

Hermeneutical Injustice as Basing Failure

Mona Simion

University of Glasgow, Cogito Epistemology Group

Abstract

This paper defends a novel view of hermeneutical epistemic injustice (HEI). To this effect, it starts by arguing that Miranda Fricker's account is too restrictive: hermeneutical epistemic injustice is more ubiquitous than her account allows. That is because, *contra* Fricker, conceptual ignorance is not necessary for HEI: hermeneutical epistemic injustice essentially involves a failure in concept application rather than in concept possession. Further on, I unpack hermeneutical epistemic injustice as unjustly brought about basing failure. Last, I show that, if this view right, HEI is a form of distributive injustice, and affords the corresponding traditional normative theorizing.

1. Introduction

Epistemic goods are goods like all others: some of them are ubiquitous (perceptual knowledge of presence of large dry goods in clear sight), some of them are rare (scientific understanding); some are cheaper (knowledge of one's pains, likes), some come at more significant costs (knowledge of what's on the other side of the Moon); some are readily accessible to most of us (knowledge how to walk), some are the prerogative of the powerful few (knowledge of state secrets).

If epistemic goods are goods like all others, one would expect questions pertaining to their just or unjust distribution to bring little to nothing of interest to the corresponding discussion in ethics and political philosophy: we should expect, for instance, egalitarianism, utilitarianism and the like to deal with epistemic goods just as smoothly as they would with housing and potatoes.

According to defenders of *sui generis* epistemic injustice, though, this expectation is mistaken: of course, epistemic goods, like all goods, can be more or less evenly distributed – some

people have more access to information than others, some people go to better schools than others etc. and there is a question to be asked as to how we should go about this in an ethically permissible way. Ethics of redistribution should be able to clear these issues for us. However, it is argued, one can identify several distinctively epistemic forms of injustice, whereby the victim is harmed, specifically, in her capacity as a knower, and which afford specialized theorizing (Fricker 2007, 1). Following Miranda Fricker, several philosophers¹ have purported to identify ways in which this may happen. The two main candidates in the literature are testimonial and hermeneutical epistemic injustice.

Very roughly, the former happens when the speaker, usually a member of a marginalized group, is not given due credibility by the hearer in virtue of her being a member of said group. Since the quality of our testimony is an expression of our epistemic standing, unjust credibility attribution is taken to be tantamount to unjust assignment of epistemic standing.

Hermeneutical epistemic injustice occurs when the interpretive resources available to a community render a person's experiences unintelligible to her, due to the epistemic marginalization of that person or members of her social group.

More recently, doubts have been expressed in the literature about whether testimonial injustice is correctly categorized as non-distributive, and thus *sui generis*, to begin with; Jennifer Lackey (2007), most notably, convincingly argues that speakers can be harmed in their capacity as knowers even if they are given due credibility, merely in virtue of more privileged epistemic agents being given more credibility than deserved. This suggests that testimonial injustice requires traditional treatment, in line with other types of unjust goods distribution.

This paper makes the corresponding point concerning hermeneutical epistemic injustice (henceforth also HEI, for short). To this effect, it starts by having a closer look at the meaning dynamics involved in the later. To begin with, it argues that Fricker's account is too restrictive: hermeneutical epistemic injustice is more ubiquitous than her account allows. That is because, *contra* Fricker, conceptual ignorance is not necessary for HEI: hermeneutical epistemic injustice essentially involves a failure in concept application rather than in concept possession (Section #2). Section #3 puts forth a novel view on hermeneutical epistemic injustice as basing failure. Further on, I show that, if this view right, HEI is a form of distributive

¹ See e.g. (Anderson 2012), (Daukas 2006, 2011), (Dotson 2011), (Mason 2011), (Medina 2012).

injustice, and affords the corresponding traditional normative theorizing (Section #4). In the last section I conclude.

2. Hermeneutical Injustice without Ignorance

Consider the following case from (Fricker 2007, c.7):

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: 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 scientist at a distance while maintaining 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 benefits was denied (2007, 150).

