



# ACEPS Presents: Epistemic Injustice, Reasons and Agency Conference 2022

Abstract Book

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Online and In-person

## **Attention and Hermeneutic Gaps and Distortions**

**Isabel Kaeslin**

(University of Fribourg)

How does attention contribute to correcting hermeneutic distortions and to filling hermeneutic gaps? Research on the nature of attention has gained traction in recent years. Work on hermeneutic injustice has received much attention. However, these two strands of research have not been brought into contact yet. By answering the question of how attention contributes to correcting hermeneutic distortions and to filling hermeneutic gaps, I show that these two strands of research can inform each other.

Watzl (2017) shows that attention is an activity of foregrounding and backgrounding mental contents. I argue that there is one feature missing: attending entails being vigilant, as ‘expecting something to come up’. This vigilance comes in two forms, leading to focused and open-minded attention.

Hermeneutic gaps exist when we don’t have concepts to describe an experience. Hermeneutic distortions are the case when we have concepts for an experience, but, as it turns out, these concepts were ill-fitting.

I show that attention is exactly what is need in order to solve these two hermeneutic problems. The two forms of attention, focused and open-minded, happen to be precisely the two tools that we need in order to correct hermeneutic distortions and to fill hermeneutic gaps.

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## **Hermeneutical Injustice in the Context of Settler Colonialism**

**Balamohan Shingade**

(University of Aukland)

For those of us in Aotearoa New Zealand who are not immersed in te ao Māori (‘the Māori world’), our dominant settler frameworks often receive Indigenous ideas as incongruous and uninterpretable. We are without the inheritances and orientations to take up, let alone dwell in, such non-Western modes of reasoning and relating. This gap motivates my project. I argue that settler-colonialism is perpetuated in part by hermeneutical injustice, which we ought to demystify for prospects of just Indigenous–settler relations. Drawing on cases at the interface of te ao Māori and the Western worldview, I discuss how attempts at interpretation and understanding can go wrong, and how they end up reproducing disrespect of Indigenous peoples and knowledges. Given

this context, I propose ‘unsettling interpretations’ as a possible way forward, taking the example of Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017, which granted Legal Personhood to the Whanganui River.

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### **Epistemic Injustice in Social Networking Platforms**

**Abraham Tobi**

(University of Johannesburg)

Should the possibility of anonymity influence how we think of epistemic injustices? It is not a worry in typical instances of epistemic injustice since the victims and perpetrators are distinct across social groups. However, with anonymity on the internet, it is not always apparent who is behind a post since people can use anonymous accounts. Then, it becomes difficult to talk about victims of epistemic injustice simply based on seeming membership in social groups. If this is the case, I argue that we might want to extend the idea of epistemic injustice beyond the agential and structural aspects to include an ideological element. That is, rather than think of epistemic injustice in terms of socially dominant vs socially marginalised persons and institutions, we should extend it to include the adoption or spread of ideas that are detrimental to members of socially marginalised groups.

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### **Who Needs to tell the Truth?**

**Kerstin Reibold**

(University of Potsdam)

This article focuses on TRCs that take place in non-transitional societies in which the political and social structures, institutions, and power relations have largely remained in place since the time of injustice. It uses the example of the Canadian and the Norwegian TRCs to show that TRCs try to address epistemic injustices through the practice of truth-telling. The article then argues epistemic exploitation might arise in this context - especially if the majority has no incentive to overcome their (willful) ignorance and the burden of educating the majority about past wrongs lies with the victims. TRCs thereby might create a double bind for victims which makes them choose between epistemic exploitation or continued injustices based on the majority’s ignorance. The article concludes with some suggestions for the set-up of TRCs for minorities in non-transitional societies.

