness to language, not just in Eichmann’s case, but across the board, echoing Grossman’s claims in her assertion that:

Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence. If we were responsible to this claim all the time, we would soon be exhausted; Eichmann differed from the rest of us only in that he clearly knew of no such claim at all. (LOM, 4)

To be clear: Arendt doesn’t believe that thinking can cause virtuous behavior, only that the lack of thinking may open the door to all manner of vice. And it is this concern that caused her to wonder, “Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually ‘condition’ them against it?” (LOM, 5)

Arendt is fully aware of the fact that most philosophers consider thinking the activity of the few, the “professional thinkers.” But she aligns her view on this with Kant’s, pointing out that he “almost alone among the philosophers – was much bothered by the common opinion that philosophy is only for the few...because of its moral implications” (LOM, 13). While Kant thought that immorality, or “wickedness,” was caused by “stupidity,” Arendt instead suggests that, “absence of thought is not stupidity; it can be found in highly intelligent people, and a wicked heart is not its cause; it is probably the other way round, that wickedness may be caused by absence of thought” (LOM, 13).



### ***Vernunft* and *Verstand* / Reason and Intellect / Understanding and Knowledge**

These reflections led Arendt to investigate Kant's important distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand* or *reason* and *intellect* (while the German "Verstand" is often rendered in English versions of Kant's work as "understanding" Arendt finds this a mistranslation<sup>45</sup>) which he drew "after he had discovered 'the scandal of reason,' that is, the fact that our mind is not capable of certain and verifiable knowledge regarding matters and questions that it nevertheless cannot help thinking about" (LOM, 14). This so-called 'scandal' caused Kant famously to "deny knowledge [in order] to make room for faith," (Critique of Pure Reason) but Arendt counters, "he had not made room for faith; he had made room for thought, and he had not 'denied knowledge' but separated knowledge from thinking" (LOM, 14).

Arendt argues that thinking and knowing are "two altogether different mental activities" aimed at "two altogether different concerns, meaning...and cognition" (LOM, 15). The desire for knowledge, on this account, comes from the faculty of the intellect, which concerns itself with matters of cognition such as truth claims and credibility assessments. However Kant's famous "need of reason" is, Arendt insists, "*not inspired by the quest for truth, but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same*" (LOM, 15, emphasis in original). While the implications of this proclamation are manifold, we will at this point primarily concern ourselves with the fact that theories of meaning tend not to be exclusive in ways that theories of truth often are: a plurality of meanings need not entail contradiction in the way that a plurality of truths often might.

In taking up a standpoint theory of *meaning*, Arendt is not committing herself to a relativist approach to truth because she is not suggesting that truth is relative to particular individuals. Quite the contrary, in her standpoint theory of meaning what we might call truth is

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<sup>45</sup> See pages 13-14 of the *Life of the Mind* for more on this.

relative only to the meanings that guide all inquiry from within any particular meaning-framework, be it a theory, story, or conceptual scheme. And ‘what we might call truth’ are the perceptions that a diversely situated group of individuals would agree are common within any given meaning-framework. In other words, truth is relative to a framework of meaning, but not to each individual who subscribes to that framework of meaning.

Within any given meaning-framework (and truth is certainly not a concern outside of any of them), the ‘quest for truth’ is a quest to identify appearances that are common, which culminates in *knowledge*. Such knowledge isn’t the kind that Descartes so earnestly sought, it isn’t fixed once and for all time. But it is *durable* insofar as the ‘truths’ of a group are not commodities to be exchanged or consumed. They instead constitute the background assumptions of a group that are only questioned either by those appealing to a different set of truths, or from, in Arendt’s felicitous phrase, those “doubters and skeptics” living within the borders of the group in times of upheaval or crisis. In other words, these ‘truths’ aren’t immutable, but neither are they easily uprooted, for they are often defended with an existential intensity among the ‘respectable’ members of one’s group.

Conversely, a ‘quest for meaning’ is a quest to identify the contours of a meaning-framework by imagining what might constitute truth (identifying which appearances are common to their group) from the standpoint of another and then attempting to identify the meaning-framework they might be employing in order to make sense of the common appearances, or truths, that confront them. This process of imagining oneself standing in the position of another and identifying their meaning-framework, if successful, culminates in *understanding*.

In Fricker’s language, images or appearances that are common constitute the ‘shared

hermeneutical resources' of, apparently, *everyone*. But if there exist a plurality of shared hermeneutical resources or social imaginaries, some can and often will contain meanings or senses that are common only *to a particular group*. This means that the opportunity for misunderstanding between groups is always present, because even if Donald Davidson is right that *in principle* we cannot make sense of a plurality of conceptual schemes that can't always be translated one to another, *in practice* (because we are such finite creatures) such translations will sometimes simply not be possible.<sup>46</sup> And in fact, as Arendt passionately argues, to think of arriving at an understanding of the meaning-framework that makes sense of another's truths as a work of *translation* is to fundamentally misunderstand both the method and the goal of understanding. In attempting to imagine a meaning-framework that can make sense of the knowledges that another expresses when identifying their truths we do not *translate* their knowledges into the language of our own meaning-framework – for what we are after – an “image” of the meaning-framework of another – is in fact, not just untranslatable, but *unsayable*.

### **The Ineffability of Meaning-Frameworks**

The fact that meaning frameworks are ineffable does not mean that they cannot intelligibly be discussed, but it does mean that in discussing them our speech may at times border on the poetic. We will turn to a poet – Audre Lorde – for aid in fleshing out such things as meaning-frameworks in the next chapter. But for now, we will turn, not to a poet, but a philosopher, for help in expressing “that which cannot be said”: Ludwig Wittgenstein. While the

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<sup>46</sup> See Davidson's highly influential essay, *On The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme* for more on this. As Davidson so elegantly argues, logically speaking the ‘very idea’ of the existence of competing conceptual schemes (and therefore the ‘very idea of a conceptual scheme’ in the first place) is inconsistent and therefore incoherent. But this is only to say that *in principle* the concept of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible. *In fact* – because we are finite creatures and therefore incapable of ever achieving the kind of linguistic coherence about which Davidson speaks – the concept of a conceptual scheme is, as countless epistemologists since at least W.V.O. Quine (with whom Davidson was in conversation) have convincingly shown time and again, is quite useful and therefore *meaningful*.

meaning-frameworks within which epistemic agents make sense of their worlds can be *expressed*, they cannot be rendered in the form of propositional statements. However the truths that that comprise an epistemic agent's knowledge can be formulated in propositional statements.

As Wittgenstein explains in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*,

Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form. In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside of logic, that is to say outside the world. Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language... Propositions *show* the logical form of reality. They display it... What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said" (Tractatus, 4.12- 4.121).<sup>47</sup>

If we take 'the whole of reality' to mean the sum total of an epistemic agent's knowledge, which is derived from their perceptions of the world as it appears to them, then we can agree with Wittgenstein that, at least *in principle*, propositions can represent it. And if we take 'what [propositions] must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form' to mean a meaning-framework, then we can further agree with Wittgenstein that (1) 'propositions cannot represent' it, and (2) it '*can* be shown'.

Meaning-frameworks cannot be represented in language, but they are that which 'expresses *itself* in language' whenever we tell a story involving the truths that can be represented in language. It's important to note that in speaking of 'reality' we are adopting an Arendtian definition of it: reality is, for Arendt, simply the way the world appears in common to any particular social group as expressed by its members in the public realm. It is the meaningful world they *create* and maintain through the power of their public speech acts. And it's equally important to note that in speaking of meaning-frameworks, we are again adopting an Arendtian

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<sup>47</sup> Although in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein's account appears monological, it nonetheless offers important insights. I would argue that the basic structure of Wittgenstein's views on language remained remarkably consistent throughout all of his works, even though he (thankfully) explicitly pluralized his *Tractarian* account in *Philosophical Investigations*.

definition of them: they are the sum of the meanings that are common to any particular group at the particular place and time in which they are expressed, and they form the yardsticks according to which ethico-epistemic judgments regarding the intelligibility of each other's speech acts are made.

When it comes to the ethico-epistemic practice of arriving at *understanding*, what we are attempting to do is identify the meaning-frameworks according to which our interlocutors are formulating their intelligibility assessments. And it is only *after* we have identified, at least a basic outline, of the contours of another's meaning-framework that we can embark on the ethico-epistemic task of assessing their *truth-claims*, and subsequently begin to make credibility assessments about the speakers whose truth claims we are assessing. To better understand just how this Wittgensteinian construction relates to our overall understanding of epistemic injustice, let's cash this out in the terminology we've been using throughout this chapter.

