The Epistemic Injustice Anthology: A Review of *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*

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The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice
Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr.
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438 pp.

I am undertaking a review of The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice with some trepidation. In reviewing an edited volume with over forty authors, I will inevitably commit some omissions and oversights, but the utility of this book justifies even a fool-hardy attempt. The length of this review suggests the troubles associated with adequately covering such an important anthology.

The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice, edited by Ian James Kidd, José Medina and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., is a comprehensive anthology on the current theories of epistemic injustice with important implications for future research. The diverse methods and topics of this text make it an excellent introduction for graduate seminars, as well as a common resource for researchers in the field. It includes contributions from most authors active in the field, with enough diversity in contributors to represent the substantive and methodological differences among them. The text is prospective as it provides new methods and topics for future research. It is retrospective as it clearly canvasses and articulates major concepts and theories to date. Given the breadth and length of the book, I will provide only a cursory overview of most chapters, noting general themes.

The scope of the book addresses key issues of epistemic injustice, divided among its five parts. Part 1, “Core Concepts”, provides answers to questions such as what epistemic injustice is and what its constitutive concepts are. These include testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and various methodological lenses. Fundamental issues of responsibility, ideology and trust fill-out the section.

Part 2, “Liberatory Epistemologies and Axes of Oppression Answers”, addresses the ways in which epistemic injustice can be resisted and how epistemic injustice is sustained, sometimes despite good intentions.

Part 3, “Schools of Thought and Subfields within Epistemology”, canvasses an array of theories and methodologies which have informed or could be instrumental for understanding epistemic injustice. Diverse theoretical frameworks such as feminist epistemology, queer theory, and disability theory, are promising for future work in the field.

Part 4, “Sociopolitical, Ethical and Psychological Dimensions of Knowing”, relates epistemic injustice to agency, freedom, and social institutions.

Part 5, “Case Studies”, addresses sites of epistemic injustice, suggesting direction for future applied research and a keen sense of current applied research foci.
On Part 1

In Chapter 1, “Varieties of Epistemic Injustice”, Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. outlines four lenses with which to interpret epistemic injustices. Considering relations of epistemic dominance and oppression, Pohlhaus invokes variations of social contract thinking, agential conditioning by social circumstance, degrees of change in epistemic systems, and epistemic labor and knowledge production.

Chapter 2, “Varieties of Testimonial Injustice”, by Jeremy Wanderer clarifies and develops the concept of testimonial injustice. While testimonial injustice was first conceived of as prejudicial interpersonal credibility deficits (Fricker 2007, 28), Wanderer extends the analysis to general types of testimonial injustice which includes transactional and structural forms. Wanderer also posits testimonial betrayal, which is the violation of epistemic trust established between persons.

Chapter 3, “Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice”, by José Medina distills hermeneutical injustice to cases in which “the intelligibility of communicators is unfairly constrained or undermined when their meaning-making capacities encounter unfair obstacles” (41). Generalizing from hermeneutical injustice as conceptual lacunas which manifests from structural deficits in hermeneutical resources, Medina notes contexts in which culpable hermeneutical injustices arise.

Chapter 4, “Evolving Concepts of Epistemic Injustice”, allows Miranda Fricker to refine her conception of the scope of epistemic injustice. Fricker emphasizes epistemic phenomenology, directing attention at the role of intention in culpability. This emphasis on normative epistemic psychology supports a unique field of inquiry in epistemic injustice.

In Chapter 5, “Epistemic Injustice as Distributive Injustice”, Coady elaborates on his concept that distributive considerations are integral to understanding epistemic injustice. For example, credibility distributions are integral to understanding testimonial justice and injustice. Without an account of how much credibility a person deserves, calls for testimonial justice are moot.

Chapter 6, “Trust, Distrust and Epistemic Injustice”, by Katherine Hawley focuses on the foundational role of trust relations for epistemic justice. Hawley considers various conceptions of trust arguing that trust relations are often the basis of epistemic injustice and justice.

In Chapter 7, “Forms of Knowing and Epistemic Resources”, Alexis Shotwell maintains that fixation on propositional knowledge is itself an epistemic injustice and that thought experiments are unable to capture the epistemic dimensions of practice. Distinguishing between knowing how and knowing that, Shotwell attends to the ways in which know-how are intimately connected with our identities.
Chapter 9, “Ideology”, by Charles Mills connects Marxist notions of ideology and false consciousness to projects on epistemic injustice by extending the analysis beyond class to race, and in doing so provides an account of the nature of ideology. Mills notes the materialist basis of ideology founded in the interest of dominant classes and the epistemologies of ignorance that may explain many intelligibility deficits and hermeneutic lacunas.