Carmita Wood was the victim of sexual harassment; unfortunately, however, she did not know that she was: she was unable to interpret and understand the meaning of her experience. After she reported her experiences, several women present at the meeting in question had a revelation: they had had similar experiences in the past, and they had never told anyone about them. They decided 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,' [...] '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 behaviors. Somebody came up with "harassment." Sexual harassment! Instantly we agreed (2007, 150).

According to Miranda Fricker, hermeneutical epistemic injustice occurs when the victim's understanding of her own experiences is impaired in virtue of conceptual ignorance, due to the ways meanings are handled by the socially empowered, at the disadvantage of marginalized groups. Carmita Wood did not know she was sexually harassed because she did not have the concept of sexual harassment; that is why she was unable to understand her own experiences. According to Fricker, Wood suffered 'an acute cognitive disadvantage due to a gap in the community's hermeneutical resources:' these particular type of aggression had not been yet fully conceptualized at that time, which rendered Wood epistemically impaired. According to Fricker, in turn, this is due to systematic hermeneutical marginalization of women at the time, i.e. their exclusion from social meaning production, as it were: there was no concept of sexual harassment for Wood to access and employ, because social power relations were such that women's experiences were not at the forefront of social concept building. Importantly, though, Fricker notes that *systematic* hermeneutic marginalization, although present in the case of Carmita Wood, is not an essential feature of this form of injustice; hermeneutical epistemic injustice can also be an one-off event, whereby the victim is not a member of an

often marginalized group.

From what I gather, three features are essential to Fricker's account of hermeneutical epistemic injustice: (1) conceptual ignorance on the part of the speaker, (2) the fact that feature (1) is brought about through a lack of conceptual resources in the relevant community, and (3) the fact that the lack in question is brought about unjustly through hermeneutical marginalization (which need not be systematic).

I believe condition (3), as stated, is too strong. The reason why I am skeptical about (3) is that it is not the case that injustice, in general, needs to be brought about by marginalization of any sort. We can easily imagine (find) cases in which, contrary to expectation, socially powerful groups are, nevertheless, victims of injustice. It is less likely that this will be the case, of course, but that does not make marginalization an essential source for injustice. What is plausibly essential to hermeneutical epistemic injustice is that the relevant form of epistemic failure is unjustly brought about, no matter how this happens, i.e. whether as a result of marginalization or not. I will, however, not press further in this direction, but rather work with a version of (3) simplified accordingly. What I will be concerned with in what follows is arguing that both (1) and (2) are too strong: hermeneutical epistemic injustice is more ubiquitous than Fricker's account makes it out to be.

Let us start with (1). Importantly, even if we accept Fricker's account of the epistemic trouble present in the Wood case, i.e. in terms of conceptual ignorance due to lack of available conceptual resources, it does not follow that the latter is necessary for hermeneutical epistemic injustice to occur. Individual hermeneutical failure, i.e. failure to interpret and understand one's experiences, need not be sourced in a large-scale conceptual gap; individual conceptual impoverishment is enough for HEI, insofar as it is brought about by unjust social structures. To see this, consider a modified story of Carmita Wood (involving Carmita*), happening in recent times, when the concept of sexual harassment is both thoroughly theorized and widely covered by legislation:

SEXUAL HARASSMENT*: Carmita* Wood lives in a society characterized by unfair distribution of welfare. She does not have the concept of 'sexual harassment' because her parents could not afford to send her to college. As such, when becoming the victim of sexual harassment, Carmita* is not able to either understand what is going on or communicate her experiences to the relevant authorities.

Carmita* suffers from hermeneutic ignorance: she is not able to interpret her own experiences due to the fact that she does not possess the concept of sexual harassment. Furthermore, the relevant ignorance is unjustly brought about: her being a member of an impoverished social group results in her having scarce conceptual resources. What SEXUAL HARASSMENT* shows is that (1) is too strong: hermeneutical epistemic injustice need not be caused by gaps in the collective conceptual resource. A more localized failure to conceptualise is enough, insofar as it is unjustly brought about.

