

## **Epistemic Injustice, Epistemic Paralysis, and Epistemic Resistance: A (Feminist) Liberatory Approach to Epistemology**

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***Kelly Louise Rexzy P. Agra***

**Abstract:** Using the vocabularies of *epistemic injustice* coined by Miranda Fricker, *epistemic paralysis* (my term for the incapacitation of the epistemic agent), and *epistemic resistance* developed by José Medina, I aim to sketch in this paper an epistemic liberatory project in philosophy that takes its cue from recent philosophical literature in feminist (but also decolonial and critical race) studies, which interrogates *the fundamental role of social identity in knowledge formation*. The central focus shall be the interrogation of the ways in which power relations between social identities create conditions of hermeneutical inequality and testimonial privileging and/or marginalization within the field of philosophy. Drawing from Linda Martín Alcoff's and Elizabeth Potter's development of feminist epistemology that no longer takes gender as a "'pure' or solitary influence" in the production, construction, and validation of knowledge, this paper, to use the words of Alcoff and Potter, hopes "not only to satisfy intellectual curiosity," but also to contribute to the emancipatory goal of "the expansion of democracy in the production of knowledge," with specific attention to the practice of academic philosophy. In this sense, the paper is feminist in its emancipatory goal; but it aims to liberate and empower not only 'women' in philosophy, but other (intersectional) social identities silenced by the privileged rhetoric of philosophical practice.

**Keywords:** feminist epistemology, epistemic injustice, epistemic resistance, philosophy

“... to refer to a liberatory project as ‘feminist’ cannot mean that it is only for or about ‘women,’ but that it is informed by or consistent with feminism. It seeks in current feminist parlance, to unmake the web of oppressions and reweave the web of life.”

“For feminists, the purpose of epistemology is not only to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but also to contribute to an emancipatory goal: the expansion of democracy in the production of knowledge. This goal requires that our epistemologies make it possible to see how knowledge is authorized and who is empowered by it.”  
—Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter<sup>1</sup>

In their introduction to the 1993 anthology, *Feminist Epistemologies*, Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter stress how feminism is fundamentally a political agenda. For this reason, discourses on the intersection of feminism and epistemology within the framework of traditional epistemology seem to occupy an uneasy position in as much as the canons of traditional epistemology foreclose the association of epistemology with politics. At the same time, feminist epistemologies’ commitment to contexts and relationality seems to run in opposition to traditional epistemologies’ commitment to universality and subjectivity. These are particularly distinguishable for instance in Immanuel Kant’s *Critiques*, where practical reason is foreclosed from pure reason, and where pure (necessary and universal) knowledge ranks higher to empirical (accidental and particular) knowledge. In such a framework, the commitment to the recognition of complex power relations and singular contexts as implicative to the production and validation of knowledge in feminist epistemology is a form of political resistance to traditional theories of knowledge.

I seek to explain this political move in epistemology as a form of *epistemic resistance* necessary to combat *epistemic injustice* within philosophy. Using the vocabularies of *epistemic injustice* coined by Miranda Fricker, *epistemic paralysis* (my term for the incapacitation of the epistemic agent), and *epistemic resistance* developed by José Medina, I aim to sketch in this paper an epistemic liberatory project in philosophy that takes its cue from recent philosophical literature in feminist (but also decolonial and critical race) studies that interrogates *the fundamental role of social identity in knowledge formation*. The central focus shall be the interrogation of the ways in which power relations between social identities create conditions of hermeneutical inequality and testimonial privileging and/or marginalization within the field of philosophy. Drawing on Alcoff’s and Potter’s development of feminist

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, “Introduction: When Feminisms Intersect Epistemology,” in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. by Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 4; 13–14.

epistemology that no longer takes gender as a “‘pure’ or solitary influence”<sup>2</sup> in the production, construction, and validation of knowledge, this paper, using the words of Alcoff and Potter, hopes “not only to satisfy intellectual curiosity,” but also to contribute to the emancipatory goal of “*the expansion of democracy in the production of knowledge*,”<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the paper is feminist in its epistemic emancipatory goal; but it aims to liberate and empower not only ‘women’ in philosophy, but also other (intersectional) social identities silenced by the dominant rhetoric of philosophical practice.

