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ARTICLE

Against Epistemic Harm

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Abstract

Often, accounts of epistemic injustice either conflate epistemic harming with epistemic wronging or assume epistemic injustice is grounded in instances of epistemic harm. Recently, Dunne and Kotsonis (2024) have argued that neither conflation nor grounding make sense; the two are separate phenomena and have attempted to show how the two relate to one another. I argue this approach is mistaken: rather than just distinguish epistemic harming and wronging, instead we should question the very existence of epistemic harm. First, I discuss the relationship between epistemic harm and epistemic wrong and briefly summarize the ways in which they come apart. While I argue that Dunne and Kotsonis' arguments are unsuccessful, I offer a new argument to the same effect, showing that current accounts of epistemic harm are underinclusive with respect to epistemic wronging. Second, I show that, generally, wronging does not require harming. Finally, I give us reason to believe that indeed, epistemic harm doesn't exist: I argue that the notion of intrinsically epistemic harm is suspect, and does not fit within extant theorization on harm more generally and that we, therefore, ought to abandon it entirely: like the general case, epistemic wrong can exist without epistemic harm. To modify a slogan proposed by Bradley, we should do away with epistemic harm.

Keywords: Epistemic injustice; social epistemology; harm; epistemic harm; testimonial injustice

1. A brief survey of epistemic injustice and epistemic harm

Miranda Fricker's 2007 book *Epistemic Injustice* has become the locus classicus in the epistemic injustice literature. There, she posits two categories of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.[1] The former occurs when "prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (Fricker 2007, 1). Fricker offers as a paradigm case the trial of Tom Robinson in Harper Lee's *To Kill a*

[1]Since the publication Fricker's work, our understanding of epistemic injustice has broadened considerably. New categories such as willful hermeneutical injustice and testimonial smothering, have been offered by authors such as Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. and Kristie Dotson. The former is constituted by "the propensity to dismiss whole aspects of the experienced world by refusing to become proficient in the epistemic resources required for attending to those parts of the world well (Pohlhaus Jr. 2017, 17, Pohlhaus Jr. 2012) The latter occurs when one "perceives one's immediate audience as unwilling or unable to gain the appropriate uptake of proffered testimony", (Dotson 2011, 244), leading one to not even offer testimony.

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Mockingbird. The all-white jury predictably disbelieves Tom Robinson's testimony, and convicts him; their racist prejudice leads them to unjustly deflate his credibility. He is "... unable to convey to them the knowledge he has ..." (28). Critical to Fricker's account is that it is an identity prejudice that causes the jury to disbelieve him, namely, their racist prejudice against black people. Fricker distinguishes between incidental credibility deficits that are the results of, for example, mere bad epistemic luck and those that are grounded in larger systems of social injustice.[2] These are those features by which prejudices "Track the subject through different dimensions of social activity" (27). Since Fricker's original publication, numerous modifications to the concept have been proposed, however the central case of testimonial injustice remains a wrongful, lowered assessment of another's credibility as a function of prejudice: one wrongfully treats them as less credible than one should.

Hermeneutical injustice is "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (155). As an example, Fricker cites Carmita Wood's account of the origin of the term sexual harassment. Prior to this coinage, despite sexual harassment being an overwhelmingly common experience, there was no name for that experience, diminishing women's ability to understand a distinctive social experience. This cognitive disadvantage constituted a hermeneutical injustice. Note that while harassees and harassers alike had the same cognitive impairment due to this lacuna, it constitutes a hermeneutical injustice only to the harassee because for the harasser, this disablement is not a significant disadvantage (151). Not all instances of absent conceptual resources constitute a hermeneutical injustice; the lack of those resources must be wrongful. Prior to the development of germ theory, many people lacked the cognitive resources to make sense of their lived experience vis-à-vis disease, but this was not wrongful, because it was due to technological and conceptual limitations, rather than structural identity prejudice.

In both kinds of injustice, the subject is stated to be the victim of epistemic harm. However, there is ambiguity between epistemic harming and epistemic wronging in Fricker's text.[3] She states,

> *The* harm *that concerns us here is not the epistemic* harm *incurred by the hearer or the epistemic system, nor any implied damage done to the foundations of the polity and its institutions, but rather the immediate* wrong *that the hearer does to the speaker who is on the receiving end of a testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007, 44, emphasis mine)*

Here, the harm and the wrong are clearly conflated—the harm *is* the wrong—the distinction simply isn't made. However, elsewhere in Fricker's work, as well as in the broader literature, it's clear that what's at play is something more like a grounding relationship. The reason that epistemic injustices *are* epistemic injustices is *because* of the harms involved. The existence of epistemic harm is not a sufficient condition for epistemic wronging (Fricker and others give cases where epistemic harm exists without epistemic wrong), but it is both necessary and explanatory.

Fricker believes however that we must also sort out from the "primary" epistemic harms from the "secondary" harms: harms extrinsic to the primary injustice "in that they are caused by it rather than being a proper part of it" (44). They are harms that result

[2]This distinction has been criticized. See Dotson (2012).

[3]Among others—this conflation can be seen throughout the literature. As an example, see (Pohlhaus Jr. 2014, 101).

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from instances of epistemic injustice. She argues that we can divide these downstream harms into two classes, practical and epistemic. The former are the deleterious effects of being disbelieved: one is falsely convicted of a crime, one loses out on a job opportunity, etc. The latter consist of those effects that epistemic injustice may have on one's own epistemic cognition. One may

> *lose confidence in his belief, or in his justification for it, so that he ceases to satisfy the conditions for knowledge; or, alternatively, someone with a background experience of persistent testimonial injustice may lose confidence in her general intellectual abilities . . . (47)*

Contra Fricker, some accounts of epistemic injustice ground the wrong thereof in these secondary epistemic harms—epistemic injustice is wrong *because* of the injurious downstream effects that it has on peoples' lives. In "What's Wrong with Epistemic Injustice" (2017), Matthew Congdon observes that this Utilitarian sort of analysis "leaves something out of the moral picture," following similar observations from, among others, Fricker herself (2007, 43-46); Haslanger (2014); and Wanderer (2012). Epistemic injustice is wrong even when these kinds of downstream harms don't obtain. Wanderer provides a useful case wherein it is the perpetrator, rather than the victim, who bears the practical consequences of unjust disbelief. Suppose someone chooses not to heed a lifeguard's warning concerning a shark sighting, because of a negative identity prejudice, and is then killed by a shark (149-153). The lifeguard is the victim of epistemic injustice; the perpetrator is the one that suffers the downstream consequences.

I'll not dispute the existence or significance of secondary epistemic harms. That being disbelieved often carries with it these secondary harms is inarguable, as is that these secondary harms can be disastrous, such as the murder of innocents by the state when wrongfully disbelieved.[4]

Let us move on to the primary harm of epistemic injustice. Fricker characterizes the primary harm as

> *a form of the essential harm that is definitive of epistemic injustice in the broad. In all such instances the subject is wronged in her capacity as a knower. To be wronged in one's capacity as a knower is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value*[5]

She defends this on the grounds that "The capacity to give knowledge to others is one side of that many-sided capacity so significant in human beings: namely, the capacity for reason."