Even if one can give an account of her reasons for a particular epistemic judgment *after the fact*, that does not mean that her original judgment was made based on doxastic criteria. Nonetheless, we storytelling creatures *can* identify /create /surmise either a logical or a narrative structure (a meaning-framework) that makes sense of our epistemic judgments. If we strike upon a meaning-framework that seems to 'work', that is, makes sense of another's or our own epistemic judgments, we may have identified something akin to their /our overall meaning-framework. That is to say, we may have gained invaluable insight into their /our ways of making meanings.

### **Logical Form by Analogy**

The simplest way to determine a logical form/structure is by way of analogy: Horse is to Cart as Reindeer is to Sleigh. These four things are not related to each other in any logically

*necessary* way (i.e. a horse is still a horse with or without a cart), however we can identify certain relations between them. The relationships we identify say *much* about our own identity, but they don't say anything about themselves – we can *see* these relationships, but they aren't at all articulated in the analogy itself, since all its references are four things.

We may attempt to shed some light on the logical structure/ form of the analogy by saying that the relationship between a horse and cart is that a horse pulls a cart, and the relationship between a reindeer and sleigh is that a reindeer pulls a sleigh, so what makes these things analogous is an animal's ability to pull things. But then all we've done is provide a measuring stick, which itself appears nowhere in the analogy, by which to measure likenesses between two animals. This measuring stick – the ability to pull things – provides the logical structure of the analogy, but it is only *shown* not *said*: there is no reference to an ability to pull things in the original analogy. It's important to note that the ability to pull things *isn't the only possible yardstick by which to measure likeness*. I could just as easily argue that a horse can't pull a cart when wounded and a reindeer can't pull a sleigh *when wounded*, so these things are related by the measuring stick of an *inability to pull things when wounded*. And then, of course, the logical structure of the analogy is changed.

If we can determine the yardsticks by which people measure things (whether they are aware of them or not), we've come a long way in understanding their "form of life," to borrow another Wittgensteinian phrase. For instance: if we know that animals are often judged according to their ability or inability to pull things among a particular group, we may then begin to make some informed hypotheses about the overall meaning-framework within which that particular group makes sense of their lives: they see animals as useful in terms of their ability pull things, perhaps. The ability to pull is, in other words, *meaningful* to them. Since reindeer are pulling

sleighs in the analogy, we may conjecture that a jolly fat man who brings toys to little children plays a meaningful role in the wintertime myths and rituals of the ones who crafted the analogy. We can begin to shape our understanding of people and the groups to which they belong by the lights of the logical structures that are employed in their speech, which reveal what is meaningful to them.

To recap: in Arendt's theory of meaning, truths are agreed upon perceptions: those images or appearances to which epistemic agents within a given meaning-framework appeal in order to make sense of their lives. Arriving at agreement on these perceptions is a work of cognition, and it provides a common sense among those who more or less agree on how things appear. The sum of these truths equals an epistemic agent's 'reality' about which they can have *knowledge*. And meanings are the measuring sticks used to judge these knowledges and the credibility of the epistemic agents expressing them. The sum of these meanings /measuring sticks equals the sum of the meanings that comprise an epistemic agent's background framework, about which they can have *understanding* (although no epistemic agent ever possesses perfect knowledge of the *sum* of her own meaning-frameworks). Determining the measuring-sticks by which a group makes their ethico-epistemic judgments is a work of what Arendt calls *thinking*, and it provides a shared meaning-framework among those who more or less agree on how things ought to be judged. The faculty of the intellect yields truths; the faculty of reason yields meanings.

### **The Sociality of Knowledge-Production and Meaning-Making Practices**

There are a few things about this account of truths and meanings that immediately beg for clarification. First, there can be no solipsistic account of either truth or meaning: as noted, truths are relative to meaning-frameworks, and meaning is not something that any individual can create

or maintain alone. Second, there can be no account of either truths or meanings that are “ineffable.” Arendt sums these two points up succinctly, “There may be truths beyond speech, and they may be of great relevance to man in the singular, that is, to man in so far as he is not a political being, whatever else he may be. Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves” (THC, 4). ‘Men’ (sic) can surely ‘talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves’ in small or large groups that do not constitute an “official” *polis*. But in order to enter the *polis*, that public space of appearances, one must belong to a group.

One’s group consists of others who have, more or less, adopted a meaning-framework similar to which she appeals in order to make sense of her life and experiences. One can, and I submit always does, have more than one group. We each appeal to meanings from within the standpoints of several groups, as we each stand at various intersections of difference (i.e. “gay and privileged,” and/or “black and female”) and thereby have access to more than one social imaginary. Some of our social imaginaries cross multiple intersections (i.e. “lover of classical music and female” who is also “black and economically underprivileged,” etc.). But in order for the meanings of a particular group to enter into “public discourse” within the *polis* Arendt conceives, they must be *articulated* to members of other groups. In other words, one must *testify* to the meanings that make sense of their life to and among significantly different others in order for those meanings to appear in the *polis*. Just as individuals cannot make meanings absent a group of others, so groups cannot make meanings appear in the public realm absent the presence of other groups. What’s important to remember is that each group has access to their own social imaginary, which means that each individual has access to a plurality of social imaginaries, and



it is from within these that meanings either appear or fail to appear in the *polis*.

Many of the meanings to which hermeneutically marginalized subjects appeal are indeed obscured by the darkness of the gaps in hermeneutical resources of mainstream epistemic agents, in this much Fricker is right. But if they have access to alternative epistemic resources, alternative social imaginaries, those hermeneutically marginalized within mainstream epistemic practices and/or the *polis* may understand their own speech perfectly well, and have no trouble accessing the shared meanings that help make sense of their lives from within these alternative social imaginaries.

If their interlocutors are unable to understand them, they may yet be harmed in a socially, politically, or economic way: they may not fare well within the mainstream within which many important social, political, and economic goods are distributed. But these are not *ethico-epistemic* harms; however socially, politically, or economically unjust, being denied access to social, political and economic goods is not *epistemically* unjust. The epistemic injustice that hermeneutically marginalized (within the mainstream) subjects often suffer in ‘dark times’ stems primarily, not from the inability of either hermeneutically marginalized speakers or hermeneutically privileged hearers to understand the lives of *hermeneutically marginalized subjects*, it stems rather from the inability of hermeneutically privileged hearers to understand *their own* lives and the myriad ways in which their privilege has served to shape the social, political, economic, and epistemic circumstances surrounding them.

Charles Mills offers us a stark example of the kind of “privilege blindness” to which I’m referring in *The Racial Contract*, wherein the racially privileged (whites) sign on to “an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic

outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (Mills, 18). In other words, blindness to one’s own privilege, and here I’m highlighting epistemic privilege in the context of mainstream epistemic practices, often benefits those hermeneutically privileged, or in Mills’ case white, subjects both psychologically and socially – they may believe themselves to be, for instance, perfectly aware of their conditions, psychologically “whole” and socially adept – and yet render them epistemically impoverished in terms of understanding the world in which they live, and have at least in part helped to construct. Mills continues, “Part of what it means to be constructed as ‘white’...to become a white person...is [to adopt] a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities. To a significant extent, then, white signatories will live in an invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland... located in real space” (Mills, 18).

It is this kind of lack of self-transparency to which I’m referring, one that results in hermeneutically privileged hearers becoming unable even to adequately perceive, much less comprehend, themselves and the world(s) in which they live. And I’m suggesting that it is the lack of self-understanding that results from these compromised perceptual abilities on the part of privileged epistemic agents that lies at the heart of epistemic injustice. Such failures of perception (which are, as we have seen in the previous chapter, are failures of imagination) often result in false representations of one’s self in the public space of appearances – false insofar as they are not the faithful renderings of one’s self that a more perceptive, self-reflective epistemic agent would reveal in the public arena.