## I. Epistemic Injustice

*Epistemic injustice* is a category coined and developed by Miranda Fricker in 2007, in her book, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*. The category and her work aimed at capturing and analysing the forms of violence and inequality that are of the epistemic kind. Her work proceeds from the area of social epistemology which extends the horizon of epistemic investigation from the provenance of the solitary-individual human subject to the social sphere or to the ways in which, by and large, the society (or a collective or a system) affects or creates the conditions of the possibility of knowledge. At the same time, in as much as the struggle against injustices at the epistemic level requires the cultivation of ‘epistemic virtues,’ the discourse on epistemic injustice also interests those working in area of virtue epistemology. In her works, Fricker asserts that epistemic justice lies at the intersections of epistemology, ethics, and political life.

Fricker broadly defines epistemic injustice as “a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower.”<sup>4</sup> She notes however that the question regarding unfair access to epistemic goods, such as education or information for instance, while may very well be forms of epistemic inequality, do not immediately qualify as epistemic injustices. Fricker emphasizes that rather than including simply the distributive aspect of epistemic unfairness, epistemic injustice investigates instead the discriminatory origin of the inequality. She is particularly interested in two kinds of *discriminatory* epistemic injustices: *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. In the context of this paper, both forms of epistemic injustices will be considered but with particular focus on hermeneutical injustice.

Testimonial injustice is explained by Fricker as that which “occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

speaker's word."<sup>5</sup> Testimonial injustice is an assault to someone in their capacity as bearers and transmitters of knowledge. This kind of injustice is conditioned by what she calls *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*<sup>6</sup>, which evaluates the veracity of a testimony on the basis of the speaker's social identity rather than on the basis of the statement's truth-content. In her book, she used the example of the fate of Tom Robinson, an African-American accused of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell, in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. Robinson was basically *silenced* in the court because of the prejudicial biases against his social identity. In her lecture on "Epistemic Equality?", Fricker noted that she may seem to have identified testimonial injustice in her book as something that might more often occur in courts, but she explained that it also covers a whole range of pragmatics, from making a statement, to airing an opinion, to sharing a hypothesis or an idea.<sup>7</sup> She also gives emphasis on the fact that the prejudice against the identity of the speaker could be nonintentional and therefore difficult to immediately detect.

Meanwhile, hermeneutical injustice is wider in scope and could even be that which lies at the background of certain testimonial injustices. Fricker explains that hermeneutical injustice "occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences."<sup>8</sup> In clarifying this, she used the example of the difficulty of explaining the experience of *sexual harassment* back when the term has not yet been coined and circulated. What is most significant in her discussion is that a phenomenon becomes a case of hermeneutical injustice if the lacuna in the collective hermeneutical understanding of an experience is largely caused by the fact that those who undergo that experience, on account of their identity, are not being allowed to contribute to the stock of meaning necessary to make sense of the experience—that is, if they are, in other words, hermeneutically marginalised. If testimonial injustice operates at the level of the individual, whether consciously or unconsciously, marginalization in hermeneutical injustice operates at the structural level. As Fricker explains, it 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."<sup>9</sup> It amounts to the "prejudicial exclusion

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. Fricker also talks about *credibility excess* in contrast to *credibility deficit* but notes how the latter is of greater importance in terms of the ways in which they disadvantage epistemic agents.

<sup>7</sup> Miranda Fricker, "1 Miranda Fricker - Epistemic Equality?" SocialEqualityUCT in YouTube (10 September 2014), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8zoN6GghXk&t=595s>>.

<sup>8</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 155. Emphasis added.

from participation in the spread of knowledge”<sup>10</sup> due to an identity credibility deficit that is structurally or systemically deployed.

