

Book of abstracts

International Conference **Communicative Paths to Righting Epistemic Wrongs**

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Havi Carel (University of Bristol)

Is illness ineffable?

It is often presupposed that illness experiences are deeply ineffable or contain elements that are incommunicable. It is assumed that illness experiences are too traumatic to be coherently articulated, too extreme to be sharable, and isolate the ill person in a way that renders communication about illness impossible. This results in (1) an inability to understand one's own experiences and (2) an inability to share them. I suggest that ineffability can be construed as total ((1) and (2)) or partial (just (2)), as unique (or not) to embodied experiences, and as hermetically isolating (or not). This produces a taxonomy of ineffability claims, which can be used to study the communicative problems faced by ill persons, especially within healthcare settings.

I argue that total ineffability only applies to a small subset of cases. Partial ineffability is more common and can be mitigated more readily. I conclude that claims for the ineffability of illness should be treated with caution, as uncritical acceptance of such claims risks undermining the subjectivity, agency and interests of ill persons. Moreover, we should strongly advocate the use of tools for combating (1) and (2), many of which are already at our disposal.

Richard Pettigrew (University of Bristol/Oxford)

The Wrong of Epistemic Injustice

We have a strong sense that, in a standard case of testimonial injustice, the testifier is wronged by the hearer who treats her testimony as less credible than it is. But what is the nature of this wrong? Of course, there are many wrongs that might follow from such treatment: in medical contexts, the testifier might not get the care they need; in legal contexts, crimes against them might not be prosecuted. But many of us also have the sense that there is a wrong that is intrinsic to the testimonial injustice, and it is committed regardless of other downstream harms. In this talk, I draw on work by Rachel Fraser to identify this wrong.

Claudia Picazo (Universidad de Educación a Distancia)

Conceptual Amelioration and the Transformative Power of Social Movements

Recent literature on hermeneutical injustice shows that, in some cases, existing concepts render some significant experiences unintelligible, thereby generating hermeneutical injustice and potentially obstructing social justice. When this happens, we might be interested in engineering them. Conceptual engineering has three steps: assessment, revision and implementation. It is often argued that implementation is difficult, and that it leads to communicative disruptions. When our aim is social justice, one reason why it is difficult is that audiences are resistant to the revision. I argue, first, that we can learn about implementation from social movements. I identify a strategy designed to counter hearer resistance, that I call transformative performance. Second, I argue that communicative disruptions often pre-exist conceptual engineering, and that conceptual engineering can in fact alleviate them. Finally, I argue that, despite the focus on implementation, assessment and revision can be as difficult as implementation.

Leo Townsend (University of Southampton) & Dina Lupin (University of Southampton)

Communicative Resistance and Indigenous Rights to Consultation

International and domestic law protects the rights of Indigenous Peoples to have a say in land-use decisions that affect their land, livelihoods and cultural practices. In previous work, we have highlighted some of the ways that participation processes ostensibly aimed at giving these communities a say have, in practice, had the opposite effect – they have subjected these communities to forms of silencing and epistemic injustice.

In this talk, we explore two ways in which Indigenous Peoples have resisted these practices of silencing and epistemic injustice. The first is by challenging the underlying narratives, myths, and stereotypes that legitimate those practices. We call this “narrative resistance,” and illustrate it with reference to the long-running battle of the Amadiba community in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa against unwanted development on their traditional land. The second form of resistance we explore takes the form of imaginative reclamation and re-writing of the law. We call this “expressive resistance” and illustrate it with reference to the development and staging of a piece of activist theatre, “Isitha Sibantu” (Enemy of the People) – a production which functions not only as storytelling but as a form of legal testimony.

SELECTED SPEAKERS

Amandine Catala (Université du Québec à Montréal)

Beyond diagnostic and discursive approaches: Pluralizing amelioration toward epistemic justice

The literature on epistemic injustice remains largely diagnostic, focused on the identification rather than amelioration of epistemic injustice, and logocentric, centered on propositional rather than experiential knowledge. A pluralist account includes not only propositional but also experiential knowledge. This paper aims to tease out the implications of a pluralist account of knowledge both for epistemic agency and injustice, and by extension for epistemic repair. The paper is divided into two main parts. In section 1, I introduce a pluralist account of knowledge, epistemic agency, and epistemic injustice, explaining why it is descriptively more complete and normatively more inclusive, and why it might therefore be useful for projects of epistemic repair. In section 2, I draw on this pluralist account to develop an account of epistemic repair. I propose a systematic framework to unpack what epistemic repair involves, centered around five questions: (i) what are we repairing, or the objects of epistemic repair; (ii) who is repairing, or the agents of epistemic repair; (iii) why or with what aim, or the goal of epistemic repair; (iv) where, or the sites of epistemic repair; and (v) how, or the mechanisms of epistemic repair. I illustrate my pluralist account of epistemic repair with concrete examples.

