

# Where's the Harm in It?

## Distinguishing epistemic and moral harm in cases of epistemic injustice

KIRSTY HARDWICK\*

*University of St Andrews*

**Abstract** At the heart of the epistemic injustice debate is Fricker's claim that an agent can be harmed purely in their capacity as a knower. For Fricker, this harm occurs in cases of epistemic injustice, where an individual's testimony is undervalued due to the prejudice of their audience. In this paper, I consider Fricker's claim that these cases involve a 'distinctly epistemic kind of injustice.' I argue that Fricker relies too heavily on her virtue epistemological commitments which leads her to conflate moral and epistemic concerns in cases of epistemic injustice. Concluding that we therefore we need to be more precise about what it means for an agent to be harmed as a knower, in the second part of the paper I sketch a theory-neutral distinction between epistemic harms, where knowers are restricted from access to a knowledge exchange, and moral harms, where moral agents are negatively affected by morally impermissible actions. I suggest that this distinction can enable us to be clearer about the harm done in cases of epistemic injustice and help us identify who is responsible. The paper ends with suggestions for further research.

## 1 Introduction

Placed at the intersection of ethics and epistemology, the epistemic injustice debate examines where our roles as knowers and moral agents coincide. Crucial to this debate is the claim, proposed by Miranda Fricker in her seminal book *Epistemic Injustice*,<sup>1</sup> that

---

\*Kirsty Hardwick is a recent philosophy graduate from the University of St Andrews. She focuses on philosophical topics which have a political bite, including social epistemology and the philosophy of sex. Putting off the real world for another year, she is about to begin an MPhil in Philosophy at University of Cambridge.

1. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

an individual can be harmed purely in their capacity as a knower. In Fricker's central cases this harm occurs when epistemic agents are not trusted to be competent testifiers due to the prejudice of their audiences.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I consider Fricker's claim and argue that we need to be more precise about what it would mean for a harm to be epistemic. I sketch a theory-neutral distinction between epistemic harms, where a knower has restricted access to a knowledge exchange, and moral harms, where moral agents are negatively affected by morally impermissible actions. I suggest that this distinction can enable us to be clearer about the harm done in cases of epistemic injustice and help us identify who is responsible.

In §2, I set out Fricker's account of epistemic injustice and discuss two central cases to illustrate the phenomenon. In §3 I consider Fricker's own characterisation of the harm done in cases of epistemic injustice and argue that her commitment to virtue epistemology causes her to conflate moral and epistemological concerns. In §4 I sketch a theory-neutral distinction between epistemic harms and moral harms and apply it to the cases introduced in §2 and in §5 I respond to possible objections to my distinction. Finally, I consider the challenge of extending the account to cases of structural injustice and discuss avenues for future research.

## 2 Defining epistemic injustice

### 2.1 Two concepts of epistemic injustice

David Coady distinguishes between two attempts to identify a type of injustice that is purely epistemic.<sup>3</sup> The first characterises epistemic injustice as an unjust distribution of epistemic goods (e.g. knowledge and education).<sup>4</sup> While certainly a prevalent social injustice, Fricker argues that this understanding of 'epistemic injustice' is not properly epistemic because the fact that the good in question is an epistemic good is, according to Fricker, 'incidental.'<sup>5</sup>

Coady disagrees, arguing that since the epistemic goods in question are intrinsically epistemically valuable, it is not incidental that the distribution of these goods is an epistemic issue.<sup>6</sup> However, this misses the point. It is the injustice—the harm caused—not the epistemic goods, which is not truly epistemic. Once we have identified what epistemic goods are, the question of their fair distribution, as Coady himself

---

2. Discussion of Fricker's second type of epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustice, on which an individual is disadvantaged because of a gap in her society's understanding of a concept needed to understand her experience, is beyond the scope of this essay.

3. David Coady, 'Two Concepts of Epistemic Injustice', *Episteme* 7, no. 2 (2010): 101.

4. Ibid.

5. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

6. Coady, 'Two Concepts', 106.

notes,<sup>7</sup> collapses into the same discussion of distributive justice that occurs for other goods/property. Therefore, it is not a distinctly epistemic type of injustice.

