Preamble

Katherine Puddifoot

One of my roles as an academic philosopher in a United Kingdom institution of higher education is undergraduate admissions officer. This means that several times a year I am involved in Open Days. Students and their parents or carers are invited to our university to get information to inform their decision about whether they are going to apply to study with us or accept an offer of a place. In some of these Open Days we offer a taster of the type of teaching that we provide to undergraduates. On several occasions, I have provided a taster session of teaching on epistemic injustice. I invite students, and their parents, if they like, to think of cases where they have been disbelieved. Then I ask them to consider whether this may have been due to some aspect of their social identity: their gender, age, class, perceived racial or religious identity, and so forth. I am, many of you will recognise, getting them to begin to reflect on whether they personally have experienced epistemic injustice, specifically, what Miranda Fricker labelled testimonial injustice.[1]

The sessions go well. The students find the topic engaging. But what is often most satisfying to me is the responses of the parents, most notably, the mothers. Something happens to some of the mothers. They might begin sceptical or disinterested. Many of them have not studied philosophy before, and they might not have a good sense of what it is that their children are choosing to embark on when they apply for a philosophy course. At some point in the session though, a look creeps across many of their faces. I interpret it as the look of someone who feels like their experiences are being seen for the first time. Sometimes the look almost takes the form of panic. The panic of someone whose experiences of being dismissed – as a woman, middle-aged, sometimes from minoritized groups, and so forth – are being given recognition for the first time. The concepts of testimonial injustice, and epistemic injustice and epistemic violence more broadly, are tools to which they have not previously been exposed, which capture something profound about their experiences of being in the world.

I am proud that we give our undergraduate students the conceptual tools of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence early on in their academic careers, and their

1 See Fricker, Miranda: Epistemic Injustice. Power and the Ethics of Knowing, Oxford 2007.

lives, when they study these concepts as first year undergraduates. These conceptual tools, like many others from social and feminist philosophy, give many of us resources to frame our experiences, and to articulate them to each other, and sometimes even to those in positions of power and influence over us. I hope that the undergraduates that we teach are thereby given a form of protection against at least a small amount of the confusion and loneliness that can be experienced when one's epistemic agency is curbed, undermined, or questioned.

However, something else often happens. Something that gives me less reason for optimism. Students reaching the middle or end of their studies – in their second, third and fourth years in higher education – often use the conceptual tools provided by their beginners' epistemology course, the concepts of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence, and the concepts used to describe their various forms, to describe their experiences during their higher education. They might describe their contributions to class being dismissed; being excluded from group chats by dominant group members, which they later find contain sexist content; finding the ideas of marginalised thinkers are unduly dismissed as worthless by peers who are members of those same dominant groups. In some of the most worrying cases, they describe their experiences of being targets of sexual harassment or misconduct, and being given less credit than they are due when they report these experiences, including to the police. Perhaps the form of sexual harassment that they experience does not fit the stereotypical conception of harassment. In any case, many are not given the support that they need at a time of great vulnerability from the relevant authorities because their claim to have been harassed is not treated as credible. Depressingly, I sometimes see students begin to self-silence or truncate their testimony about their experience of harassment due to an increased sense that they will not be believed or taken seriously if they speak out.

These experiences, which I and colleagues have on a regular basis within the context of higher education, underscore the importance of the work in this volume, addressing epistemic injustice and epistemic violence in philosophy. And when I say 'addressing epistemic injustice and epistemic violence in philosophy' is crucially important, I refer to several senses of 'addressing epistemic injustice and violence in philosophy'.

Philosophical work addressing epistemic injustice and violence by honing the general theoretical concepts of epistemic injustice and violence is extremely important. The experiences of my students show how understandings of epistemic injustice and violence can be a lifeline to vulnerable individuals. My students can use these concepts to articulate their experiences to instructors and peers who are well-versed in the meaning of the terms. It is not only students in higher education that can benefit in this way. The theoretical concepts of epistemic injustice and violence can provide crucial support for the understanding and articulation of experiences of marginalised individuals from a multiple of backgrounds, and with various life

experiences – as is illustrated by the parents in my Open Day sessions, who come from a variety of backgrounds.

