

Credibility Deficit and Excess

- You enjoy a credibility excess when somebody thinks you are a better source of evidence on some subject than you actually are.

You enjoy a credibility deficit when somebody thinks you are a worse source of evidence on some subject than you actually are.

- * A GP(/family doctor)'s patients might over-estimate how much they know about a particular rare illness.
- * I might underestimate the testimony of someone who works at a philosophy on ethics, not knowing that they are a medical ethics professor.
- Excesses don't always help and deficits don't always harm:
 - * It's not good for the doctor that the patient over-estimates what he knows about the illness: he has to be super-careful in what he says.
 - * A detective could lull a suspect into a false sense of security, if he has a credibility deficit with the suspect.

Nevertheless Fricker says there is a special kind of credibility deficit which is systematically *morally bad* and arises because of the way power is distributed in society.

Power

- Power is, in some sense, the capacity control what others do.
But not all exercises of power are *active*: some are passive.
 - * Traffic warden can impose a fine and so influence someone's behaviour.
 - * Her mere presence and her ability to impose a fine can influence someone's behaviour.
- Usually when we think about power, we think about examples where one social agent (an individual/group/institution) has power over another agent.
This is *agential* power.
- But Fricker thinks there is another kind of power, *structural* power:

Consider, for instance, the case where a given social group is informally disenfranchised in the sense that, for whatever complex social reasons, they tend not to vote. No social agent or agency in particular is excluding them from the democratic process, yet they are excluded, and their exclusion marks an operation of social power. It seems in such a case that the power influencing their behaviour is so thoroughly dispersed through the social system that we should think of it as lacking a subject.

Power is exercised over a group here, but in a complex, unplanned way.

- She then defines the notion of social power:

a practically socially situated capacity to control others' actions, where this capacity may be exercised actively or passively by either by particular social agents or purely structurally.

“Socially situated” means that this power depends, at least, in part on the way society is set up.

- Sometimes one person/group etc. can have social power over another because of stereotypes about the kind of people involved:

- * For instance when Greenleaf dismisses Marge by saying "there's female intuition, and then there are facts".

This exploits the sexist stereotype that men are more reasonable than women.

Fricker calls this *identity power*.

- Question about social power:

- * Having power over someone is not the same as causing them to do something.

When I ask the cashier to cash a check, this causes them to do it; but I don't have *power* over the cashier.

- * Why think that structural power is really a form of power and not just causation?

The Central Case of Testimonial Injustice

- Fricker's main case of testimonial injustice is Tom Robinson's trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

The year is 1935, and the scene a courtroom in Maycomb County, Alabama. The defendant is a young black man named Tom Robinson. He is charged with raping a white girl, Mayella Ewell, whose family's rundown house he passes every day on his way to work, situated as it is on the outskirts of town in the borderlands that divide where whites and blacks live. It is obvious to the reader, and to any relatively unprejudiced person in the courtroom, that Tom Robinson is entirely innocent. For Atticus Finch, our politely spoken counsel for the defence, has proved beyond doubt that Robinson could not have beaten

the Ewell girl so as to cause the sort of cuts and bruises she sustained that day, since whoever gave her the beating led with his left fist, whereas Tom Robinson's left arm is disabled, having been injured in a machinery accident when he was a boy.

- Two important features about how this connects to testimony:
 - * Clearly in a situation like this, when it is Tom Robinson's word against Mayella Ewell, the jury will always take her word over his;
 - * As Fricker emphasises, there is basically *nothing* Robinson could have said that would not have incriminated him in the minds of the jurors.
- A crucial fact about the case is that the jury *really believe that he is guilty*.
 - * Because of the racist stereotypes the jurors believe, there is nothing Robinson could say that would demonstrate his innocence in their eyes. Everything will be interpreted as a sign of guilt.
- This is why it is an example of testimonial injustice: Robinson is just not able to give them evidence they will accept that he is innocent, because of the role racial stereotypes play in the juror's assessment of him.

Testimonial Injustice

- Fricker says that someone suffers testimonial injustice when they are "wronged in their capacity as a knower".

But what does this mean?
- Fricker thinks that we have to assess people for their trustworthiness when they testify. In doing this we rely on stereotypes.
 - * This does not *necessarily* lead to bad results.
 - * However, when we rely on a sexist/racist stereotype, it will usually lead to a credibility deficit for the speaker.
- This deficit that systematically arises from stereotypes is an example of identity power:
 - * You are being controlled in your actions by the way society is structured.
 - * The particular social feature that makes the control possible is the existence of racial/sexist stereotypes.
 - * Presumably it is an example of structural power rather than agential power.
- More generally, testimonial injustice happens when a social prejudice systematically makes you to have a credibility deficit in the eyes of your audience.

Sexist/racist stereotypes very often involve claims about people of the relevant group being untrustworthy or unreliable.

- * It's an injustice because social power is being used unjustly.
- * Important that the prejudices are *systematic*: very local prejudices, specific to small groups of individuals, do not give rise to testimonial injustice.
- Here's a question for you to think about: Fricker thinks that only credibility deficit and not credibility excesses can lead to testimonial injustice.
Is she right?

Testimonial Injustice and Prejudice In General

- Why is this novel? Didn't we already know that racist or sexist attitudes harm people?
- These attitudes harm people in lots of different ways: physical well-being, economic well-being, political representation...
Fricker wants to say that testimonial injustice is a different kind of harm from any of those things: it takes away their ability to transfer knowledge to other people.
- Why think this is a real harm?
 - * Fricker's thought is that, given that we are social creatures, an important part of what it is to be human is to be able to testify to another person.
 - * So testimonial injustice harms people because it undermines this important aspect of what it is to be a human.
- Another question for you to think about: who is doing the harming in cases of testimonial injustice?
 - * Clearly we want to say that the jury are doing something wrong in dismissing Tom Robinson's testimony out of hand;
 - * But because the power is structural, *they* are not the ones exercising the power here.
So how should Fricker explain why they are doing something wrong?