### **Conclusion**

When the self-images of privileged epistemic agents become distorted by the kind of privilege blindness outlined by Mills above, many of them tend to project images of themselves

that are overly optimistic, and corresponding images of underprivileged or oppressed epistemic agents that are unduly harsh. Further exacerbating this problem, these privilege-blind epistemic agents, just as Grossman and Arendt warn, often maintain their insularity by embarking on a process of severely restricting the scope of their vision so as to avoid being confronted by any evidence that contradicts their ‘false’ self-image. These actions are compounded when mainstream epistemic agents bring their social/ political/ economic power to bear in their attempts to police the boundaries of the appearances they deem fit for the *polis*, resulting in epistemic injustice. This kind of epistemic injustice is often motivated by the same things that motivate mainstream epistemic agents engage in misrepresentations of themselves within their own groups: they cannot rectify the ‘reality’ that confronts them with their own self-images, and so turn a blind eye to all appearances that serve to undermine them. In these cases a multitude of meanings are lost, and the very ‘reality’ of the public realm can become suspect.

While this particular brand of, perhaps entirely accidental, hypocrisy on the part of hermeneutically privileged subjects may not strike one as immediately threatening to hermeneutically marginalized subjects, if Arendt is right that, “...our feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence” (THC, 51) then what is threatened when appearances become false is in fact the “reality” that constitutes the public realm, within which epistemic agents can appear, bearing whichever meanings they carry with them from their multiple and varied social imaginaries. The reality is first corrupted by the hypocritical self-images mainstream epistemic agents project in the public arena. It is then compounded when those same epistemic agents turn a blind eye to the images projected by underprivileged or oppressed epistemic agents. In Arendtian terms, this corruption of appearances in the polis

resulting in 'dark times' amounts to a "loss of world," a tragedy almost unparalleled in her estimation, and one that, if it becomes widespread and/or long-lasting, can lead human beings into all manner of vice, epistemic and otherwise.

## Chapter 4

### A Lordian-Inspired Approach to Combatting Epistemic Injustice: More Poetry Than Prose

*There is a timbre of voice  
That comes from not being heard  
And knowing you are not being  
Heard noticed only  
By others not heard  
For the same reason  
-Audre Lorde, "Echoes"*

#### Introduction

In her interview with the poet Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde recalls an earlier telephone conversation she had with Rich during which Rich grew frustrated by Lorde's singular focus on attempting to articulate her 'intuitions'. Having trouble grasping just what Lorde sought to describe, Rich impatiently insisted that Lorde "document" her intuitions. Reflecting upon Rich's request during the interview, Lorde muses, "I've never forgotten the impatience in your voice that time on the telephone, when you said, 'It's not enough to say to me that you intuit it.' Do you remember? I will never forget that. Even at the same time that I understood what you meant, I felt a total wipeout of my modus, my way of perceiving and formulating" (SO, 103-4).

Rich initially objects to Lorde's characterization of her request for documentation as a 'wipeout of [Lorde's] modus', protesting that "There are times when I simply cannot assume that I know what you know, unless you show me what you mean" (SO, 104). But Lorde will have none of this. In the exchange that follows Lorde outlines a striking approach to combatting what we now refer to as epistemic injustice by identifying Rich's request for documentation as a paradigmatic instance of it. She begins by focusing on testimonial injustices, and proceeds to incorporate the ways in which hermeneutical injustice goes hand-in-hand with testimonial

injustice by revealing how both forms of epistemic injustice were present in her earlier encounter with Rich.

Throughout this process, Lorde leans heavily on important distinctions she draws between the epistemic practices of producing knowledges and arriving at understandings. Pointing out that Rich's aspiration to 'know what Lorde knows' is in many ways driven by a markedly different ethico-epistemic goal than Rich's desire to have Lorde 'show [Rich] what she means', Lorde distinguishes the former, which has to do with knowledge production, from the latter, which has to do with the task of coming to understand. Lorde's masterful grasp of these distinctions will be the focus of this chapter, for exploring them will illuminate a Lordian-inspired path toward combatting the problem of epistemic injustice along the lines of what we referred to in chapter two as the "testimonial track."

Lorde begins to draw the crucial distinctions between knowledge and understanding immediately following the above-recorded exchange. In asking Lorde to document her intuitions before Lorde had the chance even to articulate and begin really to perceive them, Rich was asking Lorde to embark upon a work of understanding before engaging, or continuing to engage, in the work of knowledge production. In rejecting Rich's request for documentation, Lorde was insisting upon her right to continue working in the vein of knowledge-production before tackling the markedly different task of understanding. As we will see, for Lorde much hinges on this point, for although the language of social epistemology was not yet available for Lorde to draw on at the time of the interview, Lorde was able nonetheless to recognize Rich's epistemic request as ethically suspect.

Careful to stake out the space within which her knowledge production practices can flourish, Lorde is intent on staving off the demand to make sense of them according to existing

mainstream frameworks of understanding – at least until she has the time adequately to articulate the knowledges she is in the process of producing. Lorde’s objection to Rich’s request for documentation was an attempt to carve out the space she needed to further explore her intuitions, and begin to articulate them so that they might form her knowledge. Countering Rich’s protestation that she ‘cannot know what [Lorde] knows unless [Lorde] shows [her] what she means’, Lorde explains, “But I’m used to associating a request for documentation as a questioning of my perceptions, an attempt to devalue what I’m in the process of discovering” to which Rich replies, “It’s not. Help me to perceive what you perceive. That’s what I’m trying to say to you” (SO, 104).

Lorde responds by beginning to draw out the distinctions between knowledge and understanding that will be our focus in this chapter. Tying perception to knowledge and documentation to understanding, Lorde critiques Rich’s request for documentation by clarifying: “But documentation does not help one perceive. At best it only analyzes the perception. At worst, it provides a screen by which to avoid concentrating on the core revelation, following it down to how it feels. Again, knowledge and understanding. They can function in concert, but they don’t replace each other” (SO, 104).

In this chapter we will review certain portions of the interview between Rich and Lorde in some detail in order to draw out the ways in which knowledge and understanding ‘function in concert’ but ‘don’t replace each other’. We will further examine what documentation, perception, analysis, revelation, and feeling have to do with each of these ethico-epistemic concepts. Once outlined, we will employ Lorde’s distinctions between knowledge and understanding in the service of identifying just how testimonial and hermenetical injustices also ‘function in concert’ yet remain two distinct subsets of the problem of epistemic injustice. We

will then look to Lorde's work as a guide to devising an effective response to the problem of epistemic injustice as a whole.

### **Part I - The Interview**

#### **Drawing Distinctions – Knowledge vs. Understanding, Perceiving vs. Documenting, Poetry vs. Prose**

In leveling the charge of “wiping out her modus...her way of perceiving and formulating” against Rich, Lorde attempts to explain just how Rich's request for documentation can be viewed as exemplary of what she refers to as “patriarchal thinking.” Such thinking involves “the worship of rationality and that circular, academic, analytic thinking” which, among other things, serves often to occlude the introduction of novel knowledges into public spaces (SO, 100). Although she finds such thinking useful, Lorde is adamant that it be put to use in the service of “the chaos of knowledge” (SO, 100). “Rationality is not unnecessary,” Lorde explains, “It serves the chaos of knowledge. It serves feeling. It serves to get from this place to that place. But if you don't honor those places, then the road is meaningless” (SO, 100).

For Lorde, rationality is a tool used to arrive at understandings: one comes to understand her experiences in the world by ‘documenting’ them, that is, by rationally constructing or reconstructing a framework of understanding within which those experiences begin to make a certain sense, or convey particular meanings. And just as rationality is a tool used to arrive at understandings, understanding is, on Lorde's account, also a tool. One engages in the project of understand in order to “build roads” between various ‘chaotic’ knowledges: “What understanding begins to do,” writes Lorde, “is to make knowledge available for use, and that's the urgency, that's the push, that's the drive” (SO, 109).

What understanding does *not* do, according to Lorde, is reveal a monolithic, immutable meaning-frameworks of understanding capable of circumscribing just what counts as knowledge



and why prior to the exchanges wherein knowledge is produced through the articulation of one's intuitions or perceptions. Lorde fights to retain certain hard-won knowledges, no matter how 'chaotic' they may seem from within existing meaning-frameworks of understanding, suggesting that often times the understanding framework within which those knowledges are judged might itself be in need a critique. In Lorde's view, when one's framework of understanding does not make an adequate sense out of the knowledges she is forming, she ought first to question, not the knowledges she is in the process of forming, but the meaning framework of understanding according to which those knowledges might be judged.

