

BOOK REVIEW

## The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice

Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., London and New York: Routledge, 2017 (ISBN: 978-1-138-82825-4)

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David, an asylum seeker from Honduras, wanted to ask for asylum in the US, but, he said, “the agents didn’t listen. They just gave me documents to come back to a court date in December.” David is just one of thousands of asylum seekers sent back to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols, which were adopted by the United States Customs and Border Patrol on January 28, 2019 (more commonly known as the “Remain in Mexico” policy). According to these protocols, Customs and Border Patrol agents can send those seeking asylum at the United States southern border to Mexico until their case is heard in court (DHS 2019). In this context, most asylum officers see their jobs as “trying to weed out the fakers, the ones trying to game the system” (O’Toole 2019), meaning that they enter all interactions with asylum seekers with the presumption of distrust. Consequently, the experience of a Honduran woman—who told authorities that she could not wait in Mexico for her court date because it was unsafe for her to do so, only to have the agent not believe her and send her back to Mexico where she was kidnapped and raped by multiple assailants (Rose and Smitherman 2019)—is all too common.

Countless injustices are engendered by this policy, with epistemic injustices prominent among them. Detailing how this is so may seem overwhelming, though, especially since the literature on immigration justice rarely intersects with that dealing with epistemic injustice. And, even more challenging, someone may not know where to begin since the discussion on epistemic injustice has grown so fast since Miranda Fricker’s book, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, burst onto the scene (Fricker 2007). But now, with the publication of the excellent, well-written, and beautifully compiled *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, there is a book that discusses the principal themes of epistemic injustice, highlights numerous connections to other academic literatures and contemporary debates, and opens the door to potential areas of further study that will make projects—such as identifying and resisting immigration injustices in US policy—much easier.

In order to accomplish these goals, the anthology is divided into five parts. The first section—core concepts—consists of various essays that invite novice and experienced readers alike into the conversation. Here, the section combines essays that explain the main concepts in the literature, such as epistemic injustice (Pohlhaus, Jr.), testimonial injustice (Jeremy Wanderer), and hermeneutical injustice (José Medina); connect the debates to other traditional philosophical discussions, such as those about trust

(Katherine Hawley), distributive justice (David Coady), and ideology (Charles Mills); provide historical context for the discussion (Fricker and Lorraine Code); and note how the discipline of philosophy itself contributes to epistemic injustice (Alexis Shotwell). The essays in this first section do not simply define terms, however. To the contrary, they offer new ways to understand core concepts of epistemic injustice and introduce novel conceptions, such as Pohlhaus Jr.'s suggestion that we apprehend epistemic injustice via (at least) four different lenses (social contracts and systems of oppression, care and trust, epistemic structures themselves, and epistemic labor and knowledge production), Wanderer's delineation of three varieties of testimonial injustice (*transactional testimonial injustice*, *structural testimonial injustice*, and *testimonial betrayal*), and Medina's introduction of the idea of "epistemic death."

With this conceptual foundation in place, the second part of the book moves to connect epistemic injustice to other axes of oppression and liberatory epistemologies. In fact, as we discover as we traverse part 2, many liberatory epistemologies—including Black feminism and intersectionality (Patricia Collins), Western feminist epistemology (Nancy Tuana), philosophy of race (Luvell Anderson), decolonial theory (Andrea Pitts), queer theory (Kim Hall), trans\* studies (Rachel McKinnon), and disability studies (Shelley Tremain)—were discussing epistemic injustice long before Fricker used that term. The essays in this section go beyond simply illuminating how themes of epistemic injustice were central to various literatures well before Fricker. To the contrary, they build on the insights of current epistemic injustice discussions to reveal further examples of it in specific contexts. Collins reveals how epistemic injustice has been perpetrated in the development of intersectionality within academia. Anderson delineates the epistemic injustice in misreading the slogan "Black Lives Matter." McKinnon demonstrates how supporters of trans\* individuals perpetuate epistemic injustices toward them under the guise of being "allies." And Tremain notes epistemic injustice in the fact that the epistemic injustice literature rarely, if ever, engages the disability apparatus. In this way, part 2 incorporates the concepts we learn in the first part while also making important connections to other liberatory movements.

The third section moves from connecting epistemic injustice discussions to other liberatory philosophies toward connecting them to different philosophical schools and subfields within epistemology. Specifically, the essays in part 3 explore the potential of other philosophical areas for enhancing our understanding of epistemic injustice. Amy Allen, for example, argues that discussions of epistemic injustice would benefit from Foucault's (1) theorization of power, (2) analysis of knowledge/power regimes, and (3) the concept of genealogy. Lori Guenther criticizes Fricker's understanding of phenomenology and suggests how her account would be improved by looking at the work of Merleau-Ponty and Franz Fanon, and Shannon Sullivan suggests that Fricker's account of epistemic harm would be improved by the pragmatist epistemology of John Dewey. In his entry, Sanford Goldberg discusses the nature of various forms of epistemic injustice as seen from the angle of social epistemology. And, finally, Heather Battaly suggests that we can understand testimonial injustice as an epistemic vice and, in this way, understand that it is a disposition of the hearer, not some "one-off."