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## **Answerability and Self-Answerability in Mania: from Responsibility to Reconciliation**

**Elliot Porter**

(University of Kent)

Responsibility practices to track changes in our relationships with others, be they moral strangers or intimates, (Scanlon, 2008). We are often ambivalent in our reactive attitudes towards marginal agents, in which cases, Shoemaker holds that responsibility divides into three faces, respectively evaluating character, judgement, and an agent's regard for others (2015). I suggest that manic agents typically find themselves in apparently urgent circumstances, where the relevant 'instead of' reasons speak against acting, but only meekly. Such agents can recite the relevant instead of reasons, but these reasons cannot be weighty - an alteration in agent's judgement. Drawing on Westlund (2009) I note that manic agents have a disposition to justify their normative outlook. The set of 'instead of' reasons that are relevant depend on which interlocutor is being answered, and manic agents are likely to take interlocutors to share their urgent view of the normative space. Even on Shoemaker's view, it is ambiguous whether manic agents remain answerable, but as the relevant 'instead of' reasons depend on a proper recognition of one's interlocutor, answerability evaluating judgement cannot be isolated from accountability evaluating regard. The assumption that others share one's urgent outlook impairs regard. Holding manic agents responsible in this context means recognising that an interpersonal relationship is impaired by this impaired regard. Restoring this relationship requires reconciliation (Rashed, 2019). Both intimates and moral strangers need interpretive tools to make sense of manic reasoning, and so the project of creating mad social meaning is an urgent matter of (distributive) hermeneutic justice.

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## **Know-how Dismissal**

**Jules Salomone-Sehr & Camille Ternier**

(McGill University)

Epistemic injustice theorists have predominantly focused on injustices that insult our capacity for propositional knowledge. In this article, we foray into injustices that target our capacity for knowledge-how and develop a new concept of epistemic injustice: the concept of knowledge-how dismissal. Knowledge-how dismissal is the injustice you suffer when a task you have been recruited to perform has been designed in such a way that it culpably fails to do justice to your competence in that practical domain. Knowledge-how dismissal can occur in face-to-face interactions, as when

your tasks in our shared cooking culpably fail to tap into your great cooking skills. More important, knowledge-how dismissal regularly occurs in structured organizations like firms, as when workers' tasks culpably fail to honor the workers' competence. In fact, a virtue of our concept of knowledge-how dismissal is that it highlights the distinctively epistemic wrong workers experience when assigned meaningless tasks.

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## **Decolonizing Epistemic Power: Epistemic Injustice, Political Equality, and Colonial Memory**

**Amandine Catala**

(University of Quebec at Montreal)

Most western democracies have been, or continue to be, involved in colonialism. Yet colonial memory is often either severely distorted or lacking entirely – a situation that can be characterized as “colonial erasure.” I argue that colonial erasure produces and maintains inequalities in both epistemic and political power and undermines the democratic process of reason-giving. I proceed in three steps. I first argue that, by obscuring the continuity between historical and contemporary injustice, colonial erasure creates epistemic injustice for minoritized groups like Afrodescendants and Indigenous peoples. I then argue that colonial erasure undermines political equality in contemporary societies by creating what I call a “meta-epistemic filter.” Finally, I argue that this situation of meta-epistemic filtering undermines political equality because it significantly hinders these minorities' ability to engage in the democratic process of political participation on an equal basis.

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## **Metaphors and Hermeneutical Resistance**

**Milan Ney**

(CUNY)

This talk explores ways in which metaphors contribute to hermeneutical resistance. I distinguish two aspects of hermeneutical injustice and two corresponding kinds of resistance: exoteric and esoteric hermeneutical injustice/resistance. The former injustice consists in unjust harm due to an inability to make one's experience understood to others. The latter consists in such a harm due to an inability to fully understand one's own experiences. In exoteric hermeneutical resistance,

metaphors can overcome resistances in others to understanding marginalised agents' contributions. In esoteric hermeneutical resistance, metaphors may highlight common structures in various aspects of marginalised agent's experiences, they can provide means of denoting social properties obscured by hermeneutical injustice and they can exhibit hermeneutical injustice by resisting interpretation. I illustrate these practices through works by Emily Dickinson, Ralph Ellison, Frantz Fanon, Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs.