She claims this harm has a further symbolic power that "adds a layer of harm of its own: the epistemic wrong bears a social *meaning* to the effect that the subject is less than fully human" (Fricker 2007, 44, emphasis original). She adds, "When one is wrongfully mistrusted . . . one is *dishonored*—this would not be an inappropriate term in connection with the primary harm of testimonial injustice" (46, emphasis original).

[4]It's not clear that we should consider these secondary harms as epistemic harms. Wanderer notes that "testimonial injustice . . . is not merely an injustice associated with an act of testimony, but an injustice that stands in a categorical connection with the social practice of testimony" (2017, 37). By analogy, it's intuitive that epistemic harm should not be viewed merely as any harm associated with an epistemic injustice, but only those that have this kind of categorical connection.

[5]Here, Fricker suggests that the primary harm of epistemic injustice is sufficient for epistemic injustice—elsewhere she gives examples of where the two come apart. I'll discuss these in what follows.

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This primary harm, according to Fricker, is that "testimonial injustice demotes the speaker from informant to source of information, from subject to object. This reveals the intrinsic harm of testimonial injustice as epistemic objectification" (133). While not affirming, to use her language, the whole of Kant's "considerable philosophical apparatus," she characterizes this as a species of treating the person as a mere means (134). Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. usefully diagnoses the badness of this harm:

> *. . . as testimonial injustice unfairly excludes particularly epistemic agents from participating fully in this most basic of social epistemic practices . . . it constitutes an epistemic wrong on both a communal and individual level . . . "*[6] *On an individual level, it is harmful because it unfairly excludes the victim of testimonial injustice from a basic epistemic practice and so treats that victim as less than a full epistemic subject. (Pohlhaus Jr. 2014, 101-02)*[7]

Here we can see the grounding relationship between the wrongness of epistemic injustice and epistemic harm. Epistemic injustice is wrong in virtue of the epistemic harm involved. This isn't to say that epistemic harm is sufficient for epistemic injustice. Fricker writes,

> *. . . there is neither epistemic nor ethical fault in judging someone, without prejudice, to be untrustworthy if they are indeed untrustworthy . . . judging someone untrustworthy does pro tem strip them of their function as an informant and confine them to functioning merely as a source of information . . . . Some forms of epistemic objectification, then, are ethically acceptable, not to mention epistemically meritorious. (Fricker 2007, 135-136)*

Thus, it is only when epistemic harming is the result of a negative identity prejudice that it also results in epistemic wronging. This establishes this structure as a species of the larger genus, wherein harming is permissible only with adequate justification. To use Fricker's example, we are justified in harming Matilda when we epistemically objectify her, because she has given us good reason to do so, but not Tom Robinson, where only prejudice is working as the justifier (42).[8]

Objections have been raised against Fricker's account of epistemic harm. Congdon (2017) offers the case of Mr. B, a Muslim Bosnian citizen being held without charge in Guantanamo for seven years – his captors refuse to believe, on the basis of his being Muslim, that he does not have any knowledge concerning a bomb plot. However, they do not objectify him in the relevant way. Rather, they *rely* on his being a reliable informant, respecting his subjectivity. Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. 2014) observes that this recognition is a critical part of epistemic injustice. She writes,

[6]I omit the communal level here, as it belongs to the extrinsic harms. Fricker argues throughout her work that that the function of an epistemic community is the pooling and transmission of knowledge. She defines being a knower as participation in the sharing of information, and our larger epistemic practice as "a co-operative practice of pooling information" (Fricker 2007, 145). Using the accounts of Craig (1990) and Williams (2002), she gives reasons to believe that an epistemic community is necessary for us to have certain kinds of goods and to avoid certain kinds of ills within our world.

[7]Again we see the conflation of epistemic wrong and epistemic harm.

[8]It's worth noting here that there are cases where the legitimacy of such a justification can become blurred. She borrows the case of Solomon from Arpaly: a person is raised in a society that believes women to be intellectually inferior, and who never sees evidence to the contrary precisely because women are prevented by the sexist norms of that rural community from displaying their intellectual prowess. (Fricker 2007, 33-34; Arpaly 2003, 103).

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> *it is precisely because Sherwood*[9] *and Robinson are percieved as subjects that makes it possible for hearers in both cases to avert the kind of claim their testimony ought rightly to make upon hearers and to do so without the hearers risking the charge of irrationality. (104, emphasis original)*

With this in mind, Pohlhaus Jr. introduces her own account of epistemic harm. She contends that while epistemic harm treats the victim as less than a full epistemic subject, it doesn't wholly treat them as an object. She suggests that instead we draw from de Beauvoir, and ground it in a subject/other relationship: the harm of epistemic injustice is that it diminishes the subjectivity of the victim such that they are treated as a full subject only when doing so accords with the subjectivity of the dominant knower. When it doesn't, their experience is disregarded, and *then* they become, to use Fricker's language, a mere source of information. She labels this, following Cahill (2012), as being *derivatized*, stating, "Under this model, the primary harm of testimonial injustice is defined as: being relegated to the role of epistemic other, being treated as though the range of one's subject capacities is merely derivative of another's." (Pohlhaus Jr. 2014, 107).

Other accounts of epistemic harm exist. Shannon Sullivan (2017) offers an account using Deweyan pragmatist epistemology. According to Dewey, rather than knowledge being a matter of objectively representing the world, beliefs are true or false as a function of their enabling us to pragmatically transact in the world. Borrowing an example from Sullivan, knowing the width of a table is a function of our ability to use that knowledge to do certain actions. If one wants to know if certain items will fit on it, it's true that the desk is thirty inches wide. However, if a carpenter wishes to construct an alcove in which to fit the desk, instead one might measure it to be 29.9 inches. For the function of carpentry, it's true that the desk is 29.9 inches wide (208-209).

This framework, Sullivan thinks, makes better sense of epistemic harm than Fricker's representationalist epistemology, stating that, "working with a transactional epistemology is more likely to improve human lives by eliminating the harms of epistemic injustice." She characterizes epistemic harm in several ways, stating that, "the speaker isn't allowed to epistemologically transact with the world in ways that enable her own, as well as others' flourishing" and that "the harm is that being dismissed as crazy impacts the perceived reasonableness of the entire culture or community in question" For Sullivan, it is a multifaceted harm. She adds, "epistemic injustice conceived as a failure of transactional suffering can happen as a deprivation . . . but even more importantly it can occur as a production, in which a person is produced as a kind of knower required to epistemologically engage the world in ways that undercut her" (210).

2. Underinclusivity

Fricker's objectification account allows epistemic harm to be decoupled from epistemic wronging—there are cases of epistemic harming which are justified. But can epistemic wronging exist without epistemic harm? Dunne and Kotsonis (2024) aim to demonstrate the necessity of distinguishing epistemic wronging from epistemic harming, attempting to demonstrate that epistemic wronging can exist without epistemic harming, and vice-versa. They conclude that while wronging can exist without harming, harming cannot exist without wronging; epistemic harm is a sufficient condition for epistemic wrong.