What I would like to focus on in hermeneutical injustice within the ‘Academy’ in the discipline of philosophy, is not only how it excludes persons or groups from participating in knowledge formation on account of their social identities, but how epistemic injustice paralyzes epistemic agency itself. This is something that Fricker has already hinted at when she wrote that:

When you find yourself in a situation in which you seem to be the only one to feel the dissonance between received understanding and your own intimated sense of a given experience, it tends to knock your faith in your own ability to make sense of the world, or at least the relevant region of the world.<sup>11</sup>

Hermeneutical injustice as a harm done in your capacity as a knower is not only about how you are excluded by an *external* entity—a person, a community, or a system—from contributing to the pool of hermeneutical resources, but also about how you can be incapacitated to participate in the democratic production of knowledge because of an *internalized distrust towards your own epistemic agency as a result of a dissonance between a received understanding and your own intimated sense of a given experience*. This is the dimension of epistemic injustice that interests me most in the context of this paper because it is what, I think, lies at the other half of the critique against the kind of violence inflicted by a philosophical practice that is Euro-, ego-, phallo-, and logo- centric. I will call this *epistemic paralysis*.

## II. Epistemic Paralysis

Philosophers differ in their view of what is to be considered as the primary role of philosophy in human life and in the society. Some view it as a tool for diagnosing social pathologies, some view it as a form of social hope, some view it as a tool for analysis and clarification of statements and ideas, some view it as an interpretation of life and the world, and some view it as an existential proposal or a way of life. I side with those who view philosophy as necessary for human flourishing. In general, I consider three interconnected social functions of philosophy: ethical, epistemic-ethical, and political-social.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

1. *Ethical function*: Philosophy promotes the conduct of a good life in everyday situations through reflection and/or prescription.
2. *Epistemic-ethical function*: Philosophy provides critical tools for evaluating the society's institutions, norms, and practices.
3. *Political-social function*: Philosophy provides creative tools for the theoretical construction in the sense of a reconstruction or imaginative projections of the principles of a good society in relation to concrete and actual contexts.

These three interconnected functions are what philosophy, *in principle*, can provide to the individual and the society. Whether philosophy, *in fact*, fulfils such social function is a different matter for this, then, calls for the shift from the descriptive to the normative evaluation of the *task* of philosophy, or more appropriately, the *responsibility* of philosophy.

Philosophy as practiced by Socrates, Confucius, or Siddhartha Gautama was a kind of thinking or reflection that seemed organic to the human being. But as it and other scientific fields developed, philosophy has evolved into an institution. The French philosopher Alain Badiou refers to the philosophical institution as “a procedure of conserving a knot, a knot in danger of being cut, which would cause its components to disperse” — components which include philosophical addresses, transmissions, and inscriptions.<sup>12</sup> He also rephrases this as the “management of factional equilibrium” among philosophers (professors), their disciples (students), and publications (books, articles, speeches).<sup>13</sup> The philosophical institution is the empirical marker of the existence of philosophy. It is what materially sustains philosophizing.

Philosophy, as an institution, is part of an *epistemic system*. An *epistemic system* “designates a social system that houses social practices, procedures, institutions, and/or patterns of interpersonal influence that affect the epistemic outcomes of its members” and has “truth-promoting or error-minimizing properties.”<sup>14</sup> This is where the discussion about the intersection of epistemology, ethics, and politics becomes significant. In as much as the philosophical institution is part of a larger epistemic structure, it is not spared of the pressures that economic and political structures exert on that epistemic

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<sup>12</sup> Alain Badiou, “What is a Philosophical Institution? Or: Address, Transmission, Inscription,” in *Conditions*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 27.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>14</sup> Alvin Goldman, “A Guide to Social Epistemology,” in *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings*, ed. by Alvin Goldman and Dennis Whitcomb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13, 18.

structure. This interrelation between economic, epistemic, and political structures that forms a Borromean knot, is the convergence point of the discussions of Karl Marx on the relation of practice and critique, and Michel Foucault on knowledge and power. It is at the same time that which threatens or obstructs the delivery of the three-fold social function of philosophy.