The second conception of epistemic injustice, Fricker's own, aims to be more fundamentally epistemic.<sup>8</sup> The injustice lies in an individual not being acknowledged as a knower, resulting in their testimony being undervalued.<sup>9</sup> Crucially, note the harm done is 'not to be characterised as a non-receipt of one's fair share of a good (credibility).'<sup>10</sup> Instead, Fricker argues the harm is the distinctly epistemic harm of being undermined in one's capacity as a knower.

Before I examine whether epistemic injustice does involve distinctly epistemic harms, in §2.2, I introduce some terminology from Fricker to further elucidate her concept of epistemic injustice. In §2.3, I introduce two central cases which illustrate Fricker's characterisation of epistemic injustice.

## 2.2 Fricker on epistemic injustice

To understand Fricker's characterisation of epistemic injustice, we must briefly consider her views on testimony, the everyday epistemic practice of conveying knowledge to others.<sup>11</sup> When we listen to testimony, we face the decision of how much credibility to attribute to the speaker. Given the little information we have on which to judge the speaker's credibility, Fricker suggests that we often use stereotypes as heuristics to facilitate making credibility judgements.<sup>12</sup> These stereotypes may be useful, prejudicing us to trust the testimony of teachers over our peers for instance. Yet they may also introduce prejudice into our credibility judgements, causing testimonial injustice whereby a speaker's testimony is undervalued by a hearer on the basis of a facet of their identity such as their gender or race.<sup>13</sup>

Fricker identifies two ways in which testimony can be dysfunctional as a result of prejudice.<sup>14</sup> First, in cases of *credibility excess*, a speaker receives more credibility than she otherwise would have due to the prejudice of a speaker.<sup>15</sup> For example, we attribute an excess of credibility to doctors about medical matters because we are prejudiced to think that doctors know about medicine. Second, in cases of *credibility deficit*, a speaker receives less credibility than she otherwise would have due to the prejudice of

---

7. Ibid., 103.

8. Ibid., 101.

9. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

10. Ibid., 20.

11. Ibid., 16.

12. Ibid., 30–33.

13. Ibid., 1.

14. Note that prejudice may be positive or negative. To be prejudiced to think  $x$  is, roughly, to be resistant to thinking not- $x$  (ibid., 35).

15. Ibid., 17.

the speaker.<sup>16</sup> For example, the boy-who-cried-wolf receives a credibility deficit from his audience since they are prejudiced to think he is lying.

Fricker further distinguishes between *systematic* and *incidental* cases of injustice. In incidental cases, the prejudice is highly localised to the situation. For instance, suppose a student encounters a teacher with a strong prejudice against people who write in fonts besides Times New Roman and undervalues the essay she submits in Calibri. In this case, the prejudice in question is not commonly-held so will not generalise, causing further injustices. In systematic cases, the prejudice which causes the credibility deficit is pervasive and connects the epistemic injustice to other types of injustices.<sup>17</sup> For example, testimonial injustices based on race or gender are examples of systematic injustice.

### 2.3 Central cases

Fricker's central cases of epistemic injustice are cases of systematic *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*. By *identity-prejudicial* Fricker means that the prejudice that causes the credibility deficit is a *negative identity prejudice*, which we can understand simply as a commonly-held disparaging association between a social group and one or more attributes.<sup>18</sup> These cases are central for Fricker because they connect to other forms of social injustice that a subject might encounter, hence locating epistemic injustice within the 'broader pattern of social injustice.'<sup>19</sup>

**Central case 1** For our first central case, let us follow Fricker in using a story from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Tom Robinson, a black man in 1930s Alabama, is on trial for beating and raping a white young woman. His lawyer has proved beyond reasonable doubt that Tom cannot be responsible for the beating yet despite this, the jury still refuse to believe a black man's testimony over the testimony of a white woman. Here, we have a clear-cut case of identity-prejudicial credibility deficit. The jury exhibits a negative identity prejudice against Tom because they associate lying with being black. This leads them to assume that Tom will not give testify the facts of the case. Therefore, Tom is attributed a strong credibility deficit due to the jury's racial negative identity prejudice and they cease to view him as a knower, that is someone who is capable of knowing the facts and transmitting them. Furthermore, since this prejudice is prevalent and the credibility deficit is one of many injustices the black community suffered, the injustice is systematic.<sup>20</sup>

---

16. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

17. *Ibid.*, 27.

