eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

Epistemic Injustice and The Preservation of Ignorance

Ignorance is not always bad; far from it. Looking at the issue in its most general aspect there is the obvious point that for finite beings massive ignorance is a precondition of having an epistemically functional life, for cognitive overload is an epistemic liability. There is an indefinite, indeed infinite, number of things that we do not have the slightest need to know—the number of hairs on your head at midnight on your next Birthday, for instance. Furthermore, we actively need *not* to know most of them (or not to spend time and energy investigating them) in order to conserve cognitive capacity for those things that we do need to know. Less abstractly there is also the point that there are many things it would be morally and/or prudentially bad to know—intimate details that are none of our business; techniques of criminality; methods of rekindling old ethnic hatreds in a population. These points are familiar from debates about 'the value question' in relation to knowledge.[1] Furthermore, as Cynthia Townley has argued, many forms of epistemic cooperation, and many of the dispositions involved in epistemic virtues generally, depend crucially upon our leaving some useless or harmful things unknown, and passively or actively preserving others' ignorance of things they need not or should not know (Townley 2011). In short, good epistemic practice is necessarily highly selective in all sorts of ways. What matters is that we know what we *need* to know, expanding outwards to the broader aim of knowing and telling what we *should* know and tell, given our purposes and broadly ethical obligations all things considered. Good epistemic conduct needs to be understood as the maintenance of appropriate balances of knowledge and ignorance, in oneself and also in relation to others.

This opening reflection on the epistemic value of ignorance and its place in the epistemic economy directs our attention to the basic normative ambivalence in our use of the term.[2] 'Ignorance' may refer simply to an epistemically innocent absence of

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[1] See Sosa's example of 'trivial' knowledge (2002) p. 156; and Zagzebski's examples of prudentially and morally 'bad' knowledge (2003) p. 21.
[2] For debate about what ignorance is necessarily ignorance *of*, see for instance the exchange between Pierre Le Morven (2010 and 2011) and Rik Peels (2011).

knowledge (this absence being advantageous or disadvantageous, as the case may be, without any reflection on the conduct of the epistemic subject in question); or alternatively it may refer to some kind of cognitive failure, which might be non-culpable (perhaps the result of misleading evidence) or which might, on the other hand, represent a blameworthy failure to put the requisite effort or skill into knowing something one ought to know.

This paper will focus on those forms of culpable and non-culpable ignorance that are created or preserved by one or another kind of epistemic injustice that I have elsewhere labelled 'testimonial injustice' and 'hermeneutical injustice'.[3] I shall discuss the first only briefly, for it is more specifically in relation to hermeneutical injustice that new and complex issues have recently been raised concerning various different forms of ignorance that can be involved in this phenomenon. In particular I hope to say something useful about the place of 'willful'[4] or motivated ignorance, and to thereby contribute to recent debates in which the phenomenon of hermeneutical injustice has been related to what Charles Mills has termed 'white ignorance'.[5] Ultimately I shall argue that the phenomenon Mills characterises on the whole picks out a different kind of ignorance from any that is involved in hermeneutical injustice. But I shall also argue that the two categories can overlap.

Preserving Patterns of Social Ignorance: Testimonial Injustice and Hermeneutical Marginalisation

When the level of credibility attributed to a speaker's word is reduced by prejudice operative in the hearer's judgement, the speaker suffers a *testimonial injustice*. Despite the specific label, the speech act in which his word is expressed need not be strictly that of testimony or telling, but might equally be the airing of an opinion, suggestion, or relevant possibility. Furthermore, as Christopher Hookway has suggested, it might even be occasioned by the asking of a question that is designed to

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[3] See Fricker (2007) and (2013).
[4] The term 'willful ignorance' is from Gaile Pohlhaus (2012).
[5] See Mills (2007) and (2015).

contribute to some shared inquiry.[6] The prejudice driving any case of testimonial injustice may or may not be a belief, and it operates specifically in the hearer's *judgement of credibility*, where the judgement may be unreflective and spontaneous—a matter of ingrained habit. (The trained quasi-perceptual dispositions governing such judgements I have elsewhere labelled the hearer's 'testimonial sensibility'.) The influence of prejudice in judgements of credibility can make itself felt regardless of the hearer's beliefs, indeed in spite of them, for prejudice can operate unconsciously or, as we have now learned to say, at the level of 'implicit bias'.[7] Testimonial injustice's obvious connection to ignorance is that in cases where the speaker knows that *p* and the prejudice operative in the hearer's credibility judgement prevents her learning that *p* from the speaker, other things equal she thereby stays ignorant of *p*.

