

# A Resentment of Disappointment for the Politics of Resentment

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**Abstract** Prejudicial beliefs are often associated with ignorance. Indeed, common views of prejudice hold that it is precisely in their ignorance that those with prejudicial beliefs perpetrate a wrong to the victim of the prejudicial belief. This view of prejudice neatly accounts for the prejudices of epistemically culpable epistemic agents. But what about cases where a prejudice is held by an epistemically exculpable epistemic agent? This paper presents an example of a deeply prejudiced belief about Indigenous Peoples, taken from a recent ethnography of rural Wisconsin, and argues that it is epistemically exculpable. If it is indeed epistemically exculpable, then we need to look beyond the individual when directing our blame for the prejudicial belief; we can only be disappointed in the circumstances that enable an epistemic agent to be epistemically exculpable for expressing such a belief.

## 1 Introduction

This paper attempts to give an epistemological account of the phenomenon identified as “the politics of resentment” by the sociologist Katherine Cramer, which “arises from the way social identities, the emotion of resentment, and economic insecurity interact”.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the paper argues that we cannot epistemically blame certain individuals within the politics of resentment for their extremely prejudiced, morally blameworthy beliefs. In section 2, I present the central case under discussion in the paper as

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1. Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 9.

it appears in Cramer's ethnography of political consciousness in rural Wisconsin: a rural Wisconsinite's deeply prejudiced belief about Indigenous Peoples.<sup>2 3</sup> In section 3, I motivate Endre Begby's challenge to a common view of prejudice, which shows that prejudiced belief can be epistemically justified, and his notion of *highly non-ideal epistemic contexts* as sufficient circumstances for epistemic exculpation of prejudiced beliefs. In section 4, I show how we can extend Miranda Fricker's condition for epistemic exculpation of testimonial injustice, historical-cultural distance from the present moral discourse, to the central case in this paper. Ultimately, this paper suggests a counterintuitive, perhaps troubling conclusion about prejudicial beliefs produced in the "politics of resentment"; that, in Fricker's terms, we cannot extend a "resentment of blame" to those with prejudicial beliefs, but only a "resentment of disappointment".<sup>4</sup>

## 2 The Politics of Resentment: The Central Case

In the period between May 2007 and November 2012, the sociologist Katherine Cramer visited 27 different community groups, mostly in rural communities, across Wisconsin, to listen to their conversations.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, Cramer's "main motivation was not to get at how well people make sense of politics, but to get at how they do so".<sup>6</sup> Cramer's findings encompassed a broad spectrum of issues, from views on economics, to health-care, to the University of Wisconsin-Madison.<sup>7</sup> Here, I focus on the findings with distinctively high moral stakes: the prejudicial beliefs that racially dominant groups have on racially dominated groups. For the purposes of the paper, I take it for granted that

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2. I want to flag in advance that I will be quoting directly this lengthy, dehumanising prejudicial belief, and to emphasise that discussion of the belief will occur throughout the paper. The quote begins on the next page. My thanks to Dr. Aidan McGlynn for guidance on flagging this aspect of the paper, and for prompting my inclusion of the following footnote.

3. It is important to acknowledge at the outset of this paper that the appropriate collective term of reference for so-called "Indigenous Peoples" is controversial and contested. The prejudiced belief under discussion, since it does not specify a specific tribal identity, all but forces my hand to use this collective term which, although less harmful than some other terms, is nonetheless directly connected to the centuries-long, ongoing practices of settler-colonialism perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples. For an excellent introduction to the importance of this issue, see Michael Yellow Bird, "What We Want to Be Called: Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives on Racial and Ethnic Identity Labels," *American Indian Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1999): p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1185964>. For work on the role of misrepresentation in the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in contemporary higher education, see Adrienne Keene, e.g. "Representations Matter: Serving Native Students in Higher Education," *Jcscore* 1, no. 1 (June 2018): pp. 101-111, <https://doi.org/10.15763/issn.2642-2387.2015.1.1.101-111>. I am very grateful to members of the "Decolonise UWC" Facebook group for guidance and literature recommendations on this issue.

4. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 104.

5. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*, 29, 35.

6. *Ibid.*, 20.

