Collective resources and collectivity: A reply to José Medina
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I am grateful to José Medina for his thoughtful response to my concerns about abandoning the notion of a broadly shared hermeneutical resource.[1] This notion of a shared resource, opened up so nicely by Fricker's work, will be of interest to anyone concerned with how we manage to share our thoughts with one another — both in terms of shared understandings and in terms of shared conversations.[2] Without some shared set of meanings, concepts, terms, or practices, these fundamental capacities for communication and understanding become impossible for us. The questions under discussion in my exchanges with Medina are about *how* we share our collective resource, and with *whom* we do the sharing. Medina's comments provide helpful clarification about these questions, and they promise to move the debate forward in several ways.

First, as I said, they provide a necessary clarification. In my previous reply to Medina, I expressed the concern that polyphonic contextualism might inevitably result in a turn "away from talk of interpretive resources and towards a context-based parsing of politically significant communication failures."[3] In other words, I worry that any move away from a broadly shared resource and towards a more context-sensitive approach is a move away from Fricker's central concern that our collective resources can become structurally prejudiced. With respect to my concerns here, it appears that there may be room for some middle ground. It seems clear that Medina wants to hold on to talk (and use) of collective hermeneutical resources, or, in his own words, shared expressive and interpretive resources. Instead of abandoning resource talk altogether, Medina advocates a shift away from thinking of hermeneutical resources as broadly shared and towards a conception of these resources as divided amongst sub-groups and tied to particular contexts and expressive practices. This emphasis on the ways in which our communicative practices and requirements vary from context to context is at the heart of Medina's polyphonic contextualism. It is, I think, both a useful insight into our communicative practices and a potential source of trouble for Medina.

To begin, let's be clear about Medina's conception of our shared expressive and interpretive resources.

> In the first place, far from trying to shift our attention away from hermeneutical resources, my polyphonic contextualism and my argument in the paper under discussion try to show precisely that we need to pay attention to expressive and interpretative resources in a more pluralistic and situated way, taking into account not only those resources that are widely or universally shared, but also those that are only shared by subgroups in virtue of their distinctive experiences, and even those nascent meanings that only some individuals (who do not yet constitute a well-

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[1] Medina (2012b).
[2] See Fricker (2007) here.
[3] Beeby (2012), p.4.

formed public) are struggling to articulate. I argued that there are typically more hermeneutical resources than those shared by all the members of a collective.[4]

In this passage, Medina alludes to three distinct kinds of resource: widely or universally shared resources, resources shared by subgroups with distinctive experiences, and nascent resources emerging from individuals not yet grouped as well-formed publics. This expanded repertoire of resources accomplishes two goals. First, it helps us to avoid the distorted perspectives that may result from a homogenous resource. Second, it allows for the diversity of voices, standpoints, and practices that are surely present among any community of language users without imposing "the hermeneutical resources of mainstream culture or of the established social imaginary".[5]

This picture of our shared hermeneutical resources is appealing and intuitively plausible. It captures the sometimes localized dynamics of communication and self-understanding. It pays attention to the fact that some of these practices are relative to events and issues tethered to a particular geographic location or specific sub-population (Medina's example about the epistemic needs of immigration officials is a vivid illustration of this). However, I worry that to take this approach is to risk minimizing the force of hermeneutical injustice.

For Fricker, the notion of hermeneutical injustice depends on the sense that we all share, and are all thereby vulnerable to, a collective resource. Indeed, this collectivity is the only thing that allows a dominant understanding of one practice or the complete lack of understanding about another practice to become oppressive. If we have other options to turn to for our expressive and interpretive needs, the sense that we are victims of hermeneutical injustice becomes more difficult to motivate. It is the idea of an established social imaginary that grounds Fricker's notion of hermeneutical injustice in the first place. For Fricker, hermeneutical injustice is the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding. If there is no failure in our collective understanding, but only a partial occlusion of understanding in some of our resource sub-communities, we lose much of the intuitive plausibility of Fricker's case for the presence of an injustice.

Consider some of Fricker's examples to see the importance of a broadly shared resource. First, her paradigm example about the origins of the term 'sexual harassment' would be much less compelling if women like Carmita Wood had access to other resources in addition to the collectively shared one. If Wood had access to other means of understanding and communicating about her experiences (sub-group and nascent resources, for example), there would be less of a sense that she was prevented from understanding and communicating about her experiences in such a way as to constitute an injustice. In Fricker's parlance, these significant areas of Wood's social experience would not have been quite as obscured from collective understanding. Instead, they would only

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[4] Medina (2012b), p.1.
[5] Medina (2012b), p.1.

be obscured from some understandings in some contexts. Similarly, in the example taken from McKellan's novel *Enduring Love*, the notion that Joe was a victim of some sort of one-off marginalization and hermeneutical injustice only makes sense against the background of a dominant understanding that Joe-like people are people of privilege. If the police did not understand that Joe was being harassed, but some people might have understood this in the right context and under the right circumstances, then Joe's case seems like more of an unfortunate story of a man misunderstood by the police. It does not seem as much like the story of a moment when our collective hermeneutical resources were inadequate for Joe's needs in such a way as to obscure relevant social experiences from collective understanding.

Does this mean that there are no sub-dialects or nascent half-meanings? Of course not. In fact, it may be the case that Medina's picture of how our expressive and interpretive resources work is a more complete and inclusive picture than Fricker's. There is a lot to like about the polyphonic contextualist's picture. However, in giving her account of hermeneutical injustice, Fricker does not aim to provide us with a picture of our resources that is fully comprehensive. Instead, she begins a process of thinking about what hermeneutical resources might be like by thinking about cases in which they fail us. Perhaps Fricker's kind of dominant and inadequate resource only arises when the other kinds of resources suggested by Medina are stamped out or otherwise made unavailable. In this case, polyphonic contextualism might present us with a better picture of the solution than the problem. Medina himself affords this kind of interpretation:

> I contend that a more nuanced—polyphonic—contextualization offers a more adequate picture of what it means to break social silences and to repair the hermeneutical injustices associated with them.

In this way, polyphonic contextualism picks up where Fricker leaves off. Polyphonic contextualism is about what it means to break social silences, and hermeneutical injustice is about the silences themselves and how they come about. The two pictures need not be incompatible.

Medina moves on from resource talk to a discussion of collective agency and shared responsibility. Of course he is right to point out that our institutions and structures are not separate from our "hearts and minds". I did not mean to suggest such separation. Instead, my thoughts about broadly shared responsibility were intended to mirror my thoughts about a broadly shared resource. The thought was something like this: if we share the resource collectively, then we also share the responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of the resource in terms of both epistemic virtue and in terms of functionality. I worry that a turn away from a conception of broadly shared resources will entail a turn away from this sense of shared responsibility. My claim is that it is harder to feel responsible for a sub-resource that does not seem to touch on your immediate social experience. It is hard to feel responsible for a resource that you don't use. In this way, polyphonic contextualism may result in dividing, rather than mobilizing, our collective agency. Again, under the Fricker model we see only cases where collective agency goes wrong. In these cases, and precisely because the resource is broadly shared among us, we

are still responsible for the dominant social imaginary even when it does not do an adequate job of representing a fair (or polyphonic) picture of social experience.

I want to suggest that there may be a way of taking Fricker and Medina together here. In so doing, we begin to have a more complete picture of what our hermeneutical resources might be like at a range of moments and for a range of people. This picture seems to remain congenial to Medina's goals, though he and I may differ in terms of mobilization strategies for collective agency.

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