Testimonial injustice not only blocks the flow of knowledge, it also blocks the flow of evidence, doubts, critical ideas and other epistemic inputs that are conducive to knowledge. The free circulation of these epistemic goods is conducive to knowledge not only in the direct sense that ready-made items of knowledge may themselves be transmitted, but also in the indirect sense that such items tend also to constitute reasons to believe *other* things, so that they may have the epistemic power to convert other of the hearers beliefs into knowledge. The obstructions that

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[6] I am grateful to Chris Hookway for this point that someone who puts a *question* as a contribution to collective inquiry (perhaps in the classroom) might find her question passed over due to prejudice (Hookway, 2010). I hope I may ultimately be allowed this as a limiting case of testimonial injustice, even though it concerns a speech act that is not an assertion. The label 'testimonial injustice' was always explicitly intended capaciously, to include not only the broad class of tellings but also cases where a speaker 'expresses a personal opinion to a hearer, or airs a value judgement, or tries out a new idea or hypothesis on a given audience' (Fricker, 2007; p. 60). Hookway's case of the student's relevant question admittedly stretches my characterisation; but provided one can regard the asking of such a question as potentially vulnerable to a *prejudicial credibility deficit* then it seems more or less to belong to the same category. I would certainly acknowledge that this requires us to take 'credibility' in its everyday sense, as covering the wide range of respects in which what someone says may be taken as more or less authoritative. Such a colloquial construal is supported by the fact that the object of any credibility judgement includes not only *what is said* but also *the speaker*. At any rate, I hope these considerations provide enough commonality to keep the diverse possibilities sufficiently unified under the category 'testimonial injustice'.

[7] There is a fast growing philosophical literature drawing upon empirical work in psychology on implicit bias. See, for instance, Holroyd (2012), Saul (2013), Gendler (2014), Nagel (2014), Leslie (forthcoming), and Saul & Brownstein eds. (forthcoming).

testimonial injustice introduces into the circulation of such epistemic items is therefore not only bad for the person whose word is prejudicially downgraded; it is epistemically bad for the hearer, and for the epistemic system quite generally. An epistemic system characterised by testimonial injustice is a system in which ignorance will repeatedly prevail over potentially shared knowledge, despite speakers' best efforts. Where a speaker knows something the hearer doesn't (and where the level of credibility deficit is such that the hearer does not accept what she is told) the hearer's ignorance is conserved. Alternatively, where the speaker is offering evidence with a (positive or negative) bearing on something the hearer already believes but does not know, then the hearer misses out on reasons which (if positive) might render her belief knowledge or at least lend it greater justificatory weight; or which (if negative) might disabuse her of a false belief, or at least reveal it as less well supported than it had seemed. Either way, an opportunity for epistemic improvement is lost, and ignorance prevails.

A further, more buried, form of epistemic damage caused by testimonial injustice is that, where it is persistent and socially patterned (as anything driven by prejudice is likely to be), it will tend to create or increase *hermeneutical marginalisation*. That is to say, it will tend to create and sustain a situation in which some social groups have less than a fair crack at contributing to the shared pool of concepts and interpretive tropes that we use to make generally share-able sense of our social experiences. We might gloss this idea of a pool of concepts and interpretive tropes as 'shared social meanings', where the idea is that while this pool will surely not exhaust all the various up and running sets of social meanings that are being used locally by this or that group in a given society, the *shared* pool (elsewhere I have called this the 'collective hermeneutical resource') contains only meanings that just about anyone can draw upon and expect those meanings to be understood across social space by just about anyone else. The collective hermeneutical resource contains those concepts and conceptualisations that are held *in common*.

This means that being a member of a social group that does not contribute on an equal footing with other groups to that shared interpretive resource (a position of hermeneutical marginalisation) puts one at an unfairly increased risk of having social experiences that one needs, perhaps urgently, to understand and/or communicate to certain powerful social others—to a teacher, an employer, a police officer, a jury—but which cannot be made mutual sense of in the shared terms available. We are only

now, for instance, entering a historical moment in the West at which it is increasingly possible for a young person originally assigned as 'male' to be able to say to a parent, teacher, or friend that she had always felt herself to be a girl in 'the wrong body' and hope to be understood as expressing an intelligible experience. Increasingly the various concepts and conceptions of how sex, gender, sexual orientation and other deep identity affiliations may be organised and re-organised in an individual's experienced identity—notably the concept of 'trans' together with its less established counterpart 'cis'—are gradually entering the shared hermeneutical resource instead of staying local to the trans community. Still now, where a trans woman might attempt to describe her experience of gender identity to a social other who does not share the relevant concepts, she is unlikely to be able to make herself much understood, and this is where her remaining hermeneutical marginalisation will manifest itself in the unfair deficit of intelligibility that constitutes a hermeneutical injustice. Like testimonial injustices, this kind of hermeneutical injustice preserves ignorance, for that which remains insufficiently intelligible to the relevant social other cannot be passed on to them as knowledge.

Here we see how closely the two kinds of epistemic injustice are related: testimonial injustice can create or sustain hermeneutical marginalisation by blocking the flow of reports, ideas and perspectives that would help generate richer and more diversified shared hermeneutical resources that all can draw on in their social understandings, whether of their own or of others' experiences. Therefore the broad patterns of testimonial injustice—most likely patterns created by the operation of negative identity prejudices, inasmuch as these are the chief systematic prejudices—will tend to reproduce themselves as patterns of hermeneutical marginalisation, and it is these that give rise to systematic hermeneutical injustices. Thus we can see how the preservation of hearer-ignorance that is the likely effect of any instance of testimonial injustice can contribute directly to the hermeneutically marginalised position of the speaker. And a hermeneutically marginalised speaker is vulnerable to hermeneutical injustice. Charles Mills has noted this close connection between the two kinds of epistemic injustice in respect of race:

> 'Applying these concepts [of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice] to racial domination, we could say that white ignorance is achieved and perpetuated through both varieties working in tandem: a general scepticism about non-

white cognition and an exclusion from accepted discourse of non-white categories and frameworks of analysis. Thus a double handicap will result— *people of color will be denied credibility and the alternative viewpoints that could be developed from taking their perspective seriously will be rejected…*' (Mills, 2015 p. 222; italics added).