We are asked to consider the following case:

[9]Here referencing the character Marge Sherwood from the play *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Minghella 2000) another paradigm example in the epistemic injustice literature.

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> *Someone who belongs to a marginalized social group is in a car accident and then rushed to hospital. She is seen by one of the hospital's consultants who is a white, heterosexual, middle-aged male. She is told that she will need spinal fusion because the nature of her injuries has exacerbated her pre-existing scoliosis. Now, imagine that the patient believes that white, heterosexual, middle-aged males should never be trusted. Not only that, but, as someone who has lived with severe scoliosis, she knows that fusion might make her posture more upright, but the consequent level of pain is not worth enduring. Because of this, she assigns the doctor's expert opinion a low degree of credibility and elects not to have the surgery. Is the doctor epistemically wronged by the patient? (8)*

The authors answer in the affirmative: "On Fricker's conception of epistemic injustice, the answer is yes. He is wronged in his capacity as a knower; he is wronged as a giver of knowledge." They argue that he is not harmed per Fricker's (or Pohlhaus's) conception of epistemic harm, saying, "There is no widely held identity prejudice against white, heterosexual, middle-aged male doctors.[10] The doctor is not a marginalized speaker who "is likely to be discredited and/or silenced when the information she contributes moves beyond the scope of the world experienced from dominant subject positions."

But Fricker's understanding of epistemic harm doesn't require prejudice. As discussed in the foregoing, Fricker's account of epistemic harm *is* epistemic objectification, " . . . this reveals the intrinsic harm of testimonial injustice as *epistemic objectification:* when a hearer undermines a speaker in her capacity as a giver of knowledge, the speaker is epistemically objectified." While this objectification *may* be the product of prejudice, it need not be. Fricker gives as example the case of Matilda, who is disbelieved to due a long history of dreadful lies. (Fricker 2007, 42) She is epistemically objectified, but justifiably so. Fricker tells us, "If a hearer cannot be blamed for the grounds of her flawed credibility judgement . . . then she cannot be blamed for the harm that may result." Her framework makes sense of this case by stating that the doctor in the case may be harmed (because epistemically objectified) but not wronged (because not a victim of identity prejudice). Nor does this threaten Pohlhaus Jr.'s framework; her overall structure of the relationship of harming and wronging is consistent with Fricker's, and nothing turns on which of the two accounts we accept. Thus, Dunne and Kotsonis fail to give a case of epistemic wronging without epistemic harming.

From here, they move to the question of epistemic harming without epistemic wronging. After considering some possible cases they state "Perhaps there are cases of epistemic injustice that we have not considered where an agent is harmed qua knower without been wronged [sic]. We do not think that such a case exists. This is because Fricker (2007) frames the concept of epistemic injustice in a manner that requires primary epistemic wrongs to follow from epistemic harms" (11). However, recall that Fricker explicitly offers a number of cases where harming *does* exist without wronging. Matilda's history of lying justifies her hearers, both ethically *and* epistemically, in reducing their credibility of her, even to the extent of treating her as an epistemic object. Dunne and Kotsonis recognize that Fricker allows for certain exceptions (12), but don't adequately recognize these counterexamples, stating instead that "to be objectified, more often than not requires that one is wronged . . . More often than not, this view of objectification holds true even if, for some non-epistemic reason, we believe that we are justified in treating others in an epistemically unjust way." This however, is a *petitio principii.* The question at hand is whether or not there are epistemically *just* ways of

[10]They do not consider alternative theories of epistemic harm, such as Sullivan's.

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epistemically harming, not whether we are justified in treating others in an epistemically unjust way. According to Fricker, there are cases where we may justifiably objectify people epistemically, and it is here that we see instances of epistemic harming without epistemic wronging.

Of course, it certainly *seems* like the doctor has been wronged; he is distrusted for morally suspect reasons, and that, perhaps, he hasn't been harmed, precisely because "the doctor has not experienced any adverse impact on his epistemic agency as a knower or giver of knowledge via the wrong he suffered from the patient" (Dunne and Kotsonis 2024, 8). To take this strategy though is to simply deny Fricker's account: Fricker defines epistemic harm *as* epistemic objectification, and this would be to say that not all instances of epistemic objectification are epistemic harms. This may be true, but once we abandon Fricker's view, we cannot use it alone to demonstrate underinclusivity. To show that epistemic wrong can exist without epistemic harm *outside* of Fricker's framework, one must show that *no* account of epistemic harm can ground all cases of epistemic wronging.

Dunne and Kotsonis fail to adequately decouple epistemic wrong from epistemic harm. Can there exist epistemic wrong without epistemic harm? In the remainder of this section, I will argue that it can. To develop their case, Dunne and Kotsonis draw on the literature on credibility excess, especially the work of Emmalon Davis. While I believe that their efforts fail, I believe that they correctly identified wrongful credibility excess as a plausible locus for decoupling harming and wronging.

Early in her work, Fricker dismisses the possibility of epistemic injustice in cases of credibility excess. While it is the case that sometimes people are afforded more credibility than they deserve, she denies that this is an instance of epistemic injustice:

> *. . . while credibility excess may (unusually) be disadvantageous in various ways, it does not undermine, insult, or otherwise withhold a proper respect for the speaker qua subject of knowledge; so in itself it does her no epistemic injustice, and a fortiori no testimonial injustice. (Fricker 2007, 20)*

This has been challenged by a number of authors, including Medina (2011, 2012) and Coady (2017), who illuminate the reciprocal relationship between credibility deficits and excess: Sometimes, someone's being the victim of a credibility deficit implies that someone else is undeservedly benefitting from a credibility excess. That Tom Robinson is accorded less credibility implies that his accuser Bob Ewell is afforded unjust epistemic esteem. Coady and Medina both argue that this constitutes its own form of epistemic injustice; Coady illustrates it in usefully distributive terms—when we must choose who to believe between two conflicting claimants, a credibility excess translates into a credibility deficit insofar as credibility is a scarce resource.

This kind of relative, distributive excess is more intuitive than the possibility of an absolute excess. Typically, we find that simply giving people more of a good isn't the sort of thing that can wrong them, unless it involves an unjust deprivation on the part of another. Furthermore, in these kinds of cases, while it's clear that injustice has occurred, it's not clear that the person who is benefited is themselves wronged. We don't necessarily think that Bob Ewell is wronged when the jury affords him a credibility excess. Rather, it is unjust insofar as it wrongs Tom Robinson.

But there are cases where absolute, nonrelative benefits can wrong a person. Suppose that a computer science professor affords all the women in his class additional time on an exam, assuming women are more likely to struggle with the material. Suppose too that one of the women really *were* struggling, and succeeded because of the extension.

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She is nevertheless wronged by the professor. She is benefitted for the wrong reason – because of a negative identity prejudice held by the professor.

