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Epistemic Injustice: A Role for Recognition?

My aim in this paper is to propose that an insightful way of articulating the feminist concept of epistemic injustice can be provided by paying significant attention to recognition theory. The paper intends to provide an account for diagnosing epistemic injustice as a social pathology and also attempts to paint a picture of some social cure of structural forms of epistemic injustice. While there are many virtues to the literature on epistemic injustice, epistemic exclusion, and silencing, current discourse on diagnosing as well as explicating and overcoming these social pathologies can be improved and enriched by bringing recognition theory into the conversation: under recognition theory, social normative standards are constructed out of the moral grammar of recognition attributions. I shall argue that the failure to properly recognise and afford somebody or a social group the epistemic respect they merit is an act of injustice in the sense of depriving individuals of a *progressive* social environment in which the epistemic respect afforded to them plays a significant role in enabling and fostering their self-confidence as a rational enquirer. Testimonial injustice is particularly harrowing, because it robs a group or individual of their status as a rational enquirer, thereby creating an asymmetrical cognitive environment in which they are not deemed one's conversational peer. Hermeneutical injustice is particularly harrowing, because asymmetrical cognitive environments further entrench the normative power of ideology.

I

The concept of epistemic injustice, as articulated by, for example, Miranda Fricker (2007), emerges out of and has re-invigorated a rich line of work in feminist epistemology on epistemic exclusion, silencing, and subordination.¹ The foundational insight of this area of “critical social epistemology”,² elegantly articulated by Charles Mills (2007), is the idea that our epistemic practices – from innocuous instances of belief

¹ Notable contributions here include work on silencing by Ishani Maitra (2004, 2009); on different forms of testimonial injustice by Kristie Dotson (2011, 2012, 2014a, 2014b); on distorted communicative dynamics by Jose Medina (2004, 2006, 2012, 2013); and on epistemologies of ignorance (the phenomenon of motivated ignorance on the part of empowered groups) by Charles Mills (1997, 2007) and Linda Alcoff (2007).

Sadly, I have not had the space in this particular paper to properly engage with epistemologies of ignorance, and what generates pathologies in the space of reasons. Like Mills and Matthew Congdon, I think there is a need for work on the relation between epistemologies of ignorance and the Myth of the Given.

² M. Congdon, 2015: 76.

formation to the ways one goes about credibility attribution – involve *social mediation*.³ In the spirit of Wilfrid Sellars’s famous rejection of a non-conceptual Given acting as the normative foundation for perceptual beliefs and judgements, critical social epistemology argues that social structures and social attitudes permeate our epistemic practices all the way through: an important advantage of the Sellarsian commitment to conceptually mediated intentional states and perceptual judgements is how one can be alert to the ways in which race prejudices or gender biases or many other long-held socio-cultural views “can embed themselves in our thinking, distorting even basic instances of empirical claim-making, memory, and belief-formation”.⁴ Arguably, the most serious distortion involves acts of epistemic injustice.

Epistemic injustice arises when somebody or a social group is wronged in their “capacity as a knower”.⁵ This can happen usually in two ways: (i) testimonial injustice, which occurs when a speaker’s assertions are given less credibility than they deserve because the hearer has prejudices about a social group of which the speaker is a member; (ii) hermeneutical injustice, which occurs when as a result of a social structure rendering social group X powerless, members of social group X lack the cognitive resources to adequately make sense of their social powerlessness. With regard to testimonial injustice, it would be helpful to illustrate this with an example used by Jane McConkey (2004), a true story told by Patricia Williams:

I was shopping in Soho [in Benetton’s] and saw a sweater that I wanted to buy for my mother. I pressed my round brown face to the window and my finger to the buzzer, seeking admittance. A narrow-eyed, white teenager wearing running shoes and feasting on bubble gum glared out, evaluating me for signs that would pit me against the limits of his social understanding. After about five seconds, he mouthed “We’re closed”, and blew pink rubber at me. It was two Saturdays before Christmas, at one o’clock in the afternoon; there were several white people in the store who appeared to be shopping for things for *their* mothers. I was enraged. At that moment I literally wanted to break all the windows of the store and *take* lots of sweaters for my mother. In the flicker of his judgemental grey eyes, that sales-child had transformed my brightly sentimental, joy-to-the-world, pre-Christmas spree to a shambles ... I am still struck by the structure of power that drove me into such a blizzard of rage ... No words, no gestures, no prejudices of my own would make a bit of difference to him; his refusal to let me into the store ... was an outward manifestation of his never having let someone like me into the realm of his reality. (P. J. Williams, 1991: 44-5)

³ To quote Robert Brandom here, we understand “*normative statuses as social statuses*” (R. B. Brandom, 2000: 34).

⁴ Congdon, 2015: 78.

⁵ M. Fricker, 2007: 20.

