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Political Conviction and Epistemic Injustice

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Abstract
Epistemic injustice occurs when we fail to appropriately respect others as epistemic agents. Philosophers building on the work of Miranda Fricker, who introduced the concept, have focused on epistemic injustices involving certain social categories, particularly race and gender. Can there be epistemic injustice attached to political conviction and affiliation? I argue yes: politics can be a salient social category that draws epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustices might also be intersectional, based on the overlap of politics and some other identity category like race or sex. Further, and more provocatively, I argue that political minorities in academia, in particular conservatives and libertarians, are most likely the victims of epistemic injustice on the basis of their politics. Such epistemic injustices might even be routine. Although more limited in scope and severity than other forms of epistemic injustice, political epistemic injustices in academia ought to be of special concern from a standpoint of social justice because of the academy's central role in knowledge production and dissemination.

Keywords Epistemic injustice · Social epistemology · Campus ethics · Ideological discrimination · Testimony

1 Introduction

Epistemic injustice occurs whenever we fail to respect others as epistemic agents in some significant way. Since Miranda Fricker (2007) introduced the concept of epistemic injustice, it has been a fruitful area of research in social epistemology. This research has primarily focused on racial minorities, women, and other historically oppressed groups, but there may be other forms of epistemic injustice worth investigating. Here I argue for two claims. First, people can be the victims of epistemic injustice on the basis of their political convictions and affiliations, even when there is no history of

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oppression against their identities, and they aren't marginalized in society at large. Second, and more controversially, I argue that that political minorities in academia, by which I mean primarily conservatives and libertarians (or those with views associated with these ideologies), are plausibly victims of epistemic injustice. Given the role of the academy as the central site of knowledge production and dissemination, epistemic injustices within this context merit special attention. If this is correct, then this highlights an important social problem and simultaneously address a lacuna in the epistemic injustice literature.

In §1, I introduce the notion of epistemic injustice in general and two subtypes, testimonial injustice and epistemic silencing, in particular. In §2, I argue that there are some epistemic injustices that are based on the victim's political comments and affiliations, and on the intersection of politics and other factors. §3 turns to political minorities in academia, i.e., conservatives and libertarians, and presents empirical evidence that there is bias against them, and that this bias can be epistemically distorting. §4 considers specific instances of alleged differential treatment and argues that some of these plausibly amount to epistemic injustices. §5 addresses two objections, the most important of which is that the unfavorable treatment of political minorities might be justified. Finally, §6 considers some of the possible negative consequences of political epistemic injustices in academia.

1.1 Some Forms of Epistemic Injustice

In *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007), Fricker introduces the concept of "epistemic injustice," which is "a kind of injustice in which someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*" (27). The primary form of epistemic injustice, testimonial injustice, occurs when a hearer's assessment of a speaker's testimony is distorted in ways that are morally culpable, primarily when the speaker's testimony is taken less seriously than it should be. Testimonial injustices aren't merely mistaken credibility assessments; they result from the audience's ethically criticizable attitudes. Such unjustified credibility deficits may be incidental or occur only within limited contexts (28–9). The worst kind of testimonial injustice, however, in terms of its harms to individual speakers and broader social ramifications, is systematic.

Systematic testimonial injustice occurs when it is the product of a widely shared identity-based prejudice. A paradigmatic case occurs in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as a paradigm case (Fricker 2007, 29–31; Lee 1961, chapters 17–20). Set in Maycomb County, Alabama in 1935, the novel describes the trial a black man named Tom Robinson, who is accused of beating and raping a white woman. Robinson's defense attorney, Atticus Finch, produces compelling evidence to substantiate Robinson's declaration that he is innocent. In his impassioned closing statement, Finch implores the members of the jury to do their duty, which was not only to acquit Robinson, but also to believe what he is telling them. Commenting on this, Fricker writes, "Given the evidence before them, their immovably prejudiced social perception of Robinson as a speaker is at once a gross epistemic failure and an appalling ethical failure of grave practical significance" (2007, 25–26).

Although I will not discuss all of the forms of epistemic injustice Fricker and other philosophers have identified, Kristie Dotson's concept of "epistemic

silencing" is important to what follows.[1] This occurs when a speaker, or group of speakers, are systematically deprived of an audience willing or able to give appropriate uptake to their testimony owing to prejudice. In order to truly be able to speak, one must have the potential of reaching an audience; hence depriving a person of an audience in this way is tantamount to rendering him speechless or silencing him. Dotson distinguishes between two kinds of silencing: testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering. Quieting occurs "when the audience fails to identify a speaker as a knower" and this failure is the product of "pernicious ignorance" (2011, 242).

Dotson writes that "Testimonial smothering, ultimately, is the truncating of one's own testimony in order to insure [sic] that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence" (244). The incompetence of the audience "must follow from, or appear to follow from, pernicious ignorance." Unlike testimonial injustice or testimonial quieting, the victim of testimonial smothering actively suppresses her own speech before an audience can hear it and presumably dismiss it out of hand. Nonetheless, this self-censorship should be seen as coerced: "Many forms of coerced silencing require some sort of capitulation or self-silencing on the part of the speaker. Testimonial smothering is merely a type of coerced silencing" (244). She adds:

> It is not unusual for some types of information to be risky and unsafe in different contexts. However, when a speaker capitulates to the pressure to not introduce unsafe, risky testimony, then it is possible that testimonial smothering or some other form of coerced silencing is afoot. (245).