Taking wrongful credibility excess as a legitimate form of epistemic injustice, we should not just consider the cases where dominant knowers are given unwarranted epistemic esteem because of the negative identity prejudices held about nondominant knowers, but also the case where a nondominant knower is afforded a credibility excess because of a negative identity prejudice. This phenomenon has been discussed in depth by (Davis 2016). I will offer two such examples, the latter adapted from Davis.[11]

Suppose that Aubrey is seeking advice concerning polyamorous lifestyles. They ask their coworker Shannon for advice, and, without critical reflection, accept what Shannon has to say. However, suppose that the only reason that they afford this credibility to Shannon is not because they have evidence that Shannon is knowledgable about polyamory, but rather because Shannon is queer, and Aubrey holds a negative stereotype of queers as promiscuous.[12] This is intuitively wrong for the same reasons that affording a credibility deficit to Shannon would be if they were to opine about sports, believing queer folk wouldn't be knowledgeable about sports.

Alternatively, we might consider the perception of Asian-Americans as "model minorities." This is clearly a wrongful, racist stereotype and if it should afford an Asian person a credibility excess, this is plausibly an instance of epistemic injustice. Suppose that Jordan is struggling academically, and so turns to their friend Rin, a Japanese-American student, for advice on more effective studying. They do so not on evidence that Rin is a more successful student than they, but because Rin is Asian, and they hold the racist stereotype that, as such, Rin is a good student. They wrong Rin before even listening for their answer. Their asking the question itself constitutes affording Rin an unjust credibility excess.[13]

It's clear Aubrey has wronged Shannon and Jordan has wronged Rin. But have they been harmed? According to the three theories discussed, I don't think so. For Fricker, this would mean Aubrey has downgraded Shannon from an informant to a mere source of information, not treating them as an epistemic subject.[14] But clearly, this is not so. We can apply a similar criticism here as was applied by Congdon and Pohlhaus Jr.– Aubrey treats Shannon as a subject, but in a wrongful manner.

Given this inadequacy in Fricker's account, Davis (2016) instead endorses Pohlhaus Jr.'s formulation,[15] arguing that

> *the account of derivatization not only captures what is wrong with credibility deficit but with prejudicial credibility excess as well; in both cases, the speaker's epistemic subjectivity is externally constricted by dominantly situated hearers and inquirers (489)*

However, Pohlhaus Jrs.' account doesn't fare any better here. While it's possible Aubrey *might* derivatize Shannon in this instance, it's not clear that this *must* be the case.

[11]Dunne and Kotsonis discuss a similar case.

[12]We should also note there the negative prejudice which conflates polyamory and promiscuity.

[13]This case differs from the Shannon-Aubrey case insofar as we could construe this not as negative identity prejudice, but wrongful positive identity prejudice. Nevertheless, contra Fricker, it still seems to constitute epistemic injustice even sans negative identity prejudice.

[14]For the sake of brevity I will focus here on the Shannon-Aubrey case, but my comments are analogous in the Jordan-Rin case.

[15]Here I address only the primary harm, to use Fricker's terminology. Davis also identifies a number of secondary harms concomitant with positive stereotyping (487).

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Shannon is certainly being othered, but not in a way that necessarily derivatizes them. Rather, it privileges their subjective experience. Their experience is wrongfully and unjustly considered superior to the hearer's. Now, it is plausible that should the victim challenge them on this, that they will *then* derivatize them. If Shannon challenges Aubrey, Aubrey might well then disbelieve that Shannon is not familiar with polyamory, because, to use Pohlhaus Jr. 2014) language, " . . . a dominantly situated subject, is not disposed to seeing the world from the eyes of nondominantly situated subjects in ways that displace the centrality of his own subjective experiencing of the world" (109).

Recognizing this problem, Davis modifies Pohlhaus Jr.'s account, noting that in these sorts of cases, "it is only because a marginalized speaker possesses what dominant others perceive to be socially and epistemically distinct experiences that she is acknowledged at all." She offers a modified account of the primary harm of epistemic injustice, at least in cases of credibility excess:

> *Harm arises, however, when a marginalized speaker's acceptance in an epistemic community or inclusion in a testimonial exchange is conditional upon the speaker adopting a—the—voice of distinction. Thus, we might characterize the primary, or intrinsic, harm of epistemic injustice as a form of epistemic othering, through which the capacities of a speaker are prejudicially assessed in such a way that bypasses or circumscribes the speaker's subjectivity. In cases of PCE,*[16] *this harm is uniquely manifested through compulsory representation, whereby a speaker's epistemic subjectivity is recognized only insofar as the speaker might provide some informational service, where the information in question is perceived by dominant hearers to be inaccessible from their own epistemic position . . .*
>
> *Although marginalized knowers are invited to participate in epistemic exchanges, the invitation is extended to the individual only insofar as the individual satisfies a certain description (woman, person of color, sexual minority, and so on). We might refer to this kind of inclusion as de dicto inclusion. By granting a speaker de dicto inclusion, hearers do not offer her full participation in the relevant epistemic community. One might say that she—the particular speaker in question—is not really invited to participate anyone who looks like her would do. She—the person—is still epistemically excluded, even as she—the woman, the person of color, the sexual minority—is asked to perform a specific act of epistemic labor. That is, she lacks de re epistemic inclusion. When a speaker is merely de dicto included, the subject is still marginalized—for the subject herself is not really included. (Davis 2016, 490)*

This makes more sense of the phenomenon than does Pohlhaus Jr.'s original account, but I think it is still inadequate. To show why, I'll first show that de dicto inclusion is not necessarily problematic. As an ethicist, I'm approached for my views on ethical conundra in various discursive contexts; it's assumed that I can provide insight into the problem at hand in a way that a non-ethicist might not be able to. In such circumstances, I am granted de dicto, rather than de re, participation in the conversation. I am not asked to give my view on the conundrum in my capacity as me, but rather in my capacity as a relevant expert. Echoing Davis, any ethicist would do.

This is saliently different than the case of compulsory representation that Davis discusses; it's reasonable to expect that an ethicist provide insight into ethical conundra, just as it is to ask a chemist to provide information about chemistry, or a composer about

[16]Prejudicial Credibility Excess.

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music. Given norms of expert deference, it's critical that relevant experts be solicited in this de dicto fashion, especially in contentious and evaulative fields like ethics. Calling upon experts to perform acts of epistemic labor isn't problematic, because that is the expert's social epistemic role. That some invitations to participate de dicto are pernicious does not mean that all are.

So, we must determine if the kind of de dicto participation that Davis proposes is pernicious, not because they are de dicto, but for some further reason. Key to Davis's account is the idea that speakers are invited to participate epistemically only insofar as they speak with a voice of distinction: it is not just that they are invited to speak as a representative of that group, but they are invited to speak *only* as a representative of that group, and excluded from the conversation otherwise. The marginalization occurs because the speaker is not invited to speak as a full subject.

But we should recognize that in certain epistemic circumstances, even this truncating of subjectivity is warranted. Consider an ethicist being asked to give an assessment of a situation, not in a casual environment, but in their capacity as a member of an ethics board for a hospital. Here, it is both epistemically and morally critical that they give the best answer that they can given their training, *not* merely their own view. This limiting of one's subjectivity is a necessary function of their social epistemic role.