A rumour got started that the Benetton's story wasn't true, that I had made it up, that it was a fantasy, a lie that was probably the product of a diseased mind trying to make all white people feel guilty. At this point I realised it almost didn't make any difference whether I was telling the truth or not – that the greater issue I had to face was the overwhelming weight of a disbelief that goes beyond mere disinclination to believe and becomes active suppression of anything I might have to say. (Williams, 1991: 242)

In addition to having her personal integrity harmed by the shop clerk's racial prejudices, Williams suffered further injustice by having her claims dismissed and not afforded serious credibility:⁶ rather than be accorded the default level of epistemic respect and doxastic appreciation provided by Tyler Burge's Acceptance Principle,⁷ Williams is not only treated with epistemic scorn, she is also stripped of any normative authority, and is deemed as someone who violates norms of assertion.⁸

With regard to hermeneutical injustice, it would be helpful to illustrate this with an example used by Fricker from the memoir of Susan Brownmiller:

Carmita Wood, age forty-four, born and raised in the apple orchard region of Lake Cayuga, and the sole support of two of her children, had worked for eight years in Cornell's department of nuclear physics, advancing from lab assistant to a desk job handling administrative chores. Wood did not know why she had been singled out, or indeed if she had been singled out, but a distinguished professor seemed unable to keep his hands off her.

As Wood told the story, the eminent man would jiggle his crotch when he stood near her desk and looked at his mail, or he'd deliberately brush against her breasts while reaching for some papers. One night as the lab workers were leaving their annual Christmas party, he cornered her in the elevator and planted some unwanted kisses on her mouth. After the Christmas party incident, Carmita Wood went out of her way to use the stairs in the lab building in order to avoid a repeat encounter, but the stress of the furtive molestations and her efforts to keep the

⁶ Cf. J. McConkey, 2004: 202-3: "Patricia Williams made claims to knowledge arising as a result of her experiences as a black woman and this is both part of the reason why those claims were viewed as controversial and why they were disbelieved. Belonging to underprivileged social groups whose experience sharply differs from those who constitute more powerful groups, she provided a perspective that offered a challenge to the dominant norms in society. But her accusations of racism were quickly dismissed as imaginings or exaggerations. She suffered from an inability of others to appreciate the perspective from which her assertions had sprung and from the stereotypes and prejudices about black women that fed into the credibility assessment others made of her."

⁷ Cf. T. Burge, 1993: 467.

⁸ Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975: 26-30) is composed of four norms governing proper linguistic interaction with fellow speakers:

Cooperative Principle: Contribute what is required by the accepted purpose of the conversation.

Maxim of Quality: Make your contribution true; so do not convey what you believe false or unjustified.

Maxim of Quantity: Be as informative as required.

Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous; so avoid obscurity and ambiguity, and strive for brevity and order.

scientist at a distance while maintain cordial relations with his wife, whom she liked, brought on a host of physical symptoms. 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. She walked out the door and went to Florida for some rest and recuperation. Upon her return she applied for unemployment insurance. When the claims investigator asked why she had left her job after eight years, Wood was at a loss to describe the hateful episodes. She was ashamed and embarrassed. Under prodding – the blank on the form needed to be filled in – she answered that her reasons had been personal. Her claim for unemployment was denied.

'Lin's students had been talking in her seminar about the unwanted sexual advances they'd encountered on their summer jobs,' Sauvigne relates. 'And then Carmita Wood comes in and tells Lin *her* story. We realised that to a person, every one of us – the women on staff, Carmita, the students – had had an experience like this at some point, you know? And none of us had ever told anyone before. It was one of those *click, aha!* moments, a profound revelation.

The women had their issue. Meyer located two feminist lawyers in Syracuse, Susan Horn and Maurie Heins, to take on Carmita Wood's unemployment insurance appeal. 'And then ...,' Sauvigne reports, 'we decided that we also had to hold a speak-out in order to break the silence about this.'

The 'this' they were going to break the silence about had no name. 'Eight of us were sitting in an office of Human Affairs,' Sauvigne remembers, 'brainstorming about what we were going to write on the posters for our speak-out. We were referring to it as "sexual intimidation," "sexual coercion," "sexual exploitation on the job." None of those names seemed quite right. We wanted something that embraced a whole range of subtle and unsubtle persistent behaviours. Somebody came up with "harassment." *Sexual harassment!* Instantly we agreed. That's what it was. (S. Brownmiller, 1990: 280-1)

The epistemic injustice suffered by Wood and many other women here is hermeneutical, because it concerns the specific ways in which cognitive resources for interpreting one's experiences are maldistributed in accordance with the background unequal power relations governing identities: at the time of second-wave feminism, women were still rather socially powerless, in no small part due to the way unequal power relations had structured negative social attitudes and legal precedents. As a direct result of being and remaining socially powerless, they were "hermeneutically marginalised",⁹ prevented from having access to the epistemic resources required to make adequate sense of their powerlessness. Consequently, the hermeneutical marginalisation created and sustained a form of propositional paralysis, what Fricker calls "cognitive disablement",¹⁰ where, for example, victims of sexual harassment are unable to *articulate* features of their experience for *their* own full understanding. For Wood, "[h]er hermeneutical disadvantage renders

⁹ Fricker, 2007: 153.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

her unable to make sense of her ongoing mistreatment, and this in turn prevents her from protesting it, let alone securing effective measures to stop it”.¹¹

Having sketched the central themes of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, I would now like to turn to the central themes of recognition theory before explicating how recognition theory can positively contribute to diagnosing and treating epistemic injustice.