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### **Imposter Syndrome and Epistemic Injustice**

**Olerato Mogomotsi**

(University of Cape Town)

I argue that the widely accepted classical conceptions of imposter syndrome, and their more contemporary variants, commit structural hermeneutic injustice. The classical concept obfuscates the ability of historically subjugated epistemic agents entering historically white, patriarchal and privileged epistemic spaces from adequately making sense of their impostorism, and epistemically gaslights victims into seeing themselves as responsible for their impostorism. I call for an ameliorated account of imposter syndrome, especially as it relates to epistemic environments, that is inextricably linked to the experiences of epistemic injustices. I re-define and defend the following new conception of imposter syndrome as an agential state of epistemic ambivalence, where an individual is disadvantageously positioned by epistemically unjust structures and interpersonal relations in their capacity as epistemic peers, resulting in the epistemic agent discounting their epistemic competence as a member of the epistemic community in equitable epistemic standing, despite having evidence to the contrary.

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### **Justificatory Injustices: Inequality in the Access to Justificatory Reasons**

**Gloria Mähringer**

(LMU)

Being able to justify one's decisions is essential for self-respect and social integrity. However, the ability to give justificatory reasons can be compromised by social inequalities. Based on a paradigm example of a disadvantaged student, this paper distinguishes three variations of justificatory

injustice: injustice in normative understanding, injustice in normative communication, and the most intricate form of genuine justificatory injustice. While the first two variations do occur, their description fails to capture many cases adequately. Sometimes, social disadvantage can make that a person who (prima facie) has good reasons for a choice – and is also fully capable of understanding and articulating them – finds these reasons silenced or unavailable because of competing reasons that do not hold in the same way for more privileged people. By examining the nature of reasons and what it means for a justification to really be viable, we can see the need for a new concept.

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### **How Algorithms Further Epistemic Injustice**

**Andrew Akpan**

(University of Johannesburg)

Attempts to remedy algorithmic bias come from technical, and/ or legal frameworks. The technical argument is that since one prominent way in which algorithmic bias is shaped is through the data set that is used to train algorithms, it is important to widen the data set to sufficiently include underrepresented populations and minority groups. The legal framework provides rules and regulations that aim to limit or circumvent algorithmic bias. Countries are beginning to put in place regulations (like The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by the European Union) that seek to identify, mitigate, and remediate the impacts of algorithmic bias on customers. These two frameworks are underpinned by a sense of morality; that the design and operation of algorithms have ethical implications. This article considers the pitfalls of these approaches and argues that the problem of algorithmic bias should be understood and addressed, in the first instance, as an epistemological problem.

This epistemic approach, I argue, is what holds the greatest hope for addressing, at the root level, issues of epistemic injustice that are the cause of algorithmic bias. I identify a novel form of epistemic injustice – ‘homogeneous epistemic injustice’ (HEI) – that is different from existing notions of epistemic injustice in the literature, such as testimonial, hermeneutical, and contributory injustices, amongst others.

Homogeneous epistemic injustice is arguably more pernicious than all the paradigmatic types of epistemic injustice. It happens when the epistemic resources of the non-dominantly situated people are taken up but understood through the dominant lens of the West. In this way, HEI

functions to maintain the asymmetrical power structure between the North and the South in algorithmic development and use. HEI provides a useful tool for theorising the injustice intrinsic in how algorithms are constructed that goes beyond their legal and moral harms.

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### **Reasons and Agency in Injustices Suffered by Patients with CFS/ME**

**Hugh Robertson-Ritchie**

(University of Kent)

“... [W]hen our knowledge of our own experiences and sensations are dismissed, when we don’t know if we have made something up or it really happened, because we are supposed to question that lived reality, to believe it to be fiction, unevicenced and illegitimate, I know it in my own body.”