So the two kinds of ignorance that are preserved through the operation of the two kinds of epistemic injustice are causally connected, and this interconnection is part of why our subject-variant areas of ignorance—especially our ignorance of different areas of our shared but dramatically stratified social world—tend to display the patterns of social power.

Clarifying Hermeneutical Injustice—Spaces for localised hermeneutical practices

Hermeneutical injustice is internally diverse in various dimensions. One internal differentiation we can usefully emphasise is between two sorts of case. The difference is between a radical case where the person concerned is at least temporarily unable to make full sense of her own experience even to herself; and a more moderate sort of case where she understands the nature of her own experience perfectly well, and, furthermore, is able to communicate it to members of a social group to which she belongs, and yet she is unable to render it intelligible across social space to some significant social other to whom she needs to convey it.

In *Epistemic Injustice* I tried to bring out this distinction by way of a more extreme contrast between what we might call a 'maximal' and a 'minimal' case—that is, between a case where the individual was not in a position to make proper sense of her own experience even to herself; and, by contrast, a case where the individual could make perfect sense of it, and could have communicated it to almost any social other except the particular social others he specially needed to communicate it to. These two opposite extremes were intended to imply a continuum of possibilities in between—i.e. a range of cases in which there is shared intelligibility across an increasingly large group or groups. The maximal example—drawn from Susan Brownmiller's memoir of the U.S. women's liberation movement (Brownmiller

1990)—was that of a woman in late-sixties North America, Carmita Wood, who was being sexually harassed at work but for whom extant hermeneutical resources did not enable her to experience this lucidly for what it was, so that while she experienced it as upsetting, intimidating, demeaning, confusing... somehow she was also aware that these forms of understanding did not capture it. As recounted by Brownmiller, Carmita Wood remained confused about what it was she was experiencing, because there was an objective lack of available concepts with which to make proper sense of it. Her achievement was to find a community of women who together created a safe discursive space in which to explore their experiences and find a way of interpreting them that rendered them more fully intelligible. Through dialogue within the group they hit upon a critical composite label, 'sexual harassment', and they overcame their hermeneutical marginalisation in this regard by demanding that the term and the interpretation it expressed become part of the wider shared vocabulary.

In *The Epistemology of Resistance* José Medina emphasises that marginalised groups may often have perfectly functioning and sophisticated sets of interpretive practices up and running within their social group or community, which however do not work communicatively outside the group—the non-sharedness of the requisite concepts and interpretations reflecting the fact that the 'privileged' meanings held in common are inadequate.[8] This is indeed worth emphasising, and in this connection I would reaffirm the idea that the concepts and meanings that are shared by all are bound to reflect, in the broad, the perspectives and experiences of those groups with more social power generally, for the reason that those with more social power are very likely to be over-contributors to the shared hermeneutical resource. (That tendency, that alliance of hermeneutical power with other kinds of social power, is present in the very idea of hermeneutical *marginalisation*.) Accordingly, the possibility of localised hermeneutical practices is built in to the picture of how Carmita Wood and her fellow consciousness raisers overcame hermeneutical injustice. The group was of course not a *pre-existing* community, but like other such groups it swiftly developed a voice of its own, operating in a relation of dissonance and dissent as regards mainstream understandings. If we jump forward a couple of years from the time of the consciousness raising group's first meetings we would find a fully operative localised hermeneutical practice among feminists who readily named

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[8] Medina (2013). See also Medina (2012), Mason (2011), Pohlhaus (2011), and Dotson (2012).

sexual harassment for what it was, even while that concept had not yet entered the shared hermeneutical resource, recalcitrant employers and all, as later it came to do. This represents a localised well-functioning hermeneutical practice that nonetheless leaves its practitioners susceptible to hermeneutical injustice whenever they should attempt to render the experience intelligible across social space to others who are non-conversant, perhaps resistant to, the requisite modes of interpretation.

Contrasting with the maximal case exemplified by Carmita Wood, the minimal case of hermeneutical injustice presented in *Epistemic Injustice* also, and more explicitly, illustrates the possibility of a fully functioning yet insufficiently widely shared hermeneutical practice. It is already a case of such a practice, though not this time on the part of anyone generally lacking in social power. The example was that of Joe, the central character in Ian McEwan's novel, *Enduring Love* (McEwan 1998). Joe is being stalked by a religious fanatic who wants to convert him. Joe is an educated, white, middle-class man, whose hermeneutical marginalisation (if any—it is the vanishingly minimal case) is highly specific, localized to the particular matter in hand, and whose experience he himself has no difficulty in understanding and would easily be able to communicate to members of almost any social group.[9] And yet when it comes to the most important social body to which he needs to be able to communicate it, namely the police, he finds they are not in a position to make proper sense of it—there is quite literally no appropriate box to tick on their form.