7. *Ibid.*, 37, 46, 210.

white Americans constitute the racially dominant group, and non-white Americans constitute racially dominated groups. Thus, I take as the central case for the paper the views of “Ron”, a white “man in the group of loggers in northwest Wisconsin”, speaking about “American Indians” who live on the local reservation.<sup>8 9</sup> Here is Ron’s view of the Indigenous Peoples living in the local reservation:

And, there, there’s too many programs down there for a bunch of people, you know to have it for them to want to go to work. You know? They got the casino down there shoving our money through ‘em, they got the federal government shoving our money through ‘em, and they wonder where they got drunken alcohol problems, they got nothing to do all day besides sitting around and do what they want to do. And they keep giving ‘em money to do it, well how do you expect to get anything out of anybody? There’s an old saying: A hungry dog hunts harder. Hey, you keep feeding a dog or a cat, they’re not gonna hunt, they’re not gonna look for food, they’re gonna lay around and get fat.<sup>10</sup>

Herein, this case will be referred to as ‘RON’. Now, perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, when Cramer listened to Ron express this racist view—complete with a likening of Indigenous Peoples living in reservations to lazy, fat domestic animals—she didn’t take it to be an expression of “just plain racism”. Rather, for Cramer, taken in context, Ron’s racism is baked into “a much more complex process of sense making” that constitutes how he “make[s] sense of public affairs”.<sup>11</sup> Or put more bluntly, as Cramer sees it, Ron isn’t being racist for the sake of it, or simply because he’s a bigot, but because his understanding of society requires it. Cramer understands this kind of racism as a consequence of the sense of identity unique to rural Wisconsinites, which she calls “rural consciousness”, and the “broader structural forces” they are subject to, which together amount to a “politics of resentment”.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, to sufficiently understand cases like RON requires a consideration of the role that Ron’s location in a politics of resentment plays. Cramer’s diagnosis of this kind of prejudice, I will now argue, finds support in the recent work of Endre Begby on epistemic responsibility.

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8. *Ibid.*, 88.

9. As mentioned in footnote 3., the nature of Ron’s prejudiced belief makes it difficult to specify with certainty what specific reservation he is referring to. There are twelve federally recognised First Nations within the state of Wisconsin, and most of northern Wisconsin lies on Ojibwe land—however there are several reservations within just north-west Wisconsin so it is impossible to know with certainty which “local” reservation Ron has in mind. For a map of the reservations in Wisconsin, see “Current Tribal Lands Map and Native Nations Facts,” Wisconsin First Nations, March 31, 2020, <https://wisconsinfirstnations.org/current-tribal-lands-map-native-nations-facts/>.

10. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*, 88.

11. *Ibid.*, 18, 89.

12. *Ibid.*, 24.

### 3 Begby's Account of Epistemic Culpability

Begby's account of epistemic responsibility supports Cramer's diagnosis of RON by: (a) problematising a "common view" of prejudice and (b) developing the notion of *highly non-ideal epistemic contexts*.

#### 3.1 Problematising a "common view" on prejudice

Begby defines a *prejudice* as "a negatively charged, materially false stereotype targeting some social group and, derivatively, the individuals that comprise this group".<sup>13</sup> Working under this definition, Begby challenges a "common view" of prejudice advocated for by both Nomy Arpaly and Miranda Fricker.<sup>14</sup> Roughly, this common view holds that prejudices "always arise from some specifiable mishandling of evidence" such that they are deemed epistemically culpable and irrational.<sup>15</sup> Begby challenges this view on the basis that it "takes for granted a characterization of prejudices in terms of universal generalizations" and that this assumption is incorrect "at least for the majority of common and pernicious prejudices".<sup>16</sup> This assumption, Begby argues, elides the distinction between "generic judgements" and "universal generalizations" when identifying stereotype judgements. i.e. it assumes stereotypes make universal generalizations about groups, rather than fallible generalizations.<sup>17</sup> Thus "all immigrants are illegal aliens" is a universal generalization, but "immigrants are illegal aliens" is a generic judgement. This, albeit subtle, distinction is crucial because, as Begby points out, universal generalizations are far more sensitive to negative instances than generic judgements.<sup>18</sup> A single negative instance is enough to comprehensively undermine a universal generalization: if I come across a "legal" immigrant, then that is sufficient evidence to undermine, via falsification, the universal generalization "all immigrants are illegal aliens", since that proposition is incompatible with the proposition "this immigrant is legal." However, the generic judgement "immigrants are illegal aliens" is not falsifiable in the same way, even in the face of the same evidence. The proposition "immigrants are illegal aliens" is compatible with "this immigrant is legal", since we can understand the generic judgement to express a tendency, rather than a necessary condition, of a group. Thus the generic judgement that immigrants tend to be illegal aliens can accommodate a couple of "legal" immigrants here and there in a way that a universal generalization cannot. The upshot of this distinction is that while it is obviously an "epistemic mistake" to sustain a falsified universal generalization, it is much

13. Endre Begby, "The Epistemology of Prejudice," *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2013): pp. 90-99, <https://doi.org/10.1002/tht3.71>, 90.