18. For a more precise definition, see *ibid.*, 35

19. *Ibid.*, 4.

20. *Ibid.*, 23–28.

A closely related term to testimonial injustice is silencing. I follow Kristie Dotson in understanding silencing as the conjunction of two distinct epistemic injustices. *Testimonial quieting* occurs when 'an audience fails to identify a speaker as a knower,'<sup>21</sup> e.g. in the Tom Robinson case as the jury does not identify Tom as a knower of the facts of the case. The second kind of epistemic injustice is *testimonial smothering*, sometimes referred to as *self-silencing*, which involves 'the truncating of one's own testimony.'<sup>22</sup> In testimonial smothering, the knowledge of the prevalence of identity-prejudicial credibility deficits causes an individual to self-censure their speech, resulting in, to use Fricker's term, *pre-emptive* testimonial injustice.<sup>23</sup> This leads us to our second central case:

**Central case 2** GLAAD defines Bisexual Erasure as 'a pervasive problem in which the existence or legitimacy of bisexuality (either in general or in regard to an individual) is questioned or denied outright.'<sup>24</sup> This phenomenon can lead bisexuals to fear coming out since they think that they will not be believed by someone who denies the existence of bisexuality. The pervasiveness of this problem leads some to self-silence if they feel unable to come out to those around them because they do not think that they will be taken seriously as a knower of the facts about their own sexuality.<sup>25</sup> As our second central case, let us take the example of a bisexual man in a relationship with a woman who refrains from coming out to his friends and family out of fear of not being believed or being misidentified as homosexual.

Following Fricker I take both types of cases to be important examples of injustice and I agree that we should spend time examining them to highlight the prevalent social injustices they exemplify. However, in the following section I argue that we need a clearer account of the harm done in these injustices in order to call what is occurring a distinctly epistemic kind of injustice. Such an account should be able to make good on Fricker's claim that we can hurt in our capacity as a knower by distinguishing between epistemic and moral harms.

---

21. Kristie Dotson, 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing', *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 242.

22. *Ibid.*, 244.

23. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 130.

24. GLAAD, 'Erasure of Bisexuality', accessed 17 February 2019, <https://www.glaad.org/bisexual/bierasure>.

25. Note that I do not claim that all individuals who choose not to come out are self-silencing as there are many legitimate reasons why someone may not come out which has nothing to do with fear of encountering prejudice. However, when an individual would like to come out but feels unable to on account of their knowledge of prejudicial attitudes it provides a case of self-silencing.

### 3 Fricker's account of the harm in epistemic injustice

We saw in §2.1 that Fricker's aim in *Epistemic Injustice* was to identify a 'distinctively epistemic kind of injustice.'<sup>26</sup> Yet, consider the following passage, in which Fricker explains the importance of understanding the wrong done in epistemic injustices:

Any claim of injustice must rely on shared ethical intuition, but we achieve a clearer idea of why something constitutes an injustice if we can analyse the nature of the wrong inflicted.<sup>27</sup>

I think Fricker is right to note that there is a moral judgement involved in calling something an injustice, and that moreover injustice is commonly identified by means of ethical intuition or reasoning. However, if epistemic injustice is still to be properly *epistemic*, then there must be a sense in which victims of epistemic injustice are harmed epistemically, as well as morally.

While we might have expected Fricker to discuss the ways in which epistemic injustice leads to less overall transmission of knowledge, the harm Fricker actually identifies is less about knowledge and more about being recognised as a knower. In Chapter 6, Fricker clarifies her account of the harm in epistemic injustice, characterising it as a kind of *epistemic objectification*, on which individuals are treated as 'sources of information', not 'informants', or knowers.<sup>28</sup> Crucially, Fricker claims that to treat someone as a source of information or as an informant is to have a particular ethical attitude towards them,<sup>29</sup> not an epistemological one. She even adopts part of the Kantian framework to show that it is immoral to treat someone as a *mere* source of information, just as it is immoral to treat someone as a *mere* means to an end rather than an end in themselves.<sup>30</sup> The harm caused is moral, caused by a morally-impermissible ethical attitude, rather than epistemic as Fricker originally promised.