It is not only the experiences of individuals, however, that can be illuminated via the theoretical concepts of epistemic injustice and violence developed within philosophy. The limitations of social institutions, their policies, practices, and procedures, can also be illustrated using the philosophical tools of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence. When students experience sexual harassment, but their claims are not treated as credible by authorities they may experience being wronged as knowers due to the behaviour of individuals, but the policies, practices and procedures of the relevant authorities should also be scrutinised. They should be scrutinised to see if they are complicit in epistemic injustice or epistemic violence. Here, once again, the conceptual tools developed in philosophy can be utilised.

Once we recognise how the conceptual tools of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence can be applied to institutions, this raises the question of how well they apply to the institutions of higher education. Where students, and staff, experience disbelief or the felt tension of things being wrong – e.g. in the actions of staff or institutions, or the content of the curriculum – accompanied by the feeling of being unable to do anything about these wrongs, or marginalised individuals engage in practices of self-silencing or smothering of their testimony, the importance of addressing epistemic injustice and violence in philosophy takes on another meaning.

That this anthology encourages authors to address epistemic injustice and epistemic violence in philosophy in both these senses is greatly to its credit.

It would be a mistake to think that the primary goal of current and future work relating to epistemic injustice in philosophy is to develop and apply existing conceptions of epistemic injustice and violence, however. Epistemic injustice and epistemic violence are umbrella terms. They encapsulate a diversity of experiences and injustices. Via the process of identifying previously unacknowledged or underacknowledged examples of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence, it is possible to provide the conceptual tools to capture a greater variety of experiences of marginalisation and discrimination, and to have a positive influence on a greater range of policies and practices. As more discussions open up about epistemic injustice and epistemic violence, new testimonies emerge – including in our philosophy classes – about previously unacknowledged or underacknowledged experiences of being treated poorly as knowers: excluded, dismissed, oppressed. Sometimes the experiences described by the testimony are neatly captured by existing theoretical formulations of epistemic injustice or epistemic violence. But often there are similarities, but also important differences, between the experiences articulated and epistemic injustice and epistemic violence as described in the existing literature. The general notions of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence seem to apply, but specific formulations of these concepts do not. These testimonies show that the project of

carving conceptual space for all forms of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence therefore rightly goes on, as it does in this anthology.

Work on epistemic injustice and violence can thus be understood as giving people conceptual tools to frame their experiences of injustice and oppression, inside and outside of higher education. It carves out new intellectual space, by identifying and labelling new forms of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence. It has the potential to challenge institutional norms, including the norms of higher educational establishments. It therefore involves intellectual and conceptual revision, and the challenging of disciplinary norms. It aims to rupture existing practices and patterns of thinking. We have seen a great deal of progress in this direction from work operating within the confines of philosophy's disciplinary norms and expectations, including the work of authors like Miranda Fricker and Kristie Dotson. But because of the revisionary and discipline-challenging nature of at least some work on epistemic injustice and epistemic violence, as well as the way that it speaks to fundamental experiences of social life experienced by minority groups who may often be excluded from higher education contexts, there is an important place for work operating outside the narrow confines of disciplinary expectations about excellence.

Artists, artworks, non-academic speakers, poetry, non-standard prose – each of these, and other forms of expression, have the potential to capture experiences of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression that may be less easily captured operating within the confines of the disciplinary norms of academic philosophy. For example, where works are not confined to the objective third person perspective, perhaps posing questions rather than proposing answers, they may elicit personal experiences of injustice and oppression more effectively. Personal experiences of injustice and oppression may inform the reader's (or viewer's) understanding of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence generally. They may also elicit insights about specific forms of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence that have previously been unacknowledged or underacknowledged. All of which is to say that the nature of this volume, bringing together a diversity of approaches and perspectives on epistemic injustice and epistemic violence, places it in an excellent position to open up new discussions about epistemic injustice and violence while also presenting the challenge to institutional norms that the evidence of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence in institutions calls for.