Let's return for a moment to the interview in order to flesh out this potentially gestalt-shifting insight: Early on in the interview, Rich asks Lorde about her relationship to language, especially with regard to the differences between her poetry and the prose works that Lorde was, at the time, really just beginning to write.<sup>48</sup> Lorde explains to Rich how poetry always came naturally to her, while prose took much longer and was much harder for her to master. In her poetry Lorde sought to "preserve [her] perceptions – pleasant or unpleasant, painful or whatever" so that they might begin to form the inner knowledge upon which she relied for her sense of self, and self-direction (SO, 81). In her prose works, Lorde aimed instead to 'document' those perceptions and thereby begin better to understand them. Poetry, in other words, was Lorde's

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<sup>48</sup> At the time of the interview, August 30, 1979, Lorde had already written some very powerful essays that would become landmark works for second wave feminists, including "Poetry is Not a Luxury" and "Uses of the Erotic." She would go on to contribute many more important essays following the interview. Additionally, at the time of the interview Lorde was in the process of writing what would become her "mythobiography" – *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name*. As we can see, Lorde was clearly already well on her way to becoming more comfortable with writing the prose that would prove central to feminist, race, and queer theorists for years to come when she paused to engage in the discussion with Rich recorded above. The interview, however, offered her a rare opportunity to reflect upon her progression toward making the knowledge she shared in her poetry 'available for use' by forming understandings in her prose works. The interview, therefore, provides a unique look into the thought processes that led Lorde to begin in earnest to perfect her prose form – and this thought process is what provides the fodder for our intervention into the problem of epistemic injustice along what we've identified as the testimonial track.

vehicle for conveying the perceptions of her experiences that would, upon reflection, form her knowledge, and prose was Lorde's vehicle for documenting those perceptions in such a way as to create a meaning-framework of understanding within which those perceptions-turned-knowledges could make a coherent sense.

Lorde learned to trust the language of poetry at a very young age, finding it capable of preserving, not only her 'perceptions' – perceptions that were often shot-through with some rather intense *feelings* – 'pleasant or unpleasant, painful or whatever', but also her very self. "I kept myself through feeling. I lived through it... When someone said to me, 'How do you feel?' ... I would recite a poem, and somewhere in that poem would be the feeling, the vital piece of information. It might be a line. It might be an image. The poem was my response" (SO, 81-2). Lorde goes on to explain how the language of prose took her longer to trust: "I was busy feeling out other ways of getting and giving information and whatever else I could because talking wasn't where it was at. People were talking all around me all the time – and not either getting or giving much that was useful to me" (SO, 81-2).

What Lorde had always found useful was to appeal to poetic imagery in order to identify and articulate her feelings, perceptions, and intuitions. Although she may not have walked around spouting poetry at every turn, Lorde was able to translate her poetic capabilities into a kind of everyday parlance. When attempting to initially articulate her intuitions, for instance, Lorde drew on the power of metaphor, and trusted in the familiar cadence and rhythms of her knowledge producing practices – which in her case began, as with her poetry, with attempts to put words to images, feelings, perceptions, or intuitions.

Where prose had failed Lorde was in its often all-too-conservative configurations of those images, feelings, perceptions, and intuitions into existing frameworks of understanding,

meaning-frameworks that seem to belie the knowledges that Lorde was still in the process of forming. And whenever Lorde was able to achieve the transformation of her intuitions, feelings, perceptions, into language, she found that the knowledges that these intuitions, feelings, perceptions created at times fared quite poorly when viewed from within existing frameworks of understanding. She explains:

**Lorde:** "...there were inescapable conclusions or convictions I had come to about my own life, my own feelings, that defied thought. And I wasn't going to let them go. I wasn't going to give them up. They were too precious to me. They were life to me. But I couldn't analyze or understand them because they didn't make the kind of sense I had been taught to expect through understanding. There were things I knew and couldn't say. And I couldn't understand them.

**Rich:** In the sense of being able to take them out, analyze them, defend them?

**Lorde:** ...write prose about them. Right...All I had was the sense that I had to hold on to these feelings and that I had to air them in some way.

**Rich:** But they were also being transformed into language.

**Lorde:** That's right. When I wrote something that finally had it, I would say it aloud and it would come alive, become real. It would start repeating itself and I'd know, that's struck, that's true. Like a bell. Something struck true. And there the words would be. (SO, 87-8)

At this point in the interview there are a couple of important things occurring: first, Lorde – together with Rich – is beginning in earnest to draw a conceptual dividing line between the ethico-epistemic concepts of knowledge and understanding. On the knowledge side of the divide, Lorde places such practices as airing one's feelings, transforming one's convictions or 'inescapable conclusions' into language, striking upon an apt word or phrase and repeating it in the imagination, and writing poetry. On the understanding side of the divide being drawn here we find such practices as engaging in dialectical conversations, thinking, analyzing one's knowledges and defending them, documenting, and speaking in prose. The second important thing to note about what's occurring in the above exchange is the fact that Lorde's interviewer, her old friend Adrienne Rich, is dynamically engaging with Lorde in a back-and-forth, give-and-take dialogue.

At this point in the interview Rich is able insightfully to recognize that some conclusions, convictions, perceptions, feelings, etc. may initially defy analysis, thought, or even documentation, particularly before they have been ‘transformed into language’. However by the time Lorde turns toward critiquing Rich’s prior, epistemically unjust, engagement with her on the telephone, Rich’s penetrating insights and observant recognitions come to an abrupt halt, and she grows defensive, unsure, and decidedly undiscerning. This shift from insightful interlocutor to perpetrator of epistemic injustice against Lorde is striking; but a short while later in the interview we find Rich herself, in particularly self-reflective and vulnerable moment, able eventually to diagnose what caused her aversive reaction to Lorde’s charge.

We will continue to explore the divide Lorde begins to draw here between knowledge and understanding in some detail in the coming pages. Doing so will not only help us better to appreciate just why Lorde reacted so strongly to Rich’s seemingly innocuous request for documentation in the way that she did. It will also help us to formulate a diagnosis of the problem of epistemic injustice that is uniquely useful for creatively combatting it along the lines of the “testimonial track.” But first, let’s turn to Rich’s pivotal flash of insight in regards to her earlier ethico-epistemic misstep by briefly reviewing key moments leading up to Rich’s insightful confession, followed by the confession itself.

### **Confessions of Resistance: Rich’s Self-Reflective Concession and What it Means**

Rich’s interview with Lorde is long and covers a wide array of topics, many of which have been addressed at length either in Lorde’s poetry, or the essays she had begun to write shortly before the interview. Since Lorde’s work had been generating quite a buzz among feminist thinkers at the time of the interview, Rich unsurprisingly asks about how some of Lorde’s works had been received among members of the various communities with which Lorde

self-identified. Rich hearkens back to a personal memory of Lorde participating in a poetry reading in the early 1970's "on the Upper West Side, [at] a coffeehouse at 72<sup>nd</sup> Street," where Lorde read "Love Poem" (SO, 98). Since "Love Poem" includes explicitly lesbian imagery, and since, in the early seventies, and perhaps particularly in Black communities, being an "out" lesbian was still a rarity, Rich recalls Lorde's reading with more than a touch of awe, explaining, "It was the first time I'd heard you read it...It was incredible. Like defiance. It was glorious" (SO, 98).

Lorde responds by first confirming that 'defiant' was exactly how she felt when reading the poem that day, "because as bad as it is now, the idea of open lesbianism in the Black community was...totally horrible" (SO, 99). As Lorde pauses to reflect upon the vulnerability she also felt while reading the poem, she clarifies some of the reasons why she felt particularly vulnerable reading the poem in the company of other Black women. She explains,

When a people share a common oppression, certain kinds of skills and joint defenses are developed. And if you survive you survive because those skills and defenses have worked. When you come into conflict over other existing differences, there is a vulnerability to each other which is desperate and very deep. And that is what happens between Black men and women because we have certain weapons we have perfected together that white women and men have not shared... When you share a common oppression you have certain additional weapons against each other because you've forged them in secret together against a common enemy. It's a fear that I'm still not free of and that I remember all the time when I deal with other Black women: the fear of the ex-comrade. (SO, 99)

Immediately following this exchange, Rich inquires into certain accusations that she knows have been leveled at Lorde for "restating the old stereotype of the rational white male and the emotional dark female" which leads Lorde to reflect on how difficult it can be to formulate certain knowledges when the meaning-frameworks within which they might make the kinds of sense she aims to create simply do not yet exist (SO, 100). She explains, "I do think that we have been taught to think, to codify information in certain old ways, to learn, to understand in certain

ways. The possible shapes of what has not been before exist only in that back place, where we keep those unnamed, untamed longings for something different and beyond what is now called possible, and to which our understanding can only build roads” (SO, 101).

