

About the Project

An Introduction

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Activists¹ and academics² repeatedly point out that forms of e.g. racist and sexist injustice can be found at the epistemic level. Thus, the spheres of knowledge production are analyzed with regard to inherent power structures and unjust dynamics. With the publication of Brunner's work *Epistemic Violence* and the translation of Fricker's book *Epistemic Injustice. Power and the Ethics of Knowing* into more and more languages, the discourse on epistemic injustice and violence has been reignited and is being negotiated in post- and decolonial, and feminist debates.³ This book is dedicated to the special role of epistemic injustice and violence in philosophy. Philosophy often referred to as the love of wisdom has had and still has a huge influence on other sciences and our everyday lives. Not only the theories that have been produced by academic philosophy, but also the structures around the so-called ivory tower of academic philosophy have led to both emancipation and exclusion. Questions around *how* philosophy should be practiced, *who* should engage in it, and *what* philosophy should deal with are negotiable and controversial. By shedding light on the inherent unjust structures of (academic) philosophy, we hope to better understand this powerful discipline that impacts the academic landscape as well as our individual and collective ways of being.

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- 1 See e.g. Why is my curriculum white?, displacement of indigenous languages in favour of colonial languages, Vandana Shiva's critique of science etc.
 - 2 Brunner, Claudia: *Epistemische Gewalt. Wissen und Macht in der kolonialen Moderne*, Bielefeld 2020; Fricker, Miranda: *Epistemische Ungerechtigkeit. Macht und die Ethik des Wissens*, München 2023.
 - 3 See e.g. Fricker, Miranda: *Epistemic Injustice. Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford 2007; Brunner, Claudia: *Epistemic Violence. Knowledge and Power in Colonial Modernity*, Bielefeld 2020; Dotson, Kristie: *Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing*, in: *Hypatia* 26 (2011) 2, 236–257; Dhawan, Nikita: *Hegemonic Listening and Subversive Silences. Ethical-political Imperatives*, in: Lagaay, Alice/Lorber, Michael (eds.): *Destruction in the Performative*, Amsterdam/New York 2012; de Sousa Santos, Boaventura: *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide*, New York 2014; Graness, Anke/Schirilla, Nausikaa (eds.): *Epistemische Gewalt*, in: *polylog* 50 (2023) 12 and many more.

Injustice and violence related to knowledge (production)

The use of academic terms holds the inherent potential to exclude people from a conversation. That being said, this book still has barriers since many of us editors and our fellow authors use academic terms that are not salient beyond the philosophical discipline. Here is a brief introduction to the central notions of the book: Epistemic injustice and epistemic violence.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge:

Its central questions include the origin of knowledge; the place of experience in generating knowledge, and the place of reason in doing so; the relationship between knowledge and certainty, and between knowledge and the impossibility of error; the possibility of universal scepticism; and the changing forms of knowledge that arise from new conceptualizations of the world. All of these issues link with other central concerns of philosophy, such as the nature of truth and the nature of experience and meaning.⁴

The adjective “epistemic” thus points to something that is related to knowledge. For a very first understanding, we can say that epistemic injustice is an umbrella term for injustices related to knowledge and epistemic violence refers to violence resulting from power-structures that are related to knowledge. For me, the example of epistemic injustice at hand is the use of academic language as a means of exclusion. It is not the academic term itself that is unjust, but the social dynamic that – through language – determines who can participate in a conversation and who cannot.

According to Fricker, a distinction can be made between hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice – both forms of epistemic injustice.⁵ While testimonial injustice occurs when a person is not believed due to prejudice, hermeneutical injustice happens when a person cannot make sense of her own experience due to a gap in common knowledge.⁶ Brunner works with the concept of epistemic violence, which differs from Fricker’s analysis not only because of the different discipline of origin. Fricker’s theory is rooted in analytic and moral philosophy. Brunner’s thoughts sprouted within the discipline of peace studies and is now also discussed in philosophical disciplines like Intercultural Philosophy.⁷ According to Brunner,

4 Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095755106> (12/03/2024).

5 See Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

6 Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 15.