1.2 Politics and Epistemic Injustice

Philosophers interested in epistemic injustice have understandably focused on historically disadvantaged groups, but it's plausible that others can also be victims of epistemic injustice. In particular, it's plausible that people can be victims of epistemic injustice based on their political convictions or affiliations. We can see this from two complementary lines of reasoning: (a) intuition-based appeals to cases that seem

[1] The second form of epistemic injustice that Fricker identifies is hermeneutical injustice, "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experiences obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (2007, 155). For example, until recently victims of sexual harassment were unable to appropriately categorize their experiences because they had not been introduced to the concept of sexual harassment. Hermeneutical injustice, unlike testimonial injustice, must exist society-wide if it exists at all. If women were marginalized at work but not in society at large, then society would have provided them with a conceptual framework that would allow them to correctly identify what's happening to them at work. By contrast, it's possible that women's opinions could be unfairly dismissed at work – constituting testimonial injustice – but not elsewhere. I won't have much to say about hermeneutical injustice because of the scope of this paper: it's clear that conservatives and libertarians aren't facing hermeneutical injustice because they aren't systemically marginalized. Indeed, both are skilled at generating concepts and slogans to propound their points of view (e.g., "reverse discrimination" and "nanny state"). Political hermeneutical injustices are possible, however, in totalitarian societies. The "newspeak" in George Orwell's *1984* is a good example.

parallel to those Fricker uses to motivate the concept of epistemic injustice; and (b) arguments that what Fricker says about testimonial injustice suggests that some epistemic injustices can be partly or wholly based on the victim's politics. I believe that these points carry over to Dotson's "epistemic silencing" and other types of epistemic injustice philosophers have identified, though I won't elaborate on that point very much.

To begin with the appeal to intuition: imagine a modification of the *To Kill a Mockingbird* case. Suppose that Robinson, rather than being black, is a white member of the American Communist Party who accepts every part of that party's platform. The majority of people in Maycomb County, Alabama, however, not only favor capitalism, but perceive communism as Godless, anti-American, and evil. Again, Robinson is accused of rape on the basis of paltry evidence, and again Atticus Finch produces compelling evidence to corroborate his denial. Nonetheless, the staunchly anti-communist jurors are convinced that the communist must have committed the crime and vote to convict. The jurors once again have a moral duty to assess the evidence fairly; their inability or unwillingness to put their political biases at arm's length constitutes a moral failing. Whatever's going wrong in the original case, it seems to me, is going wrong here, too.

Some might think it's significant that Robinson's ordeal in the original case is based on a marginalized identity category that is situated within an oppressive history. But suppose that *To Kill a Mockingbird* were set within an alternate history in which Africans, instead of being brought to the U.S. in chains, immigrated like other groups and sporadically encountered bigotry. Against this backdrop, the events of Robinson's trial play out. Once again, Robinson is convicted based on paltry evidence because of the jury's racial biases. It's strange to think that this Tom Robinson has less of a grievance than the original character, and arbitrary to say that the first case instantiates epistemic injustice, but the second case doesn't, if "epistemic injustice" is supposed to be a normatively significant concept.

One important difference between political and non-political epistemic injustices needs to be acknowledged. Given the frequency of severity of political disagreement, political epistemic injustices are harder to identify. Any accusation of politically motivated epistemic injustice can elicit a flat-footed reply that because the supposed victim's views are unreasonable, whatever differential treatment he receives is justified. It's difficult to get any agreement on what constitutes a political epistemic injustice without resolving the first-order political issues.[2] Nevertheless, some of these injustices are flagrant enough that reasonable people will agree about them. Even conservatives who loathe communism should admit that Tom Robinson the communist in the modified example is the victim of epistemic injustice – or something *very much* like it – if his views result in an unjust prison sentence for a crime he didn't commit. So while uncertainty about political truth makes political epistemic injustices harder to identify, this shouldn't cast doubt on the claim that they occur.

[2] For a recent and thorough treatment of the demands of intellectual humility and the limits of expertise, see Ballantyne (2019).

I turn now to the second contention, that Fricker's own account suggests that some testimonial injustices are at least partly based on the victim's politics. Here is how Fricker defines "testimonial injustice":

> The speaker sustains such a testimonial injustice if and only if she receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer; so the central case of testimonial injustice is *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*. We should note, however, that there could be exceptions; that is, one can imagine cases of identity-prejudicial credibility deficit that are not cases of systematic testimonial injustice, and so not examples of our central case. (2007, 28).

Prejudices are "judgments, which may have a positive or a negative valence, and which display some (typically, epistemically culpable) resistance to counterevidence owing to some affective investment on the part of the subject" (35; italics removed). Political bias sometimes satisfies these criteria: they can be resistant to counterevidence – as everyone admits when it comes to their political opponents – and they are often (notoriously) emotionally motivated. As for social identities, Fricker takes these to be "conceptions alive in the collective social imagination" that lay out expectations for certain groups of people that sometimes affect credibility (ibid). As Fricker explicitly notes (53), political identification may be central to someone's social categorization in this way. Indeed, it's hard to how political identifications could be non-arbitrarily excluded from any adequate account of *social* identity. So it seems clear from what Fricker says that there is conceptual space for political epistemic injustices, even those that aren't systematic.

One thing Fricker doesn't explore as fully as she might are intersectional epistemic injustices, i.e., those that are based on the confluence of two or more identity categories. Plausibly someone could be the victim of testimonial injustice because of a combination of her politics and her race or sex. Consider another one of Fricker's central examples of epistemic injustice, a nineteenth-century woman whose suffragist views are rudely dismissed:

> If when this woman expresses her beliefs and opinions around the dinner table she receives a blank wall of incredulity from her hoped-for conversation partners, is she not likely over time to be inhibited precisely in the development of an essential aspect of who she is? Excluded from trustful conversation of the only people allowed to talk politics, is she not blocked from becoming, in some significant aspect, the person that she is? (54–55).

Fricker answers these questions affirmatively. Thus the scope of testimonial injustice for Fricker extends beyond people's reports about their immediate experiences to their views on controversial topics. (Note: it would be strange if this only applied to people expressing *correct* views, since erring souls, too – and maybe especially them – need opportunities for self-development). It's interesting to consider the likely interplay of sexism and political bias in this case. Fricker doesn't say explicitly that the audience disagrees with what the Victorian woman is saying, but she leaves us with that impression. A woman in this setting who agreed with her male audience is presumably less likely to encounter "a blank wall of incredulity," though of course she still might.