It was in the wake of these reflections that Rich ventured into the realm of the epistemically unjust, which begins with Lorde’s reminiscence about the telephone conversation wherein Rich demanded ‘documentation’ for the intuitions she was just beginning to form. After Lorde explains that Rich’s request left her feeling “a total wipeout of my modus, my way of perceiving and formulating,” Rich objects,

**Rich:** “Yes, but it’s not a wipeout of your modus. Because I don’t think my modus is unintuitive, right? And one of the crosses I’ve borne all my life is being told that I’m rational, logical, cool - I am not cool, and I’m not rational and logical in that icy sense. But there’s a way in which, trying to translate from your experience to mine, I do need to hear chapter and verse from time to time. I’m afraid of it all slipping away into: “Ah, yes, I understand you.”...There are times when I simply cannot assume that I know what you know, unless you show me what you mean.

The first problem with Rich’s response is that she fails to acknowledge Lorde’s *feeling* about how Rich had undermined her ‘way of perceiving and formulating’ by denying that she had called Lorde’s ‘modus’ into question at all. The second problem with Rich’s response is that she insists that in order for her to acknowledge the intuitions Lorde had been attempting to articulate, and accept them as the nascent knowledges that they were, she would require Lorde to accompany her nascent knowledge articulations with explanations or justifications of their *meanings*. It is at this point that, as described above, Lorde objects and begins to draw out the differences between the ethico-epistemic practice of producing knowledges, and the practice of arriving at understandings.

In order better to appreciate Lorde's later remarks regarding the distinctions she makes between knowledge and understanding, let's return to where we left off of the above exchange for more from Lorde on this:

**Lorde (cont.):** At certain stages that request for documentation is a blinder, a questioning of my perceptions. Someone once said to me that I hadn't documented the goddess in Africa, the woman bond that moves throughout *The Black Unicorn*. I had to laugh. I'm a poet, not a historian. I've shared my knowledge, I hope. Now you go document it if you wish. I don't know about you, Adrienne, but I have a difficult enough time making my perceptions verbal, tapping that deep place, forming that handle, and documentation at that point is often useless. Perceptions precede analysis just as visions precede actions or accomplishments. It's like getting a poem..." (SO, 104-5)

Lorde uncharacteristically lets her thoughts trail off here and returns later, as we have already begun to see, to take up this thread about the possible link between perceptions, visions, and 'getting a poem'. But at this point Lorde goes on to explain how she's had to fight her whole life to preserve her "perceptions of how things are...in the face of tremendous opposition and cruel judgment," which at times caused her to question her own "perceptions and interior knowledge" (SO, 105).

It is at this point in the interview that Rich finally concedes that there was more to her request for "chapter and verse" during their earlier telephone conversation than she had been willing to admit. Rich confesses, "I've had great resistance to some of your perceptions. They can be very painful to me. Perceptions about what goes on between us, what goes on between Black and white people, what goes on between Black and white women. So it's not that I can just accept your perceptions unblinkingly. Some of them are very hard for me" (SO, 105). I submit that Rich's initial resistance to accepting Lorde's perceptions 'unblinkingly' has much to do with both forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.

In order better to see how Rich's request for documentation was epistemically unjust, we will return once again to the distinctions Lorde draws between knowledge and understanding. As

will soon become clear, there is an intimate relationship between the ethico-epistemic practices of knowledge production and the generation of understandings, and the ethico-epistemic failures involved in instances of testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. By reviewing Lorde's account of the ways in which Rich's request struck Lorde as epistemically unjust, we will begin to see just why Lorde chose what we referred to in chapter two as the 'testimonial track' in her attempts to combat the problem of epistemic injustice as she understood it. In order more fully to appreciate the richness of Lorde's unique approach to the problem of epistemic injustice, we will subsequently turn briefly to Gail Polhaus' recent work on the problem of testimonial injustice. Polhaus' work will help to clarify, and in some ways even redefine, the problem in ways that highlight the genius of Lorde's response to it.

## **Part II - The Interview**

### **Taking Steps: On the Roles of Trust, Imagination, and Novelty in Combatting Epistemic Injustice**

Lorde highlights one of the most insidious aspects of what we now refer to as epistemic injustice when she explains that, "The way you get people to testify against themselves is not to have police tactics and oppressive techniques. What you do is build it in so people learn to distrust everything in themselves that has not been sanctioned, to reject what is most creative in themselves to begin with, so you don't even need to stamp it out" (SO, 102). When meaning-frameworks of understanding are viewed as "sanctioning" frameworks – delimiting what counts as knowledge and why prior to certain attempts at knowledge production – they render certain testimony unintelligible or "irrational" from the outset. This makes it incredibly difficult to bring new knowledges – knowledges that don't fit into existing meaning-frameworks – into public places wherein mainstream meaning-frameworks of understanding reign over knowledge producing practices.



This insight is part and parcel of what Lorde's famous dictum that "the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house" is all about. As Lorde explains,

It means different tools in language, different tools in the exchange of information, it means different tools in learning. It means that we use the tools of rationality, but we do not elevate it to the point that it is no longer connected to our lives. It means that we do not require from each other the kinds of narrow and restricted interpretations of learning and the exchange of knowledge that we suffered in the universities or that we suffered in the narrow academic structures. It means that we recognize that, while we are functioning in the old power, because we must know those tools, we cannot be ignorant of them, we are also in the process of redefining a new power, which is the power of the future. (CWAL, 151-2)

This turn toward what might become a redefined, new power, 'the power of the future', stands behind Lorde's desire to stake out new ground upon which the knowledges she aims to convey may grow and flourish.

Not content to accept an epistemic status quo that she knows all too well can smother attempts to convey novel knowledges, Lorde pushes back on the notion that only certain predetermined, mainstream meaning-frameworks of understanding can 'sanction' one's descriptions of her experiences such that those descriptions can rise to the level of being considered knowledge-conveying. What counts as knowledge and why, is, in other words, never a closed question for Lorde. And it is the right to convey one's intuitions without requiring that they fit neatly into existing meaning-frameworks of understanding for which Lorde fights. "I...think that we have been taught to think, to codify information in certain old ways, to learn, to understand in certain ways," writes Lorde. She then acknowledges how impoverished these 'old ways' of understanding will remain unless they are questioned, challenged, and expanded to include novel knowledges. She explains that, "The possible shapes of what has not been before exist only in that back place where we keep those unnamed, untamed longings for something

different and beyond what is now called possible, and to which our understanding can only build roads” (SO, 101).

### **The Primacy of Knowledge-Production Practices In Lorde’s Approach**

To import these insights regarding the ‘road-building’ nature of understanding into our discussion of the above recorded exchange between Rich and Lorde, we might say that in rejecting Rich’s demand to ‘document’ her intuitions, Lorde is attempting to carve out the space within which novel knowledges might begin to find a fit home in a meaning-framework of understanding that can make a new kind of sense of them. Lorde is continually challenging Rich throughout the interview to move beyond the circular, analytic thinking that characterizes so much of academic discourse. And all the while Lorde is articulating a view of the nature of the relationship between knowledge and understanding that privileges the process of coming to know over the process of coming to understand.

Put within the framework outlined in chapter two, we can say that throughout this important interview, Lorde is describing what it means to pursue what we referred to as the “testimonial track.” She is engaged in the task of articulating her perceptions of her experiences, which will constitute her knowledge. She is offering novel images of her experiences by painting of pictures through words. The images she creates, if acknowledged as part of a meaningful framework of understanding by herself and others, will become part of the ‘economy of credibility’ according to which other images can be judged.

Lorde may, for instance, describe an experience she has had, like the experience of perceiving her relationship with a partner as “precious to both [partners...and something both] were still committed to build” (Zami, 231). In the context of a meaning framework wherein such an image makes sense – one wherein both partners really are committed to building their

relationship, and counting it ‘precious’ – other perceptions can be judged against this perception. If one’s committed partner stays up late talking to an ex on her living room couch, considered from within the context of a meaning-framework of understanding about one’s relationship that includes the image of it being ‘precious’ and something both partners are committed to build, this experience will be perceived, not as a threat to the relationship but instead as simply a chat between friends. If one perceives it as anything other than a harmless chat between friends, since that perception does not fit well with one’s other perceptions of her relationship, it is judged erroneous and perhaps then simply dismissed as a non-credible perception or a *misperception*.

