

Epistemic Justice as a Panacea for Political Freedom

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Abstract. The paper examines the links between epistemic justice and political freedom. It is also an attempt to reveal how epistemic injustice leads to oppression, disabling conditions for an individual as manifested in testimonial practice. However, political freedom here includes civil liberties and positive exercise of human rights. The paper argues that social inequalities are the root cause of epistemic injustice. Epistemic justice on the other hand concerns the just exercise and attribution of epistemic power. Epistemic power is enabled by authority, a prerequisites for being regarded as epistemically trustworthy. The paper adopted descriptive and content analysis method to examine the role of epistemic justice in ensuring political freedom. It x-rays how epistemic power allows us to explain the moral and epistemic nature of epistemic injustice. The paper concludes that epistemic justice is important for the welfare of society as a whole, having epistemic justice and responsibility leads to satisfaction and pleasure of life, as well as the respect and loyalty to political leaders. People who suffer epistemic injustice eventually rebel and make the abuser pay dearly.

Keywords: Epistemology, Epistemic Justice, Political freedom, Social inequalities.

1. Introduction

Epistemic justice concerns the just exercise and attribution of epistemic powers that is, one's ability to exercise epistemic influence. Epistemic power is enabled by authority or credence these are prerequisites for being regarded as epistemologically trustworthy. Epistemic injustice occur when an individual is perceived uninformed of information mutually known by others. On the other hand,

individuals are treated epistemically fairly when credibility assessments match up with the available evidence, unimpeded by prejudice. (Fricker, 2007:19).

The paper is particularly interested in some of the epistemological issues that emerge in the context of discussing the relationship between epistemic justice and political freedom. These concerns raise questions about epistemology and epistemic justice, epistemic justice and testimonial practice, epistemic justice and political freedom, epistemic injustice and social inequalities.

To deny someone the opportunity either to contribute knowledge or to receive knowledge without epistemic reason is an epistemic wrong. These can lead to oppression inequality and epistemic injustice, and in turn impoverishes our political freedom. In order to approach epistemic justice, it is also important to know how knowledge is incorporating in our understanding of everyday concept of knowledge. This concept has to do with the social aspect of epistemology. Social epistemology studies epistemic properties of individuals that arise from their relations to others, as well as epistemic properties of groups or social systems. This has to do with transmission of knowledge or justification from one person to another. Epistemic relations are a legitimate part of epistemology.

2. Epistemology and Epistemic Justice

What can we know? How do we know? These are questions very central to Philosophy. Epistemology is the technical term for the theory of knowledge. As a branch of Philosophy it studies the sources, nature and validity of knowledge. The following problems

or questions that arise in this branch of Philosophy are: what are the sources of knowledge? This has to do with how we attain genuine knowledge. How can we know the nature of knowledge? In order to understand the nature of knowledge, it is important to seek to understand what role the concept has in our lives, and why it should enjoy such a widespread use in our lives, (Welbourne, 1986: 25). Given the importance we attach to knowledge, how can we distinguish between truth and error? Why is it that some statements are qualified as knowledge while others are not? Williams writes:

Even if sufficiently complex analysis never succumbed to counter examples that would not entail the identity of the analyzing concept with the concept knows. Indeed the equation of the concepts might well lead to more puzzlement rather than less. For knowing matters, the difference between knowing and not knowing is very important to us. Even unsophisticated curiosity is a desire to know. This importance would be hard to understand if the concept know were the more or less ad hoc sprawl that analyses have had to become (2002:30).

He is of the opinion that mental states or more generally, mental attitudes, both stative and non – stative, can be externally individuated and this makes it tenable to claim that knowledge is a mental state, namely a factive one. Longino is of the opinion that knowledge is social and that the criteria for knowledge are set by the scientific community (2002:162). It can also be understood as an attitude or mental state ascribed to humans. Given the everyday sense in which knowledge is a mental state, which is ascribed to us, it links us to truths and hence means that if we are in a state of knowing, we possess truths. Williamson puts this clearer when he says:

The importance of knowing to us becomes as intelligible as the importance of truth. Factive mental states are important to us as states whose essence includes a matching between mind and world, and knowing is important to us as the most general factive stative attitude (2002:40).

He sees knowledge as the most general one of all the active mental state that is, one that is entailed by other factive mental states, such as perceiving, remembering, and hearing. Knowing then takes a pivotal explanatory role in explaining the mental, and our actions (William, 2002:7). However, any account of knowledge should enable one to understand the connection between knowledge and epistemic justice. Knowledge features in philosophical accounts of beliefs, actions, evidence or justification, and assertion. Knowledge cannot be eliminated from an

explanation of action. Knowledge is the evidential standard for the justification of belief. It follows that one should assert ‘A’ only if one knows ‘A’ (Williamson, 2002:11).