**On Part 2**

In Part 2, the primary achievement is the use of theories of difference to inform the theory of epistemic injustice. In some cases, authors show how theories of difference have already influenced the development of epistemic injustice as a field. In Chapter 11, “Feminist Epistemology: The Subject of Knowledge”, Nancy Tuana traces the influence of standpoint theory for understanding the how epistemic privilege and marginalization is generated from political repression (e.g., Harding 2004). Expanding to critical race theory, Tuana invokes Mills (1997) to explain the resilience of ignorance, as it is a strategic epistemic asset of privilege.

In Chapter 10, “Intersectionality and Epistemic Injustice”, Patricia Hill Collins analyses the relevance of hybrid social identities to understanding epistemic injustice. She writes that intersectional identities “operate not as unitary mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (115). If epistemic justice scholarship is concerned with realizing social justice and reducing social inequality through change, then scholars would do well to recognize the interconnected forms of oppression enacted on the intersectionally diverse.

In Chapter 12, “Epistemic Injustice and the Philosophy of Race”, Luvell Anderson analyzes contemporary public debate on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. By distinguishing between an exclusive and inclusive reading of BLM, in which an inclusive reading entails that “black lives also matter” while an exclusive reading implies “only black lives matter,” Anderson shows that the exclusive interpretation of BLM perpetuates hermeneutical injustice. The exclusive reading obscures the intention to bring proportionate attention to the lives of black Americans experiencing disproportionate state-sanctioned police violence.

Chapter 15 “Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice”, exemplifies the axes of oppression theme of part 2. Rachel McKinnon argues how ostensive allies engage in epistemic injustice via gaslighting when allies suggest that trans* people are misinterpreting perceived micro-aggressions. This amounts to more than mere testimonial injustice, as it is a betrayal of a trust relationship.

In Chapter 16, “Knowing Disability, Differently”, Shelley Tremain demonstrates the myriad ways in which literature on epistemic injustice has been insensitive to disability. This is evident in the use of ableist metaphors (e.g. epistemic blindness). Tremain illustrates this through a meta-analysis of the use of the trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird* in writing on epistemic injustice.
On Part 3

Part 3 offers retrospective and prospective approaches for work on epistemic injustice.

In Chapter 17, “Foucault and Epistemic Injustice”, Amy Allen argues that Foucault’s focus on the constitutive and power-laden elements of epistemic practice can be productively leveraged to study epistemic injustice, contrary to popular opinion.

Chapter 18, “Epistemic Injustice and Phenomenology” by Lisa Guenther, argues both that phenomenological methods are useful for understanding epistemic injustice and are already implicitly built into Fricker’s account of epistemic injustice.


On Part 4

Part 4 connects epistemic injustice with novel normative theories, prevailing social science, and various political concepts. This part demonstrates integral connections between epistemic injustice, social science research, normative theory, political theory, and political philosophy.

In Chapter 22, “Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat and Epistemic Injustice”, Jennifer Saul clarifies the logical relationships between testimonial injustice, implicit bias and stereotype. While implicit bias may lead to testimonial injustice, they are not the same. Likewise, stereotype threat and implicit bias may lead to hermeneutical marginalization and thus hermeneutical injustice.

In Chapter 23, “What’s Wrong with Epistemic Injustice: Harm, Vice, Objectification and Misrecognition”, Matthew Congdon engages in the normative foundations debate, positing recognition theory as novel normative basis for epistemic injustice. He argues that it explains epistemic injustice. Failures to recognize epistemic agents as such can be analyzed in terms of failures to demonstrate epistemic respect, epistemic love, and epistemic esteem.

In Chapter 24, “Epistemic and Political Agency”, Lorenzo C. Simpson articulates the view that second-order social interpretations are “logically prior to the first-order social agency that depends upon it for its focus” (259). As such, Lorenzo provides an impetus to focus on structural and political issues of hermeneutical space while demarcating the bounds of culpability.
In Chapter 25, “Epistemic and Political Freedom”, Susan Babbit uses the case of Cuban intellectuals such as José Martí wrote on epistemic injustice well before similar debates occurred in North America. Political repression explains this epistemic injustice, as the colonial status of Cuba led to a circulation and credibility deficits, suffered by Cuban intellectuals. Thus, Babbit shows how political freedom is a precondition for epistemic justice while drawing attention to underappreciated scholars of epistemic injustice.