This ability to judge other perceptions according to one’s knowledge – which is constituted by the perceptions one holds as in some way “firm” – allows us to make sense of our experiences. The framework of understanding we have constructed out of those perceptions we hold as firm offers a way to make sense of new perceptions. Whenever we see an experience as a certain type of experience – say, as a harmless chat between friends – insofar as that perception does not contradict or in some way call into question one’s firmly held perceptions it is generally accepted as a credible perception and not a *misperception*. However, as Lorde points out, if one holds one’s meaning-frameworks of understanding to be somehow beyond revision, then she will likely begin to contort the logic of her meaning-framework into all manner of striking shapes in order to make sense of certain perceptions that don’t fit well within such a meaning-framework. Lorde suggests that instead of engaging in such logic-bending understanding practices, we might be better served by allowing our perceptions of our experiences to call into question the very meaning-frameworks according to which they are initially perceived.

In describing the betrayal she suffered when her former partner Muriel cheated on her with her ex on the couch where she had left them locked in conversation the night before, Lorde

conveys the shock of having to reassess one's meaning-framework of understanding. She writes of waking "with a start in horror and disbelief" to the sound of her partner's and her ex's love-making (Zami, 231). Even though "the muffled sounds coming from the next room were unmistakable," Lorde's brain (and heart) balked at accepting her present perception of the experience she was having, listening to what was occurring in the next room. She had to form the words that would offer the truest image of what she was experiencing slowly, deliberately. "Muriel. Muriel and Jill were making love on the middle-room couch. I lay rigid, trying not to hear, trying not to be awake or there at all, trapped like some wild animal...NO EXIT" (Zami, 231).

In disbelief, Lorde had to repeat the words to herself all throughout the next day, as if to make sure that she really did experience what she experienced. Looking out of her kitchen window at the signs of the dawning season, Lorde thought to herself that, "Spring was coming on inexorably and Muriel had slept with Jill on our middle-room couch a few hours ago" (Zami, 232). In what followed Lorde's acceptance of this gestalt-altering perception of the nature of her relationship with Muriel, there was what Lorde describes as a "very guarded and tender" silence between them in regards to the infidelity, "as if [they] were both acknowledging with [their] silence what was irretrievable" (Zami, 233). Ultimately, there proved no way to bridge the distance between them with new understandings of their relationship that might at once provide a new home for their perceptions of their experiences that can make a tolerable sense of them, and to save the relationship from ending. Lorde describes how, "What was lying between us had moved beyond our old speech, and we were both too lost and too frightened to attempt a new language" (Zami, 233-4).

To attempt the creation of a new meaning-framework of understanding is akin to what Lorde piercingly perceived as necessary for maintaining her relationship with Muriel – it is like ‘attempt[ing] a new language’, as Lorde so aptly put it. Lorde’s and Muriel’s need for a new language lay in the fact that their old framework of understanding could not make an adequate sense of their new experiences. The very meanings of words, basic words, even oft used and seldom reflected upon shorthand words and phrases – the kind that can so beautifully and easily crop up between lovers and intimate friends – no longer quite fit the feelings that Lorde and Muriel originally coined them to convey. As the fact of their estrangement from, not only each other, but also their former selves – themselves as well-loved, and one half of a committed, and happy relationship – dawned on Lorde, the feelings that accompanied the fact struck true long before the meaning of it all did. She found herself lamenting, “My heart knew what my head refused to understand. Our life together was over” (Zami, 235).

Unable to construct a new meaning-framework of understanding with Muriel, one capable of making a sense out of their newfound relationship to each other with which both could live, Lorde determined that she must construct a new meaning-framework of understanding on her own. This new meaning-framework of understanding would need restore her sense of self, and make a new sense of the world that better fit the new facts of her life. Ever mindful of the cost that alterations to one’s meaning-framework of understanding might have, Lorde appreciates the fact that in order to maintain the meaning-framework of understanding that she can constructed with Muriel, she would need to change her self-conception and begin to view herself in a new light. Lorde remarks, “This was the second time in my life that something intolerable was happening; I could do nothing to affect it, nothing to help myself in it. I could do

nothing to encompass it, nor to alter it. I was too beside myself to consider altering me” (Zami, 236).

Ultimately, a change to Lorde’s self-conception or self-definition would prove impossible to avoid. Whenever one’s perceptions of her experiences in the world prompt her to make substantial changes to the ways in which she views the world – changes to the meaning-frameworks of understanding according to which she makes sense of it – many identities are suddenly on the line, including her own. When one’s love is lost, she is no longer one half of a loving, committed relationship, and as her framework of understanding adjusts to compass this fact, her self-definition is inevitably altered. Whether she may retain the status of one ‘well-loved’ (by others) and happy remains to be seen. Regardless, she becomes, in certain concrete ways another self – redefined. This fact recently hit home for me, when my father died. As I adjusted my new meaning-framework of understanding to incorporate this new knowledge – knowledge of the fact of my father’s death – I was surprised (although I probably should not have been) by the fact that those adjustments had, in some important ways, changed my self-definition. I am not now one with a father from whom she is estranged, but one without a father – an “orphan” of sorts.

Of course not all one’s experiences in the world prompt changes to their meaning-frameworks of understanding in such fundamental and devastating ways. Nonetheless, the potential for trauma is ever-present when epistemic agents attempt to incorporate new knowledges into their existing meaning-frameworks of understanding. And it is for this reason that so many, so often, fail to the hard work of *seeing* – perceiving uncomfortable truths, feeling difficult feelings, intuiting things one would rather not know – these are all potential pitfalls for

one committed to articulating her perceptions, intuitions, feelings, and thereby embarking on the ethico-epistemic task of producing new knowledges.

Although Adrienne Rich appears not to have ever fully appreciated just what it was that Lorde was on about in regards to their earlier telephone conversation in their interview, she was at least able to begin to grapple with the fact that her resistance to Lorde's intuitions was grounded in fear. Rich admits to the fearing Lorde's perceptions because "they can be very painful to me," and because "some of them are very hard for me" (SO, 105). While this confession may offer a starting-point for Rich to begin to reflect further on the harm she can (and did) cause by attempting to silence other's nascent knowledges whenever the perceptions that might lead to those knowledges are too painful or simply too difficult to accept, Rich's confession alone simply does not go far enough.

While Miranda Fricker is right to suggest that the perpetrators of the harms of epistemic injustice are the ones who should be held most accountable for combatting it, she also acknowledges how incremental improvements on this front might be. As Rich's responses to Lorde in the interview suggest, Fricker is right to harbor concerns over this issue. However, as Lorde's responses to Rich indicate, there is much room for hope in looking to hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agents for insights into combatting the problem of epistemic injustice. As in previous chapters, I want here to stress that this fact in no way translates into a license to hold those suffering most from the harms of epistemic injustice accountable for overcoming it. However, since there have been many voices issuing from positions of hermeneutical marginalization throughout the history of the spoken and written word, I do want to suggest that we all (whether as perpetrators or sufferers of epistemic injustices) would do well to honor those

voices by simply listening to the wisdom they may offer in regards to such problems as epistemic injustice.

Before we conclude with our review of the ethico-epistemic insights we can glean from the interview between Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde, I'd like to review some of Lorde's own exhortations and conclusions about the project of combatting epistemic injustice, and then apply them to instances wherein hermeneutically *privileged* epistemic agents might find themselves suffering from certain forms of epistemic injustice. We will draw on recent work by the social epistemologist Gail Polhaus in order to draw out the ways in which questions of identity lay at the heart of the problem of epistemic injustice.

Although Fricker does agree that at bottom both forms of epistemic injustice result from identity prejudices, her gross misrepresentation of the possible agency a hermeneutically marginalized epistemic agent may possess renders her analysis of the role identity prejudices play in epistemic injustice rather skewed. I argue that Polhaus offers us a better account of the role identity prejudices play in epistemic injustices. While this corrective to Fricker's account will not leave us with hard and fast rules to apply to instances of epistemic injustice, it will serve to better situate the problem itself, and highlight the insights about self-identity offered by Lorde – some of which have been shared above.