14. Begby, "The Epistemology of Prejudice", 90.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 91.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, 94.

less clear that to sustain a generic judgement in the face of a counterexample constitutes such a mistake.<sup>19</sup> In this way, prejudices, “once they are internalized. . . can quite reasonably come to control the assessment and interpretation of new evidence”.<sup>20</sup> This aspect of “epistemic insidiousness” is not captured by the common view endorsed by Fricker and Arpaly.<sup>21</sup>

For illustration, Begby refers to Arpaly’s hypothetical case of Solomon, “a boy who lives in a small, isolated farming community in a poor country” who believes that women are significantly less intellectually able than men.<sup>22</sup> The “common view” holds that while in this context, Solomon is not epistemically culpable for this belief, and so cannot be said to be prejudiced, for lack of evidence to suggest otherwise.<sup>23</sup> However, the common view holds that once Solomon encounters countervailing evidence to this belief (for example, at university where there are countless women who are at least as intellectually capable as men) then he becomes epistemically culpable for his belief.<sup>24</sup> If Solomon’s belief relies on a universal generalization that “all women are intellectually inferior to men”, then it seems the prediction of the common view holds, since he has encountered countless exceptions to this generalization at university. However, if his belief relies on a generic judgement about women’s intellectual abilities compared to men’s, then it can be rationally revised to something like: “only women who study at university can be the intellectual equals or superiors of men.” Indeed, this actually seems like the more rational response to his evidence. For Solomon would be revising his belief about women proportionate to the countervailing evidence: he has encountered evidence to suggest that “women at university are intellectually capable”, but has not encountered evidence to suggest that “women not at university are intellectually capable.” To form the latter belief, then, would be to form a belief without evidence. The upshot here is that Solomon seems epistemically justified, rather than culpable, for maintaining the generic judgement that women tend to be less intellectually capable than men. But this, clearly, is still a false stereotype that wrongs women. Thus, Begby concludes that we need to “move beyond” the common view “to determine the exact nature of Solomon’s prejudice”.<sup>25</sup> More precisely, if we are to understand “how prejudices are capable of absorbing or subsuming such contrary evidence, we must recognize that they paint a more complex picture of the world than the common view assumes”.<sup>26</sup>

Begby’s treatment of Solomon is remarkably consonant with Cramer’s judgement of RON. As Cramer notes, when we fully contextualize RON we see that Ron is making

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19. *Ibid.*, 92.

20. *Ibid.*, 91.

21. *Ibid.*, 97.

22. *Ibid.*, 91.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: an Inquiry into Moral Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 104.

25. Begby, “The Epistemology of Prejudice”, 92.

26. *Ibid.*, 97.

a comparison between an “American Indian” he works with, and those that live on reservations:

RON: Yeah. You know. Well like him that just left, that was here before to get coffee?

KJC: Yeah.

RON: He’s an American Indian. [One sentence deleted for confidentiality.]

KJC: Oh really?

RON: He’s a good guy.

KJC: Yeah.

RON: Works hard. Yeah.

KJC: Well sure.

RON: But he won’t live on the reservation where they get all that free housing and stuff, he’s self-supporting, you know?

KJC: Yeah.