To see why (2) is too strong, consider a further modification on the Wood case:

SEXUAL HARASSMENT**: In this society, sexual harassment is properly theorized, and Carmita** herself is quite competent with the concept. She is disposed to draw proper inferences employing it, she can offer a more or less precise definition, she can give examples, and, as a matter of fact, she applies the concept very reliably. However, she is not infallible: when it comes to friends and family, Carmita**, like most of us, tends to be epistemically vulnerable. Carmita**'s good old friend John, after being psychologically shaken by an ugly divorce, started acting strangely around Carmita** (in similar ways described in the original Fricker case). Although competent with the concept of sexual harassment, Carmita** is incapable of employing it on this particular occasion: conceptual competence does not imply infallibility in conceptualising. She does not think John is sexually harassing her, she thinks he is just flirting: 'after all, we are old friends; he's just been through a rough time lately, I will just not encourage him, and he will stop,' she thinks.

Carmita** fails to interpret her own experience as sexual harassment due to socially unjust treatment – being taken advantage of - by a close friend. Carmita** is a fictional character, of course, but this phenomenon is fairly ubiquitous, and it often is the outcome of socially unjust treatment of the epistemic victim; most notably, victims of domestic abuse, although competent with the relevant concepts, fail to apply them in the relevant cases: they are incapable to properly interpret and understand their own experiences when abused by their loved ones.

Conceptual competence is, on all remotely plausible extant accounts, at most a matter of reliability in concept application, not of infallibility. When failure in concept

application is triggered by social injustice, the victim suffers hermeneutical epistemic harm: due to unjust social mechanisms or behaviors, she is unable to properly interpret and understand her experiences, in spite of her general competence with the relevant concept.

3. Hermeneutical Epistemic Injustice as Basing Failure

If what the previous section argued is correct, hermeneutical epistemic injustice does not essentially involve conceptual ignorance, either at societal or at individual level. Rather, what is essential to these cases is a failure in concept application. Of course, many – if not most – cases of hermeneutical epistemic injustice will involve failure of concept application *in virtue of* conceptual ignorance. The victim fails to apply the concept of, say, sexual harassment, because she does not possess the concept of sexual harassment. Furthermore, I am confident that Fricker is right: often, the victim does not possess the relevant concept in virtue of a gap in the conceptual repertoire of her social milieu, likely due to poor theorizing in the relevant area, triggered by marginalization of the affected social group. All of this, however, is not essential to the phenomenon: what hermeneutical epistemic injustice lives and dies with is failure in concept application, triggered by unjust social factors.

Interestingly enough, note that, if this is right, hermeneutical epistemic injustice is a completely different type of epistemic beast than we thought. So one important question that arises is: what kind of epistemic failure is involved in hermeneutical epistemic injustice?

To lay my cards right on the table: this paper's thesis is that, rather than a type of ignorance (i.e. conceptual), HEI is a failure in basing. According to Fricker's account, it is essential to HEI that victims fail to believe that they are undergoing an experience of type T in virtue of being ignorant about the concept "T", which, in turn, is triggered by the unjustly brought about general societal ignorance concerning "T". According to the view defended here, HEI is a failure in basing: the HEI victim has a particular experience of type T, she is propositionally warranted to believe that she is undergoing T, but she fails to form the relevant belief in virtue of unjustly-brought-about episodic failure in concept application.

Granted, the notion of propositional warrant that I am employing here is an extremely broad one. In order to understand what I am after, it will be useful to talk in terms of reasons to

believe. That is because the epistemic basing relation is usually understood as the relation that holds between a reason and a belief when the reason is a reason for which the belief is held.