Thus I would argue that a commitment to the existence of localised interpretive practices that may perfectly capture a given range of experiences but whose meanings are not sufficiently shared across wider social space is already present at the heart of the original account of hermeneutical injustice. I gladly acknowledge, however, the importance of centre-staging, as others have done[10], what I am here calling *midway* cases of hermeneutical injustice—those situated somewhere between maximal and minimal in virtue of the fact that they concern existing communities who operate localised or in-group hermeneutical practices that are nonetheless not shared across further social space. These are cases in which there are

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[9] That his hermeneutical marginalisation is so highly specific to one area of experience (that of being non-violently stalked) renders Joe's hermeneutical injustice, in the terminology I used in *Epistemic Injustice*, a thoroughly 'incidental' rather than 'systematic' case of the injustice. (See Fricker 2007, chs. 1 and 7.)
[10] See, for instance, Mason (2011), Pohlhaus (2011), Dotson (2012), and Medina (2012) and (2013).

sophisticated interpretive practices, perhaps with their own history of internal challenge and change, which are already functionally entrenched for a given social group or groups, but not shared with at least one out-group with whom communication is needed. Members of such hermeneutically self-reliant groups are vulnerable to hermeneutical injustices whose form does not involve any confused experiences whatever, but only frustratingly failed attempts to communicate them to members of an out-group. (In the next section we shall see this midway form of hermeneutical injustice put to work in relation to a special case of white ignorance.) Medina is right to emphasise that the intersectional ignorances created by the possession and non-possession of this or that cluster of interpretive concepts growing out of this or that area of social experience tell a 'polyphonic' or multi-voiced story of power *and* resistance, societal conceptual impoverishment *and* localised interpretive sophistication and creativity. These opposing energies are present in both maximal and minimal cases, but the creative and affirming energy involved in resisting mainstream meanings and nurturing instead a set of more localised concepts and interpretations is obviously more to the fore in those cases of hermeneutical injustice that *start* from a situation in which a relatively powerless group has developed well-entrenched but localised interpretive practices of its own. In such cases in-group intelligibility is doing just fine; and any hermeneutical injustices that arise will be strictly a matter of unfairly limited communicative intelligibility in relation to an out-group.

An illustration of such a midway case of hermeneutical injustice might be drawn from the history of post-colonial race relations in the U. K. Drawing on an account of the experience of growing up in post-War Britain as the children of Caribbean immigrants to 'the mother country'—often symbolized by the *Empire Windrush* arriving at Tilbury Docks in 1948—we find that the experience of integration into British life was not structured in relation to the conceptual poles of 'acceptance' or 'rejection' to which the white perspective gave rise. Instead the black experience was structured in relation to the concept of *citizenship*. Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips recount it as follows:

> We observe that the overt declarations of racist hostility which were commonplace in the fifties have, more or less, disappeared from public life in Britain. On the other hand, it is clear that racial hostility and exclusion are a

routine part of British life, and few black British people can be in any doubt that the majority of their fellow citizens take the colour of their skins to be a characteristic which defines what they are and what they can do.

At the same time, paradoxically, among ourselves we never interpreted the racial discrimination or hostility that we encountered as 'rejection', largely because we never believed that 'acceptance' or 'rejection' was a choice available to Britain. Far from it. Our instinct told us that such notions were merely part of a racialised idiom, describing an identity which had long ago ceased to be relevant. For us the issue was…about our status as citizens…' (Phillips & Phillips 1998, p. 5).

What their instinct told them formed the cornerstone of their localised conceptualization of their situation—an understanding not supplied by the shared hermeneutical resource dominated by the 'racialised idiom' that characterised the perspective of white Britain—and it delivered a mode of understanding which they were rightly concerned to insist on introducing into the common pool of understanding: an idea of black colonial immigrants as fellow British citizens. The Empire had told their parents that Britain was their mother country and it seems that they had, in part at least, believed and internalized this fact—many had signed up to fight in the war under the identity it imposed—so that those arriving in Britain on ships like the *Windrush* 'regarded their Britishness as non-negotiable' (Phillips & Phillips 1998, p. 5). The mother country had made them British, and now it was a matter of holding her to the full implications of that status. Ideas of 'acceptance' or 'rejection' may have structured white consciousness around this immigration, but the immigrant population was living an independent and novel conceptualization according to which they were *black British citizens*—a hermeneutical trope seemingly absent from the repertoire of the white population. One could say the concept of a black British citizen had not yet taken hold in white British consciousness, and white resistance to that conceptual neologism was such that it would take some significant time to do so.