Returning to the topic of epistemic injustice, philosophy, in its Euro-, ego-, phallo-, and logo- centrism, stands charged of committing an epistemic injustice that is of the hermeneutical kind. As stated in the previous section, hermeneutical injustice covers both the marginalization of a person or group from contributing to the epistemic resource, as well as the *incapacitation of a person or group to participate in the production of knowledge by virtue of an internalized distrust towards one's own epistemic agency as a result of a dissonance between a received understanding and one's own intimated sense of a given experience*. This latter dimension of hermeneutic injustice is what I will use as the working definition for *epistemic paralysis*.

Epistemic paralysis in philosophy is what may occur when, for instance, a woman is immersed in philosophies about being human that regards being emotional as a feminine character and then equated to a form on non- and/or ir-rationality, which interferes with the philosophical contemplation of the Good. A possible outcome of such immersion to such philosophies is for the woman to deny herself of her emotions and start acting or thinking 'like a man.' Another possible outcome is that because she now thinks that she is 'essentially or naturally emotional,' she will begin to regard herself and her kind as inferior to men, may think that she will never be able to match the philosophical abilities of men, and then stops philosophizing altogether. These two epistemic outcomes may be different, but they are both instances of epistemic paralysis in so far as they both paralyze or incapacitate the epistemic ability of the epistemic agent. As in medical terms—where paralysis is the loss of the ability to move or the loss of bodily function and the ability to feel or sense, as caused by a disconnection between the brain and the muscles—epistemic paralysis is the loss of the ability to know or think in a certain way because of the disconnection between what is received as the 'correct' way of knowing or thinking and what one has organically practiced, developed, and/or experienced. At the same time, the paralysis may be partial or total. The first outcome can be said to be an instance of a partial epistemic paralysis, while the second outcome can be said to be an instance of a total epistemic paralysis in the context of philosophizing. To press this point further and to relate epistemic paralysis in philosophy to the economic, epistemic, and political tripartite structure undergirding the philosophical institution, it is fitting to discuss Linda Martín Alcoff's accusation of Eurocentrism as an epistemology of ignorance.

In her contribution to *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* entitled “Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an epistemology of ignorance,” Alcoff starts off with a quote from Kwame Nkrumah’s *Consciencism*: “... even philosophical systems are facts of history.”<sup>15</sup> Alcoff suggests in this essay that ‘the protection and maintenance of western philosophy’s ignorance about the effects, and limitations, of its geographical location through the perpetuation and defense of Eurocentric practices and curricula’ indicates that Eurocentrism “is a species of an even larger pathology,” which she calls the *transcendental delusion*.<sup>16</sup> She defines the transcendental delusion as the “belief that thought can be separated from its specific, embodied, and geo-historical source.”<sup>17</sup> Alcoff recounts in this essay the epistemologies of coloniality of Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel, Ramon Grosfoguel, and Kwame Nkrumah among others.<sup>18</sup> For Dignolo, western philosophy, with its obsession with the highest and universal form of knowledge, operates as a form of theo- and ego-politics. For him, theo- and ego-politics in philosophy intentionally disregards the question of ‘for whom, when, why, and where are knowledges generated,’ or the kind of questioning operative in geo- and body-politics. Meanwhile, Dussel describes the European colonization of the Americas as less of a discovery and more of an *encubrimiento*, or a covering over on the part of the Europeans, which resonates with what Grosfoguel named as *epistemicide*, or the denial of knowledges of the peoples subject to colonization as true, the relegation of these knowledges as inferior to European knowledges, or the outright theft of these knowledges and their repackaging as European knowledges. In the same vein, Nkrumah argues that colonialism required the suppression of epistemic democracy in order to thwart the demands for political democracy, which meant that for the colonial rule to be successful, the political rights of colonised subjects must be stripped off, and their epistemic agencies distrusted. In these epistemologies of coloniality, the idea that a strong ideological epistemic backup is essential to political and economic domination, or that canons of epistemic systems may be politically manipulated for economic gains, is recognizably deployed. In the case of European colonialism, Europe had to establish itself as “both the vanguard of human race and as achieving a universal form of thought”<sup>19</sup> in order to justify its political oppression and economic usurpation.