7 See e.g. Brunner, Claudia: Ungerechtigkeit, Unterdrückung oder doch Gewalt?, in: Graneß, Anke/Schirilla, Nausikaa (eds.), *Polylog* 50 (2024), 9–23.

epistemic violence is a contribution to violent social relations that are inherent in knowledge itself, in its genesis, formation, form of organization and effectiveness. [...] It is connected in many ways to its colonial past and the still present so-called underside that constitutes it and is characterized 'by numerous forms of violence.'⁸

The term *epistemicide*, coined by Sousa Santos, describes a specific form of epistemic injustice that aims to erase knowledge and knowledge systems.⁹ The discourse on epistemic injustice and violence has been shaped and advanced both by feminist and postcolonial philosophers such as Spivak and by activists outside academia.

In this anthology, we bring the terms of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence in conversation instead of separating the two concepts. We believe that both are intertwined and – especially within philosophical contexts – need to be considered simultaneously. Furthermore, we aim at broadening the terms “Epistemic Injustice” and “Epistemic Violence,” e.g. by including works on classism, art, and animal studies. We believe that it is important to delve deeper into the understanding of various forms of oppression and violence. With a better understanding of when, how, and why philosophy reproduces exclusion mechanisms we become better equipped agents for tackling these structures. Lastly, we are still convinced that the form of a publication should reflect the content. It is a project that allows space for autobiographical work, artistic work, and philosophical experiments in terms of knowledge creation.

How this book came into being

Defining a starting point means to determine where the story begins. Does this book project begin with Miranda Fricker's publication in 2007? Does it begin with Sabrina Kofahl, a former colleague of mine, who asked me whether we want to work on the topic of epistemic injustice together? Does it start with claims for justice on the streets? In the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh¹⁰ I would need to say: the project never started and it never ends – we find ourselves in a continuation without beginning or

8 Brunner: *Epistemic Violence*, 274.

9 See Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*. We took notice of the article “The walls spoke when no one else would” by Miye Nadya Tom, Catarina Laranjeiro, and Lieselotte Viane, and the vivid discussion around it, see *Sexual misconduct in Academia. Informing an Ethics of Care in the University*, Pritchard, E./Edwards, D. (eds.), New York 2023. As we will discuss later, themes around abuse in academia, denunciation, and the lack of caring institutions bothered us quite a bit during this project.

10 Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Zen-Buddhist monk, peace activist and founder of the monastery Plum Village in France, <https://plumvillage.org> (12/03/2024).

end. However, finding ourselves in the process of publishing an academic anthology, I choose to tell the story as follows.

This book project started after an international workshop at the Munich School of Philosophy in 2022. Philosophers and social scientists met in Munich to discuss the role of epistemic injustice and violence in philosophy. The workshop was organized by the Munich School of Philosophy, specifically the chair for Intercultural Social Transformation. It was a two days hybrid workshop supported by *pro philosophia e.V.* and the *Society for Women in Philosophy*. The program included academic presentations, artistic workshops, student poster sessions and a round table discussion. It was during this conference that the wish for a collaborative publication was expressed several times. After a short formation phase, we, Anupam Yadav (Pilani), Lou Thomine (Cologne), Cara-Julie Kather (Lüneburg), Barbara Schellhammer (Munich), and me, Lena Schützle (Munich), formed an editorial team, designed a Call for Abstracts, received numerous promising submissions and decided upon the final structure of the book. The quality and variety of abstracts that found their way to our desks were a huge motivation to keep on working on this topic. However, despite having all this tailwind, we faced some challenges along the way of publication.

Challenges along the way

One challenge in dealing with epistemic injustice and violence in an academic context is that we try to reflect on ourselves and our discipline within an academic system. This means that theoretical foundations, ways of doing, and unconscious notions may be unjust or violent itself. As academic philosophers, it is impossible for us to view and analyze epistemic injustice and violence in philosophy from the outside or from a neutral standpoint. Our positioning in the social structure, e.g. as cis female academics, shapes how we experience this discipline.