The case of the medical ethicist is useful because it helps to clarify that limited subjectivity in one discursive environment does not translate, necessarily, into a broader marginalization. One can be a full participant in an epistemic system generally, and yet be denied full subjectivity within some contexts. The ethicist asked to speak as an ethicist may be asked to speak in a de dicto fashion, even though in the larger epistemic context they have been accorded de re status.

Ergo, one must go further than simply showing that this limited subjectivity exists in cases of wrongful credibility excess, but that it is the *bad* sort of limited subjectivity. Beyond the requirements Davis sets out, it must be the case that it is not reasonable to ask the person to speak in a de dicto capacity, and that they are not more broadly granted de re status.

In most cases, I think that both conditions will be met, given the general structure of oppression. Nevertheless, Davis's account is underinclusive too. The case of Aubrey and Shannon usefully demonstrates why. Aubrey does ask that Shannon speak in a de dicto capacity. However, they do not ask them to speak as a compulsory representative of the *queer* community. Rather, by dint of their assumptions of queer promiscuity, they ask that they speak in their assumed capacity as an expert about non-monogamy.

Suppose that Shannon rebukes Aubrey, informing them that they are monogamous, and don't know anything about polyamory. Further suppose that Aubrey is unusually receptive to evidence, and upon being rebuked by Shannon, actually change their view, appropriately lowering their assessment of Shannon's credibility vis-a-vis polyamory. Aubrey might then ask what Shannon thinks about polyamorous lifestyles, inviting them to contribute to the discussion in a de re manner; they are not asked to speak from a position of distinction, because they are no longer presumed an expert.

Aubrey's asking Shannon to speak from a position of distinction came from this presumption of expertise, a presumption which came from a problematic othering of Shannon *prior* to this discursive act. Critically, Aubrey's solicitation, while only inviting Shannon to speak de dicto, was not in their capacity as a queer person, but in their capacity as someone familiar with polyamorous lifestyles. It is not just the case that any queer would do, but that anyone with that presumed expertise would do. The moral and epistemic failing was in the presumption that Shannon *had* the relevant expertise.

Admittedly, Aubrey, upon being rebuked, might not be receptive; they might insist that Shannon *must* know something and continue to press them, denying them de re

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status in the epistemic community, and demanding that they speak in the presumed authoritative capacity. This would be a wrong and would meet the criteria for harm posited by Pohlhaus Jr. and Davis. However, this would be a *separate* epistemic injustice. Aubrey's assessment of Shannon's credibility has flipped from an excess to a deficit. This isn't surprising, it's precisely this sort of inconsistency that Pohlhaus Jr.'s account is better set up to explain than Fricker's. But this second epistemic injustice does not adequately explain the first. Aubrey still wrongs Shannon when they *first* overinflate Shannon's credibility.

What about Sullivan's view? It's at least plausible that there is no harm here. It's clear Shannon is not being required to epistemologically transact in the world in ways that stymie their own or others flourishing. Since this is not a dismissal, it doesn't seem that this wrong negatively impacts the reasonableness of the epistemic community as a whole. Perhaps, though, Shannon is produced as a kind of knower required to epistemologically engage in the world in ways that undercut them. However, let us add a single stipulation to the case: suppose Shannon actually *is* polyamorous and *does* have a great deal of knowledge about polyamory – Aubrey just doesn't have that information: the epistemic wrong remains in Aubrey's problematic assumption. Though Shannon is called upon to act as an expert, it doesn't seem like they are undercut by so doing.

But let us suppose that we accept that Shannon's treatment here does cause them to be undercut. Sullivan's account will be underinclusive still. Sullivan's account, unlike, those of Fricker and Pohlhaus Jr., is subject to an *experience requirement*.[17] It requires that a victim of epistemic harm be phenomenally affected by that harm. Davis's view is similarly constrained. Suppose Aubrey never actually asks Shannon to speak. Rather, in casual conversation, Shannon opines on polyamory, and Aubrey assesses them as more credible on the subject than they otherwise would have, because of Shannon's queer identity.

Here, Shannon was already participating in a de re capacity, but because of queerphobic assumptions regarding promiscuity, Aubrey accords them a greater degree of credibility that they should; Shannon may never be aware of this. Let us further suppose Aubrey never actually asks Shannon, nor hears Shannon speak to the point; they merely think that if they *did* ask Shannon, they would get valuable information, but never broach the subject. The mere assumption is sufficient for epistemic injustice, even though it has no experiential effect on Shannon.

Neither of the other accounts have such a requirement. According to either, someone can be epistemically harmed without being aware of it. Someone may objectify or derivatize me without affecting me phenomenally in any way. Consider social etiquette. There are many circumstances where politeness demands we not make our disbelief apparent. If I, a perennially tardy individual, assure my friend that I will arrive for a meeting at three, they might (justifiably) disbelieve me, but it may still be incumbent upon them to suppress any outward signs of that disbelief to avoid rudeness.

This wouldn't be an epistemic injustice, merely an epistemic harm; they have good reason to disbelieve my claim. If however they disbelieve me not because of my perennial tardiness, but rather because they find trans persons to be inherently untrustworthy, holding that our gender presentation constitutes a constant form of dishonesty, this

[17]I borrow this concept from the well-being literature. The experience requirement is a constraint some propose on theories of well-being, claiming any plausible theory of well-being should require that shifts in well-being be accompanied by shifts in phenomenal experience. Hedonists argue against desire-satisfactionism on these grounds. It is implausible, they think, that someone could be made worse off, sometimes much worse off, without any change to their mental or physical states. See Lin (2021) for discussion.

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would by all accounts be an epistemic injustice. However, if they are a stoic enough individual who feels bound by politeness, I may be still wholly unaware of this.

Let's return to Sullivan's view. In these sorts of cases of wrongful esteem, the plausible remaining harm was that the victim of the harm was priced into transacting epistemologically in a way that undercut them. In these no-experience cases, they aren't. They aren't transacting at all. But, plainly, they are still wronged. Thus, all four accounts on the table are underinclusive.

Before proceeding, it is worth addressing a possible objection to what I've argued so far. Even if I have successfully identified cases of wronging without harm, perhaps I *haven't* identified cases of *epistemic* wronging, without *epistemic* harming.[18] That is, it's obvious that the victims in the foregoing have been wronged, but conceivably they have been wronged in a way that doesn't constitute epistemic injustice.

This problem arises as a function of Fricker's base definition of epistemic injustice; in the original framework she tells us "The primary harm is a form of the essential harm that is definitive of epistemic injustice in the broad" (44). According to Fricker's framework, without a harm, there definitionally can't be an instance of testimonial injustice.

There are two ways one can interpret this objection. First, one could reject that these are cases of epistemic injustice *because* they are cases of credibility excess, which Fricker rejects as candidates for epistemic injustice. But we must remember that while authors working in epistemic injustice studies frequently uncritically accept Fricker's original formulation,[19] significant progress has been made since her monograph. Intuitively, these are cases of epistemic injustice, just as were the counterexamples offered by, among others, Pohlhaus Jr. and Davis. Rejecting them qua credibility excess would be an uncritical rejection not only of my arguments but those of many other authors working in the field.