(Similarly, a man advocating unpopular suffragist views *might* face the same wall of incredulity). If the negative reaction she gets depend on the combination of both her sex and her views, then her epistemic oppression is intersectional, based on the intersection of sex and politics.

Let's consider a contemporary example. Some African American conservatives in the U.S. believe that they are especially marginalized in virtue of the intersection of their race and politics. Shelby Steele writes about the "loneliness of the 'black conservative,'" who simultaneously faces racial discrimination and a kind of social exile from his own racial group, and who is abused with epithets like "house slave." By "black conservative," Steele means any African American who disagrees with policies like affirmative action or slave reparations regardless of their other positions (1998, 13). Steele writes:

> Today, a public "black conservative" will surely meet a stunning amount of animus, demonization, misunderstanding and flat-out, undifferentiated contempt. And there is a kind of licensing process involved here in which the black leadership—normally protective even of people like Marion Berry and O.J. Simpson—licenses blacks *and* whites to have contempt for the black conservative. It's part of the group's manipulation of shame to let certain of its members languish outside the perimeter of group protection where even politically correct whites (who normally repress criticism of blacks) can show contempt for them. (5).

Consider in light of this the treatment of Coleman Hughes, an African American writer and philosophy student at Columbia University. Hughes addressed the U.S. Congress for five minutes on June 19, 2019 in opposition to HR-40, which would establish an official commission to investigate slave reparations. Hughes acknowledged the history of discrimination and abuse that African Americans have faced and endorsed reparations for people directly harmed by Jim Crow policies, but he expressed doubts about the wisdom of pursuing reparations for slavery. This opinion received a contemptuous response from the audience. The C-SPAN video shows the man sitting behind him shaking his head vigorously; others interrupted by booing:

> As the audience booed Hughes, subcommittee Chairman Steve Cohen banged the gavel and said "Chill, chill, chill, chill!"
> As the chamber quieted, Cohen added: "He was presumptive, but he still has a right to speak." (Christopher, 2019).

Hughes was not the only one to be booed in the tense hearing, though the booing of Hughes was especially loud and protracted. Moreover, Cohen seemed to be using "presumptive" as a synonym for "presumptuous," meaning "unwarrantedly or impertinently bold; forward." This slight from the chairman seems gratuitous since Hughes was polite throughout his remarks. Nor did it end there. After his testimony, HBO writer Rae Sanni tweeted to her 21,000 followers that "It's okay, just for today, to call Coleman Hughes a [SLUR]. He's arguing against reparations on Juneteenth [a celebration of the end of slavery in the United States]. He's [SLUR]eman Hughes til midnight Pacific Standard time" (Morton, 2019). Others called Hughes "Uncle Tom" and "traitor" (Handa, 2019). Major media outlets

effectively tuned this out.[3] Although Hughes mentioned that he is a Democrat, he satisfies Steele's definition of a black conservative, so the dynamic that Steele identified might have been in play.

Although testimonial injustice has been my primary concern in this section, I think my analysis probably extends to other forms of epistemic injustices. Dotson doesn't discuss political epistemic silencing, but it's plausible that such silencing occurs. Or if it doesn't, then there's a related form of epistemic injustice that pertains to political bias needs to be identified. Overzealous political attitudes can license the mistreatment of dissenters. When this mistreatment is based on ignorance about dissenter's arguments, opinions, or motivations, it seems "pernicious" in the relevant sense. Many in Hughes's audience apparently perceived him as a stooge for whites who don't have his (or their) interests at heart. Whether or not he is correct about slave reparations, I see no reason to doubt that he gave his opinion in good faith. Political bias thus seemed to prevent some in his audience from *really hearing* what he was saying. This seems to be a case of testimonial quieting, or some form of epistemic injustice very similar to it.[4] There are surely other African Americans who agree with all or parts of what Hughes said, but who hesitate to say so because they don't want to be designated as "traitors" themselves. Again, if these cases of self-censorship don't quite satisfy Dotson's stipulations for smothering, then they are instances of a related form of epistemic injustice worth identifying.

This concludes my case that there are political epistemic injustices. To be clear, I'm not arguing that politically based epistemic injustices generally have the same degree of severity of pervasiveness as those based on race or sex (though I think they sometimes do). Political beliefs are easier to conceal than race or sex (though not, perhaps, sexual orientation or religion) and political convictions are arguably under own control (though not more so than religion). But are they negligible? Imagining a conference at which historians of science unfairly dismiss the opinions philosophers of science, Fricker writes that "There are genuine cases of identity-prejudicial credibility deficit going on here" although they aren't systematic. She adds: "To categorize a testimonial injustice as incidental is not to belittle it ethically. Localized prejudices and the injustices they produce may be utterly disastrous for the subject, especially if they are repeated so frequently that the injustice is *persistent*" (29).

Surely politically based epistemic injustices are often at least this serious. Some that aren't pervasive enough to be called "systematic" might nonetheless affect many different spheres of life. A black conservative might have to police his views in many circumstances to avoid being designated a "race traitor." Without being systematic on the order of systemic racism or sexism, political epistemic injustices could predominate in one narrow, but very important sphere of life. As will be clear shortly, this is what I think is the case in academia.

[3] CNN (2019) barely mentioned Hughes's testimony in a single article that didn't mention the booing, his age, his race (though it mentions ambiguously that Hughes "said he's the descendant of slaves"), or the slurs directed at him.

[4] Dotson's definition of epistemic silencing requires that the audience must wrongly perceive that the victim isn't a *knower*. So if knowledge requires true belief, then it seems that by definition no one with a wrong opinion could be victimized in this way. I have two responses to this. First, someone could be a knower in the sense that he or she knows enough to form a reasonable opinion. Second, it strikes me as a reasonable extension of Dotson's view to say that people can also be victims of epistemic silencing if they are wrongly perceived as lacking justified belief, even if they don't have knowledge.