II

One of the key developments in interdisciplinary social theory over recent decades has been the rise of diagnostic social philosophy.¹² In the words of its leading contemporary exponent, the third-generation Critical Theorist Axel Honneth, such a tradition “... is primarily concerned with determining and discussing processes of social development that can be viewed as misdevelopments, disorders or ‘social pathologies’ ... Its primary task is the diagnosis of processes of social development that must be understood as preventing the members of society from living a ‘good life’”.¹³ Under such a framework, the methodology of diagnostic social philosophy roughly follows the approach of curing some kind of ailment or disease:¹⁴ just as a physician will first diagnose the condition and then administer some cure, the diagnostic social theorist must first diagnose the relevant social problem and then work out a cogent means of curing the malady.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., p. 151.

¹² The diagnostic social philosophical tradition has its historical roots in the work of de Tocqueville, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Tönnies, Durkheim, Weber, Lukács, Spengler, Dewey, Plessner, Fromm, Horkheimer and Adorno, Marcuse, Bataille, Gehlen, Heller, Márcus, Arendt, Habermas, Foucault, and Taylor.

¹³ A. Honneth, 2007a: 4.

¹⁴ “First, each theorist points to some malady or ailment that troubles their own society, and identifies some particular causes of that disorder which are specifically social. That is, the disorder is said to be rooted in the particular ordering or structuring or practices of the society. Further, the disorder identified is said to be a social problem or pathology because it impedes the ability of individuals to live fulfilling, or fully realised, or ethically praiseworthy, or happy lives. Thus the inability of individuals to live the “good life” according to the standards of the theory is said to be caused by particular features of the present social ordering” (C. F. Zurn, 2015: 93).

¹⁵ An important qualification should be made here: what counts as health is a matter of empirical fact and the relation between therapy and achieving physical health is a nomological relation. But what counts as a good life or a flourishing society (where it is possible for all citizens to live a good life) is not a matter of empirical fact. Furthermore, it is not clear that the relation between ethical actions and political programmes on the one hand and goals like a good life or a flourishing society on the other hand need be nomological. So, I would argue that whatever social pathologies are, they are categorically distinct from the sort of pathologies we find in medicine. My feeling is that social pathologies are best understood in terms of *alienation* (and this is why Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche – among others – play a special role in understanding social pathologies).

For Honneth, the hallmark concept for articulating the formal complexities of social structures, attitudes, and pathologies is *intersubjective recognition*, the practice of acknowledging and being acknowledged by others, specifically “affective approval or encouragement”:¹⁶ in his first major work, *The Struggle for Recognition* (a combination of Hegel, G. H. Mead, and Donald Winnicott), Honneth’s underlying claim is that the process of gaining recognition intersubjectively is identical to the journey of self-realisation as a social and rational agent: “practical identity-formation presupposes intersubjective recognition”.¹⁷ Taking inspiration from Hegel’s three forms of intersubjectivity – love, legal relations, and solidarity –, Honneth draws distinctions between three forms of practical self-understanding, namely self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem: *self-confidence* refers to the basic sense of the stability and continuity of one’s self as a differentiated individual with particular needs and emotions that require intersubjective recognition to be meaningfully constituted. *Self-respect* comes from being recognised as part of an equal legal community, where being part of a legal community as an equal member under the protection of law affords one social respect. And *self-esteem* comes from having one’s traits and accomplishments positively recognised either by fellow members of one’s individual community or by other communities of value.

Social conflict, then, is understood to arise from how certain collective groups within a given society experience either *misrecognition* or *nonrecognition*: in cases of misrecognition, the recognition order of a society acknowledges the subjectivity of a group or minority, but, incorrectly, does not afford that particular subjectivity the *same* level of respect and value as that of the majority. In cases of nonrecognition, the recognition order of a society incorrectly fails to acknowledge the subjectivity of a group or minority, incorrectly affording that group or minority *no* positive normative status at all.

Both misrecognition and nonrecognition are severely detrimental to human development, since they are not genuine forms of *intersubjective recognition*: “[t]hrough intersubjective recognition, [one] is engaged in the process of self-realisation with respect to [one’s] practical relation-to-self”,¹⁸ to the extent that the self-realisation of any individual can only be achieved in a progressive social environment. Since human beings

¹⁶ Honneth, 1996: 95.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁸ Zurn, 2015: 25.

are “intersubjectively vulnerable”,¹⁹ to quote Fred Neuhouser on this subject, “[t]he idea here is that each type of identity has a distinct value for individuals and that possessing them all is essential to realising the full range of possible modes of selfhood. To miss out on any of these forms of social membership, then, is to be deprived of one of the basic ways of being a self and hence to suffer an impoverishment of one’s life”.²⁰

By explicating the recognition order of a society through uncovering the moral grammar of that society, one is able to *reveal the moral and social commitments* governing how members interact with one another. This aims to practically aid emancipation by realising the immanent emancipatory potential found in contemporary social structures and social attitudes, in order to transcend the current intersubjective framework to realise full human freedom.