This quotation from a CFS/ME patient Alice Hatrick encapsulates many of the epistemic injustices that these patients suffer in their interactions with doctors. Chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyopathy (CFS/ME) is a long-term disabling condition of unknown cause and without any curative treatments. People with CFS/ME suffer excessive fatigue and many other intrusive symptoms. But many CFS/ME patients report that some doctors don’t accept their accounts, and recommend treatments that don’t help or make patients feel worse.

In this presentation I explore some reasons for these unhelpful attitudes to CFS/ME patients, and I suggest ways to mitigate them.

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### **Protesting under Conditions of Epistemic Injustice**

**Keynote: José Medina**

(Northwestern)

What are the challenges that oppressed groups face when they try to protest under conditions of communicative marginalization and epistemic injustice? Bringing together speech act theory and the literature on epistemic injustice, this talk will analyze the different ways in which protests are



silenced, and different ways of resisting such silencing through what I call epistemic activism. Elucidating the proper or improper uptake that publics give to protests, the talk will discuss the kind of communicative solidarity that we owe to social justice movements that advocate for the oppressed. An argument will be given for the special communicative obligations that we have toward oppressed protesting publics who face unfair communicative obstacles and silencing.

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### **Post-Christian Ignorance – Hermeneutical injustice in Secular Society**

**Gilles Beauchamp**

(McGill)

In this talk, I argue that there exists a kind of active ignorance about religion – that I name post-Christian ignorance – that renders the dominant post-Christian subjects in secular societies insensible to alternative understandings of religious experience. In the context of Québec laicity law, I first argue that conceiving the invisibility of religious identity as an appearance of neutrality and a visible religious identity as a failure of an appearance of neutrality is a secular bias that results from inadequate hermeneutical resources and social scripts. Secondly, I argue that failing to see that, by prohibiting (1) objects (2) that are worn by individuals, the law disproportionately burdens religious minorities and gives a structural privilege to the majority whose religious identity is or can be invisible shows vitiated epistemic habits; in particular, it shows closed-mindedness or resistance to new meanings in the religious domain.

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### **Mapping the Interplay Between Epistemic Injustice and (Deep) Disagreement**

**T.J Lagewaard**

(Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

This paper explores the interrelations between the phenomena of ‘epistemic injustice’ and ‘deep disagreement’. Both are not just epistemological puzzles but social and political problems as well. The goal of this paper is to map the interplay between epistemic injustice and deep disagreement in order to highlight fruitful avenues for future work and to draw attention to the importance of paying attention to epistemic injustice in our non-ideal political practices. The first part of the

paper sets out the concepts of epistemic injustice and deep disagreement. Then, the paper differentiates three ways in which epistemic injustice and deep disagreement interconnect: (1) Injustice-based deep disagreement, (2) Disagreement-fuelled epistemic injustice and (3) Suppressed disagreement. Throughout the paper, disagreements and epistemic injustices surrounding pregnancy is used as a case study.

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### **With a Little Help From My Friends**

**Micol Bez**

(Northwestern University / Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris (ENS) -- Institut Jean-Nicod.)

Epistemic Loyalty and Indirect Testimonial Injustice in testimonies of sexual violence Starting from the worry that testimonial injustice —a wrong done to someone in their capacity as speakers caused by prejudice in the economy of credibility (Fricker)— can be (and often is) perpetrated, directly and indirectly, by the friends and loved ones of people accused of sexual violence, this paper will attempt to analyse some of the challenges of a problem we encounter all too often these days: how to relate to a friend who has been accused of sexual violence?

The first part of the paper will attempt to define epistemic loyalty towards friends as an epistemically vicious stance, distinguishing it from other notions such as epistemic trust (Origg) or non-vicious epistemic partiality. The second part of the paper will argue that this attitude causes indirect testimonial injustice (Wanderer) and that, in order to avoid committing such injustice, friends need to cultivate and robustly commit to an epistemically abstemious stance.

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