1.3 Political Bias at Universities

Conservative commentators have long bemoaned the leftwing slant of universities (e.g., Sowell 1993; Kimball 1990). It's true that academia leans politically to the left. To take one recent study, Langbert et al. (2016) find that the overall ratio of registered Democrats to Republicans in the departments of economics, history, journalism, law, and psychology in 40 leading departments is 10:1, and that the ratio is significantly higher in the humanities and social sciences, except economics (which still has more Democrats than Republicans).[5] This, moreover, includes emeritus faculty, among whom Republicans are somewhat, though not dramatically, better represented. Indeed, these researchers found that "in 42 percent of the departments [surveyed], Republican registrants were as scarce or scarcer than left *minority-party* registrants" (425-6. Emphasis in original). This study is not an outlier. See also Gross and Simmons (2007), and Inbar and Lammers (2012, 2-3), and Peters et al. (2020). Although morally unproblematic self-selection probably plays a role in producing these striking disparities, political bias in hiring and a left-wing culture deterring conservatvies from entering into academia in the first place are likely also factors. Consider the following evidence:

> *Willingness to discriminate*. Inbar and Lammers (2012) find that 37.5% of participants within social and personality psychology said that they would hire a liberal over a conservative if forced to choose between two candidates stipulated to be equally qualified.[6] Smaller but significant minorities expressed willingness to discriminate along political lines in grant review, paper review, and symposia invitation decisions. Yancey (2011) in a survey of sociologists found that nearly 30% would be less likely to support a job seeker if they knew that he or she was a Republican. Finally, Peters et al. (2020) find that a "significant minority" of the 794 philosophers they surveyed were explicitly willing to discriminate based on political orientation, and that the further to the left the surveyed philosophers were, the more willing they were to discriminate against conservatives.
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> *Perceived hostility and discrimination*. Inbar and Lammers (2012) also find that both moderate and conservative faculty reported feeling a hostile climate towards their political beliefs. They were more reluctant to express their political beliefs for fear of professional repercussions.[7] And the more liberal the respondents were, the less likely they were to think that conservatives in academia were in a hostile climate. Jon Shields and Joshua M. Dunn Sr. interviewed and surveyed 153 conservative academics for their book, *Passing on the Right* (2016, 4). They find that 46% reported having censored themselves with respect to at least one of the following: "Including information on a CV that might identify one as a conservative

[5] For an overview of the political orientation of academics, see Gross and Simmons (2007).

[6] The authors used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all; 4 = somewhat; 7 = very much) to extract responses on questions about whether the participants would be a) negatively influenced in reviewing a grant application or paper if it took a "politically conservative perspective"; b) reluctant to invite a colleague to participate in a symposium if the colleague in question was "politically quite conservative"; and c) inclined to vote for the more liberal candidate given two equally qualified job candidates.

[7] The means for perceived hostile climate, based on a 7-point Likert scale, were much higher for conservatives (M = 4.7) and moderates (M = 3.7) than liberals (M = 1.9).

> or libertarian"; "Writing an editorial that reveals political views"; "Donating or volunteering for conservative causes"; "publishing in conservative or libertarian journals"; "Donating or volunteering for GOP or Libertarian Party"; and "Applying for grants from conservative or libertarian foundations"; 20% admitted to censoring themselves with respect to three or more of the above (100–1). The testimonies of faculty mesh with data collected from students as well. For instance, here is Yancey's (2014) summary of a survey conducted in the four universities of the University of Colorado system:
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> Republicans were more than three times more likely to feel prejudice or discrimination than Democrats (51.7% versus 14.3%) and very conservative students were more than four times more likely than very liberal students to feel prejudice or discrimination (61.8% versus 13.7%). Republicans were three times more likely to feel intimidated to share their ideas in class due to political affiliation relative to Democrats (36.9% versus 11.3%). Very conservative students were almost four times more likely to feel such intimidation relative to very liberal students (47.7% versus 12.3%).

Independent evidence suggests that political partisanship is epistemically corrupting. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) conducted three different experiments using a pool of 1971 subjects including 500 African Americans. First, subjects took a shorter version of the Implicit Association Test (IAT) used to test for racial animus. They were asked to pair positive words or negative words with various political symbols (e.g., the donkey mascot of the Democratic Party). The researchers observed, inter alia, slower reaction times in pairing good words with the opposite party's symbols and faster reaction time pairing negative words with its symbols. Strikingly, Iyengar and Westwood find that the IAT yielded *larger effects* (by 50% among whites) in the case of political orientation as compared to results from the classic application of the method, viz., to measure implicit biases against African Americans.[8] Some researchers are skeptical about what the IAT can tell us about behavior in non-experimental settings, but those who think it shows something important in the racial case should take the results seriously in the political case.[9]

During their second experiment, Iyengar and Westwood asked some of the subjects to choose one graduating high school senior for a $30,000 scholarship. The fictional resumes they were given revealed the political affiliation of the candidates (e.g., whether the candidate was the head of the Young Republicans or Young Democrats). The results show that 80% of subjects preferred to award the scholarship to the candidate whose resume revealed alignment with their own political values. Candidates with lower GPAs but aligning political views were frequently preferred to candidates with opposing political views and higher GPAs: "The probability of a partisan selecting an out-party candidate never rose above .3… partisanship simply trumped academic excellence in this task" (699).[10] Presumably, membership in the opposing party doesn't make a high school student

[8] For more information on the IAT and racial bias, see Holroyd et al. (2017).

[9] Regarding worries about the predictive validity of the IAT, see for example Blanton et al. (2009).

[10] The subjects who participated in the second study were randomly assigned to do either this political selection task or a similar selection task in which the subjects were cued into candidates' racial identities (either white or black). The results of this selection turned up of no evidence racial bias against African Americans in the selection processes. African Americans did show a significant ingroup bias toward other African Americans, and even whites ("European Americans" in Iyengar and Westwood's designation) showed a slight preference for African Americans.

less deserving of a scholarship. Hence, it seems that the subjects' political biases were distorting their judgments, or else they were willing to subordinate academic excellence to partisan interests even when nothing much politically seemed to be at stake. The third experiment turned up evidence that both Democrats and Republicans are less generous to members of the other party than the ingroup (702–705).