Nick Clanchy (University of Oxford)

Second-order hermeneutical breakthroughs

You experience a first-order hermeneutical breakthrough when something significant about yourself that was previously obscure to you suddenly becomes intelligible to you. You experience a second-order hermeneutical breakthrough when you realize that in fact it needn't matter quite so much whether something about yourself is intelligible to you – that you needn't be under quite so much hermeneutical pressure in this respect. Often, it only matters quite so much whether something about yourself is intelligible to you because you have an interest in going on to render that thing about yourself intelligible to someone else – yet, you realize, you needn't have been given this interest. I illustrate this idea by drawing on Foucault, Barthes, Glissant, and contemporary disability studies to identify some of the contingent interpersonal, institutional, and political-economic factors giving Autistic people interests in their autism being intelligible to others. I then argue that strategies which aim to prevent hermeneutical injustices by doing away with certain of the interests people have in things about themselves being intelligible to others have a previously unrecognized advantage, namely that they beneficially reduce the degree of hermeneutical pressure people find themselves under.

Alice Monypenny (University of Nottingham)

The Burdens of Epistemic Agency in Healthcare

The epistemic agency of patients is often restricted by epistemic injustice in healthcare. Effective ameliorative projects aim to support the development and exercise of patients' epistemic agency. But such projects must first face the challenging task of delineating the form and scope of epistemic agency which will act as the guiding standard for ameliorative work. I argue that epistemic agency can sometimes carry burdens, especially when that agency is developed as a means to resist hostile environments.

A greater degree of epistemic agency enables individuals to do more and pursue their own ends and projects more effectively. This often gives rise to the assumption that increased epistemic agency is always beneficial. However, I challenge this assumption by arguing that high levels of epistemic agency without appropriate support can carry costly burdens.

I focus on patients who develop resistant epistemic agency while managing long-term illness in a difficult to navigate healthcare system. I identify three broad types of burdens arising from resistant epistemic agency: the costs in time and energy to develop and exercise forms of resistant epistemic agency; the risk that strategies will backfire and lead to negative outcomes; and the failure to meet all goals or needs.

Miguel Núñez de Prado Gordillo & Victor Fernández Castro (Universidad de Granada)

Beyond Epistemic Injustice: Mindshaping and First-Person Authority in Mental Health

In this talk, we argue for the need to move beyond the epistemic injustice framework to address a neglected aspect of injustices pertaining to the exclusion of neurodivergent communities' self-interpretation tools. This concerns their first-person authority (FPA) and capacity for self-governance. We distinguish between Type I injustices (due to insufficient deference to FPA) and Type II injustices (due to excessive deference), respectively illustrated by discussions on autistic flourishing and therapy-speak. Navigating both invites a conceptual framework capable of avoiding the problems of objectivist approaches, unsuited for accommodating person-centered perspectives, while also avoiding an "anything goes" account of self-interpretation. We argue that the mindshaping framework is well-equipped for this task. On this framework, FPA is a socially negotiated status grounded in agents' capacity to shape their behavior in line with normative commitments acquired via self-interpretation. What self-interpretation resources agents have at their disposal and what normative commitments attach to them, however, is not something they can change at will, but requires transforming the social niches and practices where they partake. Distinguishing appropriate or "comrade" self-interpretations from "impostor" ones is thus an open-ended task involving the co-regulation of such practical commitments and the entitlement of different stakeholders in such co-regulation.

Ariana Razavi (University of Liverpool)

The Ideal Theory of Non-Ideal Epistemology

This paper asks whether the non-ideal turn in social epistemology succeeds in meeting the aims of non-ideal theory, as set out by Mills (2005). I argue that despite its orientation towards real-world conditions, this current paradigm falls into two failures Mills identifies in ideal theory: conceptual inaccuracy, where phenomena are distorted by conceptual tools ill-suited to them, and methodological incoherence, where idealising the social and cognitive spheres leaves a theory unable to fulfil the ameliorative aims it sets for itself.

I develop this critique through examining how non-ideal social conditions, often grouped together under the term 'oppression', are conceptualised in the literature. I show that this conceptualisation is at once too broad, encompassing instances that vary widely in cause, scale, and context, and too specific, carrying assumptions drawn from the paradigm of racial injustice in the US. This approach thus ultimately reproduces the context-insensitivity non-ideal epistemology sets out to correct. These failures, I suggest, stem from an ill-fitting orientation towards the real world. I close by gesturing towards the Philosophy of Liberation, a tradition whose account of how concepts are developed and universalized in a context-sensitive way may offer pertinent lessons at the current juncture in social epistemology.

Giorgia Toppi (Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele)

Beyond Testimonial Injustice: Vulnerability and the Political Conditions of Epistemic Appearance

Theories of epistemic injustice show how social power and identity prejudice shape the distribution of credibility (Fricker, 2007; 2017). This paper argues that credibility assessment presupposes a politically prior condition: a subject must first become recognisable as a possible public speaker.

Fricker's later concept of pre-emptive testimonial injustice already explains how institutions may exclude potential speakers before their views are heard. Yet it still concerns subjects who are intelligible as possible contributors. I introduce epistemic appearance to describe the socially and institutionally constituted condition in which an embodied subject becomes recognisable as a legitimate participant in producing, interpreting, and contesting knowledge about matters of common concern. Its denial occurs when social and political norms withhold potential speakerhood itself.

Through a dialogue among Fricker, Arendt, and Butler, I distinguish visibility, public recognisability, epistemic-political standing, communicative uptake, and credibility. Children provide a central test case: they may be visible, listened to, and even believed, while remaining excluded from political judgement.

Righting this wrong requires more than fair credibility assessment. It requires transforming institutional access, communicative formats, representation, agenda-setting, and procedures of uptake through which speakerhood becomes publicly available.