III

Recognition theory on the one hand, and contemporary epistemological work informed by feminism and critical race theory on the other, have developed largely separately from one another, notwithstanding significant points of overlap.²¹ Yet these fields of discussion have considerable bearing on one another.

From a recognition theory perspective, I think testimonial injustice is particularly harrowing, because it robs a group or individual of their status as a rational enquirer, thereby creating an asymmetrical cognitive environment in which they are not deemed one’s conversational peer. To see how this works, it would be particularly helpful to articulate an analogy between Honneth’s account of how torture and rape constitute denials of self-confidence and a recognition theoretic account of testimonial injustice: for Honneth, the trauma inflicted by torture and rape involves an often irreparable breach of one’s foundational self-confidence in one’s body.²² As he writes:

The forms of practical maltreatment in which a person is forcibly deprived of any opportunity freely to dispose over his or her own body represent the most fundamental sort of personal degradation. This is because every attempt to gain control of a person’s body against his or her will – irrespective of the intention behind it – causes a degree of humiliation that impacts more destructively than other forms of respect on a person’s practical relation-to-self. For what is specific to these kinds of physical injury, as exemplified by torture and rape, is not the purely

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁰ F. Neuhouser, 2008: 223.

²¹ E.g. Young (1990).

²² See Breakwell (1983).

physical pain but rather the combination of this pain with the feeling of being defencelessly at the mercy of another subject, to the point of feeling that one has been deprived of reality. Physical abuse represents a type of disrespect that does lasting damage to one's basic confidence (learned through love) that one can autonomously coordinate one's own body ... Thus, the kind of recognition that this type of disrespect deprives one of is the taken-for-granted respect for the autonomous control of one's own body, which itself could only be acquired at all through experience emotional support as part of the socialisation process.²³

Since the violation of bodily integrity represents the violation of one's most basic and self-evident way of interacting with one's external environment, torture and rape prevent one from trusting others and oneself – “the suffering of torture or rape is always accompanied by a dramatic breakdown in one's trust in the reliability of the social world and hence by a collapse in one's own basic self-confidence”.²⁴

Thus far, I have articulated the central features of Honneth's account of the traumatic effects of torture and rape on a person's foundational self-confidence. To develop the analogy between Honneth's account of how torture and rape constitute denials of self-confidence and a recognition theoretic account of testimonial injustice, I would like now to return to the example used by McConkey to articulate testimonial injustice: I claimed that rather than be accorded the default level of epistemic respect and doxastic appreciation provided by Burge's Acceptance Principle, Patricia Williams is not only treated with epistemic scorn, she is also stripped of *any* normative authority, nonrecognised, and is deemed as someone who violates norms of assertion. To use a Sellarsian *tournure de phrase*, testimonial injustice deprives Williams, a rational agent, of her rightful place as someone moving in the space of reasons²⁵ and thereby leaves individuals like her who are prejudiced against in a state of self-alienation: because Williams is *not* recognised²⁶ – *as opposed to recognised but treated with less credibility than other epistemic participants* – she is forcibly alienated from her own rationality, where her

²³ Honneth, 1996: 132-3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

See Scarry (1985).

²⁵ “In characterising an episode or state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.” (Sellars, 1997: §36).

For a similar account, see Jones (2002).

²⁶ See the following similar remark by Fricker: “[T]here will be few contexts in which a hearer's prejudice is so insanely thoroughgoing that he fails to regard his interlocutor as a subject of knowledge *at all*”. (Fricker, 2007: 134-5).

rationality enables her to be a member of a community of inquirers.²⁷ Crucially, the asymmetrical nature of the cognitive environment causes Williams to feel that the space of reasons, the locus of normative discourse where epistemic practices derive their sense of meaning and purpose, is not welcoming to her. As Iris Marion Young writes:

In societies stamped with cultural imperialism, groups suffering from this form of oppression stand in a paradoxical position. They are understood in terms of crude stereotypes that do not accurately portray individual group members but also assume a mask of invisibility; they are both badly misrepresented and robbed of the means by which to express their perspective. Groups who live with cultural imperialism find themselves defined externally, positioned by a web of meanings that arise elsewhere. These meanings and definitions have been imposed on them by people who cannot identify with them and with whom they cannot identify.²⁸

Given that testimonial injustice causes a victim to be alienated from both their own rationality and from the practices which necessarily constitute normative discourse between epistemic peers, I think one has compelling reason to think that nonrecognition and exclusion from the space of reasons amounts to *discursive abuse*: “the experience of being disrespected carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse”,²⁹ where the identity under threat here is a person’s self-interpretation as *Geistig*.³⁰ The failure to properly recognise and afford somebody or a social group the epistemic respect they merit is an act of injustice in the sense of depriving individuals of a *progressive* social environment in which the epistemic respect afforded to them plays a significant role in enabling and fostering their *self-confidence as a rational enquirer*.³¹ Conceived in this way, one can see the analogous parallel with Honneth’s analysis of the harmful effects of torture or rape on self-confidence:

²⁷ “The intrinsic harm of testimonial injustice as epistemic objectification: when a hearer undermines a speaker in her capacity as a giver of knowledge, the speaker is epistemically objectified”. (Fricker, 2007: 133).