These results are part of a growing body of evidence about the epistemic and moral dangers of political bias. Westwood et al. (2018) extends some of the results of Iyengar and Westwood (2015) to Great Britain, Belgium, and Spain. A study recently published in *Cognition* finds that people discounted the expertise of others who were not politically like-minded *even in non-political domains* – in this case, an incentivized shape categorization task (Marks et al., 2019). Presumably, people's political views do not affect whether they can accurately recognize shapes – but subjects in the study *behaved* as if this were true. The heuristic turned out to be a source of reliable error, as subjects unjustifiably downgraded the testimony of others. Kahan et al. (2013) find that even very numerate subjects are liable to make basic statistical errors with respect to data on gun control when it conflicts with beliefs typical of their political orientation. This occurred for subjects on both sides of the political spectrum, to a roughly equal extent. More recently, Gampa et al. (2019) find that ideological beliefs impair people's ability to recognize logical validity in arguments. Individuals across the political spectrum tended to assess logical validity of arguments based on the believability (for them) of the conclusions, leading to predictable error. Michael Huemer (2016) observes that political beliefs come in surprising bundles. For example, in the U.S., you can often guess someone's stance on taxing the wealthy if you know his stance on abortion. Similarly, you can often guess someone's political affiliation by knowing that person's age, race, sex and other demographic information that shouldn't be politically relevant. Huemer contends that these facts, together with the persistance of deep-seated political disagreement, are best explained by the hypothesis that we usually form and maintain our political beliefs through what he calls "rational irrationality." In brief, we are incentivized to be epistemically irrational when it comes to politics.

This evidence suggests that political conviction is epistemically dangerous in predictable, systematic ways to people of all partisanships. So one should suspect that wherever people of one political persuasion are concentrated, certain forms of irrationality will occur, among them a tendency to dismiss dissenting views too quickly, and to underestimate the intelligence and rationality of dissenters (including in areas that have nothing to do with politics). These findings should raise our credence in the claim that the conservative university students (and, as we'll see, faculty) who feel disrespected are picking up on something real. Indeed, it would be surprising if political minorities in academia *weren't* often victims of epistemic injustices, and a miracle if the left-wing slant of the university had no negative epistemic consequences at all.

1.4 Political Bias in Academia and Epistemic Injustice

Recall that epistemic injustice occurs when a prejudice against a speaker's identity causes the audience to give the speaker less credence than she otherwise would have (Fricker 2007, 17–29). Testimonial injustice can occur even in cases where the speaker is *wrong* if the credibility deficit is disproportionate. One way that might happen is if the audience unreasonably attributes pathology or vice to the speaker. Academics sometimes do this to

their political opponents. Philosopher Allen Wood dismisses anti-abortion positions as obvious products of tyrannical intentions, writing that: "it is an affront to human intelligence to pretend that such views are anything but an attempt to confine women, as far as possible, to their traditional status of sexual subordination as less than free persons" (2005, 229). This ignores the fact that some philosophers have made careful, though of course controversial, arguments against abortion (e.g., Marquis 1989).

In the influential sociology book, *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno et al. (1950) sought to uncover personality traits that dispose people toward acceptance of anti-democratic propaganda, and to quantify this tendency on the f-scale ('f' for 'fascism'). People who scored high on the f-scale, as determined through a combination of questionnaires and clinical interviews, were supposed to have "authoritarian personality syndrome." The researchers thought that agreement to such statements as "If people would talk less and work more, everybody would be better off" and "The business man and the manufacturer are much more important to society than the artist and the professor" indicated fascist tendencies (255). The people who scored highly on the f-scale might explicitly reject fascism, however, and exhibit no proclivity toward fascism outside of the experiment (10).

According to Google Scholar, *The Authoritarian Personality* has been cited 18,681 times.[11] Nevertheless, the study has had critics almost from the moment it appeared. Edward Shils (1954) observes that Adorno et al. construct a political spectrum between right-wing authoritarianism – characterized, inter alia, by conventionalism, ethnocentrism, sexual repressiveness, and anti-intellectualism – and benevolent, left-wing humanitarianism, which is characterized by the opposite traits. All authoritarianism is thus placed on the rightwing pole: "the investigators fail to notice that at the Left pole of their spectrum there is to be found an authoritarianism impressively like the Authoritarianism of the Right" (38). Shils probably had Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union in mind.

I don't intend to settle the debate over *The Authoritarian Personality* here, but I think the critics make a good case that Adorno et al. unfairly pathologize people based on politics. Other researchers have given reasonable accounts of the psychological underpinnings of conservatism that doesn't attribute conservative views to pathology or vice (e.g., Haidt 2012, 150–217). Moreover, Adorno et al. attributed pathology to conservatives in a way that is public and highly influential. I find it plausible that this constitutes testimonial injustice against people who have right-of-center views *even if those views are mistaken*. After all, saying that someone's views are the product of pathology is clearly a form of credibility deflation; so, if Adorno et al. pathologize conservatives unjustifiably, then they are guilty of an unjustified credibility deflation.

It's easy to see how this kind of testimonial injustice could lead to other kinds of epistemic injustices. If an audience is conditioned to erroneously see rival views as necessarily emerging from pathology and vice, then they may be unable to really *hear* the speaker expressing these views; hence testimonial *quieting* is implicated. People who anticipate that reception might withhold giving their views out of fears of dismissal; so testimonial *smothering* is arguably also implicated. Economist Glenn Loury claims that this kind of self-censorship has indeed been happening, and that it has had deleterious consequences for scholarship:

[11] As of September 3, 2020.

> Such self-censorship is the hidden face of political correctness. For every act of aberrant speech seen to be punished by the "thought police," there are countless critical arguments, dissents from the received truth, unpleasant factual reports, or nonconformist deviations of thought that go unexpressed, or whose expression is distorted, because potential speakers rightly fear the consequences of a candid exposition of their views. As a result, the public discussion about vital issues can become dangerously impoverished. (1994, 438).