However, epistemic justice requires knower’s to develop particular virtues that facilitates our relations with one another in particular ways. Fricker is of the opinion that social epistemic practice is a human practice through which knowledge is gained in or indeed lost (2007:vi). Testimony as a social practice is central to the generation and preservation of knowledge; there are also moral epistemic norms that pertain to testimony that derive from the social nature of knowledge. We can substantiate the substantive norms yielded by generation of knowledge, by beginning from actual practice and identify certain ways in which we may epistemically wrong another person (Fricker, 2007:4). Or the injustice of perceiving another epistemic agent as less credible due to identity prejudice.

The point here is that there are certain things knower’s have a right in relations to other knower. Epistemic injustice is a wrong that happens to an individual and one that can be perpetrated by individual. But the truth of the matter is that knower’s are not solitary individuals but rather agents within a larger community whose interdependency with one another requires a mutual relation to one another. To remedy this epistemic injustice our epistemic lives should be interdependent. The knower’s should develop virtues that facilitate our relations with one another, such as open – mindedness, respect, charity, epistemic courage, and epistemic humility. Epistemic injustice occurs when hearers do believe the testimony of a speaker whom they would otherwise have believed had the speaker not been a member of a particular social group. Another reason that can be attributed to this is the prejudice against the social identity of the speaker, may cause the hearer to perceive the speaker as less credible. With this deflation of credibility, it becomes difficult to transfer knowledge to those whom they wish to give it, leading to a number of epistemic wrongs.

However, in both cases, speakers stand to lose a great deal if they are not believed. This epistemic unjust means that one knower’s fails to believe another without proper warrant. This constitutes epistemic wrongs, not only on the individual but also on a communal level. Epistemic relations with other knower’s in the community enable an individual to verify and coordinate with others experiences in such a way that facilitates reliability about what is true and

what is false concerning the experienced world. Epistemic justice is an important element for any society that aspires to be a just one. It is part of what justice requires and became. Injustices of a non-epistemic kind can be addressed only when those who are mistreated or who suffer injustice of a structural nature are heard (Fricker, 2013:1324). Epistemic justice means that all human beings can contribute to the shaping of social meanings and that all putative sources of information are included.

3. Epistemic justice and Testimonial Practice

Recognizing an agent as having an epistemic standing, acknowledges the agent's status in the epistemic society. For people to enjoy epistemic power, the concept needed for people to express themselves should be available to them. Let's consider the following cases: in a well established textile company, a female employee always generates valuable contributions to her work team but never gets acknowledge for this. Rather, her male boss takes her ideas to later use and present as his own. He does this because of gender discrimination that men need to move up the business ladder, but women do not need to advance in business. This is a clear example of epistemic injustice. This is different from testimonial injustice because, the boss here is not misjudging his employee's credibility. He sees that she is capable of producing good ideas.

However, the female employee is wronged because of an identity prejudice. What the boss is required to do here is to give recognition to his employee and see her as an epistemic agent, who deserves credit for her ideas. Rather he treats her as a mere source for his own epistemic goals. Epistemic justice means all human beings can contribute to the shaping of social meanings and that all putative sources of information are included. Testimony on the other hand means the communicative interactions of an informative nature whereby knowledge is being shared (Coady, 1994:7). One of the problems of testimony is that, it is difficult to explain how knowledge can be gain through "mere say so" (Wellbourne, 1986:1). Knowledge is shareable, it can be had by virtue of mere say so. It can also be viewed as a social epistemic practice through which knowledge is gained or lost. The conception of testimony as a practice means that there are many interactions, each of which is part of the practice. It also involves epistemic dependence on others.

Testimony is regarded as a source and foundational for much of our knowledge. It is also a source, which

is transmissive of already existent knowledge whereby that knowledge was based on other sources (Audi, 2013:510). Testimony provides us with knowledge, but not with the justification. Audi explains further that:

You are my source of information, but your knowledge is not the ground of mine or my evidence. It is not because you know that I do. It is because you tell me, given that you know. Your knowledge is required for successful transmission, but my knowledge is not based on your knowledge, if this entails more than it is appropriately depending on it (2013:511).

False claims do not qualify as being knowledge. An account of testimony should include an account of the role of the hearer and specifically, an account of what rationally explains or justifies a hearer's uptake which is the acceptance of testimony issues in a state of believing (Faulkner, 2011:19). The puzzle about testimony arises because knowledge requires justification. We also want more than a general entitlement. The context of testimony is typically an interaction between two parties, the speaker and her addressees come to have a belief which she presents to them, therefore we are not talking of just any speech act nor indeed of mere assertion, telling is a special case. The relationship between the persons involved is relevant, the fact that the speaker addresses an audience means he or she is requesting the trust of these specific individuals.

Testimonial injustice is a wrong an individual suffers when he or she is perceived as not being a credible informant because of stereotype associated with it. As Kiss argues:

Providing a platform for victim is one of the core tasks of truth commission, not merely as a way of obtaining information but also from the standpoint of justice. Those who lives are shattered are entitled to have their suffering acknowledged and their dignity affirmed, to know that their pain is real and worthy of attention. We affirm the dignity of those who have been brutalized by attending to their voices and making their stories a part of the historical record (2000:73).