RON: And, there, there’s too many programs down there for a bunch of people, you know to have it for them to want to go to work. . . they’re gonna lay around and get fat.”<sup>27</sup>

When we put Ron’s prejudiced tirade in context, it appears to be a paradigmatic example of a stereotype premised on a generic judgement, and not a general universalization. RON does not express that “all Indigenous Peoples are lazy alcoholics”, but, rather, that “Indigenous Peoples who live on reservations are lazy alcoholics”. As we can see, this stereotype permits him to rationally hold that some Indigenous Peoples can be “good guy[s]” with a good work ethic, while others have a work ethic that, Ron believes, permit dehumanising comparisons with domestic animals. It doesn’t seem unreasonable to suppose that perhaps, at some point, Ron didn’t believe Indigenous Peoples to be capable of having a good work ethic *at all*, but, upon working with one of them, revised his belief accordingly in the face of that evidence. i.e. just as Solomon, while at university encountered evidence that the women there were intelligent, Ron, while at work encountered evidence that the Indigenous Person there had a good work ethic. Thus, just as with Solomon, to expect Ron to revise his belief further than his evidence permits is to expect him to act irrationally. As counterintuitive and troubling as it may seem, on this analysis Ron is not epistemically culpable. Hence, Begby’s treatment of the Solomon example gives Cramer’s claim that “To call [RON]

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27. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*, 88.

just plain racism misses the complexity of the sentiments involved here” an epistemic basis.<sup>28</sup> To call Ron’s prejudice “just plain racism” does not recognise the epistemic insidiousness of his belief, and thus provides an oversimplified diagnosis of the wrong that his prejudice perpetrates.

### 3.2 Epistemic agents in “highly non-ideal epistemic contexts”

Elsewhere, Begby develops the notion of “highly non-ideal [epistemic] contexts” (HNIEC).<sup>29</sup> Paradigmatic examples of HNIEC are those where people “grow up in deeply prejudicial social settings, with no rational access to contrary evidence”.<sup>30</sup> In such cases, epistemic agents’ prejudiced beliefs are simply “the predictable consequences of their limited epistemic opportunities”.<sup>31</sup> In this way, they are “victims” with the “peculiarly bad luck of growing up in a severely constrained socio-epistemic environment”.<sup>32</sup> Thus on Begby’s account of doxastic responsibility, being raised in a HNIEC is a sufficient condition for epistemic exculpation of a prejudiced belief.

Now, recall that Cramer’s entire project is premised on the motivation not to evaluate, but simply to understand, how rural Wisconsinites “make sense of politics”.<sup>33</sup> While not made explicit, this approach seems to presuppose, on Cramer’s part, an understanding that these people are not operating in ideal epistemic contexts. Specifically, Cramer seems to identify two distinct ways in which rural Wisconsinites like Ron are subject to HNIECs. Indeed, I will now show that not only is one’s rural consciousness “materially” reinforced through the everyday lived experiences of those with a similar share of political power, like one’s family or colleagues, but it can also be “symbolically” exploited by those with a higher share of political power, like politicians.

#### 3.2.1 Reinforcement of prejudice

Essential to rural consciousness is the sense that rural Wisconsinites are victims of distributive injustice, and that “rural folks are fundamentally different from urbanites in terms of lifestyles, values, and work ethic”.<sup>34</sup> In a 2011 state-wide opinion poll, Cramer found that “69 percent of rural respondents felt rural areas received much less or somewhat less than their fair share” of government resources.<sup>35</sup> Cramer shows that this claim is unequivocally false: “the evidence certainly does not support the notion

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28. *Ibid.*

29. Endre Begby, “Doxastic Morality,” *Philosophical Topics* 46, no. 1 (2018): pp. 155-172, <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtopics20184619>, 166.

30. Begby, “Doxastic Morality”, 168.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*, 24.

34. 35.*Ibid.*, 5.

35. *Ibid.*, 105.

that urban counties receive far more than their share of tax dollars per resident” —in fact “rural counties in the aggregate pay somewhat less in taxes per person and receive approximately similar amounts of money in return”.<sup>36</sup>

However, rather than concluding from this that rural consciousness is fundamentally an irrational, ignorant social identity, Cramer provides evidence that such communities, while not victims of distributive injustice, face considerable pressures. First, rural counties “tend to experience greater levels of poverty, lower wages, and modestly higher levels of unemployment”.<sup>37</sup> Second, rural communities have been “experiencing a long, slow death for decades”, and fighting a “losing battle economically” —local businesses, the lifeblood and pride of rural communities, cannot compete with franchises and the rapidly expanding global economy.<sup>38</sup> Third, “providing broadband service is a more daunting task in a sparsely populated community than it is in a dense urban one” due to “economies of scale”, and “[e]ducation levels tend to be lower” in rural communities.<sup>39</sup>