Alternatively, one could reject these counterexamples insofar as they do not contain an epistemic harm, which has been taken to be a necessary condition for epistemic injustice in the field so far. However, I have not at this point shown that these cases do not involve an epistemic harm at all, merely that they cannot be explained by any *extant* account of epistemic harm. The arguments in the foregoing are compatible with the possibility that some other account of epistemic harm exists – it is only in concert with the arguments in the following that I reach the claim that these cases lack an epistemic harm *tout court*. To deny that these cases are instances of epistemic injustice isn't the claim that epistemic injustice must involve epistemic harm, but is rather the claim that some *extant* account of epistemic harm is true. Rejecting the cases on this ground would be a *petitio principii;* we could have rejected Pohlhaus Jr.'s, Davis's, or Sullivan's on the same grounds.

Of course, this reply leaves open the question of what makes these cases examples of *epistemic* injustice if not epistemic harm. We will return to this question in §4, but first let us discuss the general relationship between wronging and harming.

3. Wronging without harming

None of these four accounts of epistemic harm adequately explain all cases of epistemic injustice—they cannot explain cases like Shannon and Aubrey's. Intuitively, we might

[18]I thank an anonymous reviewer for this objection, which has been critical in framing my overall argument.

[19]Especially in applied cases; see Kidd et al. (2022) for a detailed criticism of the tendency to default to Fricker's original framework.

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think that our next step should be to find a better account of epistemic harm, which will act as a better ground for epistemic injustice.

However, looking at harm more broadly, we find that this may not be the case. The motivation to provide a better theory of epistemic harm operates under the assumption that wrongs are grounded in harms. But we have good reason to doubt that this is the case. As David Boonin (2014) states, "There are many cases in which an act does not harm a person but is at least widely believed to wrong that person. If I point a gun at you and pull the trigger in an attempt to kill you . . . it seems clear that I have wronged you even if the gun misfires and you are not harmed" (108). There are a number of examples from the analytic literature on harming that demonstrate that wronging doesn't require harming. I'll briefly discuss three.

The most obviously relevant case comes from Woodward (1986).

3.1. Airline

> *Suppose a black individual, call them Quinn, desires to buy an airline ticket. However, the salesperson, call them Parker, is racist, and refuses to serve a black person, and denies Quinn a ticket. Later, the flight that Quinn would have been on crashes, killing everyone aboard. Has Parker harmed Quinn?*[20]

Originally, this case was meant to be an objection to the counterfactual comparative account of harming. According to this view, an event ϕ harms a subject X iff X is worse off in the case that ϕ occurred than X would have been had ϕ not occurred. Had Parker not denied Quinn the sale of the ticket, Quinn would have been much worse off than they actually were: dead. Woodward's original conclusion was that this was a case of harming that contradicted the counterfactual view, and that Parker had in fact harmed Quinn. Later authors, however, have challenged this view and argued that it seems like Quinn actually was not harmed in this case, they were merely wronged.[21]

A number of accounts developed since Woodward's publication attempt to make sense of this case. Shiffrin (1999, 2012) offers an account of harm where X is harmed by ϕ iff ϕ results in a hemorrhage between X's will and X's reality. But the salient point is this: *regardless* of what account of harm we adopt, it is clear that Quinn has been wronged even if they have not been harmed. For example, if the counterfactual comparative view is true, and Quinn *hasn't* been harmed, they've still been wronged.

There are more difficult cases for a theory of harm to make sense of.

3.2. Nuclear waste

> *Suppose that we are deciding between two policies for waste disposal. One is more expensive, but safer—we can be assured that the waste will remain properly contained. Alternatively, we could opt for a riskier, but cheaper policy. If we choose this policy, a hundred years from now, our containment will likely fail, and a large number of people will be subject to irradiation—suffering from cancers and other severe ailments.*[22]

[20]These are my own adaptations of the classical cases, but preserve the core elements thereof.

[21]When we say here that Quinn was not harmed, this is not to say that Quinn was not harmed overall in this case; of course Quinn was likely, and rightly, extremely upset about the injustice of the case.

[22]This problem is an example of a so-called non-identity problem, usually associated with Parfit (1984). Another example asks us to imagine a woman who can conceive now or later. Currently, she has a case of

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Intuitively, the people in this case are harmed by our decision. But, critically, the effects of our choice will include *which* people exist in a hundred years. If we don't pursue the risky policy, different people will move different places, meet and reproduce with different people, and as a result, a completely different set of people will come into existence. As such, whatever persons are badly off in this state could not exist in a better state. This of course is a huge problem for the counterfactual view given above – these persons aren't made worse off than they otherwise would have been by our choice of policy because if we *didn't* make that choice, they wouldn't have been at all. However, it also puts pressure on alternative theories of harming – these harms don't have a clear subject to be harmed unless we take the apparently harming action.

Nuclear Waste has the feature, unlike **Airline**, that the victims are in an inarguably bad state. Given a sufficiently broad harming principle, we may be able to make sense of both cases as being harms—Gardner (2015, 2019, 2021) offers a causal account of harm which, if true, can accommodate non-identity problems. If she is correct, one might say that the victims in **Nuclear Waste** are wronged because they are harmed. But if Gardner isn't correct, this does not seem to affect our judgment that those victims are wronged. It might be plausible that they are not harmed, but that does not show they aren't wronged. Boonin (2014) argues that the victims in the case *aren't* wronged, but to do so it's not enough for him to show that they aren't harmed. He must show that in addition to not being harmed, that there are no violations of rights, no violations of fairness, no disrespect. The questions of wronging and harming must be answered separately.

Let us turn to a case where it seems like the victim of a putative harm is not made badly off at all, namely, posthumous harms.

3.3. Deathbed

> *Suppose that Adrian promises their parent Casey on Casey's deathbed that Adrian will never sell the family farm, which Adrian will inherit. Casey begs this of Adrian because the growth, maintenance, and flourishing of that farm has made up Casey's life's work. After Casey's passing, Adrian does sell the farm, and it is demolished to make way for luxury condos. Has Adrian harmed Casey?*

Some authors argue yes; Feinberg (1993) and Pitcher (1984) both argue that posthumous harms are possible, and treat on variations of this case. Both, however, are confronted with a problem – posthumous harm implies either that non-existent persons can be harmed,[23] or that a person can be harmed while they are alive by an event that occurs after their death, raising a worry of backward causation.

Most philosophers dismiss the first possibility outright; a nonexistent person is not an appropriate subject of harm, and instead try to show that posthumous harm does not

German measles; thus there is a high probability that a child conceived now will be born blind. If she conceives later, an entirely different child will be born. I include this as a more realistic non-identity problem, but think it shouldn't be the locus of discussion, reliant as it is on potentially ableist ideas regarding the badness of blindness.