In my view, reasons are facts; they can, however, be facts ‘in the world’ (there being a table in front of me) or mere facts about a subject’s psychology (my having a perceptual experience as of a table). Importantly, my propositional warrant is meant to cover available reasons to believe, whether the availability in question is psychological or not. That is, my propositional warrant covers both reasons the believer *has* to believe that p, and reasons that *are* available for the believer to believe that p (that is, available in her epistemic environment), even if they are not psychologically available to her. Here is how to understand the distinction I’m talking about: If I see that there is a table in front of me I *have* a reason to believe that there is a table in front of me. If there is a table in front of me but I’m not paying attention to it, because I’m concerned with thinking about hermeneutical epistemic injustice, there *is* a reason *available* for me to believe that there is a table in front of me. If there is a mathematical truth out there that we haven’t yet discovered, there *is* a reason for me to believe it, but it’s not available to me. My propositional warrant covers the first two types of reasons (reasons had and available extant reasons), but not the latter. I am propositionally warranted to believe that there is a table in front of me if I see that there is a table in front of me. I am also propositionally warranted to believe that there is a table in front of me if there is a table in front of me, even if I’m not paying attention to it. I am not propositionally warranted to believe not-yet-discovered mathematical truths.

Here is some theory about the notion of availability at work here: first, we are cognitively limited creatures. There is only so much information we can access: the fact that there is a table in front of me is something that I can easily access. The fact that X, where X is an undiscovered mathematical truth, is not (usually) something I can easily access. As a first approximation, then, my notion of availability will track a psychological ‘can’ for an average cognizer of the sort exemplified. This psychological ‘can’ will be further restricted by features of the (social, physical) environment: we are supposed to check whether there are crocodiles in the lake, but not in the fridge; that’s because we are too limited to check everywhere, and our physical environment is such that they are more likely to be in the lake than in the fridge. We are supposed to read the newspaper on the table in front of us, but not the

letter under the doormat.² That's because we are limited creatures – we can't read everything – and our social environment is such that written testimony is more likely to be present in the newspaper on the table than under the doormat. Availability is easy enough availability.

There is one further, non-psychological restriction on my notion of availability: reasons are not available to you if you can't process the support relation. The fact that your car is in the driveway is a reason to believe you're home. But it's not a reason for my three-year-old son Max to believe that you're home: he is not attuned to the support relation. Max is psychologically capable to uptake the reason, but is epistemically not sophisticated enough to be attuned to the support relation, and thus to process it into a belief that you're home. In sum, propositional warrant requires both psychological and epistemic availability. I am not propositionally warranted to believe not-yet-discovered mathematical truths.

To go back to HEI: In line with the general normative distinction between having reasons so phi and there being reasons for you to phi, the first type of reason (the psychologically available one) implies concept possession; the latter two types (the extant available and extant non-available ones) do not. For me to have reasons to come to the party (say that I love parties) I need to have the relevant concepts (of love, party etc). For there to be (available) reasons for me to come to the party (say that, unbeknownst to me, a great electro-indie band is featured, and I love their sound), I don't need to be competent with the concepts involved ('electro-indie,' for instance). Similarly, for me to *have* reasons to believe that there is a table in front of me, I need to be in the suited psychological state – among other things, to have the concept of table to begin with. For there to exist (available) reasons for me to believe the same proposition, no table-related psychological states need to be present.³

² I'm borrowing this case from Sandy Goldberg. See Goldber (2017) for an excellent discussion.

³ The distinction roughly maps on to the classical distinction employed by people like, for instance, Crispin Wright (e.g. 2004), between justification and entitlement. The fact that there is an interesting notion of entitlement that need not imply concept possession should be hardly normatively controversial, since it maps on to the general normative landscape: in general, in order to be N-entitled to phi, you need not be able to phi (i.e., have all there's needed to phi). I am legally entitled to leave the country whenever I want, even if I don't have the money to do so. I am prudentially entitled to make a lot of money, even if I am not a talented manager. Finally, I am ethically entitled to humane treatment, even if I am incapable to bring it about.

What may be more controversial is the relation between the two normative standings: on some (more externalist) accounts, propositional justification will entail entitlement; internalists will likely deny this. Nothing

The distinction should not be a matter of much controversy: whatever your views on warrant, the fact that these two normative notions exist is fairly plausible, if you believe there are such things as reasons for belief, and that there is an important distinction between reasons one has to ϕ and reasons that exist for one to ϕ .