I've presented quantitative evidence that this is happening. Some recent research allows academics to anonymously comment on their experiences, providing us with qualitative evidence as well. In Peters et al.'s (2020) survey of philosophers, they note a number of respondents gave "colorful" accounts of their own political marginalization. As example, they quote a philosopher who said: "If my professional colleagues knew that I am moderately right-wing then half of them would call me a 'subhuman pig' and treat me accordingly. The other half would keep silent for fear of being next" (532). Shields and Dunn paint a vivid picture of political marginalization within the academy, and so I quote *Passing On the Right* at length:

> Because this [anonymous] professor strongly opposes affirmative action, we asked her if she ever shares her convictions with colleagues. She responded sharply: "Oh my God, no, no. This is one thing you have to be closeted about…. You cannot say in academia that 'I am against affirmative action.' That part you cannot be open about." When we asked why, she said her colleagues would regard her as an "evil person" …this political scientist worried that here colleagues would assume bad faith if she openly opposed racial and gender preferences. Her distrust and her decision to enter the closet partly grew out of her negative experiences in graduate school, where she recalled other female students branding her a "market-oriented bitch" for holding strong libertarian views.
>
> As this example suggests, a number of other professors even found that support for free markets must be concealed…One historian was afraid to express libertarian sympathies because she believes her colleagues link such views to racial animus. She was particularly chastened as a graduate student when a group of labor historians transformed a conference into an anti-Bush rally. By the time we identified this historian she was deep in the closet. She was one of the few academics that would not let us record her and she kept the door to her office shut during the interview even though the halls outside were abandoned. (2016, 91).

John McWhorter recently wrote in *The Atlantic* about the emails he's been receiving from academics reporting a chilling effect (2020). In a period of about three weeks in the summer of 2020, he received 150 emails from academics saying they were worried that they won't be able to speak their minds (or in some cases, even do their jobs) without career-threatening repercussions. Most of these professors aren't conservatives, he notes, but they do fear offending the sensibilities of colleagues, students, and administrators who are further to the left. Of course, McWhorter keeps their names in confidence.The use of anonymous sources here is a two-edge sword: on the one hand, they may be the only way to get the unfiltered views of people who believe that they need to self-censor as a matter of professional survival; on the other hand,

anonymity makes it impossible to evaluate the sources. Fortunately, we also have cases of people going on the record under their real names with similar complaints. To give one case, consider the testimony of Arthur Sakamoto, a sociologist at Texas A&M University who researches inequality and Asian Americans. During an interview with Heterodox Academy's "Half Hour of Heterodoxy" podcast, Sakamoto has described the dominance of what he calls the "majority-minority paradigm" about racial disparities:

> My perception has been that within the field of sociology the rewards for people who don't conform to the conventional wisdom are slim and I've known good sociologists doing good research who did not get tenure because their work did not fit into the paradigm very well. I mean, I'll be frank with you that I've been submitting papers to the *American Sociological Review* on Asian Americans for the past 25 years and, apparently, there's no data good enough for the *American Sociological Review* to convince those reviewers that Asian Americans have reached parity with whites. I mean every single one gets rejected. What happens is when the paper doesn't conform to the conventional wisdom, then the methodological standards are raised. But if you argue that there's discrimination against Asians, then the methodological standards are relaxed. (Sakamoto 2017, 7:19–8:11).

Sakamoto goes on to describe an incident in which he felt compelled to alter the conclusion of a paper to something he thought was unsupported by the evidence he and his coauthor presented:

> Basically, the review processes forced us to not reach that conclusion [i.e., that Asians had reached economic parity with whites]. We *had* to conclude that Asians faced discrimination. And as a senior author, I myself would not do that, but my coauthor was a junior person and getting this paper in the *American Sociological Review* would get him tenure… And if you read that paper carefully – and I'm afraid there's a lot of people in sociology that don't read very carefully anymore, present company excluded – the paper, the abstract doesn't even fit the conclusion. It's kind of like we wiggled around the review process and said 'ok, ok, you want to see discrimination? Here it is.' (Sakamoto 2017, 8:44–10:08).

Does this self-censorship amount to testimonial smothering? Let's look at Dotson's analysis of testimonial smothering in more detail. Dotson lays out three circumstances that accompany epistemic smothering:

> 1) the content of the testimony must be unsafe and risky; 2) the audience must demonstrate testimonial incompetence with respect to the content of the testimony of the speaker; and 3) testimonial incompetence must follow from, or appear to follow from, pernicious ignorance. As a result of these three circumstances, a speaker "smothers" his/her own testimony. (2011, 244).

Unwarrantedly excluding someone from the category of "reasonable interlocutor" ought to count as pernicious ignorance. It isn't true – to take cases mentioned by

Shields and Dunn – that opposing affirmative action makes one an "evil person" or that someone who holds libertarian views deserves to be designated a "free market bitch." Nor does it seem that Sakamoto and his coauthor were incapable of drawing their own conclusions from the evidence that they adduce in the article. If the methodology and framework were up to the standards of the *American Sociological Review*, as the eventual acceptance of their article suggests, then they shouldn't have been compelled to draw a conclusion that they didn't think was supported by the evidence.

To summarize: there are instances of academics pathologizing their political opponents (Adorno et al.) and asserting that some mainstream political views necessarily result from sinister motives (e.g., Wood). We've also seen examples of conservatives and libertarians who say they are fearful to express their views because of the social consequences in contemporary academia. In at least one case (e.g., Sakamoto), scholars capitulated to political pressure to alter their papers without justification. In §3, I observed that the academy leans politically to the left and noted that political biases are often epistemically distorting. It would therefore be surprising if the cases just discussed are the only ones that have occurred.