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<sup>15</sup> Linda Martín Alcoff, “Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an epistemology of ignorance,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. by Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 397.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 398-403.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.



Epistemic paralysis in the context of colonialism takes the form of what Dussel referred to as *encubrimiento* or Grosfoguel's *epistemicide*, where non-European knowledges and ways of knowing have been distrusted, repackaged, or even totally discarded. What is alarming, however, is that the same epistemologies are perpetuated in the philosophical institution. It is to this extent that philosophy, in its Euro-, ego-, phallo-, and logo- centricism, could be referred to as committing epistemic injustice. It reproduces a framework of epistemic assumptions that sustain epistemic violence.

### III. Epistemic Resistance

The hermeneutical injustice that philosophy commits at the institutional/systemic level when it is Euro-, ego-, phallo-, and logo- centric is wider in scope and longer in duration. When someone is immersed in philosophies of being human that are not recognizable for them, or those that do not even recognize them as human beings (as in cases of racist philosophies), *philosophy as the means for critical reflection and epistemic emancipation could be the very tool of oppression*. If sustained, such instances can take the form of an internalised distrust against one's capacity to know, in the broad sense, or to philosophise, in the specific sense, and as we have noted, may lead to epistemic paralysis. Within the context of an epistemic community, this distrust also creates divisions among epistemic agents by building suspicion towards one another's epistemic agency. This is for instance the case when Filipino philosophy scholars undervalue their fellow Filipino philosophy scholars and overvalue Western philosophy scholars not on the basis of scholarship but as an effect of an internalised philosophical position that privileges the western, white, and male identity in the judgment of philosophical prowess. The transcendentalist delusion which Alcoff referred to as both a cause and a symptom of Eurocentrism<sup>20</sup> constructs a "web of oppression"<sup>21</sup> that thwarts what Richard Rorty referred to—in allusion to John Dewey's and Jürgen Habermas's idea of democratic participation—as "the urge to come to free agreement with our fellow human beings" and "be full participating members of a free community of inquiry."<sup>22</sup> The possibility of this freedom is what is imperilled in epistemic paralysis as a result of hermeneutical injustice. How it may be protected or regained is the subject of interest of José Medina's *epistemology of resistance*.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>21</sup> Alcoff and Potter, "Introduction: When Feminisms Intersect Epistemology," 4.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Rorty, "Education as Socialization and Individualization," in *Philosophy as Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 119.

Medina, in his 2013 work *The Epistemology of Resistance*, argued that resistance is the epistemic virtue necessary for democracy.<sup>23</sup> Epistemic resistance encompasses forms of epistemic agency that are directed by the imperative to use “epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains those structures.”<sup>24</sup> Medina sees resistance or dissent as “the heart and soul, the epistemic centrepiece, of a democratic culture.”<sup>25</sup> In epistemology, epistemic approaches to democracy are categorized under Social Epistemology. This is what one finds in Medina’s work; but his analyses also provide its dialectical reverse: his epistemology of resistance is at the same time a democratic, feminist-liberatory approach to epistemology.