### **Revealing Novel Knowledges and Making Senses That Are New**

Reflecting on the daunting challenge of revealing something *new* – some new bit of knowledge, or a unique way of making a new sense out of certain knowledges, Lorde insists that women are especially skilled at “birthing” these nascent ‘possible shapes of what has not been before.’ That women are the bearers and the bringers of new things. She confides to Rich:

That the human race is evolving through women...I believe that this power exists in men also but they choose not to deal with it...But I'm not saying that women don't think or



analyze. Or that white does not feel. I'm saying that we must never close our eyes to the terror, to the chaos which is Black which is creative which is female which is dark which is rejected which is messy which is... [Rich jumps in here and offers, "Sinister..." which Lorde accepts, continuing] sinister, smelly, erotic, confused, upsetting... (SO, 101)

Having been taught to understand according to mainstream senses of understanding that belied her own knowledge, Lorde is eager to convey her conviction that there are times when attempts to articulate 'the possible shapes of what has not been before' must precede attempts to discover, or if necessary, *create*, the meaning-frameworks within which they can begin to make the kinds of sense one aims to generate. Lorde insists that in order for "that knowledge deeply born" to make its appearance in public and perhaps even to thrive there, one must be willing first to *see*, perceive, *feel* – in other words to know, for oneself (SO, 56). This ethico-epistemic task will require at least some kind of articulation – the knowledge must be shared, even if only to an "other self" within that silent inner dialogue we call 'thinking' – before it can truly be known, on Lorde's account.

These articulations of one's knowledges are both ethical and epistemic imperatives for Lorde – to acknowledge one's own inner knowledge, especially in the face of tremendous opposition to it, is nothing short of a duty for her – incumbent on all who find themselves somehow able to do it. As is the task of sharing at least some of that knowledge with others to, "speak those truths for which [we are] still seeking... [making] contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences" (SO, 41). Lorde seeks to create the space for new concepts, ideas, images, in short new knowledges, by measuring the adequacy of various modes or methods of understanding according to their ability to make a useful kind of sense out of the novel knowledges with which Lorde simply will not part.

Instead of attempting to align her knowledge with existing “meaning structures,” many of which are quite antithetical to the ‘chaotic’ knowledges Lorde vows never again to ‘close her eyes to,’ Lorde seeks either to find, or if necessary, to *create* the kinds of public spaces that will allow for the expression of those knowledges so deep and so ‘dark’ that they appear to many to threaten the destruction of mainstream or “traditional” meaning structures, or methods of understanding, and which they therefore attempt prejudicially to rule out.

While acknowledging the importance of understanding, Lorde insists that it for it to be useful and not restrictively narrow, it must grow out of ‘that knowledge deeply born’ of experience. Such knowledge, particularly when born of the experiences of marginalized actors, is not always in accord with certain preconceived methods understanding. In fact, often times “the chaos of knowledge” derived from the life experiences of marginalized epistemic agents can be so discordant with mainstream methods understanding that it cannot even be perceived as knowledge.

### **Part III: On the Role of Identity Prejudices in the Problem of Epistemic Injustice**

Mirana Fricker indicates that in the case of testimonial injustice, it is the group identity of the speaker, not the content of her testimony, that is unfairly judged, and in the case of hermeneutical injustice, it is either the content of one’s testimony, or the way in which she delivers that content, that is judged unfairly. However, I would argue that should a marginalized epistemic agent offer testimony that either leaves unchallenged, or even outright supports, the understanding of mainstream epistemic agents, her testimony is unlikely to be prejudicially negatively assessed – regardless of her group identity. For instance: a Black person testifying to the criminality of another Black person may well find her credibility *positively* assessed by the police, even though, as Fricker points out, due to widespread epistemic injustice often times “the

police [may] not believe you because you are black” (1). In other words, so long as one’s testimony does not disrupt mainstream sensibilities or challenge mainstream understandings, the credibility of her specific knowledge claims may be positively assessed, even if she belongs to an epistemically marginalized group, calling into question Fricker’s assertion that in cases of testimonial injustice it is the speaker’s group identity that leads to the epistemic harm.

This is not to suggest that identity prejudices play no role in the problem of testimonial injustice, for identity prejudices are indeed very much a part of them. However, instead of playing a causal role, as Fricker suggests, I submit that in cases of testimonial injustice, identity prejudices serve as evidential support – either in favor of or against certain knowledge claims. In other words, when testimonial injustice is present, one’s membership in an epistemically marginalized group may (unjustly) count as evidence against the credibility of her knowledge claims, but cannot on its own determine whether any of her individual knowledge claims should be considered credible or non-credible.

Treating their testimony like a broken clock that is right at least twice daily (depending on whether one uses a 12 or a 24 hour clock), mainstream epistemic agents may come to expect that epistemically marginalized speakers may, from time to time, offer reliable testimony. Unlike the clock, however, such speakers, pace Fricker, retain at least some of their status as epistemic subjects; for even when epistemic injustice is most rampant, they are not completely objectified. Marginalized epistemic agents may, for instance, possess the capacity, not only to articulate or testify to certain facts about the world, but also to offer evidence in support of their testimony. The clock strikes one but cannot say how or why or what the hour might mean; but a marginalized epistemic agent, regardless of how discounted or ignored her words might be, may yet give an account of her descriptions or testimony regarding her perceptions of her

experiences.<sup>49</sup> In other words, while epistemic objects might reasonably be characterized as offering descriptions of certain facts about the world (i.e. that it is one o'clock), they cannot sensibly be viewed as making sense of, or understanding it. The same cannot be said for marginalized epistemic agents.

### **Derivatized Epistemic Subjects – Polhaus' Approach**

Gail Polhaus, drawing on the work of Anne Cahill, brilliantly explicates this important point in her challenge to Fricker's assessment that marginalized epistemic agents are treated as 'objects' and not 'subjects' in her essay on "Discerning the Primary Epistemic Harm in Cases of Testimonial Injustice."<sup>50</sup> Polhaus convincingly argues that epistemically marginalized speakers are "derivatized" epistemic subjects, insisting that their epistemic agency, while truncated, is not entirely destroyed. They are instead epistemic "others" or

semi-subjects whose sole purpose is to provide epistemic support for navigating the experienced world of those deemed subjects. In this relation, those persons treated as 'other' serve to recognize and maintain epistemic practices that make sense of the world as experienced from dominant subjectivities, but do not receive the same epistemic support with regard to their distinct lived experiences in the world. (105)

This means that whenever a derivatized epistemic subject testifies 'with regard to their distinct lived experiences in the world,' insofar as her testimony regarding those experiences represents a departure from mainstream testimonial accounts of mainstream experiences in the world, she is likely to find little evidential support that meets mainstream criteria for what counts as evidence in favor of her descriptions of her experiences – for her own testimony, as well as *any* testimony that calls into question mainstream accounts of mainstream experiences, will automatically be deemed unreliable according to mainstream methods of arriving at understanding.

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<sup>49</sup> The successes of such descriptions rely on whether the speaker is able, first to make sense of her knowledge to herself, and sometimes also on her ability to make sense to others, both of which practices can often prove challenging.

<sup>50</sup> "Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy", published online November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Curiously, this also means that whenever a *mainstream* epistemic agent testifies ‘with regard to their distinct lived experiences in the world,’ insofar as *their* testimony calls into question the bulk of mainstream testimony regarding mainstream experiences in the world, they too will suffer a dearth of evidential support that meets mainstream criteria for what counts as evidence. In other words, if it is the *content* of one’s testimony that triggers negative credibility assessments and not identity prejudices, then what Fricker is calling testimonial injustice begins to look less like an actual injustice and more like a healthy skepticism towards certain types of testimony. But before we jump to dismiss the problem of testimonial injustice as a chimera, let’s assume that Polhaus is right in her assertion that “Identifying the kind of information stymied in testimonial injustice allows us to highlight the structural aspects of testimonial injustice without losing sight of the fact that it is an injustice, something that Fricker herself claims that her model cannot do” (109). This turn toward the structural aspects of testimonial injustice lies at the heart of what Polhaus is eager to (and expertly does) convey in her essay: the fact that while identity prejudices play a key role in both forms of epistemic injustice, in the case of testimonial injustice, that role is not a causal, but an explanatory one.

In the case of hermeneutical injustice, I believe that Fricker is correct to conclude that identity prejudices play a causal role. However in the case of testimonial injustice that is not necessarily the case. In fact, I would be so bold as to suggest that in cases of hermeneutical injustice, identity prejudices are both a necessary and a sufficient cause of it. Any gaps in hermeneutical resources not predicated on identity prejudices would not count as instances of hermeneutical injustice, which makes identity prejudice a necessary condition for hermeneutical injustice. And prejudices against another *qua* social type is, in the case of hermeneutical

injustice, sufficient reason to bar any new content into the hermeneutical resources of a community that might conflict with mainstream testimonials to mainstream experiences.