²⁸ I. M. Young, 1990: 59.

²⁹ Honneth, 1996: 130-1.
See Breakwell (1983).

³⁰ See the following similar remark by Fricker: “Persistent testimonial injustice can indeed inhibit the very formation of self”. (Fricker, 2007: 55).

³¹ I think there is an especially interesting comparison between this claim and Nancy Daukas’s concept of epistemic charity: “normal practices of epistemic interaction and cooperation require that members of an epistemic community typically extend to one another the presumption that they meet some threshold level of epistemic credibility” (N. Daukas, 2006: 110).

Torture or Rape	Testimonial Injustice
External and forcible control over one's own bodily integrity	External and forcible control over one's own epistemic integrity
Violation of bodily integrity prevents one from trusting others and oneself to the distressing extent that victims internalise culpability	Violation of epistemic integrity prevents one from trusting others and one's own rational capacities to the distressing extent that victims internalise culpability
"Physical abuse represents a type of disrespect that does lasting damage to one's basic confidence ... that one can autonomously coordinate one's own body" ³²	Discursive abuse represents a type of disrespect that does lasting damage to one's basic confidence that one can autonomously coordinate one's own claims and participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons

A further harm of the denial of epistemic recognition as a fellow member of a normative community is that the collapse of self-confidence as a rational enquirer stultifies a person's ability to actively participate in practices designed to bring about *social change*: the asymmetrical nature of the cognitive environment means that those who are accorded no testimonial credibility are further rendered powerless by having their knowledge claims, which challenge various social attitudes, summarily dismissed. As McConkey writes:

It is questionable whether an individual or group could ever really be regarded as an effective challenger to the dominant interpretations in society if they were not understood as credible knowers. In order to defy their invisibility in the self-understandings of society, putative knowers have to have their new claims to knowledge accepted as at least possibly true. They must be considered as people who can reliably tell us how things are, but this will only be achieved when they are afforded credibility.³³

In addition, there is a significant danger that testimonial nonrecognition and the lasting effects of discursive abuse can be so systemic to the extent that a victim can end up thinking *they* are at fault or that *they* deserve such treatment: as rational agents, we do not view ourselves as normatively self-supporting. However, this does not mean that we thereby relinquish our status as *independent thinkers*. Rather, this means that we continuously check our individual commitments and judgements against the commitments and judgements of our fellow agents. Such a subject is active in that they

³² Honneth, 1996: 132.

³³ McConkey, 2004: 204.

are not passive “in the use of [their] reason”,³⁴ where the sense of passivity here is one which is formally similar to that of the logical egoist, namely someone who considers themselves “to be cognitively self-sufficient”.³⁵ Since human beings are intersubjectively vulnerable and pay attention to how they are regarded by one another, critical comments are often understood as offering opportunities for self-improvement.³⁶ For example, receiving a reviewer’s report on a paper submitted to a professional academic journal which recommends rejection or revision and resubmission can often alert an author to weaknesses or errors on the author’s part. However, regressive recognition orders deliberately exploit intersubjective vulnerability and pervert communicative dynamics of critique by making those excluded from the social space of reasons feel as though their rejection is *entirely the result of their failings*. Systemic testimonial nonrecognition permeates individuals’ or a social group’s psychology to the extent that individuals or a social group are made to blame themselves for not being deemed worthy enough to be afforded credibility.

Thus far, I have offered reasons for thinking there is a substantive role for recognition theory to play in *articulating* testimonial injustice and its harmful effects. However, I would now like to turn to a discussion of whether there is any scope for recognition theory *treating* the social pathology of testimonial injustice: for Fricker, the best means of combating testimonial injustice involves the Aristotelian notion of moral training, specifically the idea of training *testimonial sensibility*: listeners need to be trained well to develop *as far as possible* non-prejudicial attitudes about both their interlocutors (and themselves).³⁷ As she writes:

[P]erhaps we should think of the ideal hearer as someone for whom correcting for familiar prejudices has become second nature, while the requisite alertness to the influence of less familiar prejudices remains a matter of ongoing active critical reflection. This seems about right. What matters is that somehow or other one succeeds, reliably enough (through time and across a suitable span of prejudices), in correcting for prejudice in one’s credibility judgements. If one succeeds in that, then one has got the virtue of testimonial justice.³⁸

³⁴ K. Deligiorgi, 2002: 150.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³⁶ See Kant, *APPV*: 128-29 and *LL*: §57, 563; §740.

³⁷ In response to Fricker, Alcott (2010) argues that since prejudice and bias are often unconscious intentional states, it is practically impossible to consciously correct those attitudes. However, I think her critique may be attacking a straw-man, since Fricker is alert to implicit bias and her position recognises the challenges facing overcoming entrenched socio-cognitive dysfunctions.

³⁸ Fricker, 2007: 98.