HEI is a failure in basing: the HEI victim has a particular experience of type T, she is propositionally warranted to believe that she is undergoing T – that is, there are reasons available for her, or her social circle, to believe that she is undergoing T, but she fails to form the relevant belief in virtue of unjustly-brought-about episodic failure in concept application: she fails to base her beliefs on available reasons to believe.

The view straightforwardly handles two out of the three cases discussed above. In SEXUAL HARASSMENT**, Carmita** is propositionally warranted (in this case, she has reasons) to believe she is the victim of sexual harassment. However, she is epistemically impaired in virtue of being unjustly treated by an old friend, and thus fails to form the relevant belief.

In SEXUAL HARASSMENT*, Carmita is propositionally warranted (in the sense that there are available reasons for her) to believe she is being sexually harassed; however, in virtue of her unjustly brought about lack in conceptual repertoire, she fails to form the corresponding belief.

One worry that naturally arises at this point concerns Fricker's original SEXUAL HARASSMENT case: is HEI construed as a basing failure not too restrictive still? After all, again, on all minimally plausible accounts, propositional warrant requires some reasonable degree of availability: again, I am not propositionally warranted to believe all mathematical truths; similarly, if there's a letter in a bottle somewhere in the Atlantic proving you ate my ice cream, it hardly follows that I am propositionally warranted to believe that you ate my ice cream. More than this seems to be needed, even for the weakest form of warrant.⁴ The relevant warrant-makers need to be, in some sense, available in the epistemic environment of the subject, even if not psychologically present. But this suggests that in Fricker's favorite cases, where the relevant conceptualization failure is ultimately due to a gap in the conceptual repertoire of the relevant social group, we don't get hermeneutical epistemic injustice.

hinges on this for the purposes of this paper, since the broad notion of warrant is doing all the work.

⁴ Although everything I argue here is also perfectly compatible with a view that construes propositional warrant as broad as to comprise all facts, no matter their availability status.

I want to suggest that SEXUAL HARASSMENT is a case of indirect hermeneutical epistemic injustice. That is, the victim fails epistemically in virtue of an unjust basing failure at the level of her social group. The relevant social group is warranted to believe such episodes constitute sexual harassment, but fails to do so. This failure, in turn, is unjustly brought about by lack of interest in the issue.

To see the plausibility of this, note that hermeneutical epistemic injustice, in line with propositional warrant, is also plausibly bound by an accessibility constraint: it needs be, as it were, that the social milieu in question had some access to conceptual resources required for the relevant concept production, for HEI to be instantiated. It is unjust that there was no concept of sexual harassment around in Fricker's original case because the relevant experiences were fairly ubiquitous – sexual harassment was widely spread – and, as the story goes, all that was needed was for the relevant social group to take interest in the matter. The unfortunate Wood event was merely the trigger for concept generation. Carmita's social group had all the needed conceptual resources and incentives to fill the relevant gap in its conceptual repertoire.

Importantly, note that, had this not been the case, HEI would have plausibly not been instantiated. In contrast to the case of the concept of 'sexual harassment,' not having a concept of 'electron' in our society's conceptual repertoire before we even discovered the existence of subatomic particles cannot have generated HEI, no matter what the effects of this conceptual lack might have been on marginalized groups. Plausibly, that is because the resources needed for concept production were not yet available to us.

If that is the case, that is, if propositional warrant and HEI share this availability constraint, it is plausible to think that what happens in HEI cases is that, although propositional warrant exists (either psychologically present or merely available in the relevant epistemic environment), the relevant epistemic subjects (unjustly) fail to form the corresponding beliefs.

4. Basing Failure and Distributive Epistemic Justice

I have argued so far that hermeneutical epistemic injustice is much more ubiquitous than Fricker's account would have it. In particular, neither societal- nor individual-level conceptual ignorance is necessary for HEI instantiation. Rather, what is essential to HEI is a (unjustly brought about) failure in basing.