In this example, it seems the sooner the new conceptualisation could become widely entrenched in the shared hermeneutical resource the better. But it is worth remembering that there can be cases in which it may not be in the interests of an oppressed group to fight immediately for the introduction of local meanings into the

wider collective hermeneutical resource. (This is a point made by Mills, quoting 'the black American folk poem, "Got one mind for white folks to see / Another for what I know is me" (Mills 2007, p. 18); and also emphasised by Medina.[11]) Sometimes there can be significant advantage in keeping things local, perhaps so that there is more time in a safe space to develop one's dissenting forms of understanding, or perhaps simply because the wider climate makes it pointless, or too dangerous to try anything else. To take an example now from the history of race in the U. S., in a radio interview the writer Alice Walker describes aspects of her upbringing under segregation in the American South in terms that indicate the value of maintaining hermeneutical privacy. Confident in their own interpretations of the social world, her parents inculcated in their children a way of understanding racial oppression that might be read as incorporating a certain security in on-going hermeneutical separation:

> Lucky for us we lived very far in the country. We saw very few white people. And when we went to town we followed rules about where we could go. And we just followed our parents. They basically helped us to see white people as, you know, very stunted. That was just the way they were. There was nothing you could do about it, they were just like that. (Who knew why they were like that?) And that was helpful. They were discussed as if they were the weather… Like 'Oh well, that's how they are. You know, what we try to encourage in our children, they beat it out of their children. They don't want their children to be kind. They don't want their children to ever see a black person and think of them as human. [12]

Here the idea that white people were 'very stunted' captures a localized hermeneutical practice that embodied a clear and confident knowledge that black people were not as white people painted them, and moreover that the racial attitudes of white people only showed them up as seriously morally damaged. The moral knowledge at large in the black community could not on the whole cross the segregated social space to find

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[11] 'As many Latina feminists and colonial theorists have argued, colonized peoples have a long tradition of exploiting the ignorance and hermeneutical limitations of the colonizers to their advantage, which can be justified for the sake of their survival' (Medina 2013; p. 116).
[12] *Desert Island Discs*. 2013. BBC Radio 4, May 24th.

intelligible expression in the white community. Thus the hermeneutical practices that produced that moral knowledge in the black community was, judging from Walker's account, highly localised. The comment about 'weather' is particularly resonant in this connection. Perhaps when the terms of segregation mean that the normal 'reactive attitudes' of moral participation can only be a losing game, it is empowering to reach instead for what P. F. Strawson identifies as the 'objective' attitude of non-engagement, so that the agency of certain others is received as weather—meaningless (if potentially dangerous) causal impacts to be managed, tolerated, avoided.[13] Keeping one's hermeneutical practices localised in a situation such as this might be a decision to leave the powerful to their pitiful ignorance, safeguarding one's localised forms of moral and social understanding as a source of in-group solidarity and strength.

White Ignorance and Hermeneutical Injustice

Continuing with questions of race and the different forms of ignorance that can be generated and preserved by the operation of epistemic injustice, let me now relate our discussion to a different kind of ignorance: what Charles Mills has named 'white ignorance' (Mills 2007). I would like to offer an account of the boundaries of the two phenomena.[14] I shall argue that for the most part the ignorance that is produced and maintained by hermeneutical marginalisation, and made manifest in hermeneutical injustice, is different in two key respects from the ignorance in white ignorance. First, white ignorance is normally epistemically culpable; and, second, it does not generally involve any paucity of concepts on anyone's part. By contrast, in a case of hermeneutical injustice the uncomprehending hearer is normally epistemically non-culpable; and there is always, definitively, a paucity of shared concepts. However, I hope to identify where the two phenomena can overlap.

Most generally speaking, 'white ignorance' is a racialized form of ideological thinking. It names a certain kind of collective *interested* or *motivated cognitive bias* in what social interpretations and/or evidence for such interpretations a racially dominant group attends to and integrates into the rest of their beliefs and

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[13] See Strawson (1974).

[14] See the substantial discussion of this issue in Medina (2013); and discussions in Mason (2011), Pohlhaus (2012), and, in different terms, Dotson (2012).

deliberations. More specifically the label 'white ignorance' names a motivated bias on the part of white people taken as a group that leaves them 'ignorant' (in this special sense) of the situation of their black compatriots taken as a group. We might say it names a form of collective *denial* in the white community about some uncomfortable truths.[15] It therefore typically exhibits a culpable motivated irrationality. Indeed in most cases of 'white ignorance' as that phenomenon is discussed it involves some self-serving *epistemic fault* on the part of whites—a conscious or unconscious resistance to accepting or learning about the sources of their social advantage, for instance. Such epistemic faults are generally culpable. As Rebecca Mason succinctly puts it: 'white ignorance is a kind of epistemically culpable and morally noxious *mis*cognition that facilitates the maintenance of the status quo' (Mason 2011, p. 302).

Mills first discussed the phenomenon in the framework of the U. S., but more recently he has made clear that he considers the issue to have global application. Referring back to his paper 'White Ignorance' (Mills 2007) he explains:

> My discussion in the essay was focused mainly on the United States, but I intended the application of the concept to be much broader. Insofar as the modern world has been created by European colonialism and imperialism, and insofar as racist assumptions/frameworks/norms were central to the theories justifying white Western conquest and domination of that world, we would expect white ignorance to be global (Mills, 2015 p. 217).