When we wrote the Call for Abstracts we explicitly invited scholars and non-academics to hand in creative pieces and testimonials besides the usual philosophical essay. We wrote:

Contributions of academics and nonacademics are welcome. Artistic and body-centered inputs beyond the conventional scientific framework are welcome. [...] We highly encourage different formats of contribution: [...] You are also very encouraged to talk about experiences of alienation or exclusion in academia or other institutions since we are looking for a variety of perspectives and are very open to

also critiquing academia through concepts of epistemic injustice/epistemic violence.¹¹

With this invitation we followed our conviction that in philosophy restrictions regarding the form of philosophizing produces exclusion and power imbalances. Upon the arrival of the abstracts we had to realize that things were more complicated than expected. It took us a lot of time to review, comment, and discuss submissions that deviated from the norm of an academic philosophical article. Which criteria do we apply to the creative pieces and how can we compare testimonials to each other to decide which one gets published? These questions were challenging but foreseeable. Especially those submissions, that included testimonials confronted us with unexpected challenges: how do we handle more or less direct accusations? What role do we take when asking for testimonials? Are there institutions that are legally equipped and skilled to handle such texts on epistemic injustice within academia?¹²

These questions became especially urgent when we received abstracts for testimonials from authors who wanted to write anonymously. Or, who included direct accusations towards other philosophers in their articles. As you can see in the book, those texts did not make it into our selection of articles. One reason we retreated from these articles was the premonition of legal insecurities for the authors and us. And at this point we found ourselves in exactly those power structures that we are reflecting on in our articles. Despite our distinct academic positions – some of us being PhD students, some of us professors – as editors of this anthology we were the ones to decide what gets published and who needs to look for other publication sites. Refusing testimonials from our book felt like reproducing certain forms of epistemic injustices. And it is true: we are part of the academic system that provides access to some and denies it to others. While some scholars in response to this dilemma retreat from the academic sphere more or less voluntarily, we took the path of looking at these injustices from within. And while this path can be promising because we can use the academic tools and resources, it also brings along the risk of being ignorant to inherent injustices.

As much as we wanted to be a part of disclosing injustices within academia, we also wanted to know our role. In this anthology you will find meta discussions of abuse and injustice, you will not find disclosures of actual misconduct of specific personas or institutions. From the number of testimonials or autoethnographic abstracts we received, we strongly believe that we as philosophers need more spaces in

11 Retrieved from our Cfa, <https://hfph.de/forschung/wissenschaftliche-einrichtungen/global-efragen/nachrichten/cfaepistemic> (08/03/2024).

12 See e.g. the journal *Hypatia*.

which injustices can be named and justice can be demanded. Then, the term justice is moved to the center of the discourse.¹³

How to work with this book

This book entails various perspectives from philosophers, students, and artists. Although the chapters follow a certain order, reading the first one is not a prerequisite for understanding the last article. We invite you to start with the very beginning: the art work by Anna Paßlick on the cover. What do you see in the picture? How does the person on the cover feel? Read her own interpretation just below this introduction. After that, you might want to follow our structure or skip to the article that most speaks to you.

The first part of the book aims at *Understanding and Exploring Epistemic Injustice and Epistemic Violence*. While writing the book we witness that the terms epistemic injustice and violence become more and more popular and the discourse is widely known in academic philosophy. Welcoming this development and its transformative potential for society, we also notice that it is necessary to continuously clarify terms. This is the reason why the first part starts by shedding light on epistemic injustice and violence. In Lieke Asma's article the reader can follow her thoughts on how epistemic injustice and the philosophical inquiry are related. Nicki K. Weber's article "Breathing Through the Epistemic Violence of the Unthinkable Black Experience" introduces the use of basic terms of this anthology – epistemic injustice and violence – and helps the reader to find their way into a discourse that covers complexity and mundanities simultaneously. This is followed by Tizia Rosendorfer's contribution. Rosendorfer lets the reader participate in the process of using poetry to illustrate epistemic injustice; she shares a re-written version of Goethe's poem *Rhodology*.¹⁴ The fourth contribution of this section Nela Adam and Sylvia Agbih are interviewed by Cara-Julie Kather about forum theater as an embodied practice in philosophy. The pictures you see in the book were taken by Peter Hoffmann-Schoenborn during a Forumtheater Workshop led by Adams at the Munich School of Philosophy.