Asking why Fricker identifies the harm done in cases of epistemic injustice in this way reveals her virtue epistemological commitments. For a virtue epistemologist, the lines between epistemic value and moral value are already blurred because they view our role as knowers as an extension of our role as moral agents (that is, how we conduct ourselves as knowers affects should be guided by whether it would lead a flourishing life or not).

Fricker's own virtue epistemological leanings are clear from the fact that in addition to identifying the phenomenon of epistemic injustice, Fricker develops an account of the virtue of epistemic justice, which also informs her suggestions for reducing epi-

---

26. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

27. *Ibid.*, 5.

28. *Ibid.*, 134.

29. *Ibid.*, 131.

30. *Ibid.*, 133.

stemic injustices.<sup>31</sup> While a full analysis of this virtue is beyond the scope of the essay, it is worth noting that Fricker aims the virtue to be 'hybrid in kind: both intellectual and ethical'<sup>32</sup> just like epistemic injustice is meant to be both epistemic and ethical. Yet the epistemological concerns, at least in the case of epistemic injustice, appear to be considered less than the ethical concerns.

Indeed, the injustice Fricker describes could more accurately be called an identity injustice, since it rests on the moral wrong of undermining the dignity of someone's identity as a knower. Consider the case of a sexist employee who fails to consider their female boss a superior because they hold a negative identity prejudice that states that women do not have leadership skills. It seems to me that the harm identified by Fricker in cases of epistemic injustice also occurs in this case. This shows that the fact that the individual was undervalued as a *knower* is incidental, just as the fact that the goods were *epistemic goods* was incidental to the kind of injustice involved in Coady's first type of epistemic injustice. This is the case so long as we identify the wrong involved in epistemic injustice as holding the wrong kind of ethical attitude towards someone on the basis of a negative identity prejudice.

In sum: while there is no doubt that there is an important ethical dimension to epistemic injustice, Fricker has failed to identify the distinctly epistemic aspect of epistemic injustice which was meant to identify it as a *sui generis* kind of injustice. In the remainder of this paper, I aim to rescue Fricker from this criticism by providing a way of identifying epistemic injustice which retains the distinctly epistemic element of the injustice. I do this by sketching a distinction between being harmed as a knower (an epistemic harm) and being harmed as a moral agent (a moral harm). On this account, the epistemic harm involved in epistemic injustice is not that someone is undervalued as a knower but that a knowledge exchange has broken down, resulting in an obstacle to gaining knowledge. Further, epistemic injustice occurs when this is due to a morally culpable prejudicial credibility deficit against a knower.

## 4 Two kinds of harm

In distinguishing between moral and epistemic harms, the goal is to provide a theory-neutral account of the harms involved in cases of epistemic injustice in order to highlight that it is an epistemic phenomenon. After sketching my distinction in §4.1-4.2, in this section I show how the distinction accounts for the harms in the central cases of epistemic injustice and motivate the use of my distinction by arguing that it explains the intuitive harm that occurs in cases of credibility excess which Fricker dismisses.

---

31. Ibid., chap. 4.

32. Ibid., 6.

## 4.1 Moral harm

I define a moral harm as *a bad effect on a moral agent resulting from a morally impermissible action by a moral agent.*

There are two important features of this definition. First, it is not complete since we need to supply further definitions of ‘bad effect’ and ‘morally impermissible’. How the definition is fleshed out will therefore depend on the moral theory that one espouses; a utilitarian might characterise ‘bad effect’ as ‘non-optimum level of wellbeing’ while the virtue ethicist could define it as ‘diminished flourishing.’ The benefit of using a loose definition is that it will show that moral harms are distinct from epistemic harms not just on one particular moral theory but in a broader sense.

Second, we should understand ‘moral agent’ as a member of the moral community, i.e. as someone who is morally responsible for their actions. Identifying the moral harms of a situation further identifies where the blame should be placed, i.e. on the moral agent who acted impermissibly. For example, acting on a morally culpable prejudice (e.g. negative identity prejudices) provides the moral harm in most epistemic injustices.<sup>33</sup>

## 4.2 Epistemic harm

I define an epistemic harm as *a restriction on access to a knowledge exchange.*

The first thing to note is that this definition is very broad. A young child who asks how babies are made is harmed epistemically when their parents do not give them the full answer, as is the student who cannot afford a particular textbook, since both are blocked from participation in an exchange of knowledge.