[23]"Non-existent" works differently here than in **Nuclear Waste**. In **Nuclear Waste**, while the people harmed by the policy don't exist at the time it's enacted, they do exist at the time that the seemingly harmful effects occur; the people that suffer from cancers and other ailments do exist when those ailments are suffered. In **Deathbed** while Casey exists, there are no apparently bad effects they suffer. If there are bad effects, they occur after Casey no longer exists.

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involve backward causation. One common counterexample in the literature is as follows – suppose that during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, the United States collapsed. If this had happened, it would then become the case that, during his presidency, William McKinley had been the penultimate President of the United States. In another version, two people shoot each other. One person dies almost immediately; the other dies several days later from the wound. When the second dies, it becomes the case that the first was, briefly, a killer. Thus, a future event can make it the case that a prior state had certain properties. To avoid the problem of backwards causation, posthumous harm theorists argue that events following a person's death can harm them in the same way. When Adrian sells the family farm, they make it the case that Casey was harmed while Casey was still alive.

This move has been extensively criticized. James Stacy Taylor argues that

> *. . . showing that certain properties can be retroactively ascribed . . . is not enough to show that attributing posthumous harm to persons need not commit one to endorsing backwards causation. One must also show that harm is the same type of property as those whose retroactive ascription to persons is metaphysically unproblematic . . . The ascription of these properties is uncontroversial because it is clear that this does not require the possibility of backwards causation. However, it is not uncontroversial that an event that occurs after a person's death can harm her. And the ascription of harm to a person in this case is controversial partly because it is not clear that such an ascription of harm would not require the possibility of backwards causation. (Taylor 2005, 315)*

Suppose we give up on the notion of posthumous harm. Must we also give up on the notion of posthumous wronging? It doesn't seem so. Taylor's own oeuvre is a testament to this; while he has extensively argued that posthumous wrong is also impossible, it is *not* on the grounds that he has already arguably dispatched posthumous harm.[24] For example, many argue that the wrong in cases like **Deathbed** is generated by the broken promise. Taylor argues against this premise, but on the grounds that upon the death of the promisee, no view about the moral significance of promise keeping could hold the promisor bound to their word, *not* because promise breaking in posthumous cases doesn't harm the promisee.[25] Alternatively, some argue that the dead can have rights that persevere despite their nonexistence, and the violation thereof is the wrong-making feature in cases like **Deathbed**.[26]

In all three of these cases, there may be an account of harm that can accommodate the intuitions of the case. There may even be an account of harm that can accommodate all three. But we don't have to answer this question in order to determine whether or not there is a wrong in the given case.

Generally, it's clear that there can be wrongs without harms. Can there be *epistemic* wrongs, though, without *epistemic* harms? In the foregoing, I briefly discussed that we should not reject putative cases of epistemic injustice on the grounds that they involve no epistemic harms *as defined by the current literature*. But, we must now answer whether

[24]See, for example, Taylor (2021).

[25]There are useful parallels here, insofar as much of the early literature on posthumous harm seems to have made a similar assumption as much of the work in epistemic injustice, viz. a posthumous wrong must be grounded by a posthumous harm. For an additional reason to question this linkage, see Kraut (2007, 139).

[26]There *are* some accounts of harm, like Woodward's, that hold that one's rights being infringed upon constitutes a harm; this is far from universal.

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it's plausible that epistemic injustice involves *no* epistemic harms, and if it is, what makes an injustice an *epistemic* injustice, if it does not involve an epistemic harm.

4. Are epistemic harms in principle possible?

Let us begin by analogizing a bit further between posthumous harms and epistemic harms. Gardner (2021) notes that at least part of the question of whether or not the dead can be harmed hinges on what Tadros (2014) calls the currency of harm. Tadros distinguishes between this currency of harm, and what he calls the measure of harm (Gardner refers to these as the substantive component and the formal component of harm, respectively.) As she puts it, "the substantive component of the theory tells us what it is about you or your life that I interfere with when I harm you . . . [the formal component] tells us how a particular harm might be related to an action or event" (Gardner 2021, 381).

Recall the counterfactual comparative theory of harm. According to this theory, the measure of the harm (the substantive component) is the victim's being worse off as the result of an action than they otherwise would have been. The currency of harm (the formal component) would be the respect in which the victim is worse off. The question of posthumous harm is partly determined by whether or not the dead are appropriate subjects for the currency of harm. For example, Gardner (2021) offers an argument that the currency of harm must be well-being.[27] If this be correct, and assuming the problem of backward causation cannot be solved, the dead cannot be harmed—the dead are not well-being subjects.

When we extend this notion to epistemic harm, the relevant question is whether or not epistemic harm trades in the currency of harm more generally; to be worthy of the name, it seems that an epistemic harm must *be* a harm, and as such impinge upon us vis-à-vis the currency of harm.[28] It must make us worse off in the relevant respect. Some possible currencies of harm in the literature include well-being (Gardner 2021), rights (Woodward 1986), interests (Kleinig 1978; Perry 2003),[29] or overall quality of life (Kagan 1994). Some of these are more narrow; Kleinig specifies that only welfare-interests are candidates, while Perry argues that only those morally relevant interests are.

Whether or not these currencies could be impinged upon by epistemic harm will typically depend on the particularities of the theory. For example, whether or not epistemic harm can impinge on our welfare will depend on one's substantive theory of well-being. Likewise, whether or not it can impinge upon one's rights will depend on one's theory of rights. This presents an initial worry for the notion of epistemic harm—it is not, to adopt Bradley's (2012) language, axiologically neutral, being incompatible with many theories of well-being, of rights, of interests. If well-being is indeed the currency of harm, as Gardner (2021) convincingly argues, then epistemic harm is plausible only under a fairly narrow subsets of theories of welfare. Notably, epistemic harm will be incompatible with any theory that has the so-called experience requirement: as discussed

[27]If this weren't the case, one would be able to be harmed without being worse off, which strains the concept.

[28]The measure of harm could also be relevant to a theory of epistemic harm. However, so long as epistemic harm is compatible with the correct currency, I think that it would be compatible with any of the current plausible theories of the measure.

[29]Here we should distinguish interests from desires, though some theorists, e.g. Pitcher (1984) and plausibly Nozick (1974) do not. If we equate them, and desire-satisfactionism is the correct theory of well-being, the interests view collapses into the well-being-as-harm view. Simester and von Hirsch (2011) argue that well-being and interests are not identical. See Gardner (2021, 383) for further discussion.

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in §2 we can be the victim of epistemic injustice without being aware that we are such a victim. Likewise, desire satisfactionism is out because, plainly, we don't always want to be believed, even when disbelieving us wrongs us (see the example in the following). Only certain objective-list theories and perhaps perfectionism would be compatible. If Gardner is correct that the currency of harm is well-being (as I believe she is), then epistemic harm is on shaky ground.

