Andrew Plum

Professor Hubbs

Phil 490

3/10/2025

Response Essay 7 – Reading: Epistemic Injustice

“Many definitions and conceptions of knowledge cast some sort of epistemic confidence as a condition of knowledge, whether it comes in as part of the belief condition or as part of a justification condition… On any confidence-including conception of knowledge, the implications for someone who meets with persistent testimonial injustice are grim: not only is he repeatedly subject to the intrinsic epistemic insult that is the primary injustice, but where this persistent intellectual undermining causes him to lose confidence in his beliefs and/or his justification for them, he literally loses knowledge… The under-confident subject will tend to back down in the face of challenge, or even at the very prospect of it, and this tendency may well deprive him of knowledge he would otherwise have gained” (Fricker 49-50).

Here, Fricker discusses how persistent testimonial injustice impacts the knowledge one has. She mentions that many understandings of knowledge entail some degree of confidence tied to beliefs. And under this framework of knowledge, persistent testimonial injustice can cause one to lose knowledge because the undermining of the subject’s confidence leads to a lack of confidence in their beliefs, which is required of knowledge. The undermining of one’s confidence not only potentially causes one to lose their current knowledge but also potentially inhibits them from gaining further knowledge.

Fricker here is only talking about how the undermining of one’s confidence, caused by persistent testimonial injustice, causes a loss of knowledge. On the opposite side, could overconfidence also lead to a loss of knowledge? She alludes to this earlier when writing about credibility excesses, but she doesn’t elaborate on the sentiment here. Why does she not consider the instances where overconfidence blinds one in one’s pursuit of knowledge? Because if you have no epistemic humility in acknowledging how your prior held beliefs could be wrong, if you have a bad foundation of beliefs to build upon, then you are certainly limited in your ability to acquire new knowledge. Also, to avoid the pitfalls of both underconfidence and overconfidence, what does the ideal amount of confidence to best obtain knowledge look like? Besides avoiding the persistent testimonial injustice Fricker speaks of, are there any discursive practices we should utilize to foster the appropriate amount of confidence for us all to best obtain knowledge? One practice I think might apply is in the setting of a debate (a discussion oriented towards the goal of reaching the truth) between a group of people with a diverse range of perceived credibilities (could be linked to some sort of nominal status if there is nothing else to measure against), have those of the lesser credibilities share their view before those of greater credibilities so one can be sure that what they share is what they believe the truth to actually be rather than being influenced by the credibility of the speakers before them.