Secondly, note that not all epistemic harms are morally culpable. The former example of the parents fudging the truth a little provides an example of a morally innocuous epistemic harm. Since we said that epistemic injustices involve both moral and epistemic harms, note that not every case of epistemic harm will count as epistemic injustice.

Instead, I suggest Fricker is right that for epistemic injustice to be an injustice, there must be a credibility deficit caused by identity-prejudice, although this should be understood as a moral, not an epistemic harm. A case counts as epistemic injustice iff it includes:

- (1) Moral and epistemic harms;
- (2) The moral harm of being undermined as a knower due to a morally-culpable

---

33. I consider exceptions to this rule in §4.3 and §7.



prejudice held by one's audience.

### 4.3 Central cases revisited

First, in the Tom Robinson case, which illustrates testimonial quietening, it is clear that on all plausible moral theories there are moral harms involved. Tom is harmed morally because he is discounted as a knower due to the morally impermissible prejudice of the jury, resulting in an unjust verdict of guilt. He is harmed epistemically because he cannot transfer his knowledge of the situation to the jury since they cannot believe his testimony. Hence, he cannot participate in a knowledge exchange and is impeded in his ability to be a knower.

An implication of my definition is that the jury are also harmed epistemically. Their inability to believe Tom's testimony blocks their receipt of the information they need to come to a true belief about what happened. This obstruction of this knowledge exchange counts as an epistemic harm to the jury as well as to Tom. Hence, victims and perpetrators are both harmed epistemically in cases of epistemic injustice.

This is an important result for two reasons. First, it captures the idea that prejudice is harmful to society since it silences whole social groups. We lose out on the knowledge that could be gained from their unique testimony and perspectives. Second, it suggests even privileged members of society should be motivated to combat epistemic injustice, since they too are epistemically harmed by injustice.

In cases of testimonial smothering, the moral harm can be harder to identify. In the case of the bisexual man, he might not come out to friends who would in fact support him since his awareness of biphobia broadly leads him to fear a negative response from his friends. We might not want to say that his friends have harmed him morally, nor that there is a pre-emptive or counterfactual harm, since his friends would have supported him. Instead, it looks like his society has harmed him morally, rather than an individual moral agent. When the prejudice involved in epistemic injustice is part of the structure of society,<sup>34</sup> the moral harms involved must be different to when injustice is the result of an individual's prejudice. I return to this worry later.

By contrast, the epistemic harm involved is clear. Just as a shy student is harmed epistemically by not engaging in discussion in class, in a similar way self-silencing is epistemically harmful to listeners and speakers since a perspective is lost to the discussion.<sup>35</sup>

---

34. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 10–11.

35. Note that epistemic blame must not relate to epistemic harm in an analogous way to moral blame since then the self-silencer would be epistemically responsible for the harm caused. However, I leave aside issues of developing an account of epistemic blame.

## 4.4 Credibility excess revisited

An important feature of Fricker's account of epistemic injustice is that it includes cases of credibility deficit, but excludes (most cases of) credibility excess.<sup>36</sup> Fricker argues that cases of credibility excess do not involve the withholding of 'a proper respect for the speaker *qua* subject of knowledge.'<sup>37</sup> However, I agree with Medina that 'Fricker's claim that a credibility excess does not handicap the speaker in the course of the exchange in the same way that a credibility deficit does is dubious.'<sup>38</sup>

By using the distinction between epistemic and moral harms, we can explain the intuitive wrong involved in certain cases of credibility excess without having to further characterise them as epistemic injustices. Consider Fricker's case of the professor who asks a junior colleague to give her comments on a paper she is presenting at a conference.<sup>39</sup> The junior colleague admires the professor and gives too much benefit of the doubt, resulting in his comments being less critical than usual. The professor is harmed epistemically since the junior colleague does not give their best comments on the paper and this restricts the professor's access to the colleague's knowledge. Yet, while this is as a result of prejudice—the junior colleague is prejudiced towards thinking the professor has good suggestions (i.e. resistant to thinking otherwise)—it is plausibly not a morally impermissible prejudice to hold. Hence, the professor is not harmed morally by the encounter and it does not count as an epistemic injustice.

