

Diversifying Syllabi 2016 Text Summary and Teaching Tips

SECTION ONE: to be completed by presenter

Article/Essay Title: Testimonial Injustice

Author: Miranda Fricker

Readability: Easy/Moderate/Difficult

Thesis: Testimonial injustice occurs if and only if the speaker receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer. This wrongs the speaker in her capacity as a knower, and is systematically connected to other forms of injustice.

Key Definitions:

Social power: “a practically socially situated capacity to control others’ actions, where this capacity may be exercised (actively or passively) by particular social agents, or alternatively, it may operate purely structurally” (13).

Identity power: “an operation of power that depends in some significant degree upon such shared imaginative conceptions of social identity” (14).

Credibility excess: Unwarranted, the speaker receives more credibility than they would otherwise have; not a core case of testimonial injustice.

Credibility deficit: Unwarranted, the speaker receives less credibility than they would otherwise have; the core case of testimonial injustice.

Testimonial injustice: “a distinctively epistemic injustice, as a kind of injustice in which someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*” (20). “The speaker sustains such a testimonial injustice if and only if she receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer; so the central case of testimonial injustice is *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*.” (28)

Brief Summary:

1. Power
 - a. Active v. passive power
 - i. Ex. Traffic warden issuing fines v. fear of traffic warden influencing people’s behavior
 - b. Agential v. structural power
- Teaching note: This section delves into details of Wartenberg and Foucauldian views about power. Perhaps advise students to gloss over this.
- c. Power is socially situated, and depends on certain kinds of social coordination
 - d. Social power: “a practically socially situated capacity to control others’ actions, where this capacity may be exercised (actively or passively) by particular social agents, or alternatively, it may operate purely structurally” (13).

2. Identity power

- a. Identity power: “an operation of power that depends in some significant degree upon such shared imaginative conceptions of social identity” (14)
 - b. Based on shared imaginative conceptions of social identities
 - i. Ex. Stereotypes, implicit or explicit
 - ii. Ex. Herbert Greenleaf’s stance towards Marge in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*
 - c. Identity power works in conjunction with other kinds of social power
 - d. Can be agential or structural
3. The central case of testimonial injustice
- a. Credibility excess
 - i. Unwarranted, the speaker receives more credibility than they would otherwise have
 - ii. Not a core case of testimonial injustice
 - iii. Ex. GP who is asked about specialized medical issues.
 - 1. Not a core case because while this places a greater ethical burden on the GP, they are not wronged in their capacity as a knower
 - iv. Ex. Privileged man who is routinely granted a credibility excess.
 - 1. Not a core case because the harm here is cumulative, whereas the harm of testimonial injustice occurs in token cases.

Teaching note: Fricker argues that credibility excess is not a core case of testimonial injustice. This is contentious. See: Emmalou Davis’ *Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokespersons: A Case for Credibility Excess as Testimonial Injustice*

- b. Credibility deficit
 - i. Unwarranted, the speaker receives less credibility than they would otherwise have
 - ii. The core case of testimonial injustice
 - iii. Ex. Accent can impact how we assess the credibility of a speaker

Teaching note: Distinguish between warranted v. unwarranted credibility attributions. Credibility excess v. warranted high credibility (expertise); credibility deficit v. warranted low credibility (novicehood)

- c. “Testimonial injustice .. as a distinctively epistemic injustice, as a kind of injustice in which someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*” (20).

Teaching note: Spend time going through wronging someone in their capacity as a knower v. wronging them in other ways.

- d. Not all cases of credibility deficit are instances of testimonial injustice
 - i. Some stem from *innocent error*: error that is both ethically and epistemically non-culpable
 - 1. Ex. Ethicist believes fellow academic to be a medical specialist because of how they are listed on a conference program and accords them low credibility in an ethics debate, but really they are a bioethicist and have high expertise.
 - ii. Ethically innocent but epistemologically culpable error also does not rise to the level of testimonial injustice
 - 1. Ex. Ethicist does sloppy web search, leading to false belief about fellow academic’s expertise

- e. Testimonial injustice
 - i. Stems from *prejudice*
 - 1. Ex. Tom Robinson in To Kill a Mockingbird
 - ii. Is *systematic*: injustices are connected via a common prejudice
 - 1. Systematic testimonial injustice “tracks” the subject through different dimensions of social activity.
 - 2. Systematic testimonial injustice is based on *social identity*: this is identity prejudice
 - iii. “The speaker sustains such a testimonial injustice if and only if she receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer; so the central case of testimonial injustice is *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*.” (28)

SECTION TWO: to be completed by note taker during discussion

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Author: Miranda Fricker

Possible Applications:

- Intro epistemology
- Intro philosophy of language
- Bioethics (especially in the context of discussions about physician and patient interactions)
- Philosophy of race
- Moral psychology
- Political philosophy
- Logic (in the context of discussions about how arguments are evaluated)

Complementary Texts/Resources:

- Kristie Dotson’s “Tracking Epistemic Violence” would pair very nicely, because Fricker lays out some important ideas that get a lot of uptake in that piece and will thus make working through the Dotson piece smoother. Especially w/r/t what constitutes an epistemic injustice and how this idea underlies Dotson’s discussion of epistemic violence and silencing.
- Fricker might pair well with articles and essays on epistemology of race. Some candidates here are Melissa Harris-Perry’s piece in The Nation, [“The Epistemology of Race Talk”](#); Myisha Cherry and Eric Schwitzgebel’s op-ed in the Los Angeles Times, [“Like the Oscars, #PhilosophySoWhite”](#); Sarah-Jane Leslie’s work on the role of generics in the development of essentialism; and select pieces by Rebecca Kukla and Rae Langton, especially by the work by the former on discursive injustice.

Possible Class Activities:

- Fox News [interview](#) with Reza Aslan

- Students can read the piece and go home and bring back stuff that might exemplify the kind of phenomena that Fricker describes
- Divide students into groups and try to come up with examples, in particular see whether they can distinguish between testimonial injustice and other forms of epistemic injustice
- Discuss case studies of people giving testimonies in courts of law. You can mine the following for case: Rachel Jeantel's testimony during George Zimmerman's trial, the Anita Hill HBO film, and Karen Jones's article about judges adjudicating refugee requests.

What traditional texts might this text replace?

Descartes?

But a more relevant question is: what concept or unit could a module on epistemic injustice replace?