One of the central ideas of Medina’s epistemology of resistance is the value of epistemic interaction and epistemic friction for a democratic community that not only expands epistemic horizons but also refines ethical sensibilities. Relaxing Elizabeth Anderson’s *The Imperative of Integration* or the obligation to integrate oneself or others into the society in order to guarantee everyone’s freedom and equality, Medina offers as an alternative *The Imperative of Epistemic Interaction*:

The aim of the *epistemic interaction* in which resources are pooled and experiences and imaginations are shared, compared, and contrasted is both practical and epistemic: democratic epistemic interactions aim at perfecting not only our practices but also our *sensibilities*. Democratic sensibilities require free and equal epistemic interaction among the heterogenous groups that are part of society. This is what I call the *Imperative of Epistemic Interaction*.<sup>26</sup>

His move to relax the imperative of integration proceeds from the recognition that there are unequal levels of privilege within societies. Medina explains that the imperative to integrate may pose problems for the already oppressed and underprivileged group. To force them to find their place in practices and institutions that are not theirs, and for which they have been excluded and marginalised, may be too strong a demand, greater than the demand for the privileged group to share their privileges. Interaction, as the ‘weaker’ version

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<sup>23</sup> José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

of integration, calls mainly for communication and cooperation. What makes it distinct from integration is the commitment to particularism and the self-empowerment of the underprivileged. The imperative seeks to provide “social spaces and practices that are intended primarily (if not exclusively) for the members of minority groups that struggle to achieve self-empowerment or to preserve their distinctiveness.”<sup>27</sup> Medina stresses that the integration must only and carefully be advised if it can assure the preservation of group specificity. In addition, the necessary ‘interaction,’ prior to integration, must have already taken place. For him, it is of vital importance to recognize differences and to not force them to cohere to generalities. At the same time, the minority group must be self-empowered so they may interact with the dominant group at a more equal footing.

This idea of self-empowerment, which I will now relate to epistemic agency, is something that Lynn Hankinson Nelson in “Epistemological Communities” (1993) and Nancy Arden McHugh in “Epistemic Communities and Institutions” (2017) have stressed in their discussions of epistemic agency. For Nelson, communities are the primary generators and repositories of knowledge.<sup>28</sup> She argues that it is the communities that construct and acquire knowledge.<sup>29</sup> Nelson strongly asserts the social construction of knowledge and argues that it is communities, and not individuals, which must be recognized as epistemic agents. McHugh recounts this in her essay and links it with Medina’s notion of epistemic resistance. For McHugh, epistemic agency in communities can take the form of epistemic resistance or subversion, or even separatism; it can even arise in conditions of oppression. She notes that “when we acknowledge that marginalised communities resist epistemic injustice, we can recognize that although epistemic injustice *is* an injustice, it is not an epistemic dead end.”<sup>30</sup> What is worth noting in McHugh’s analysis is the possibility of resisting injustice not only from the position of the one committing the injustice, but from the position of the oppressed. As to how individuals, communities, and institutions develop such resistance to injustice and how individuals within these communities and institutions regain their epistemic freedom is what primarily concerns us in the discussion regarding epistemic democracy/equality/justice.

Returning to Medina’s imperative of interaction, it is important to note his two minimum requirements for the development of habits of

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Lynn Hankinson Nelson, “Epistemological Communities,” in *Feminist Epistemologies*, 140.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Arden, McHugh, “Epistemic Communities and Institutions,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, 277.

communication and reaction, as well as the cultivation of democratic sensibilities—the requirements of *expressibility* and *responsiveness*.

Democratic sensibilities consist in cognitive-affective attitudes that facilitate and promote the capacity to relate, to listen, to feel concerned, and to care for the interests and aspirations of others. The establishment and maintenance of such attitudes require effective communications among diverse publics. And for such effective communication to take place, publics have to be formed and to become able to express themselves; and social sensibilities of openness have to be cultivated for those publics to be listened to and to be responded to properly. ... The *expressibility requirement* demands that the different groups that a social body can contain have the opportunity to coalesce in a public with expressive capacities, so that they can articulate their shared experiences and perspectives. The *responsiveness requirement* demands that the social and epistemic conditions of communication and interaction be such that the expressions of a public have the proper uptake by other publics and by society as a whole.<sup>31</sup>