We might illustrate his point with another example drawing on British colonial history, as pointed out by Mike and Trevor Phillips in their discussion of the ignorance produced by the sheer absence of black soldiers from the many British films about the war made in the post-War period:

> …it comes as a shock now to note the complete absence of black Caribbean or African participants in the plethora of British films about the Second World War. After all, the involvement of black colonials was a fact that was a part of

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[15] In Mills' list of elements it is clear that various forms of motivated irrationality, denial, or other forms of epistemic culpability characterize the phenomenon. He says, for instance: 'the dynamic role of white group interests needs to be recognized and acknowledged as a central causal factor in generating and sustaining white ignorance' (Mills, 2007, p. 34).

our experience… Our astonishment was, and still is, to do with the extent to which they had disappeared, had been expurgated from the story, as if they had never existed (Phillips & Phillips 1998, p. 5).

Let us look closely at Mills' characterisation of white ignorance in order to see (a) whether all cases are epistemically culpable, and (b) whether any involves the paucity of concepts that is definitive of hermeneutical injustice . Mills presents two main forms of white ignorance, and they share what he calls 'racialized causality'— that is, each involves the white community failing to grasp certain facts or to hold certain truthful interpretations of their social world where a significant part of the explanation why not is *race*. First, such racially caused ignorance might take the form of an individual's active racism blocking certain truths; or, second, it might be more structural in form. Mills says in this connection:

> [T]he racialized causality I am invoking needs to be expansive enough to include both straightforward racist motivation and more impersonal social-structural causation, which may be operative even if the cognizer in question is not racist… But in both cases, racialized causality can give rise to what I am calling white ignorance, straightforwardly for a racist cognizer, but also indirectly for a nonracist cognizer who may form mistaken beliefs (e.g., that after the abolition of slavery in the United States, blacks generally had opportunities equal to whites) because of the social suppression of the pertinent knowledge, though without prejudice himself (Mills 2007, p. 21).

In the case of the straightforward 'racist cognizer', the epistemic culpability is clearly on display: depending on quite what form the racism takes, such prejudiced cognizers are allowing some racist motive (perhaps racial contempt, or some kind of racial self-aggrandisement) to distort their perception of the social world and their place in it. Such motivated irrationality is plainly epistemically culpable (though of course there can be mitigating circumstances that reduce the degree of appropriate blame). In cases of hermeneutical injustice, by contrast, neither speaker nor hearer need be blameworthy for the failure of intelligibility. In itself hermeneutical injustice

is a purely structural phenomenon with no individual perpetrator.[16] In some cases the hearer *would* of course be blameworthy—for instance if she were self-interestedly to resist the meanings being offered.[17] But no such fault is a necessary feature of hermeneutical injustice *per se*. Indeed part of the intrigue of the phenomenon is that it can happen so widely without epistemic fault, which is why it calls not only for increased individual virtue but also for structural remedy through social policies and institutional arrangements that would increase equality of hermeneutical participation.

What about the question of conceptual poverty—the requisite hermeneutical gap? In the case of the straightforward racist cognizer's white ignorance there *is* no hermeneutical gap, indeed no poverty of *concepts* at all, for the racist cognizer's ignorance is not caused by any lack of conceptual-interpretive resources. Let all the hermeneutical resources stand available to him, what he lacks is the epistemic discipline to apply the extant resources in an epistemically responsible way so as to achieve cognitive contact with social reality. Given these features, the white ignorance of the straightforward racist cognizer is clearly not any kind of hermeneutical injustice. It is an independent phenomenon, played out at the level of belief and (culpable) epistemic conduct.

Let us look now to the second sort of case that Mills gives us. This is the 'more impersonal, social-structural' case of the non-racist cognizer who nonetheless 'may form mistaken beliefs…because of the social suppression of the pertinent knowledge, though without prejudice himself'. Perhaps such social suppression could be a matter of certain parts or aspects of history not being taught at school; or perhaps another example might be the cultural forgetting of the involvement of black Caribbean and African soldiers in the Second World War, as noted by Mike and Trevor Philipps in relation to British film. In most of these social-structural cases of white ignorance, I take it, the individual remains epistemically culpable to some significant degree inasmuch as it is likely that she ought to be able to remain critically

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[16] Medina develops the point that individuals can however collude in hermeneutical injustice by failing to be virtuous hearers (see Medina 2012, and 2013 ch. 3). The point is well taken, but I would resist his conclusion that this reveals that there are, after all, individual 'perpetrators' of hermeneutical injustices. Failures of virtue are bad in themselves, and when we fail to be appropriately open to the perspectives of others we are doing something bad and may even be wronging them as individuals. But being culpable for one's part in a broader injustice makes one a perpetrator only of that part; it does not make one a perpetrator of the broader injustice itself.

[17] See Mason (2011), Pohlhaus (2011), Dotson (2012), and Medina (2013).

alive to at least some of the ways in which the epistemic situation has been distorted. But equally one can imagine (I emphasise, *imagine*) scenarios in which the individual is not culpable, insofar as it is also possible that the epistemic fault driving the 'social suppression of the pertinent knowledge' could be exclusively in the collective, or in some sub-group who is manipulating collective knowledge, in a manner that no individual could reasonably be expected to detect.[18] This in-principle possibility of individually non-culpable white ignorance suggests that Mill's social-structural kind of white ignorance can in principle be non-culpable—which prompts one to ask whether it might also constitute a case of hermeneutical injustice.