Taken individually, these facts will present their own obstacles to epistemic practices—limited broadband will hinder access to online sources of information, for instance. When taken together, these facts constitute an extremely constrained socio-epistemic environment and thus will shape one’s epistemic character. Moreover, if one is interacting with people subject to the same constraints, the beliefs emerging from such an environment will be mutually reinforcing. Thus, while it may be true that rural consciousness, as expressed by those who share it, is premised on fiction, that is only part of the epistemic story here. If we are misguided when we judge Solomon’s epistemic character without having considered the epistemic context he was raised in, the same applies to our judgement of RON. Ron, as a rural Wisconsinite, is statistically more likely to have experienced greater levels of poverty, lower wages, less employment, lower levels of education, and been raised in a dying community, and is surrounded by people who are not likely to challenge his beliefs. If this doesn’t qualify as a HNIEC, it’s unclear what would. And if being raised in a HNIEC is sufficient for epistemic exculpation, then on this basis we ought to epistemically exculpate RON.

### 3.2.2 Exploitation of Prejudice

Rural consciousness will not only be shaped by severe material constraints and reinforced by interactions with individuals who share that social identity, like colleagues and family members. RON’s socio-epistemic context is also one of “a broader politics in which tapping into resentment is an effective political strategy”.<sup>40</sup> Although rural

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36. *Ibid.*, 91.

37. *Ibid.*, 94.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, 99.

40. *Ibid.*, 21.



consciousness is “not something that any one politician instilled in people overnight—or even over a few months”, political actors “mobilize support” by “tapping into” its latent resentment when it may be politically advantageous.<sup>41</sup> According to Cramer, politicians like Scott Walker “made use of the desire for people to make sense of their world, to figure out who is to blame and identify boundaries that clearly show that those who are to blame are not one of us” to win gubernatorial elections.<sup>42</sup> In this case, rather than challenging rural consciousness, Walker encouraged it for his political gain.

Thus, there is a mutually reinforcing *vertical* relationship between those in power and those who give power. The former have motivation to rather than challenge, exploit the prejudices of rural consciousness, while the latter have motivation to vote for those who they feel represented by: those political actors who do not challenge their social identity and way of life. Cramer characterises this as “a political culture in which political divides are rooted in our most basic understandings of ourselves, infuse our everyday relationships, and are used for electoral advantage by our political leaders”.<sup>43</sup> In this context of a politics of resentment, those with the power—both symbolic and material—to challenge prejudicial beliefs are motivated to instead encourage those beliefs.

Thus we can see that the politics of resentment constitutes a HNIEC in two distinct ways. First, the basic material conditions of Ron’s life will be highly non-epistemically ideal, and he is not likely to regularly encounter individuals who will challenge his beliefs. Second, Ron’s prejudicial beliefs are more likely to be encouraged, rather than challenged, by the political actors he feels represented by. Thus, insofar as RON is a consequence of the politics of resentment, RON is a consequence of a HNIEC, therefore epistemically exculpating RON.

## 4 Epistemic Injustice in a Politics of Resentment?

Having shown RON to be epistemically exculpable on the basis that the expressed prejudice can be understood as rational, and that Ron is subject to a HNIEC, I now proceed to discuss how cases like RON affect a prominent account of epistemic injustice. Miranda Fricker, in her foundational work on epistemic injustice, appears to only treat historical cases of exculpatory epistemic contexts, and not contemporaneous cases like RON. Hence, as it stands RON is not epistemically culpable according to Fricker’s account. I now present and attempt to resolve this *prima facie* problem, ultimately showing RON to be compatible with Fricker’s account.

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41. *Ibid.*, 19, 213, 221.

42. *Ibid.*, 207.

43. *Ibid.*, 211.

## 4.1 Resentment of Disappointment in mid-20th Century USA

Consider the following characterisation of one of Fricker's central cases of "epistemic injustice" (which we can refer to as 'USA1950s'):

USA1950s: Herbert is a well-to-do middle aged man raised in the United States of America in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At some point in the 1950s, his daughter-in-law, Marge gives testimony to Herbert about the whereabouts of her husband, Herbert's son. To this, Herbert dismissively responds "Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts".<sup>44</sup>