On Part 5

Part 5 applies and extends theories of epistemic injustice to the law, digital environments, science, education, health care, religion, philosophy itself, and indigenous peoples in relation to anthropology and cultural heritage. Given the breadth of coverage, I will focus on applications which have not received attention elsewhere. As such, special attention will be given to the previously unaddressed fields as represented by Chapters 28, 29, 34 and 35.

In Chapter 28 “Epistemic injustice and the Law”, Michael Sullivan argues that truth is not the sole goal of trial procedures, noting 5th amendment pleas, and non-testifying privileges retained by spouses of defendants. To promote truth and reduce epistemic injustice during trials, he offers four suggestions. First, procedures to mitigate bias and promote truth; second, judges and juries representative of local demographics; third, judges and juries should be made aware of their implicit biases and confirmation bias. Fourth, juries and judges should be made aware of their hermeneutical system and epistemic norms.

Chapter 29 “Epistemic Injustice: The Case of Digital environments” by Gloria Origgi and Serena Ciranni, canvas the unique and epistemically problematic implications of mass digitization. The authors note that predictive algorithms and online records are often considered more reliable than persons. This view poses problems for epistemic agency and self-trust. Epistemic objectification occurs as statistical doubles are generated based on our digital behaviors which are then used to predict and model our behavior. This leads to a depreciation of intentionality, as tech giants increasingly direct our attention and behavior while alienating persons from their data. As the editors suggest at the outset, this era of informational and communicative abundance makes matters of epistemic injustice especially pressing (Kidd, Medina and Pohlhaus 1). Origgi and Ciranni’s turn to digital environments is a welcome shift as big data increasingly influences our lives and epistemic activities.

In Chapter 34 “Indigenous peoples, Anthropology and the Legacy of Epistemic Injustice”, Rebecca Tsosie analyzes the influence that anthropology has had on the hermeneutics and representation of native peoples in North America. Showing that indigenous epistemic marginalization has deep legal and intellectual roots, Tsosie demonstrates the ways in which indigenous knowledge systems are viewed as epistemically deficient as they are presented as lacking the secular rationalistic values. Testimonial injustice arises as indigenous peoples are not given due credibility because of marginalization and biased epistemic norms. This marginalization and testimonial injustice leads to hermeneutical injustice as native peoples are disenfranchised from the meaning-making process about their own cultures in courts and anthropology departments.
In Chapter 35, “Epistemic Injustice and Cultural Heritage”, Andreas Pantazatos employs Hookway’s (2010) account of participant perspective epistemic injustices to argue that cultural heritage institutions have a unique duty to include members of that heritage in the process of making and conveying cultural knowledge. The cathedral of Durham City, England exemplifies the tendency to exclude relevant contemporary stakeholders, which results in a participant injustice. Epistemic injustice is interpreted as a distributional problem as some stakeholders’ perspectives are not transmitted to others.

**Epistemic Injustice and Philosophical Practice**

In the final analysis, a few points are especially evident. First, and appropriately for the field of epistemic injustice, this book displays great diversity in methods, styles, and sources. The analytic/continental distinction, which continues to haunt much of contemporary Anglophone philosophy, plays little role in demarcating disciplinary norms. For example, Lorraine Code freely admits that her narrative style may be irksome to some and that epistemology itself lacked the resources to address issues of epistemic responsibility until recently (Chapter 8, 92). Scholars draw from continental figures such as Marx (Mills, Chapter 9), Merleau-Ponty (Guenther, Chapter 18), Foucault (Hall, Chapter 14; Allen, Chapter 17), and Hegel (Congdon, Chapter 23). This demonstrates a break from much of contemporary philosophy as scholars eschew the “rhetoric of beginnings” in which a small group or individual is credited with providing the foundations of a field of inquiry (Pohlhaus 14; Dotson 2012). Rather than cite a specific body of literature due to recent philosophical mores, contributors to this volume draw from an array of source they deem useful.