As before, however, we must also look for some kind of conceptual gap caused by hermeneutical marginalisation, for it cannot be a hermeneutical injustice without at least some impoverishment in shared conceptual resources. But in itself the 'social suppression of the pertinent knowledge' does not involve any loss of interpretive concepts or conceptions. The white-ignorants[19] in question might continue to have available to them perfectly adequate conceptual resources for knowing that X, and yet fail to know that X owing to the suppression of the requisite knowledge itself—once again, a dysfunction at the level of belief and evidence rather than the level of conceptual repertoire and intelligibility. White British forgetfulness about the involvement of African and Caribbean soldiers in the Second World War, for instance, involved no deficit of intelligibility, for the shared hermeneutical repertoire was quite rich enough to have supported the lost knowledge.

We might go on, however, to envisage a third, albeit non-standard, case. One can imagine structural cases where the 'social suppression of the pertinent knowledge' *has* included suppression of concepts requisite for that knowledge. If this conceptual suppression is confined to the privileged group, a genuine *deficit in hermeneutical resources* for the white community would result, and thereby a deficit in the shared hermeneutical resource. With the hermeneutical gap so envisaged, we are closer to a case of white ignorance that is also one of hermeneutical injustice.

Given that the paucity of concepts in this case is all on the part of whites, someone might wonder whether it was the white community that was subject to the

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[18] I have argued elsewhere that such a case might represent one of epistemic agent-regret (Fricker 2016).
[19] As Mills makes entirely clear, and by way of parallel with the phenomenon of false consciousness on a Marxist picture, one does not have to be white to become embroiled in white ignorance (Mills, 2007, p. 22). But it helps.

hermeneutical injustice. Not so; for in order for such a case to constitute a hermeneutical injustice the deficit of concepts in the white population would also have to be *unfair to them* in some way. It is true enough that, as Medina emphasizes (Medina 2013, p. 108), such a hermeneutical deficit would clearly be bad for the white community in a purely epistemic sense, for there is important social knowledge they would be missing out on.[20] (So it was for Carmita Wood's harasser.) It may well be morally bad for them too (as it was for the harasser, who was prevented from grasping the ethical significance of his own behaviour, and was to that degree alienated from the meaning of his own actions).[21] But still, the disadvantage cannot be an injustice done *to them*, because *ex hypothesi* this very epistemic disadvantage plays more generally to their social *advantage*—that is the whole point: white people are represented as having an interest in not knowing certain threatening facts, and if the very concepts required for such unsettling knowledge have been suppressed, then they are all the safer from having to confront it. Rather it is the black community who suffers the hermeneutical injustice, for it is they who are asymmetrically socially disadvantaged by the whites' conceptual deficit that entails the equivalent deficit in the shared hermeneutical resource.

What we have now arrived at in pursuing the overlap between hermeneutical injustice and white ignorance is a form of hermeneutical injustice that belongs in the range of cases identified in the previous section as *midway* between maximal (Carmita Wood) and minimal (Joe) forms. Such cases are those in which one group's communicative attempts meet with failure owing to a paucity of concepts on the part of an out-group and therefore in the shared hermeneutical resource. Among those cases, we can locate the racially motivated concept-suppression scenario that we have identified as a (non-standard) case of white ignorance. The motivated concept suppression among the dominant white community means that the hermeneutically marginalised black community nonetheless possesses locally operative meanings that capture their experiences but which cannot function properly in communicative

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[20] Laura Beeby too has emphasized the importance of the purely epistemic disadvantage suffered by the more powerful party such cases (Beeby 2011).
[21] Jason Stanley expresses a general version of this point in relation to legitimizing myths: 'false ideologies harm the elites in ways that cut deeper than material interest. The reason that members of unjustly privileged groups are led to adopt legitimizing myths is that they cannot confront the possibility that their actions are unjust. False ideologies blind even those they seem to help, by making them "untrue to themselves' (Stanley 2015, p. 265).

attempts with social bodies that operate with the impoverished shared conceptual repertoire. However rich the black community's conceptual resources might be, these resources do not get integrated into the shared resource, because the white community has an interest in keeping them out. This, at last, is the overlap we have been looking for: a white ignorance whose explanation is a conceptual deficit (on the part of whites, and *ipso facto* a deficit in the shared hermeneutical resource) that is significantly caused by the black community's hermeneutical marginalisation. In such a case, motivated conceptual poverty on the part of a dominant racial group works to preserve their local ignorance of a significant dimension of the social world, and blocks another racial group from making good that ignorance.