The penultimate section of the *Handbook* uses insights and theoretical tools from psychology, social philosophy, ethics, and political philosophy to elucidate the nature and various dimensions of epistemic injustice in diverse and often pleasantly innovative ways. The section starts off with Jennifer Saul's piece explicating both the overlap and the distinctions among epistemic injustice, implicit bias, and stereotype threat and why they require distinct strategies of resistance. It continues with Matthew Congdon's

argument that we must expand our understanding of why epistemic injustice is wrong to include lack of recognition along with the ways it causes harm, promotes vices, and creates objectification. In the third essay in the section, Lorenzo Simpson uses a hermeneutical analysis to reveal the existence of different kinds of epistemic injustice, like hermeneutical oblivion and failing to protect one's interpretive capacity. Finally, the section concludes with an insightful piece from Sally Haslanger connecting epistemic injustice to status quo epistemic standards, especially those focusing on objectivity. One of the wonderful things about this section is that, although the essays just highlighted continue the trend of the book as a whole to educate the reader about the depth and breadth of issues related to epistemic injustice, various other pieces expand the literature in ways that reveal novel connections and potential modes of inquiry. For example, Nancy Arden McHugh writes an insightful chapter about her work with incarcerated men in London, Ontario, Canada to illustrate how people experience and resist epistemic injustice as communities, not (or not simply) as individuals. She does so by detailing the various ways these men, as a community, resist the epistemic injustices they face as inmates and by exploring how they create meaning in acts of collective epistemic resistance. In this process, McHugh demonstrates that, as she says, although epistemic injustice is serious and must be resisted—not only by individuals but by groups—it is not “an epistemic dead end.” In this way, McHugh's essay not only expands the literature, but centers a group whom we rarely focus on—incarcerated men—as epistemic authorities and resisters in powerful ways. Similarly, Susan Babbitt beautifully expands the conversation about epistemic justice by connecting it to Latin American struggles for political freedom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially the Cuban Revolution and José Martí's thought. In particular, Babbitt illustrates how these fights for political freedom were inherently about epistemic freedom and breaking free from epistemic injustice. And, in doing so, like Pitts, Babbitt illuminates the path for collaboration with Latin American literature and how doing so would enrich discussions of epistemic injustice.

The final section builds on the insights of the previous four to illuminate the significance of epistemic injustice beyond philosophy and the academy. The essays of part 5 do so by applying knowledge of epistemic injustice in a variety of fields, including: the legal setting (Sullivan), digital environments (Gloria Origgi and Serena Ciranna), science (Heidi Grasswick), education (Ben Kotzee), health care (Havi Cael and Ian Kidd), the treatment of the mentally ill (Anastasia Scrutton), the legal and ethical treatment of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples (Rebecca Tsosie), participant epistemic injustice in the curating and presentation of cultural heritage sites (Andrea Pantazatos), religion (Kidd), and within the discipline of philosophy itself (Linda Alcoff). The collection concludes by noting the vast possibility (and need) for additional work in epistemic injustice, as opposed to leaving readers feeling as if we have learned about a field that is closed off. In this way, the last section was enlightening and exciting.

The collection, both its individual essays and as a whole, is a welcome addition to the epistemic injustice literature. Not only is it helpful to have a single resource to which one can turn to learn more about epistemic injustice (both in general and in relation to one's own specific interests), but the editors also do a masterful job of assembling a collection of essays that are thoroughly grounded in the field's canonical works—like Fricker's—but that also move the reader beyond these thinkers. Put differently, though one must acknowledge Fricker's importance to debates about epistemic injustice, too often discussions of the topic remain too closely tied to her work, and I admit that some essays in this volume do follow this pattern. But the collection as a

whole finds a way to balance recognizing the significance of Fricker, illuminating how discussions of epistemic injustice existed long before her book was published, and pushing the discussion in new directions that go well beyond what Fricker (and philosophy for that matter) have recognized.

This leads me to a second strength of the volume, namely how it goes beyond explanation of concepts toward indicating where someone could get involved with further research. Too often people come away from handbooks like this one with the impression that they have now seen the full scope of a field, and, as a result, it is unclear what they could contribute. That does not happen with this volume. To the contrary, countless essays illuminate where further research into epistemic injustice can occur and where additional activism and resistance are needed. Put differently, the diversity of essays is not simply wonderful for the depth of understanding it provides about epistemic injustice, but also for the breadth of topics where the conversation could continue. A collection that can both educate and inspire is a rare gift.

A third strength of the anthology is how it not only includes, but also critically engages with, a diverse set of issues and social groups in ways that highlight deficits in the literature itself. Numerous essays not only point out how epistemic injustice manifests itself throughout the academy and daily life, but how the literature itself commits epistemic injustices against certain groups, like Latin American theorists and those in disability studies. In this way, the collection provides a model for both how we can identify and resist epistemic injustice and why we must simultaneously be vigilant so as not to perpetuate it in our own work.

Finally, this collection is very teachable and will prove to be a wonderful resource for undergraduate and graduate studies alike. The essays are accessible, clear, and inviting. And, because of the variety, they will be of interest to a wide range of students.

To close, I want to return to the Central American asylum-seekers and immigrants who endure epistemic injustice every day. So many of us condemn their experiences and the policies that enable them, but now we have a significant resource to help us devise strategies for identifying and resisting the epistemic injustices such immigrants face. I thank Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus, Jr. for assembling a resource that will help scholars and activists like myself shed light on this aspect of immigrants' oppression and get to work resisting it.

## References

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