That the epistemic agents, be they communities or individuals, must be *capable* of expressing themselves, and not only creating spaces for expression, is of paramount importance. This, for instance, is the core point of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) which stresses the fundamental necessity of empowerment. In epistemic liberation, the agent implicated in the perpetuation of injustice is one possible agent of resistance, but not the only one. The paralyzed victims of epistemic injustice are still epistemic *agents* capable of resisting the injustice and emancipating themselves out of the condition of oppression. It is in this sense that feminism or the feminist project in epistemology is a form of epistemic resistance. However, and this is now where most of the proposals for fighting epistemic injustice will make sense, the expressibility requirement must be complemented by the responsiveness requirement. The aim is not only to let the subaltern *speak*, but for the subaltern to *also be heard*. Siavash Saffari's reformulation of Spivak's question into 'Can the Subaltern be Heard?' hammers home this point.<sup>32</sup> In the resistance against epistemic injustice,

<sup>31</sup> Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> See Siavash Saffari, "Can the Subaltern be Heard?: Knowledge Production, Representation, and Responsibility in International Development," in *Transcience*, 7:1 (2016).

certain forms of subjectivity with certain epistemic characteristics are necessary, and Medina proposes the active search for epistemic friction as one of them. For Medina, “we all have a prima facie obligation to undergo a process of *self-estrangement*, to cultivate openness to perplexity and to interrogate received attitudes and habits.”<sup>33</sup> He writes:

... in order to be able to expand and meliorate our social sensibilities, we need to start by exposing ourselves and making ourselves vulnerable, by opening up our perspective to processes of critical scrutiny and resistance, that is, by putting our perspective in communicative interaction with the perspectives of significantly different others so that there can be epistemic friction among perspectives. ... only when significantly different perspectives are available and they are allowed to interact so as to learn from each other and to make maximal use of their difference, only then can we have epistemic and political practices that can be self-corrective in a democratic way.<sup>34</sup>

His idea of epistemic friction and self-estrangement resonates well with Fricker’s call for virtuous listening but with a specific focus on how social identities interplay with how we weigh the value of perspectives expressed by social identities different from our own. As Fricker writes: “The virtuous hearer, ... must be reflexively aware of how the relation between his social identity and that of the speaker is impacting on the intelligibility to him of what she is saying and how she is saying it.”<sup>35</sup> Fricker thinks that by exercising this epistemic virtue, one can neutralize the impact of identity prejudice on one’s credibility judgement.<sup>36</sup> The practice of epistemic virtue within the context of epistemic injustice makes agents aware of their privileged lives and privileged perspectives, calls into question how these marginalise members of the epistemic community, and thus, or at least hopefully, resists the perpetuation of individual and structural sources of epistemic inequality. Furthermore, what is equally significant to note is that epistemic resistance is primarily an exercise of epistemic agency. As Medina explains, “Resistance is not simply something that happens to us, but it is fundamentally something we do (or fail to do) and for which we have to take

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<sup>33</sup> Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 169.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

responsibility.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, as to how this can be imbibed by the philosophical institution in its delivery of its threefold social function must be the central point of critical reflection about the nature of philosophising and who are empowered or oppressed by it.

#### IV. The Responsibility for Justice of the Philosophical Institution

When as a philosopher, one is confronted with the limitations of philosophising, it is difficult to ignore the question: Is it philosophy that must be re-examined every time, or must it be the kinds of expectations and responsibilities ascribed to philosophy that must be re-evaluated? Within the context of social philosophy, the task is even larger, because it is not only thinking that must be re-evaluated and disturbed, but also existing political and economic conditions. The question of whether it is possible at all to provide a way to introduce an interruption to these structures, is a question that philosophers must commit themselves to answering—such is the social responsibility of philosophy.