Other theories of the currency of harm don't fare better. It's certainly not clear that being wrongfully disbelieved infringes on our rights, interests, or overall quality of life. This becomes more apparent when we consider that sometimes epistemic harms, per the above accounts, actually work *in favor* of the victim, in at least some respect. There are cases where we do not want to believed. Suppose that I consider myself honor-bound to tell the truth to someone, but I am hoping they will disbelieve me. If they do, this both satisfies my desire and works in favor of my interests. I might even strategically *use* the fact that I know they are likely to wrongfully disbelieve me. If they disbelieve me because of a negative identity prejudice, they've surely wronged me, but according to an interests or desires account of harm, they won't have harmed me. Conversely, they may harm me according to such an account if they do the right thing and believe me.

The notion of epistemic harm then is far from axiologically neutral; for the concept to make sense, quite a lot has to go "right." It's not compatible with *most* plausible accounts of the currency of harm. If welfare is the currency, then hedonism, desire-satisfactionism, and most objective list theories are incompatible. If rights, for example, are the currency, it must be that epistemic harm always constitutes an infringement upon our rights; this is dubious, and involves appeal to a right to credibility.

Why does it matter if our theory of harm is axiologically neutral? Simply put, it is because epistemic injustice is manifestly *important*. If epistemic harm is a necessary condition for epistemic injustice, then the plausibility of epistemic injustice hinges on the plausibility of epistemic harm, and ipso facto, what the correct theory of well-being, or interests, or rights is. But plainly, epistemic injustice is real and significant *regardless* of what the correct theory of well-being, interests, or rights is. If we take it as true that epistemic injustice exists (as we should), one of two things is also true. Either, epistemic harm is not required for epistemic injustice, or hedonism, desire-satisfactionism, and most objective list theories are *all* false; if we can affirm the existence of epistemic injustice, and we hold that epistemic harm is necessary for epistemic injustice, we will have solved much of the debate on harm and well-being more generally.[30] While not definitive, I find the alternative, that epistemic injustice can exist absent epistemic harm, to be more plausible. After all, there are already theories of epistemic wronging that *don't* appeal to epistemic harm. While I don't want to endorse his view as correct, Congdon (2017) does, for example, argue instead for a basis of Hegelian misrecognition.

In §2, I showed that there are cases of putative epistemic injustice that cannot be explained by current theories of epistemic harm. In the interim, I've argued that epistemic harm likely does not exist, and if so we cannot explain those cases[31] with *any* theory of epistemic harm. What remains then is the problem of what makes epistemic injustices genuinely epistemic, as opposed to some other kind of injustices, if not epistemic harm. How can we explain one's "being wronged in their capacity as a knower?" While there is no space in the present work to fully explore this question, I offer three general possibilities. First, a sufficiently circumscribed account of wronging may be able to do that job. If Congdon's misrecognition account is true, perhaps that

[30]Here I assume the currency of harm is well-being, but an analogous argument holds for rights, interests, etc.

[31]Or, for that matter, any others.

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misrecognition is the unifying feature. Perhaps it's even possible that a small adjustment to an extant theory of epistemic harm may do the job. Suppose that McGlynn (2019; 2020) adequately rescues Fricker's objectification account. It may be that a kind of epistemic objectification is indeed the ground for the wrong of epistemic injustice, just without constituting a harm. This might seem to come down to semantics—whether or not we use the term "harm." However, by not appealing to harm, even just as a matter of verbiage, we also preempt objections to cases of epistemic injustice where the victim does not seem worse off, just as we insist that Quinn is wronged but not worse off in **Airline**.

The second possibility is that the *ground* of epistemic injustice isn't what unifies the concept. Perhaps sometimes the ground is objectification, in other cases derivatization, etc. If epistemic injustice encompasses all cases where someone is wronged in their capacity as a knower, it may not be the wrong-making feature that matters, but just *that* the victim is wronged in this capacity.

Finally, it's possible that there just *isn't* a unifying property that makes epistemic injustice epistemic. It could instead be a Wittgensteinian cluster concept. These are simply preliminary possibilities, and this question should be explored in greater depth in further work in epistemic injustice studies. Regardless though, it is plausible that if we abandon the concept of epistemic harm, we do not threaten the existence of epistemic injustice more generally.

Some may think that we are giving up too much if we abandon epistemic harm. What about epistemic violence? Kristie Dotson (2011) defines epistemic violence as "a failure of an audience to communicatively reciprocate, either intentionally or unintentionally, in linguistic exchanges owing to pernicious ignorance" and pernicious ignorance as "a reliable ignorance or a counterfactual incompetence that, in a given context, is harmful" (242). At first blush, abandoning epistemic harm might seem like abandoning epistemic violence. But this needn't be the case.

Dotson notes that the harms involved in pernicious ignorance and epistemic violence are quite varied. She states,

> *On my account, determining which kind of harm results from testimonial quieting is a context-dependent exercise . . . However one identifies the harm in a given practice of testimonial quieting, the epistemic violence present in such happenings should be located at the juncture where an audience fails to accurately identify the speaker as a knower, thereby failing to communicatively reciprocate in a linguistic exchange due to pernicious ignorance in the form of false negative stereotyping. (243)*

Citing Fricker (2007), Townley (2003), and Collins (2000), Dotson discusses specific harms to intellectual courage, epistemic agency, and the intellectual traditions of entire groups, respectively, as relevant harms that might be involved in cases of epistemic violence. Elsewhere, discussing a case from Cassandra Byers Harvin (1996), she states, "the harm that results from the situated ignorance in the Harvin example can come from many fronts. Some argue that part of the "stress" of living as a black person in the United States is the persistence of racial microaggressions" (Dotson 2011, 250)

My theory doesn't given us reason to doubt that these are harms. Recall Fricker's distinction between primary and secondary harms. What I've argued for casts doubt only on the primary harm: the epistemic harm. Under this primary-secondary framework, these harms would be secondary. They are the downstream, damaging effects of epistemic injustices, rather than the objectification, derivatization, or undermining testimonial practice, as described by Fricker, Pohlhaus Jr, or Sullivan.

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Wouldn't abandoning epistemic harm undermine some cases of epistemic violence? Surely some cases of pernicious ignorance are harmful only in virtue of putative epistemic harms. Suppose this is the case. This may give us reason, rather than doubting cases of epistemic violence, to expand our understanding thereof. Perhaps reliable ignorance needn't be harmful to be pernicious. This would give us reason to believe that it's possible that harm is not a necessary condition for epistemic violence, just as it is not for epistemic injustice more broadly.

5. Conclusion

I've argued that current theories of epistemic harm are insufficient to make sense of the full scope of epistemic injustice. Furthermore, I've argued that if we are to find an adequate theory of epistemic harm, it faces major in-principle difficulties when we consider how it coheres with a more general theory of harm and well-being. But, I've also shown that it's already widely accepted within the harm literature that harming is neither necessary nor sufficient for wronging. Not identifying an intrinsic epistemic harm doesn't threaten our broader notion of epistemic injustice at all. Sometimes, epistemic injustice involves epistemic objectification, derivatization, or disrespecting the agency of the victim; sometimes it does not. In all of these cases, it remains deeply wrong. We do not need a theory of epistemic harm to develop our theories of epistemic injustice.

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