A key feature of Fricker's project of training testimonial sensibility involves the hearer developing greater empathetic competency. Empathy plays a crucial role here just not because this particular kind of intentional emotional state is a *formal* condition for trust,³⁹ but also because empathy is required to make the *right* kind of credibility attribution judgement: minimal levels of empathetic engagement invariably prevent a hearer from being salient to or correct for prejudice, since the failure to put oneself in one's interlocutor's shoes – whether due to emotional immaturity or due to personal vindictiveness – results in *epistemic misperception*. As Fricker writes: “If, for instance, her lack of empathetic skill renders her unable to pick up on the fact that her interlocutor is afraid of her (perhaps he is a school pupil and she the head teacher), then she may well misperceive his manner, taking him, for instance, to be insincere when he is not”.⁴⁰

While there are virtues to Fricker's account of empathy, epistemic exclusion, and silencing, I think empathy is too individualistic, and we need to theorise recognition and mis/nonrecognition as social phenomena. For the recognition theorist, testimonial injustice is classed as a particular variety of social pathology. Since testimonial injustice is analysed here under what one may call a *clinical framework*, we shall find, in what follows, that recognition theory provides a more *complex* but complementary diagnosis *and* social cure of discursive abuse: for testimonial injustice to be categorised as a *social* pathology, this described phenomenon needs to be established as something that is *pervasively experienced throughout society*. What this means is that one can legitimately regard a pathological property or symptom to have *social* reach only if there is compelling reason to think that the pathogens do not occur *only* in isolated and individual instances.

Once we understand the *social scope* of the experiences of testimonial disrespect and alienation, we then develop an epidemiology of discursive abuse that goes *beyond* the proto-typical social scientific statistical practices of questionnaires and reports, since, as Christopher Zurn correctly writes, “maladies ... are not often acknowledged as such by those who suffer from or are subject to them”.⁴¹ Moreover, the recognition theorist's sensitivity to the limitation of proto-typical social scientific statistical practices as an *appropriate* epidemiological methodology for treating social pathologies also points towards a sophisticated form of *critical social aetiology and therapy*: relations of misrecognition and nonrecognition and processes of epistemic exclusion and silencing

³⁹ See Jones (1996).

⁴⁰ Fricker, 2007: 79.

⁴¹ Zurn, 2015: 114.

are *mutually supporting*: what sustains an asymmetrical social structure is an asymmetrical cognitive environment wherein some speakers are illegitimately deprived of participating in epistemic practices; what sustains an asymmetrical cognitive environment is an asymmetrical social structure wherein some members assume a mask of invisibility. Since recognition theory offers a diagnosis of a social malady in terms of uncovering the moral grammar underlying an asymmetrical recognition order, the kind of therapeutic programme is one rooted in developing the conditions required to bring about intersubjective testimonial recognition. The practice of *overcoming epistemic unsociability and realising our epistemic sociability* seems to share much in common with the process of *transitioning from asymmetrical recognition orders to genuinely symmetrical recognition orders*, since *true* sociality does not merely consist in interacting with others *simpliciter*, but rather in interacting with others in *such a way that enables self-realisation*.

I think there are a number of important advantages to this approach: (i) articulating the relationship between structures of regressive recognition and regressive epistemic practices in terms of mutual sustainment rather than a linear top-down or linear bottom-up relation aids the critical theoretic understanding of the social sphere as a dynamic and complex normative domain; (ii) realising our epistemic sociability in terms of transitioning from asymmetrical recognition orders to genuinely symmetrical recognition orders necessarily requires significant empathetic engagement: attentiveness to the particularity of the other person, in light of *difference*, is precisely what is required for *genuine* recognition. This Hegelian remark both complements and *expands* on Fricker's position on training empathy: attentiveness to the particularity of the other person is not only a crucial feature of empathetic competency, the Hegelian claim *also* provides a significant *metaphysical backstory* concerning the way in which intersubjectivity and empathy are constituted by developing mediated unity out of immediate unity's sublation by difference. This is why Hegel famously claims that a self-consciousness can only be satisfied by another self-consciousness.⁴² Whilst mutual recognition is *partly* designed to follow Kantian respect, since we should not treat others as means to an end, mutual recognition goes further, for not only should we treat others as ends in themselves, but *we have realised that recognition of others as equals is a necessary condition for the possibility of us achieving self-consciousness in a significantly normative manner*.⁴³ Our

⁴² Cf. "Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness." (PS : §175, 110)

⁴³ Given this, I think it is worth comparing Hegel's position with what Kant writes in *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*: "Human beings have an inclination to associate with one

unsociable sociability – to use Kant’s term –⁴⁴ forces us to engage in all sorts of unpleasant and reprehensible practices, whose consequences are so harrowing that they *rationaly* compel us to overcome those structures and social attitudes that are symptomatic of the unsociable aspects of our nature, so that we can fully develop *empathetic* engagement; (iii) an especially illuminating feature of the recognition approach, one which both feminism and critical race theory can find helpful, is the way it articulates the complexities of the *collective phenomenology of disrespect* and the rational motivation to express collective resistance to such disrespect. As Honneth writes:

Feelings of having been disrespected ... form the core of moral experiences that are part of the structure of social interaction because human subjects encounter one another with expectations for recognition, expectations on which their psychological integrity turns. Feelings of having been unjustly treated can lead to collective actions to the extent to which they come to be experienced by an entire circle of subjects as typical for their social situation ... [T]he models of conflict that start from the collective feelings of having been unjustly treated are those that trace the emergence and course of social struggles back to moral experiences of social groups who face having ... recognition withheld from them ... [In this case] we are dealing with the analysis of a struggle over the intersubjective conditions for personal integrity.⁴⁵

The importance of emphasising collective experiences of a social pathology such as discursive abuse lies in a *descriptively* rich, anti-abstract account of current societal failings, and in an *emancipatory* narrative concerning how immanent social critique points towards, what Honneth calls, the ‘untapped normative surplus’ in society: collective experiences of a social pathology can lead to Consciousness-Raising initiatives, which in turn can help bring about solidarity movements, to form practical ways of bringing about social change, “an innerworldly instance of transcendence”.⁴⁶ For example, with regard to testimonial injustice, the epidemiology of this form of epistemic abuse is endemic enough to unite those who experience testimonial injustice in different ways and those who express solidarity with those victims. It is precisely because outrage at such a social pathology and a concerted effort to end this genus of oppression is ever-growing that one has compelling reason to think experiences of testimonial injustice

another because in such a condition they feel themselves to be more human, that is to say, more in a position to develop their natural predispositions.” (*Idea*: 8:20-21)

⁴⁴ Cf. *Idea*: 8:26.

⁴⁵ Honneth, 1996: 163.

⁴⁶ A. Honneth & N. Fraser, 2003: 238.

coalesce into movements which have the capability of reforming the current recognition structure.⁴⁷

In response, a potential critic of the recognition theorist may well object to the putative virtues of realising the goals of epistemic sociability under the framework of intersubjective recognition: not only does the concept of intersubjective recognition fail to explain how power operates in the normatively integrated social spheres – the ways in which “power relations centrally structure intersubjective recognition”⁴⁸ – the concept also fails to show adequate sensitivity to how forms of recognition themselves produce and endorse unequal power between people.⁴⁹ In other words, the principal problem with recognition theory as offering a cure for the social pathology of testimonial injustice is that it is hopelessly naïve and insensitive to the workings of identity power and prejudice. For, one can argue that the very notion of a ‘recognition order’ presupposes the vocabulary and practices of *hierarchical relations*, to the extent that if one aims to bring about a *genuinely* symmetrical cognitive environment in which epistemic participants are *acutely* sensitive to the surreptitious presence and power of prejudice, one needs to radically think of the space of reasons in terms of Gloria Steinem’s Gandhian notion of *listening circles*.⁵⁰

Though the critique of the recognition theorist seems compelling – even the most sympathetic defender of recognition theory would recognise the lack of a satisfactory theory of power – I would not regard this limitation to be a “call for rejection, but for further work in broadening and diversifying the basic social theory”:⁵¹ there seems to be nothing in the conceptual resources of either theories of power or the current iteration of recognition theory to suggest that they *cannot* be compatible with one another, not in the least because *both* approaches are exemplars of *anti-ideal* social philosophy.⁵² For, that Honneth puts significant emphasis on sociology and historiography gives one *prima facie* reason to hope that the power relations theorist and the recognition theorist can pool their respective resources:

⁴⁷ **I think there is an especially interesting comparison between this claim and Anderson (2012).**

⁴⁸ Zurn, 2015: 209.

⁴⁹ See Allen (2010), Connolly (2010), Ferrarese (2009), McNay (2008), Petherbridge (2013), Rössler (2007), and Young (2007).

⁵⁰ Steinem (2016). I am greatly indebted to Eleanor Bainbridge for pointing me to Steinem’s memoir here.

⁵¹ Zurn, 2015: 205.

⁵² Some concept of social alienation à la Marcuse can play a central role in explaining both asymmetrical recognition orders and how power operates.

The motor and the medium of the historical process of realising institutionalised principles of freedom is not the law, at least not in the first instance, but social struggles over the appropriate understanding of these principles and the resulting changes of behaviour. Therefore, the fact that contemporary theories of justice are guided almost exclusively by the legal paradigm is a theoretical folly. We must instead take account of sociology and historiography, as these disciplines are inherently more sensitive to changes in everyday moral behaviour.⁵³

Because recognition theory places so much importance on accounting for the formal *and* qualitative dimensions of the *experiences of those suffering from disrespect*,⁵⁴ I think there is compelling reason to believe that there is significant scope for recognition theory articulating Fricker's project of training the ideal hearer in relation to Steinem's concept of empathetic listening circles.

Having explicated how recognition theory can positively contribute to diagnosing and treating testimonial injustice, I would now like to turn to how recognition theory can positively contribute to diagnosing and treating hermeneutical injustice.

IV

Returning to the example used by Fricker to articulate hermeneutical injustice, I claimed that as a direct result of being and remaining socially powerless, Carmita Wood and many other women were prevented from having access to the epistemic resources required to make adequate sense of their powerlessness. Consequently, the hermeneutical marginalisation created and sustained a form of propositional paralysis, where, for example, victims of sexual harassment are unable to *articulate* features of their experience for *their* own full understanding.