What about the question of epistemic culpability? In our earlier discussion of Mills' *knowledge*-suppression case I suggested that such cases might normally be epistemically culpable, though we could imagine scenarios where there was no epistemic culpability. The matter turned on how far it was reasonable, in any given case, to expect the uncomprehending hearer to be alert to the distortions in the epistemic system. The same goes for our *concept*-suppression example. Here the hermeneutical marginalisation of the black community kettles their concepts, thereby creating a conceptual lack in the shared hermeneutical resource, and so preserving white ignorance by disabling the essential conceptual means to their understanding expressions of black experience. The question of epistemic culpability in such cases will depend, as it does in general, upon how far the uncomprehending hearer could reasonably be expected to have been alert to the fact of her conceptual impoverishment. If she could have known better, then she should have known better.[22] These issues of individual culpability and non-culpability seem worth thinking about in principle, even if we are pessimistic about how much individuals can really do.[23] In cases of hermeneutical injustice, the requisite structural remedy involves the reduction of hermeneutical marginalisation; in cases of white ignorance, a whole range of structural remedies is no doubt called for.[24] Such structural changes

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[22] I have argued more fully for this view of the borders of culpable and non-culpable ignorance more fully in Fricker (2010).

[23] For this concern about the limitations of increased individual virtue, see Alcoff (2010), Langton (2010), and Anderson (2012).

[24] See Anderson (2012) for the proposal that racial integration is essential as a structural feature of institutional epistemic justice. For her more general case for racial integration, see Anderson (2010).

are called for *in addition to* individual efforts—for, after all, structural changes are often in significant part the upshot of individual efforts.

Hermeneutical Injustice Is Not Necessarily A Face of Oppression

I hope to have clarified and defended my original characterization of hermeneutical injustice by showing that its core notion of hermeneutical marginalisation allows for the sorts of *midway* and/or motivated cases of hermeneutical injustice that other writers have rightly emphasised.[25] If the driving thought is that hermeneutical gaps are typically *made* rather than found, then I agree. One group's marginalisation is typically motivated by the interests of another group whose purposes are served by the marginalisation. It is therefore in the nature of any marginalisation that ideology, and other kinds of privileged motivation, will be chief among its causes. Hermeneutical injustice, like testimonial injustice, is typically a face of oppression—it tends to preserve ignorance that serves the interests of dominant groups.[26]

However, I would also affirm that it is important we air possibilities of hermeneutical marginalisation that are not themselves part of a pattern of oppression. The category is broader than that, for there can be unfair forms of hermeneutical marginalisation that are to be explained in terms of more *de facto* forms of social powerlessness, or more fleeting kinds of ideological struggle; and there can sometimes be hermeneutical gaps that are more like unforeseen consequences of social flux, or of processes that do not particularly reflect the long-term interests of one group over another. Perhaps an example might be the kind of hermeneutical marginalisation that 'teenagers' (itself a new concept at the time) in the early Sixties rebelled against. They didn't get much of a look in to the processes of meaning-making before that, but they found a noisy way of making new meanings among themselves, interpreting and constructing their experiences accordingly. If we imagine early-Sixties teenagers trying and failing to convey to their parents what was so great about rock'n'roll and everything it stood for, maybe we confront a case of hermeneutical injustice of the non-oppression kind I aim to leave room for in my

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[25] See Mason (2011), Pohlhaus (2011), Dotson (2012), Medina (2012 and 2013).
[26] Using the terminology I employed in *Epistemic Injustice* (Fricker, 2007), I would say that testimonial and hermeneutical injustices in their 'systematic' (as opposed to 'incidental') forms are the *central* cases of epistemic injustice, because it is these forms that reveal the connection with other dimensions of social injustice.

characterisation. It is of course *political*, since it involves a struggle of power—the power of one generation over the next—and even of competing ideologies. But we would not normally regard it as a matter of oppression, for nobody is a teenager for very long, and this kind of struggle represents a near inevitable process that is part and parcel of on-going historical change, including ethical change. Such inter-generational struggle might therefore play a role, even a desirable role, in any human society.

For these reasons the teenage-culture case is not the kind of power struggle we would ordinarily characterise as a fight against *oppression*. It involves the hermeneutical marginalisation of the younger generation for sure; but it would be a jaundiced view of the perennial struggle between one generation and the next to insist that this marginalisation was fundamentally oppressive in nature. It is simply (and thankfully) in the nature of young people to want to make their own world, and that involves a certain overthrow of parental regime. Where that regime has hermeneutically marginalised its young, hermeneutical injustices are bound to arise from youthful attempts to express the new social ideas to the older generation.

Hermeneutical injustice can affect people's lives in many different ways. I believe it is most useful to have a theoretical framework that makes room for all sorts of cases, so that the various degrees of wrongful unintelligibility can be seen to run from maximal to minimal (from Carmita Wood's inarticulable outrage to Joe's articulate yet ultimately frustrated communicative attempts); and so that the forms of hermeneutical marginalisation can be seen to run from actively oppressive motivated ignorance (as per the case of motivated concept-suppression white ignorance) to ordinary attempts by parents to shape a new generation according to values they understand. The purpose of placing these different formations in a single theoretical structure is to reveal the range of possibilities in all their similarities and differences. Ignorance, as we observed at the outset, is not always bad; but social ignorance that results from hermeneutical marginalisation is intrinsically likely to be bad insofar as it is likely to be conserving ignorance that sustains unequal social relations. Those cases clearly *are* oppressive, and they preserve forms of ignorance that demand to be made good.[27]

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