Fricker holds that Herbert's treatment of Marge in this case constitutes an epistemic injustice (EIJ). For Fricker, an EIJ is perpetrated when someone is harmed by someone else "specifically in their capacity as a knower".<sup>45</sup> The specific kind of EIJ perpetrated here is a testimonial injustice, which occurs when someone is afforded an identity-prejudicial credibility deficit (IPCD).<sup>46</sup> An IPCD consists in a speaker being given less credibility than they otherwise would have due to their hearer having an identity prejudice against them.<sup>47</sup> In this way, the speaker is harmed specifically in their capacity as a knower because their attempt to communicate knowledge is undermined by their hearer's prejudice against them. Fricker later characterises the perpetration of a testimonial injustice as a failure to exercise the virtue of testimonial justice.<sup>48</sup> Such a virtuous hearer "neutralizes the impact of prejudice in her credibility judgements" which requires a "distinctly reflexive critical social awareness" either "actively" or "spontaneously".<sup>49</sup>

But while Fricker identifies USA1950s as a paradigmatic case of epistemic injustice, she exculpates Herbert since he is in a cultural-historical "setting in which there is little critical awareness of the construction of gender".<sup>50</sup> Fricker takes this lack of critical awareness to result in a lack of "conceptual resources" available to individuals in that context.<sup>51</sup> In the USA in the 1950s, then, where there was such a lack of critical awareness of the construction of gender, on Fricker's view we can say that the impoverished conceptual resources available to that society were conducive to perpetrating identity prejudice against women, rather than cultivating the virtue of testimonial justice with respect to women. This is borne out when we consider our intuitive response to the following case:

USA2019: Herbert is a well-to-do middle aged man raised in the United States of America towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At some point in 2019, his daughter-in-

44. Adapted from Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 9.

45. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

46. *Ibid.*, 28.

47. *Ibid.*, 27-28.

48. *Ibid.*, 86.

49. *Ibid.*, 91-92.

50. *Ibid.*, 99.

51. *Ibid.*, 103.

law, Marge gives testimony to Herbert about the whereabouts of her husband, Herbert's son. To this, Herbert dismissively responds "Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts."

In USA2019, it seems clear that Herbert is culpable for his IPCD against Marge. In 2019, rather than a lack, there is an abundance of conceptual resources available to individuals for them to develop critical awareness of the construction of gender. For instance, feminist scholarship has since become well-established. Given this, we have grounds for expecting more from the Herbert in USA2019 compared to the Herbert in USA1950s, since, for example, in the former there exist established concepts such as "gender performativity", whereas in the latter there do not. Fricker articulates this difference in Herbert's blameworthiness by distinguishing between "routine" and "exceptional" discursive "moves in a moral discourse".<sup>52</sup> Exercising the virtue of testimonial justice in USA1950s would require an "exceptional" discursive move given the moral discourse of that context, since the "routine" move would have been to perpetrate IPCD against women. Likewise, exercising the virtue of testimonial justice in USA2019 would only require a "routine" move given the moral discourse of today. Fricker holds that in cases where agents are at fault for not making an exceptional move, they are not culpable for failing to make that move since they were not "in a position to know better".<sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup> Thus, it is only in cases where agents fail to make routine moves that they can be held culpable for the failure to make it, since it is only in these cases that they are in a position to know better. In cases of culpable ignorance, our intuitive "resentment of blame" towards such prejudiced individuals is justified i.e. our resentment of their prejudice is grounded in a legitimate levelling of blame towards them.<sup>55</sup> However, in cases of excusable ignorance, we are only justified in a "resentment of disappointment".<sup>56</sup> Here, our justification for resentment of prejudiced individuals only extends as far as our disappointment in their failure to make the exceptional move, which is no justification for blame towards them.

This distinction seems to make the right predictions: if I'm a doctor I would be culpable for not knowing how to treat a common, extant virus, but I can hardly be deemed culpable for not knowing how to treat a virus that has not yet been discovered. In the former case I would have failed a routine move for doctors—knowing how to treat

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52. *Ibid.*, 104.

53. *Ibid.*, 100.

54. There are, of course, many other accounts dealing with blameworthiness in potentially exculpating contexts besides Fricker's. For some of these recent accounts, see e.g. Nomy Arpaly and Timothy Schroeder, "Praise, Blame and the Whole Self," *Philosophical Studies* 93, no. 2 (1999): pp. 161-188, <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1004222928272>, Lisa Bortolotti and Kengo Miyazono, "The Ethics of Delusional Belief," *Erkenntnis* 81, no. 2 (2015): pp. 275-296, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-015-9739-9>, Sanford C. Goldberg, "Should Have Known," *Synthese* 194, no. 8 (2015): pp. 2863-2894, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-015-0662-z>, and Elinor Mason, "Moral Ignorance and Blameworthiness," *Philosophical Studies* 172, no. 11 (2015): pp. 3037-3057, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-015-0456-7>.