## 5 Objections

Having introduced my distinction between epistemic and moral harms and provide some reason for thinking that it is useful, in this section I consider two possible objections to my account.

### 5.1 The epistemic harm harmful?

In §4, I aimed to provide a theory-neutral account of moral and epistemic harms. While my definition of moral harm is neutral with regards to which moral theory is correct, it may be objected that my definition of epistemic harm commits me to a particular conception of epistemic value. The challenge my account faces is to answer how an epistemic harm can be a kind of harm even using loose definitions of knowledge and epistemic value.

---

36. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 21.

37. *Ibid.*

38. José Medina, 'The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary', *Social Epistemology* 25, no. 1 (2011): 17.

39. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 18.

The easiest way to see the harm in restricted access to a knowledge exchange is to say that we lose out on the knowledge that we would have gained from the knowledge exchange. By knowledge, I here mean a weak sense of knowledge used by Goldman, 'true belief'<sup>40</sup> and as with the moral harm definition, I leave the fleshing out of the concept to an individual's preferred theory of knowledge. Yet we are left with a regress of the question—we must now ask why it is harmful to miss out on knowledge, particularly when it is understood as mere true belief.

The obvious response, versions of which are endorsed by Coady<sup>41</sup> and Goldman is that knowledge has intrinsic value (if one that can be trumped by other values).<sup>42</sup> This view explains the wrong of cases of epistemic harm because being blocked from a knowledge exchange then restricts one's access to something which is intrinsically valuable. However, we can question whether all true beliefs are indeed intrinsically valuable: as Coady quips, 'the project of maximising true beliefs seems at best to be valuable for those who want to do well in the game of *Trivial Pursuit*.'<sup>43</sup>

Consider as an example my true belief that 'Meghan Markle's baby is due in April 2019'. Prima facie, it does not appear to be intrinsically valuable to hold this belief, and hence not all true beliefs are intrinsically valuable. Thus, to preserve the sense in which we are harmed by missing out on knowledge we must amend the weak definition of knowledge beyond 'true belief'. I briefly consider two such attempts.

First, Greco argues that knowledge should be understood as true belief arrived at by a method that deserves credit.<sup>44</sup> The value of knowledge lies in arriving at the truth by a reliable method rather than accidentally. However, consider an investigative journalist who puts in the effort to reach this true belief, perhaps even checking with Kate Middleton's obstetrician. The burden of proof is still on Greco to explain why using reliable methods to arrive at trivial truths should be intrinsically valuable, particularly when such methods and effort could have been utilised to arrive at more important truths.

Second, Coady, following Goldman, restricts intrinsic value to true beliefs that answer:

First, questions the agent happens to find interesting, second, questions the agent would find interesting if he or she had thought of them, and third, questions that the agent has an interest in having answered.<sup>45</sup>

Adopting this view implies knowers are only harmed epistemically when they lose

---

40. Alvin I. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

41. Coady, 'Two Concepts', 106.

42. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*, 6.

43. Coady, 'Two Concepts', 103.

44. John Greco, 'Knowledge as Credit for True Belief', in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives From Ethics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Clarendon Press, 2003), 116.

45. Coady, 'Two Concepts', 103.

out on *interesting* true beliefs. Since such beliefs are taken to be intrinsically valuable, we can explain why cases of epistemic harm are harmful.

The problem is that the inclusion of an agent's interests makes the value more instrumental than intrinsic. It is plausible that knowing 'Meghan Markle's baby is due in April 2019' is instrumentally valuable to an avid royalist, aiding their goal to know trivia about royalty. However, I see no reason why being an avid royalist makes it an intrinsically valuable true belief to hold.

Yet, even if knowledge is only instrumentally valuable, I argue that we can still see the harm in epistemic harm. To the extent that our goals/interests are prudentially valuable to us, knowledge which furthers these goals/interests is valuable. Hence, a breakdown in an exchange of (interesting) knowledge does result in the loss of something valuable, and thereby we are harmed.

## 5.2 A distinct kind of harm?

Having established that knowledge need only be instrumentally valuable for epistemic harm to be harmful, a second possible objection is that making this move causes the distinction to collapse between epistemic and moral harms. The worry here is that if our goals/interests are harmed, then we are harmed morally every time we are harmed epistemically.