1.5 Replies to Objections

The primary objection I need to face is the flat-footed one I highlighted in §2: political biases don't render academics unable to hear what conservatives are saying; rather, those in the majority accurately assess them as foolish and react accordingly. Some respondents to the Peters et al. (2020) survey say as much. One says: "conservative ideas tend to lose in fair competition in the marketplace of ideas. They are given their chance, and are generally shown to be bad. People who accept many of them tend to be bad philosophers." Another says: "I'd be inclined to negatively review a right-leaning paper for the simple fact that I believe, given the arguments, that the political right get things *wrong*. We're talking about matters of objective truth here" (533).

This sort of reply would be reasonable against certain positions. The view that the moon landing was faked, that the 9/11 attacks were a premeditated U.S. government conspiracy, that Timothy McVeigh's 1995 bombing in Oklahoma City was morally justifiable, or that the Nazi Holocaust never happened (or killed far fewer people than credible historians say) are examples of views like this. Let's call such views *comprehensively undermining*. These are views that are so irrational that the possession of one such belief entails that the possessor is, in some significant sense, not a reasonable person. It's possible for people with comprehensively undermining views to be victims of epistemic injustice; nonetheless, the discovery that someone has a comprehensively undermining view should generally lead us to drastically lower our credence in what he or she says on any controversial issue. We have no obligation to see to it that these views are well-represented in institutions of higher education and may even have obligations to shut them out.

I think it's unlikely that conservatives and libertarians in academia generally harbor comprehensively undermining views. For one thing, conservatives and libertarians make significant contributions to scholarship. In the penultimate chapter of *Passing on the Right* (2016, 83–7), Shields and Dunn adduce some plausible areas in which conservative scholars have helped improve scholarship. Conservative psychologists and sociologists seem to have been vindicated about the negative effects of divorce on

children, for example. And conservative historians have helped set the record straight with regard to progressive enthusiasm for – and Catholic resistance to – eugenics, the significance of Christianity to the American Civil Rights Movement, and other matters. Moreover, these insights were overlooked for long periods of time, sometimes decades. On the libertarian side, there is a long and rich history of scholars arguing for the morality and beneficence of free market policies, including Adam Smith (2012) F.A. Hayek (2011) and Deirdre McCloskey (2011). No one could argue that Nazis or flat-Earthers have made similar contributions arguing for their views.

There's also evidence that the dearth of conservative and libertarian views in academia has fostered significant blind spots. A detailed case study is Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate* (2002), in which he argues that environmental determinism – the view that variance in human behavior is determined entirely by environmental factors – is an unfounded assumption that persists in many areas of social science. Psychologist Lee Jussim (2007; 2012, 269–403) has argued that political bias has prevented social scientists from seeing that stereotypes are far more reliable than they assume. Social psychologists Joe Duarte et al. conclude that "that the collective efforts of researchers in politically charged areas may fail to converge upon the truth when there are few or no non-liberal researchers to raise questions and frame hypotheses in alternative ways" (2015, 2). For similar reasons, Cass Sunstein (2018) argues that the dearth of conservative professors "hurts everyone." Sunstein (2019) further explores the ways in which conformity in general hampers knowledge production and can often lead to dangerous blind-spots. Recent work by Feng Shi et al. (2019) shows that teams of Wikipedia editors produce better work on social and political topics when they are ideologically diverse, even polarized.

Finally, we are likely to underestimate the reasonableness of views that we disagree with. This might occasionally cause us to treat others' views as comprehensively undermining when they are not. As Hugo Mercier and Sperber (2017) have recently argued, reason's primary function is to act as a lawyer, defending our antecedently held beliefs. If one takes this evidence into account, one should worry that one might be overstating the case against our political opponents' positions at least some of the time. It's also worth remembering how dramatic and extreme philosophical disagreements can be. Some believe there are robust moral facts, others think morality is a fiction. Some believe in concrete possible worlds other than the actual world, while others find that absurd. Skeptics think we can't know things that seem to most people to be non-negotiable matters of common sense. These are fundamental, radical disputes, yet most philosophers don't think that disagreement about any of these issues licenses them to treat their disagreeing peers in the profession as evil or insane people who should be marginalized. Political disagreement ought to be viewed in a similar vein.

This is prima facie evidence that conservative and libertarian views aren't comprehensively undermining; hence treating people with these views as if they held comprehensively undermining views is suspect. Now it might be that we should give less credence to people who express views which, although not comprehensively undermining, are still less than completely rational. But some of the apparent epistemic injustices I've discussed political minorities being treated as if they had comprehensively undermining views when they do not (e.g., the libertarian-leaning anonymous academic who thought she would be dismissed as a "market-oriented bitch"). Even if

some credibility deflation is warranted, testimonial injustice, quieting, and smothering may all be implicated in excessive credibility deflation.

The second objection I want to consider concedes the normative point but alleges that the bad treatment of political minorities in academia isn't really happening or is exaggerated. After all, the Shields and Dunn rely on unnamed sources that can't be directly evaluated. Other evidence is subject to doubt. For instance, conservative college students might perceive themselves to be victimized or marginalized when they are not because this conception supports a political narrative. The data that comes from surveys that seem to show a willingness to discriminate can also be challenged. Online surveys tend to have low response rates; Yancey (2011), Inbar and Yammers (2012) and Peters et al. (2020) aren't exceptions. (Yancey's participation rate was highest at 29 percent; the Peters et al. sample of 794 philosophers came from a pool of over 11,000, or less than 7 percent). Finally, some allege that conservatives themselves might dishonestly report a high willingness to discriminate against conservatives in order to boost the narrative of political persecution.[12]

Although it's possible that one line of evidence we rely on might be faulty, the cumulative case arising from multiple surveys, the testimonies of many different people, the use of several different methods of measuring bias, people's tendency to extend political bias into epistemic evaluation within non-political domains, etc. seems strong. The case is further strengthened by the evidence that the academy tilts heavily in one political direction, and that political bias is generally epistemically corrupting. This background information should lead us to believe that there are a certain number of cases of unfairness like those we have reports of. As a thought experiment, suppose that we had similar evidence of bias against racial or gender minorities in academia. I suspect that this would (rightly) cause alarm. Indeed, in the context of race, many assume that pernicious forms of bias underly observed disparities *even when no one is willing to admit inter-racial hostility, or any intention to discriminate*.