55. *Ibid.*, 104.

56. *Ibid.*

common viruses—but in the latter case I have failed to make an exceptional move—discovering a new common virus. Thus, by appealing to the “historical contingency” of Herbert in USA1950s, Fricker justifies his exculpation.<sup>57</sup> However, Fricker’s discussion of such exculpatory contexts focusses exclusively on cultures constrained by “historical distance” from the present moral discourse.<sup>58</sup>

## 4.2 Resentment of Disappointment in a Politics of Resentment

With reference to the foregoing analysis of RON, I now propose that Fricker’s distinction between routine/exceptional discursive moves also holds for cultures contemporaneous to the present moral discourse, and thus exculpates the prejudice in RON. But before doing so, I briefly anticipate an objection to this approach.

One might object that Fricker’s endorsement of the “common view” of prejudice suggests that her account of epistemic exculpation is incompatible with cases like RON that undermine the common view, i.e., how can I now be endorsing Fricker’s view on exculpating certain prejudiced subjects, when I earlier rejected her view as to what constitutes being a prejudiced subject? The response to this objection is simply to bite the bullet and maintain that Fricker’s initial verdict about Solomon seems mistaken. Insofar as the common view has been undermined as a plausible definition of culpable prejudice, what it predicts is inconsequential for further analyses of culpability about prejudice. Moreover, Fricker’s account of epistemic exculpation is not developed in terms of the nature of the prejudice, but the context in which the prejudice is perpetrated. Therefore, nothing of substance in Fricker’s account of exculpation is contingent on the specific nature of the prejudice, and so we can both reject her endorsement of the common view and endorse her notion of exculpatory contexts. Thus, we only need to focus on whether Fricker’s distinction between routine/exceptional moves in a moral discourse can apply to non-temporal distance from the present moral discourse. If it can, then historical distance is not a necessary condition for the relevant kind of inaccessibility to be in play on Fricker’s view, which clears the ground for cases like RON to be compatible with Fricker’s conditions for exculpability.

Indeed, historical distance does not seem necessary for the relevant kind of inaccessibility to be in play. What is relevant to the distance from the present moral discourse in Fricker’s analysis is not its metaphysical inaccessibility—that such concepts literally did not exist in USA1950s—but that they are functionally inaccessible. In other words, it is not the metaphysical status *simpliciter*—whether it exists or not—of a concept that is necessary for some agent to be able to access it. It is the metaphysical status of the concept relative to the agent that is necessary for the agent to be able to

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57. *Ibid.*, 100.

58. But for a passing suggestion about the possibility of “cultural distance” see Miranda Fricker, “The Relativism of Blame and Williams’s Relativism of Distance,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 84, no. 1 (January 2010): pp. 151-177, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8349.2010.00190.x>, 167.

access it. Although the non-existence of a concept is a sure way to guarantee its inaccessibility to some agent—since it will be inaccessible to all agents—it is not necessary.

A concept might exist but be inaccessible to an agent all the same, rendering it functionally inaccessible. We can all too easily imagine a situation where a ‘Big Pharma’ company has discovered a new common virus at a time  $t$ , but kept it under lock and key from the rest of the medical community because it is in their financial interest. But although the virus has been discovered at  $t$ , we could hardly hold the doctors not privy to its existence at  $t$  culpable for not knowing how to treat the virus after  $t$ . It is irrelevant to our judgement of the doctors that at  $t^{-1}$  the treatment was metaphysically inaccessible and at  $t^{+1}$  it was metaphysically accessible. What is relevant is that at  $t^{-1}$  it was inaccessible and  $t$  onwards it remained inaccessible to all but the Big Pharma company. Hence, to alter our judgement of the ignorant doctors from before  $t$  and after  $t$  would be to hold them accountable for the actions of the Big Pharma company—for an action they were completely unaware of. This seems like a very wrongheaded conceptualization of epistemic responsibility. Thus, if mere metaphysical accessibility is not sufficient for moral responsibility, then historical distance is not necessarily the only kind of distance required for epistemic exculpation. That is, the doctors in the above example are distant in a non-historical sense from the knowledge of the virus treatment, a sense we might perhaps call “organisational distance”. This organisational distance seems sufficient to exculpate them for their ignorance in this case.<sup>59</sup>