*The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* is a major step for the field of epistemic injustice. This contribution creates a space for and central pillar of epistemic injustice research. This is not merely a result of the scope and content of epistemic injustice, canvassed above. The very methods of the field challenge long-standing disciplinary norms about intellectual antecedents, appropriate methods, and blurring of classic distinctions between political philosophy, ‘proper’ epistemology, and ethics. One major methodological transition is evident in the self-reflexive assessment of philosophy, its limits, and its methods. This metaphilosophical inclination challenges inherited norms about proper philosophical practice.

Patricia Hill Collins challenges the distinction between social justice scholarship and activism, noting a characteristic aversion to activism in philosophy departments. She writes, “[y]et once inside the academy these actors discovered that political action and taking principled positions became objectionable because they seemingly opposed norms of scholarly objectivity” (Chapter 10, 118). Here Collins takes aim at practical norms within academia urging a more intimate connection between theory and praxis. Likewise, Linda Alcoff challenges Eurocentrism in the academy. She argues that the practiced belief that theory is separable from a historical context constitutes a “transcendental delusion” (Chapter 37, 297). Alcoff insists that the philosophical practice of giving nearly exclusive credit and scholarly attention to Western canons itself presupposes that geographical and cultural origin bestow special epistemic authority. Shotwell criticizes central features of philosophy, namely...
propositional knowledge and thought experiments (Chapter 7, 79). As such, the aversion to the “rhetoric of beginnings” mentioned above allows scholars from across disciplines to take up research in epistemic injustice—a process which has already begun in many applied social science journals. Despite these challenges to philosophical institutional norms, a final marked contrast of this book is its eschewing of combative dialectics.

Edited philosophy volumes are often arranged for the purposes of putting interlocutors in direct conflict. By contrast, the scholars in this volume freely choose among scholars to analyze the phenomena of epistemic injustice, without asserting perceived problems in the work of others. The reader gets the sense that rather than positing competing theories of epistemic injustice, the field is undertaken as a cooperative endeavor in which scholars add and refine each other’s conceptual and practical contributions towards a common end. There are no contributions which attempt to reduce epistemic injustice to some single theory or basic phenomena. Instead, authors posit additional theories and contributions and show how they are fecund for analyzing epistemic injustice. While substantive and methodological disagreements persist, the *cogito conquero* is notably absent (Dussel 2010).

A final note will be offered regarding one opportunity for future work on epistemic injustice. Fricker (2007) focused on collective hermeneutical space and the social imagination that informs our affective and epistemic systems. Recently, scholars have moved away from the view that there is a one collective hermeneutical space (Mason 2011; Medina 2013). Scholars increasingly acknowledge heterogenous worldviews which leads to contexts for epistemic justice and injustice. For example, in Chapter 36 “Epistemic Injustice and Religious Experience” Ian Kidd argues that deep epistemic injustice arises as incompatible worldviews may forestall “the very possibility of credibility or intelligibility” (393). While these issues are ripe for analysis, the background conditions of epistemic practice and experience are undertheorized. A latent tension throughout the anthology is competing conceptions of these collective epistemic entities and activities. This occurs both at the level of world-views and interactions within and between world-views.

This transition has led to conceptual landscape strewn with locutions regarding worldviews. Throughout the book references to life-world (Mills 103), “*the imaginary*” (Code, Chapter 8, 94), and discourses (Haslanger 279) are used to refer to a common domain adding to the parlance of social imagination (Fricker 2007). Relatedly, epistemologies of ignorance, ideologies, false consciousness, and adaptive preferences express ways in which epistemic systems can be immoral or maladaptive. Localized hermeneutical practices pick-out epistemic norms within discursive sets, controlling images delimit the norms of social imagination (Medina, Chapter 3, 44; Pohlhaus, Chapter 1, 21). Medina identifies the possibility of attuning oneself to different hermeneutical systems with his concept of “kaleidoscopic sensibility” (Medina 2013, 16).

Nancy Tuana cites Lugone’s “world-traveling” to express the similar idea that agents can adjust their epistemic lenses to appreciate different epistemic communities (Chapter 11, 128-31). While this text moves the dialectic forward in many ways, it also makes under-theorized areas more evident. Many readers probably have some sense of the theoretical relations
between these concepts, yet little formal work has been done to connect this panoply of concepts. A reductive account risks epistemic injustice and may be logically impossible, but some analytical accounts to understand the coherence and connections between these concepts is in order. As the contemporary study of epistemic injustice matures, conceptual house-cleaning will facilitate a clear body of hermeneutical resources for further study of epistemic injustice. As such, The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice provides a great deal of content and opportunities in a single volume.

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References