For instance, if I hold an identity prejudice against you because of your social type, I might strenuously object to allowing your evidence that that prejudice is unfounded into the social imaginary that constitutes our shared hermeneutical resources. However, in the case of testimonial injustice, identity prejudice is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause for it. Instead, identity prejudices manifested in unwarranted negative credibility assessments are among the “master tools,” which he uses to maintain the systematic epistemic marginalization of certain speakers – namely those persistently offering testimony that either challenges or simply does not sit well with mainstream knowledges and understandings in communities where hermeneutical injustice exists, regardless of the speaker’s social, political, or economic status.

### **Identity Prejudices and Mainstream Epistemic Agents**

We can begin to see this more clearly by returning to the case of the mainstream epistemic agent whose testimony runs against the grain of mainstream epistemic experiences. For instance, if a middle-to-upper class, white, heterosexual male testifies to the continued existence of Jim Crow Laws in the U.S. in the form of unjust policing and incarceration practices aimed at dominating Black bodies, he may well find himself a victim of testimonial injustice. While his mainstream group identity may shield him from immediate dismissal as an incompetent knower for a time, should he persist in testifying against the grain, additional steps might be taken against him by those invested in maintaining what they perceive to be the integrity of the boundaries between what counts as knowledge and who counts as a credible giver of it. He may, for instance, find himself disqualified as a member of mainstream epistemic groups by virtue of the fact that he is now viewed as a “race traitor.” His subsequent testimony

would then be prejudicially negatively assessed by virtue of his group identity as a ‘race traitor,’ making him a victim of testimonial injustice.<sup>51</sup>

If this account is correct, then whenever one articulates her experiences or ‘verbalizes her perceptions’ in communities wherein hermeneutical injustice exists, she opens herself to the possibility of testimonial injustice whenever those descriptions depart from and/ or call into question mainstream testimony regarding mainstream experiences in the world. If one belongs to an epistemically marginalized group, her group identity will count as evidence against the reliability of her descriptions in cases of testimonial injustice whenever those descriptions undermine mainstream descriptions. If one belongs to an epistemically mainstream group, she places her epistemic group identity on the line whenever her descriptions of experiences in the world depart significantly from mainstream descriptions of the world. “Evidence” of her unworthiness to remain in an epistemically mainstream group mounts with every such description, until eventually she comes to be regarded as an ‘honorary’ member of the epistemically marginalized group with whose testimony hers more closely aligns.

Once this rebranding occurs, even previously epistemically mainstream actors can suffer testimonial injustice, for their honorary status as a member of an epistemically marginalized group can then be deployed against them in the form of testimonially unjust prejudicially negative credibility assessments. As circular as this logic is, I submit that just such ‘logic’ is in fact in play in hermeneutically unjust communities, making hermeneutical injustice the driver of testimonial injustice. It is upon the scaffolding of hermeneutically unjust social imaginaries,

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<sup>51</sup> I am not at all trying to equate the gravity or even violence of these instances of testimonial injustice against mainstream epistemic agents with the severity of the harms perpetrated against marginalized epistemic agents whose testimony is so often unfairly judged. I’m simply suggesting that the intensity with which the content of certain testimony is denied a fair hearing, or even any hearing at all, may in some cases cause testimonial injustice to cross over boundaries of race, sex, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

wherein epistemically prejudicial images of certain identity groups lie, that the identity prejudices involved in testimonial injustice are built.

### **Conclusion: More Poetry Than Prose**

When asked to address the charge of “simply restating the old stereotype of the rational white male and the emotional dark female,” in her work, Lorde addresses the sterility of “the worship of rationality and that circular, academic, analytic thinking” aimed at silencing “different” or novel knowledges or ways of knowing (SO, 100). She explains, “If you’re traveling a road that begins nowhere and ends nowhere, the ownership of that road is meaningless. Leaving rationality to the white man is like leaving him a piece of that road that begins nowhere and ends nowhere” (SO, 100). Resisting the usual “think/feel dichotomy” in favor of “a choice of ways and combinations,” Lorde acknowledges, “Rationality is not unnecessary. It serves the chaos of knowledge. It serves feeling. It serves to get from this place to that place. But if you don’t honor those places, then the road is meaningless” (SO, 100).

The only way to break out of these limited and limiting circular ways of thinking is to allow the content of one’s thought to dictate the road to its comprehension instead of deploying a static set of meaning structures by which all content must be understood. It was poetry that allowed Lorde, not only to articulate and thereby come to know and feel her perceptions of her experiences, it also illuminated paths toward understanding them that might otherwise have remained unseen. Lorde explains, “I had a very emotional relationship with poetry when I was young because I was very inarticulate. I didn’t speak...I couldn’t stutter because I got hit if I stuttered. So writing was the next best thing...I used to get stoned on poetry when I was a kid. When life got just too difficult for me, I could always retreat into those words. If they didn’t exist I made them up...So poetry is very important to me in terms of survival” (CWAL, 35-6). In



reflecting further on her childhood self, Lorde exclaims, “That child didn’t understand anything at all, but she knew a great deal... In those days when I could not afford to know what I was feeling, I wrote a great deal. In that way I could write down what I was feeling and it stood me in good stead” (CWAL, 37).

Learning the role of understanding came later to Lorde than learning the role of knowledge, especially self-knowledge, did. This makes a beautiful kind of sense to me, considering the fact that, on her own account Lorde’s very first language was poetry, and she only undertook the task of honing her prose skills later in life, in what I imagine was a rather arduous act of love. For that place ‘where knowing and understanding mesh’ has, for Lorde, *everything* to do with the place where poetry and prose meet: the explicit goal of Lorde’s prose works was to provide a framework of understanding within which she might make the knowledges revealed in her poetry ‘available for use’. Make no mistake; Lorde’s first and truest love was love of “the Black mother in each of us, the poet” (SO, 100). But by the time she wrote her first long prose piece, her “Autobiomythography” called *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name*, she was committed to the process of coming to “understand what [she] knew and also mak[ing] it available to others” (SO, 109).

Reflecting on the intimately connected practices of articulating one’s perceptions, or identifying and revealing one’s knowledge; and making sense of, or coming to understand that knowledge – one could say, ‘documenting’ it – in ways that help facilitate one’s own and others’ understandings of it, Lorde muses, “Inseparable processes now. But for me, I had to know I knew it first – I had to feel” (SO, 109). Just as describing a work of art helps one to really see it, so too does acknowledging one’s knowledge (‘I had to know that I knew it first’) help one to feel its import (‘– I had to feel’). Importantly, Lorde relegates the role of understanding, through

analysis, translation, and evaluation, to a secondary status – insisting on the primacy of description / acknowledgment in knowledge producing practices. She explains, “understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge deeply born” (SO, 56).

Case in point: when Adrienne Rich demanded ‘documentation’ from Lorde in support of the perceptions Lorde had been trying to articulate to her, she was asking Lorde to provide evidential support for her descriptions of her experiences in the world. But Lorde, knowing all-too-well that the only testimony that would count as rising to the level of credible evidence was testimony that corroborated mainstream experiences in the world, adroitly maneuvered around Rich’s request. If she had conceded to Rich’s demand for ‘documentation’ before having taken the opportunity simply to articulate her experiences – both to herself and to Rich – in order for them both to better perceive them, Lorde would have had to edit her descriptions of her experiences in order to make them fit the only evidence that counted if she wanted to render them intelligible to Rich: they would need not to call into question mainstream experiences of the world. In other words, Lorde would have had to lie in order for her testimony to be considered intelligible, for her truths simply would not fit that mold.

Lorde is wary of being roped into attempting to explain, justify, or make sense of her experiences in the world before taking the time to really *perceive* and begin to know them. By giving herself room to articulate her experiences without attempting to fit them into any pre-formed meaning-frameworks, Lorde is giving them primacy of place: she tries to stay true to her experiences, letting them suggest new ways of understanding instead of putting understanding first, and describing her experiences only in ways that do not call into question mainstream methods of understanding of the world.

By requiring 'documentation' up front, Rich was asking Lorde to represent her perceptions in an orderly fashion, according to the lights of mainstream methods of understanding. But Lorde instead insisted on generating her own light, and found poetry to offer the truest way of forming it: "This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are – until the poem – nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding" (SO, 36). In refusing to 'document' her perceptions before taking the time to know or feel them through the poetic process of describing them, Lorde attempts to set right what she sees as an inverted epistemic order: she places the practice of articulating knowledges ahead of the practice of making sense of, or coming to understand it. In other words, in the battle against epistemic injustice, Lorde seems to suggest that what's initially needed may be more poetry than prose.

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