I submit that a similar kind of distance applies to Ron’s ignorance, which leads him to RON. Ron’s lack of conceptual resources for avoiding prejudice against Indigenous Peoples on the local reservation is not metaphysical – the conceptual resources to not stereotype Indigenous Peoples certainly do exist. But Ron is plausibly a victim of a relevant kind of inaccessibility, caused by his location in a HNIEC. This reading of Fricker’s distinction is made further plausible when we understand Fricker’s regard for USA1950s as implicitly treating it as a HNIEC. Recall Begby’s definition of a HNIEC: where people “grow up in deeply prejudicial social settings, with no rational access to contrary evidence”.<sup>60</sup> This seems to resemble Fricker’s regard for Herbert’s context in USA1950s. Furthermore, Fricker herself characterises Herbert in USA1950s as a subject of “bad luck”, matching Begby’s characterisation of those subject to HNIECS as victims

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59. Full discussion of the metaphysical commitments of my argument is beyond the scope of this paper. For discussion of the relevant notion of “metaphysical trans-substantiation” (whereby “[a]lthough there is no new stuff in the world... new entities [can] come into being” ), see Judith Baker, “The Metaphysical Construction of Value,” *Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 10 (1989): pp. 505-513, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil1989861020>, 507. For interesting discussions of the contingency of ethical judgements on metaphysical commitments, see Roy Sorensen, “Future Law: Prepunishment and the Causal Theory of Verdicts,” *Nous* 40, no. 1 (2006): pp. 166-183, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0029-4624.2006.00605.x> and Roy Sorensen, “Future Law: Prepunishment and the Causal Theory of Verdicts,” *Nous* 40, no. 1 (2006): pp. 166-183, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0029-4624.2006.00605.x>. My thanks to Dr. Alasdair Richmond for discussing such issues with me, and for these preliminary recommendations for further reading.

60. Begby, “Doxastic Morality”, 168.

of bad luck.<sup>61</sup> In this way, USA1950s seems to be an example of a HNIEC.

On this basis, we have strong motivation for finding Fricker's analysis of USA1950s also applicable to RON, meaning that, by Fricker's own lights, RON is epistemically exculpated for the same reasons that Herbert in USA1950s is exculpated: Ron's failure to be testimonially virtuous with respect to the testimony of Indigenous Peoples is subject to the same exculpatory inaccessibility of conceptual resources as Herbert's. Thus we have a case of a contemporaneous prejudiced belief that meets the standards set by Fricker for epistemic exculpation. Were Ron to perpetrate a testimonial injustice against one of the Indigenous Peoples in the local reservation, for example, if they try to explain to him their history of being oppressed by white settlers, Ron, while at fault for perpetrating the epistemically unjust IPCD, would, on Fricker's own analysis, be epistemically exculpated. In such a case, as counterintuitive as it may seem, we would not be justified in having a "resentment of blame" towards Ron, but only a "resentment of disappointment" towards the circumstances that produced RON.

## 5 Conclusion

In closing, this paper has provided an epistemic basis for Cramer's imperative to view the prejudiced perspective of Ron, the logger from Northern Wisconsin, not as "just plain racism" but rather as the consequence of a much more complicated set of beliefs. In doing so, it has shown (i) that within the "politics of resentment", Ron's prejudiced perspective is more epistemically insidious than a common view of prejudice suggests, (ii) that Ron's location in a highly non-ideal epistemic context is sufficient for the epistemic exculpation of his prejudiced perspective, and (iii) that, in addition to historical-cultural distance, Ron's contemporary-cultural distance from the present moral discourse is sufficient for his epistemic exculpation. Taken together, these points suggest a counterintuitive, perhaps troubling conclusion about cases like RON. Insofar as an individual with an epistemically insidious belief has always been subject to a highly non-ideal epistemic context, any resentment of blame we harbour towards them is unjustified – we can only justifiably harbour a resentment of disappointment towards the circumstances that produced their prejudiced perspective.

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61. Fricker, Epistemic Injustice, 101.

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