1.6 The Academy as a Center of Epistemic Injustice

I turn now to the potential negative consequences of widespread, politically based epistemic injustice in academia. Fricker notes that epistemic injustice prevents the accurate flow of information, which negatively affects the audience, but the primary wrong inflicted on the victim is that she has been "wronged in her capacity as knower" – essentially, disrespected as something less than a rational agent. Fricker writes:

> We are long familiar with the idea, played out by the history of philosophy in many variations, that our rationality is distinctive of what lends our humanity its distinctive value. No wonder, then, that being insulted, undermined, or otherwise wronged in one's capacity as a giver of knowledge is something that can cut

[12] This allegation was with reference to Peters et al. (2020) – then forthcoming – in the comments thread of a post about the study in the philosophy blog, *Daily Nous*. http://dailynous.com/2019/07/29/political-hostility-willingness-discriminate-philosophy/

> deep. No wonder too that in contexts of oppression the powerful will be sure to undermine the powerless in just this capacity, for it provides a direct route to undermining them in their very humanity. (2007, 44).

Fricker's view seems to be that epistemic injustice is wrong for broadly Kantian reasons – since it fundamentally concerns the respect that persons are owed in virtue of their epistemic capacities – though she suggests here that these wrongs cause bad consequences, too, including the agent's loss of confidence in her ability as a knower. Fricker adds that if this loss of confidence goes far enough, then it can undermine an agent's ability to form a social identity: "Persistent testimonial injustice can indeed inhibit the very formation of self" (55).

Gaile Pohlhaus, emphasizes that the curtailment of one's ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources is a core harm of epistemic injustice. She writes:

> On a communal epistemic level, [epistemic injustice] is harmful because it forestalls conditions that are maximally truth-conducive for the epistemic community; it prevents the transmission of potential knowledge from one agent to another and, in preventing that transmission, it prevents any knowledge that might have arisen from the effect this piece of potential knowledge might have had on other beliefs held by the community (as when a justified true belief adds support for or counteracts other held beliefs). (2014, 101–2).

Note how similar this is to Loury's concern, which we saw earlier, that politically correct self-censorship impedes scholarly investigation. Our systems of knowledge are interconnected – what we take ourselves to know depends on our access to the testimony and expertise of others.[13] Systemic obstacles to offering certain kinds of testimony then, can have profound impact on our collective epistemic resources. I think that such negative epistemic consequences are especially important in the context of modern academia. Now, of course, while the academy – especially the social sciences and humanities – is heavily skewed to the left, the same is not true for many other professions. The oil and mining industries tend to be very right-skewed (Kiersz and Walker 2014). It wouldn't be surprising to learn of epistemic injustices against people on the environmental left in those industries. But epistemic injustice at the university arguably deserves special attention. This is because the academy is putatively the central site for knowledge production and dissemination.[14] While epistemic injustices within the academy are localized to a context, the importance of that context to knowledge production makes them a society-wide concern.

[13] A stark example of this involves cases where psychologists asked test subjects to say whether they "knew" how a simple mechanism – a flush toilet or a bicycle – worked. Most said yes, though subsequently many could not actually describe or draw the actual details of the mechanisms. For a comprehensive overview of these results, see Sloman and Fernbach (2017).

[14] For further discussion, see Peters et al. (2020, 536–538).

This problem, moreover, isn't just a matter of the suppression of opinions worth discussing. An under-emphasized part of the problem is the credibility *inflation* afforded to speakers espousing dominant or ascendant views – this is especially relevant given the lowering of methodological standards that can accompany defenses of conclusions that are politically friendly to the majority, as brought out in the Sakamoto interview.[15] Fricker considers paradigmatic cases of testimonial injustice to be deflationary but considers the possibility that pervasive credibility inflation might constitute another form of epistemic injustice (2007, 17–20). Medina (2011) further explores this possibility, arguing that credibility excesses for some groups imply credibility deficiencies for other groups, at least comparatively. Both deflation and inflation can seriously distort our knowledge-seeking practices – again, especially when they occur in the institutions most responsible for knowledge production.

2 Conclusion

I have argued that people can be victims of epistemic injustice on the basis of political conviction and affiliation. Moreover, it is plausible that political minorities in academia are victims of epistemic injustice. While such injustice may be narrow in scope than some other forms of epistemic injustice, it is crucial to address given the importance of the university as an institution of knowledge production and dissemination. This raises the question of what practical conclusions, if any, we should draw from this investigation. I'm skeptical that muscular interventions – e.g., implementing affirmative action-like policies to advantage political minorities in hiring – would be desirable. Political minorities might end up being more despised if their colleagues suspect that they are benefiting from preferential treatment aimed at correcting political imbalances. What certainly is needed is more research on the topic.

One promising avenue of future research might take up the project of regulative epistemology, in the vein of Ballantyne (2019), applying it to the case of political bias in particular. This would be an essentially interdisciplinary effort, synthesizing results from psychology, sociology, history, and philosophy. It would seek to answer the question: how ought we, as imperfect beings, guide our inquiries and epistemic practices given that we are prone to political bias? Part of promoting epistemic justice might involve abiding by and fostering norms of civility in political discourse and robust free inquiry with respect to topics of social and political import.[16]

[15] For a detailed discussion of the history of academic discussion of stereotypes, see Jussim et al. (2016).

[16] I would above all like to thank Hrishikesh Joshi, who presented with me on this topic at the 2018 American Philosophical Association Pacific Division meeting in San Diego. Ultimately, we decided to make this a single author paper, but I'm nonetheless indebted to him from our fruitful collaboration. I'd also like to thank Dan Lowe for his especially helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Thanks also to Regina Rini, for chairing the APA session and for thought provoking discussion on this topic, and to David Boonin, Tim Perrine, Matt Lutz, Nathan Cofnas, and Dan Greco for comments on earlier drafts. Finally, I'd like to thank everyone else who has spurred my interest in this topic over the years, whether intentionally or not.

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