The victims of HEI fail to interpret and understand their own experiences, in virtue of failing to form the relevant beliefs, in spite of the fact that the corresponding propositions enjoy propositional warrant. In some case, this happens because the victims lack the relevant concept; in others, although conceptually competent, they fail to apply it.

What I am going to do next is 1. go through some accounts of basing on the market and illustrate how HEI works on these accounts, and 2. argue that, no matter your preferred view on the basing relation, if this paper is right about HEI amounting to basing failure, HEI is nothing but garden-variety distributive injustice.

Causal theories of the basing relation hold that for a belief to be based on a reason, the reason must cause the belief in an appropriate way. As such, according to (Moser, 1989, p. 157): *S*'s believing or assenting to *P* is based on his justifying propositional reason *Q* if and only if *S*'s believing or assenting to *P* is causally sustained in a nondeviant manner by his believing or assenting to *Q*, and by his associating *P* and *Q*. On this view on basing, then, my account takes HEI to amount to an unjustly brought about rupture⁵ in the (nondeviant) causal chain. Although the victim had the relevant causal triggers available to her, the chain is interrupted through some unjust intervention.

The main competitor on the market is the doxastic view (e.g. Tolliver 1982). Doxastic theories of the basing relation hold that having an appropriate meta-belief to the effect that a reason is a good reason to hold a belief is sufficient for the belief's being based on the reason. On this view, failure in basing will amount to ignorance: the victim of HEI fails to have the corresponding meta-belief in virtue of some unjustly-brought-about epistemic situation – be it conceptual ignorance or failure to note the support relation.

There are ups and downs to both these views. The causal view excels in capturing the explanatory aspect of believing based on reasons, but it is often accused of failure to capture its normative aspect. The doxastic view captures its normative aspect: the believer forms the corresponding belief in virtue of what she takes to be a good support relation. It does so at a very serious over-intellectualization cost, however.

In previous work, I have suggested a novel view of basing, aiming to capture both the explanatory and the normative

⁵ 'Rupture' might not be the most intuitive way to describe what is going on in cases where the causal chain is not even initiated. For lack of better way to put it, here and below I will use 'rupture' as a technical term that includes initiation failure.

dimensions, which I take to be jointly necessary and sufficient for basing, but at no cost for unsophisticated cognizers. I construe basing as indicator following. On this view, reasons are indicators of norm compliance, and the basing relation consists in following⁶ these indicators. Indicators, in turn, are given a proper functionalist spin: something is an indicator that *p* is the case if and only if it has the etiological function of reliably signaling *p*'s being the case.

On this view, a belief *B* is based on a reason *R* iff, in believing *B*, the subject is treating *R* as an indicator of compliance with the norm of belief and thereby follows it. The fact that I see a table in front of me is a reason for me to believe that there is a table in front of me because it indicates that my corresponding belief will comply with the norm of belief. In turn, my belief that there is a table in front of me is based on the fact that I see a table in front of me if, in so believing, I treat this fact as an indicator that my belief will comply with the norm of belief and thereby follow it.

The basing as following indicators view has a very visual and intuitive way to explain what is happening in cases of HEI: although the corresponding indicators are present, the victim is unjustly prevented from following them. Imagine, as it were, that the victim is driving to hermeneutical success, but fails to take the proper turn, in spite of there being an indicator pointing in the relevant direction, because she is unjustly prevented to follow it.

Whatever your preferred view on the basing relation may be, one interesting result to note is that, if HEI is a failure in basing, it is but an instance of good old distributive injustice. In cases of HEI, the victim's access to the relevant goods is unjustly blocked. Just like people that are unjustly prevented from accessing extant resources, such as food, shelter, education, health and so on, HEI victims are unjustly prevented from accessing epistemic goods. On the causal view, that is because the causal chain is unjustly interrupted. We find cases like this in general goods maldistribution all the time. On the doxastic view, what prevents the HEI victim's access to one type of epistemic good – understanding her experiences – is her (unjustly brought about) lack of a different epistemic good (the relevant metabelief). Again, this picture often obtains in the realm of non-epistemic goods: the poor do not have access to health care in virtue of not having money, which is the case in virtue of not having a job, which, in turn, is the case in virtue of not having access to education and so

⁶ For the purposes of this paper, I will not unpack the following relation. See, however, Simion (2018).

on.