Undermining someone as a knower is conceptually and historically closely related to their being undermined as a practical reasoner (Fricker, 2007:137). Not understanding the mechanisms of oppression significantly limits one's ability to challenge them.

4. Epistemic Justice and Political Freedom

Fulfillment of our political obligation to vote in a democratic society should be seen as political freedom. Citizens have a right to exercise their civil duties. This epistemic justice will contribute to the epistemic advantages of democracy. Human rights have always been, and always will be a struggle (Alston, 2017: 3). Political freedom is one of the most important features of democratic societies. It is the ability of a nation's citizens to participate freely in the political process, and have equal access to relevant knowledge. Epistemic justice enables people to participate freely in the political process which is the system by which the polity chooses authoritative policy makers. In a free society, this represents the right of all adults to vote and compete for public office. Epistemic oppression is an instance of epistemic injustice, this occurs when there is repeated widespread systemic injustice (Deutsch, 2006:10). Epistemic oppression occurs when there is a restriction on an agent's capacities and successes within the political domain. An agent can also be epistemically marginalized, when he or she is excluded from political practices in light of group membership. Marginalization occurs when women are expelled from useful participation in political society. This marginalization is epistemically unjust because women should be given the opportunity to exercise their capacities in a defined and recognized way.

Epistemic justice prevents monopoly of authority, this is because the government is bound by an election term where parties compete to regain authority, and the elected ruling will make sure their policies will work for the people. Epistemic justice also protects equality of the citizens. Generally, democracy is based on the rule of equality, which means that all people are equal as far as law is concerned. Every citizen have the right to experience and enjoy equal political, social and political rights and the state is not allowed to discriminate him on the standard of sex, class and religion. Epistemic justice also gives room for a responsible and stable administration when there are elected and fixed representatives; a more responsible government is formed within an epistemic community. Everyone with certain rational capabilities has standing in the broadest sense of the epistemic community. This standing makes certain behavior appropriate, such as permitting the agent to speak, and giving a standing to criticize. This gives room for political freedom and democracy can be efficient, firm and stable. The society is ruled and conducted with a sense of dedication, and people under this system discuss matters and problems thoroughly to come up with sensible decisions.

5. Epistemic Injustice and Social Inequalities

Epistemic injustice is a distinctive epistemic kind of injustice in which an individual is wronged specifically in his or her capacity as a knower (Fricker, 2007:1). People suffer from epistemic injustice and social inequalities when they are denied the credibility that they deserve (Coady, 2017: 61). Treating credibility as a distributive good has an advantage, though credibility is not an agent. When individuals are not taken seriously due to prejudice, they suffer from a distinctively epistemic injustice. Insensitivity is at core of epistemic injustice that is being cognitive and effectively numbed to the lives of others. It also include being inattentive to and concerned with their problems, and aspirations. It is important to examine the harm and think critically about possible solution. This also raises bigger question about the nature of epistemic agent. An agent words can be unfairly discredited to racial prejudice. For example in a recent example, a person in need of legal assistance was initially neglected after a white man refused help from a black female lawyer. This is a case of epistemic injustice and it is not only morally problematic, but also epistemically problematic. Racial discrimination has shaped the existing distribution of economic resources

However, fixing epistemic injustice is obviously not easy, but we can take a hard look at ourselves, take stock of our beliefs, our biases and work to change them. We also need to think about and change how we talk about each other as individuals and as a society. We need to speak up when see any form of epistemic injustice. Empowering ourselves and each other is an important way to begin. We need to talk to our children about epistemic justice and injustice and teach them healthier ways to treat each other. We need to work with our schools to be sure that all children, no matter what, have access to a good and supportive education. We need to ensure that there are programs in place to not just help people who are poor or struggling, but lift them out of poverty. We need to be sure that our laws truly protect all citizens, not just some people. From the foregoing, it is now clear that epistemic justice plays a vital role in the inculcation of rights attitudes, values, such as cooperation, open-mindedness, honesty, respect, obedience, national consciousness and loyalty on the citizens.

6. Conclusion

Epistemic justice is worth pursuing in its own right, epistemic justice can further other kinds of justice.

Some rights can be valued for more than one reason, the right to freedom of expression, for example, may be valued in terms of intrinsic good of self fulfillment, or because it is a means towards the generating of truth and knowledge, or because it is a necessary condition of democracy (Malcolm, 2017:29). Preventing epistemic injustice and seeking epistemic justice is a question of how to reduce the negative impact of prejudice within our interpersonal interactions and our epistemic communities. It is important to point out that individuals at political disadvantage are those experiencing epistemic injustice. Full and equal participation of men and women in political decision making will provide a balance that much accurately reflects the composition of the society and may as such enhance the concerns and perspectives of all segments of the society.

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