One particularly helpful way which recognition theory can contribute to articulating hermeneutical injustice is by looking at the Marxian concept of ideology: as a pathology of capitalism, ideology refers to those social and cultural attitudes designed to further maintain domination over the oppressed by passively or actively encouraging those oppressed to accept/welcome their position of powerlessness. As Honneth writes:

The pride that 'Uncle Tom' feels as a reaction to the repeated praise of the submissive virtues makes him into a compliant servant in a slave-owning society. The emotional appeals to the 'good' mother and housewife made by churches, parliaments, or the mass media over the centuries caused women to remain trapped within a self-image that most effectively accommodated the gender-specific division

⁵³ Honneth, 2014: 329.

⁵⁴ For further on this, see Honneth, 2003: 114-134.

of labour. The public esteem enjoyed by heroic soldiers continuously engendered a sufficiently large class of men who willingly went to war in pursuit of glory and adventure ... [These examples] ... make strikingly clear that social recognition can always also operate as a conformist ideology, for the continuous repetition of identical forms of recognition can create a feeling of self-worth that provides the motivational resources for forms of voluntary subordination without employing methods of repression.⁵⁵

In addition to failing to adequately distribute material resources amongst members of society, ideology functions to prevent cognitive resources from being adequately allocated to the oppressed. For, if the powerless have access to epistemic resources necessary for overcoming their hermeneutic marginalisation, not only can they begin to make sense of their experiences and their dominated position, they can also crucially develop Consciousness-Raising initiatives, which in turn can help bring about solidarity movements, to form practical ways of bringing about radical social change.

From this perspective, then, the principal harmfulness of hermeneutical injustice consists in depriving a victim of having access to the self-interpretational dimension of rational agency: this represents a *specific* variety of alienation, because an indispensable feature of rational agency is one's ability to make sense of one's experiences. Due to individuals and/or groups being alienated from a crucial part of their rationality, asymmetrical cognitive resource distribution further entrenches the normative power of ideology. This seems to complement and *expand* on what Fricker writes here: "The primary harm of hermeneutical injustice, then, is to be understood not only in terms of the subject's being unfairly disadvantaged by some collective hermeneutical lacuna, but also in terms of the very construction (constitutive and/or causal) of selfhood".⁵⁶

The curative programme for overcoming the social pathology of hermeneutical injustice that Fricker recommends adopting is one which aims to create "*a more inclusive hermeneutical climate—one without structural identity prejudice*".⁵⁷ For the recognition theorist, a more inclusive hermeneutical climate can only be meaningfully brought about by proposing *significant progressive* changes to the recognition order governing society:

Hermeneutical Injustice	Hermeneutical Justice
Material and cognitive resources are maldistributed	Material and cognitive resources are symmetrically distributed

⁵⁵ Honneth, 2007b: 325-6.

⁵⁶ Fricker, 2007: 168.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Asymmetrical resource distribution further entrenches the normative power of ideology	Symmetrical resource distribution limits the normative power of ideology
Structural identity prejudice	Structural identity prejudice Consciousness-Raising initiatives

From an intersectionist perspective, mutual recognition and hermeneutical justice could only be *fully* generalised and receive institutionalised support in a society that was *not* or *no longer* capitalist, racist, sexist, etc. But that does not mean (and *cannot* mean) that mutual recognition and hermeneutical justice are *impossible* under the regressive neoliberal market sphere. It means rather that mutual recognition and hermeneutical justice will be *difficult* to achieve under existing conditions.⁵⁸ Recognition theory shares much in common with a *social democratic* call for progressive correction, where the goal of social critique is a world in which recognition is no longer subversive: *progressive reform of how resources are distributed to make sense of one's experiences aims to shift unequal power relations that are directly responsible for the hermeneutical lacuna and the kind of alienation that is produced by hermeneutical marginalisation and that further entrenches ideology*. This critical theoretic remark complements Fricker's position on the virtue of hermeneutical justice: attentiveness to how shifting unequal power relations enables access to the self-interpretational dimension of rational agency can help "neutralise the impact of structural identity prejudice on one's credibility judgement".⁵⁹

I take the arguments proposed in this paper to hopefully go to some considerable length in bringing recognition theory and the literature on epistemic injustice into conversation: there is scope for a new set of conversations and contributions about epistemic injustice, exclusion, and silencing, one which assesses the prospects of approaching epistemic injustice from the perspective of recognition theory and vice versa, and that this conjunction could help feminist and critical race theory address current social challenges. *The failure of mutual recognition explains how epistemic injustice is possible*: Not adequately epistemically recognising is a damning indictment of society on the grounds that its social structure and moral grammar fail to encourage the quest for

⁵⁸ **As Carl Sachs helpfully raised in conversation.**

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

self-realisation and thereby leaves individuals who are prejudiced against in a state of self-alienation. While, of course, we may never approximate epistemic justice and intersubjective recognition, the ideas of epistemic justice and intersubjective recognition, as Kant would say, are “to be diligently pursued as the vocation of the human race” (*APPV*: 331).

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