You will not be surprised that my favorite account of basing strongly supports the non-*sui generis* claim too, that is, the claim that HEI is mere garden-variety distributive injustice: for the simplest analogy, just imagine someone being unjustly kept from reaching their destination by being prevented from following the relevant traffic indicators. Or, to use a more thoroughly theorized analogy, think of opportunity unjust distribution: here, the victims are unjustly blocked from accessing routes to their desired goods.

In sum: if HEI is a failure in basing, it amounts to unjustly preventing the victim from accessing the relevant (in this case, epistemic) goods; needless to say, cases of unjustly blocked access to goods are but garden variety cases of distributive injustice. HEI is not a *sui generis* form of injustice, and there is little reason to believe it affords specialist theorizing. Our results in the literature on general distributive injustice will do just fine.

I will end by going back to Carmita Wood, because it is quite interesting to see what particular type of distributive injustice is involved in the original Fricker case. Recall that I proposed that what we have here is a case of indirect hermeneutical epistemic injustice: Carmita's failure to interpret her own experience is due to a basing failure at the level of her social group: the group is warranted to believe experiences of the type described in Wood's case are instances of sexual harassment (all conceptual resources for generating the corresponding concept are readily available), but it fails to do so due to unjust marginalization of the interests of the affected group. I want to propose that what we have here is a particularly interesting type of distributive injustice: unjust distribution of production means. The equivalent case for non-epistemic goods would be one whereby we have all the needed resources to produce a particular drug that would save many lives in an impoverished part of the world, but we (unjustly) fail to allocate the needed production resources because the interests of the relevant population don't figure in our top priorities list. As such, just like Carmita Wood, the victims don't have access to the relevant goods because we don't care enough to produce them, in spite of ready availability of resources.

5. Conclusion

Epistemic goods are goods like all others: some of us have better access to them than others. Straightforwardly, this is the case with

things like information and education. Less obviously, they can be unfairly distributed in testimonial exchanges when we fail to give people the credibility they deserve. This paper has argued that, in line with general distribution of goods, the access of some of us to hermeneutical epistemic goods such as properly interpreting and understanding our experiences are unjustly blocked through basing failure.

References

- Anderson, E. (2012). Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions. *Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy*, 26(2): 163–173.
- Daukas, N. (2006). “Epistemic Trust and Social Location,” *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology*, 3(1): 109–124.
- Daukas, N. (2011). “A Virtue-Theoretic Approach to Pluralism in Feminist Epistemology,” *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Power in Knowledge*, Heidi E. Grasswick (ed.), Dordrecht: Springer, 45–67.
- Dotson, K. (2011). “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 26(2): 236–257.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goldberg, S. (2017). Should Have Known. *Synthese* 194 (8): 2863 – 2894.
- Lackey, J. (2007). Credibility and the Distribution of Epistemic Goods. (manuscript available here: <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/elucidations/files/2017/08/Credibility-and-the-Distribution-of-Epistemic-Goods.docx>).
- Mason, R. (2011). Two Kinds of Unknowing. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 26(2): 294–307.
- Medina, J. (2012). Hermeneutical Injustice and Polyphonic Contextualisms: Social Silences and Shared Hermeneutical Responsibilities. *Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy*, 26(2): 201–220.
- Moser, P. (1989). *Knowledge and Evidence*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Simion (2018). Reasons, Basing and Warrant. Manuscript.
- Tolliver, J. (1982). Basing Beliefs on Reasons. *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 15: 149–161.
- Wright, C. (2004). On Epistemic Entitlement: Warrant for Nothing, and Foundations for Free? *Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Vol 78 (1):167-212.