Alcoff, in her criticism of philosophy as an epistemology of ignorance, provides a staunch attack against simple multi-perspectivism. She argues that,

... one cannot simply add women and stir as a way to introduce scholarship and research on women into the academy .... Just so, one cannot simply add non-Western philosophy or topics such as race and colonialism to the existing field of philosophy, its canon and curriculum, without subverting the mainstream periodization, the existing canon, even questioning what is meant by ‘philosophy.’<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore,

Eurocentric theory is going to be called out, and worse, put in context as a limited, partial, often delusional perspective, and not in any sense the underlying key to the riddle or the mainspring of critical and liberatory philosophy.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Alcoff, “Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an epistemology of ignorance,” 399.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

Alcoff explains that “it is not that the origin of an idea is all-determinative, but that we should stop assuming it has no effect without explanation.”<sup>40</sup> Philosophy, if it sustains its Euro-, ego-, phallo-, and logo- centrism, risks misnaming particulars as universals.<sup>41</sup> To simply provide space for resistant epistemologies without subverting the presuppositions of traditional epistemology will be to defeat the purpose of the struggle. Recalling the threefold social function of philosophy that has been mentioned in the second section, philosophy as an institution cannot be allowed to operate under the epistemology of ignorance. If critique, theory, and practice only privilege a certain bio-geo-political group, then philosophy fails in the delivery of its social function through and through. At the same time, if such privileging and marginalization persists within the philosophical institution itself such that different identities are paralyzed rather than enabled to philosophise, then it certainly becomes a non-democratic and unjust educational institution that betrays the people. As McHugh, in reference to Dewey, explains:

‘Education’ should be seen not only as a set of practices that can lovingly confer tradition, but also as practices that confer habits of privilege, experiences of marginalization, ways of viewing our own and others’ bodies, practices that sediment social relationships and interactions, and an epistemic lens through which to experience and know the world.<sup>42</sup>

Intentionally or unintentionally reproducing epistemically unjust educational institutional structures equates to the ‘protective’ and ‘defensive’ conscious or non-conscious refusal to create conditions for the flourishing of members of the society. If philosophy is accessible only to the few, or if its fundamental epistemic assumptions are compatible with the structures that create conditions of inequality, then it has failed in its social responsibility, lost its social relevance, and is systemically committing epistemic injustice. If the philosophical institution sustains its ‘meta-insensitivity’<sup>43</sup> to how different political relationships undergirding epistemic practices construct a ‘web of oppression,’ then it frustrates its own emancipatory function.

The primary liberatory aim of the feminist critique to philosophy is to challenge philosophy’s insensitivity to its own insensitivity. It seeks to disillusion philosophical thinking from its transcendental delusion. Its agenda is epistemic, political, and ethical: the critique and grounding of

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>42</sup> McHugh, “Epistemic Communities and Institutions,” 271.

<sup>43</sup> Medina, “Insensitivity and Blindness,” Foreword to *The Epistemology of Resistance*, xi.

thinking to the principle of human flourishing. It obliges philosophy to bear the responsibility of resisting epistemic injustice by actively searching for epistemic friction, which entails listening to those whose positions contest or dispute its own, as well as being mindful of how social privileges affect philosophical deliberation. The feminist struggle in philosophy is the struggle to make philosophy democratic and empowering. It is the resistance to philosophy's dominating, authoritarian, ideologically blinding, and epistemically paralyzing unexamined presuppositions and practices.

In the context of epistemic resistance to injustice as an institutional responsibility, philosophy must become *more than* a philosophy and *more than* an institution. It must become a *just philosophical institution* that translates its epistemic virtues into institutional virtues. It must be able to empower social groups that have been systemically marginalised from contributing to the philosophical resource by virtue of their belonging to a specific gender, race, age, class, or sexuality. This empowerment must encompass a whole range of institutional support—from funding, to curricular presence, to institutional visibility, to the creation of social spaces for epistemic interaction. Philosophy as an institution must commit to being epistemically democratic, aware of the structural dimension of knowledge (including its economic and political historicity) and how social relations between identities may implicate philosophical practice. Only when philosophy is self-corrective in a democratic way can it enable epistemic agency and help create conditions for human flourishing.

*Department of History and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Baguio  
School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, Ireland*

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