The answer to this concern is to point out that our goals are not always moral. To illustrate, suppose you walk down the street and encounter an obviously shady character wearing a balaclava and holding an empty bag labelled '\$ \$ \$'. If they ask you where the nearest bank is and you purposely deceive them, the would-be criminal is harmed epistemically since they lose out on interesting knowledge (i.e. knowledge that furthers their interest in robbing the bank). Yet, they are not harmed morally since (plausibly) you have not acted morally impermissibly by obstructing their own immoral act. The distinction survives since there are cases which involve epistemic, but not moral, harms.

## 6 Concluding remarks

In this paper, I aimed to do three things. First, I argued that Fricker's account of the harm done in cases of epistemic injustice misses the *epistemic* harm caused and fails to establish why epistemic injustice is 'distinctly epistemic.' Second, I sketched definitions of epistemic and moral harms and used these to analyse key cases of epistemic injustice and to identify the intuitive harm in some instances of credibility excess. Third, I responded to possible objections to my distinction and argued that we can separate the moral and epistemic elements of epistemic injustice.

One remaining worry with my argument is that it is difficult to attribute moral blame in epistemic injustice cases such as testimonial smothering. The crux of this issue is that the prejudice involved is not tied to an individual, but rather part of the fabric of the society we live in, i.e. it is *structural*. For example, in our second central case the mere awareness that pervasive biphobia and bisexual erasure exists can cause testimonial smothering, independent of any individual's biphobic belief. This threatens my suggestion that identifying the moral harm in a case of epistemic injustice further identifies who is to blame.

Even where the prejudice can be attributed to an individual, the prejudice is often an implicit bias the individual may be unaware they have. It is tempting to say that we cannot be blameworthy for such implicit biases. Yet, while this may be comforting, it risks demotivating our attempts to resist our implicit biases by assuming we have no control over our biases. Instead, there is empirical evidence that suggests we can improve the situation through reflective self-regulation.<sup>46</sup> Given that such self-regulation will be a long and effortful process, we need a motivation to even try. Taking responsibility for our implicit biases by seeing the moral harms that they cause provides an essential first step towards motivating the effort involved in such self-regulation.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, Fricker is right to argue that combating epistemic injustice requires both individual reflective self-regulation and enacting changes in structural mechanisms.<sup>48</sup> These are important topics and provide fruitful areas for further research. However, one promising direction for identifying the moral harms in structural epistemic injustice is to say that we are all to blame. Consequently, we are all responsible for working towards changes in ourselves, and in our society.

## References

- Coady, David. 'Two Concepts of Epistemic Injustice'. *Episteme* 7, no. 2 (2010): 101–13.
- Dotson, Kristie. 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing'. *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236–57.
- Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . 'Replies to Alcott, Goldberg, and Hookway on Epistemic Injustice'. *Episteme* 7, no. 2 (2010): 164–78.

---

46. Margo Monteith, 'Self-regulation of Prejudiced Responses: Implications for Progress in Prejudice-reduction Efforts', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65, no. 3 (1993): 469–85.

47. Many thanks to Dr. Elinor Mason for her presentation 'Taking Responsibility for Implicit Biases,' which influenced this discussion.

48. Miranda Fricker, 'Replies to Alcott, Goldberg, and Hookway on Epistemic Injustice', *Episteme* 7, no. 2 (2010): 165.

- GLAAD. 'Erasure of Bisexuality'. Accessed 17 February 2019. <https://www.glaad.org/bisexual/bierasure>.
- Goldman, Alvin I. *Knowledge in a Social World*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Greco, John. 'Knowledge as Credit for True Belief'. In *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives From Ethics and Epistemology*, edited by Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski, 111–34. Clarendon Press, 2003.
- Mason, Elinor. *Taking Responsibility for Implicit Biases*. Presentation. Society of Women and Minorities in Philosophy, St Andrews, 2017.
- Medina, José. 'The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary'. *Social Epistemology* 25, no. 1 (2011): 15–35.
- Monteith, Margo. 'Self-regulation of Prejudiced Responses: Implications for Progress in Prejudice-reduction Efforts'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65, no. 3 (1993): 469–85.