The second section of the first part (1.2) focuses on epistemic injustice and violence in academic philosophy. With Lars Leeten's article the inherent classism of philosophy is brought to the center of the discussion. This is followed by Francesca

13 See e.g. works on transitional and transformative justice.

14 We are aware that Goethe's poem has been interpreted as a romantization of rape, see e.g. Bortloff, Jens: Heidenröslein – Das me-too-Gedicht Goethes (5/8/2000), <https://www.goethe-mannheim.de/Goethebrisant> (17/4/2024). We trust that Rosendorfer's way of encountering the poem and redefining its intention is a productive example of engaging with problematic content.

Greco's perspective on the history of philosophy and how it relates to epistemically unjust notions. While Leeten and Greco focus on the discipline as such, Maren Behrensen takes the human dimension into account. Behrensen discusses analogies between epistemic violence in academia (i.e. academic philosophy specifically), and spiritual abuse. These three articles aim to shed light on problematic aspects of academic philosophy and to point out hinges where philosophy bears inherent unjust structures.

In section 1.3 we aim at expanding the scope of the discourse on epistemic injustice and epistemic violence. Lou Thomine argues that we need to widen our understanding of testimonial injustice – one form of epistemic injustice – to overcome the deficiency view. Clement Mayambala draws on linguistic injustice as a specific notion of epistemic injustice. This article is of great importance since it points towards a form of injustice that we as publishers reiterate by asking for articles in English only. Cara-Julie Kather then widens the scope not only by taking Maths and its inherent power structures into account, but by doing so in forms of lists that invite the reader to reflect upon their own experiences. With Namita Herzl, the reader has the chance to get to know women thinkers and how they used asceticism as philosophical practice. With that she reflects on two of the afore-mentioned questions: *who* is doing philosophy and *how* is it practiced. This is followed by Chiara Stefanoni's article in which the author shares experiences of teaching animal resistance in the classroom. Lastly, Lucienne Spencer and Matthew Broome widen the discourse of epistemic injustice to the topic of suicide claims. As you can see, this section contains a variety of themes which go beyond the standard discourse on epistemic injustice and violence.

The second part of this book *Questioning and Reshaping: Tools to Transform Unjust and Violent Epistemic Structures* is directed towards possible futures. We were tempted to put much more articles of this kind in the book because when working on epistemic injustice and violence, the problems become so evident that the urge to transform the system of (academic) philosophy becomes omnipresent. However, we acknowledge that firstly, there is still a lot of unpacking to do before this complex problem can be solved. And secondly, that while we are situated in unjust conditions, acknowledging is important to prevent further harm.

In Section 2.1 the reader can follow the process of maneuvering positionality in philosophy. It begins with Isabela Gonçalves Dourado who offers guidance for identifying exploitative structures in academia and academic philosophy. This is followed by a personal and structural reflection of Barbara Schellhammer asking "Who am I Doing Philosophy with Indigenous Peoples?" Lena Schützle's/my article on self-compassion and epistemic injustice offers a reflection on how to deal with the epistemic injustice we and others are facing in philosophy. This section is rich with questions and humble and honest maneuvering. We welcome the reader to continue this exploration.

In the last section of the book, we gather contributions that are disruptive tools in themselves or that reflect on transformative practices. Paloma Nana and Cara-Julie Kather experiment with sharing parts of personal and academic considerations in another way to conceptualize intellect. The reader might already be familiar with the comic artist Anna Paßlick who also designed the cover of the book. In section 2.2 she illustrates the above-mentioned dilemma of searching for tools to dismantle epistemic injustice and violence with reference to Sylvia Winter. Anupam Yadav and Baiju P. Anthony recall Ambedkar's critique of sacred narratives and liberatory practices to let the reader get a taste of how philosophy can play out on the political level in society. Jelena Jeremejewa introduces the reader to Ukrainian artists who use art as a way to transmit what cannot be transmitted via language alone. Jeremejewa offers this contribution and proposes the reader to grasp notions of war and humanity that cannot be grasped with words alone.

One thing is already clear: this book is a rich collection of perspectives, standpoints, and aspects of epistemic injustice and violence. We are in the process of learning and have learned so much from each contribution. For sure, five years from now, we would highlight different aspects, rephrase certain sentences and criticize terms and practices that are now included without further notice. We are looking forward to this collective learning process that has already begun and will definitely ignite once again after publication. If you want to get to know the authors a little more, get in touch with us or share our work, please take a look at the short biographies at the end of this book.

Thank you

We thank all activists, scholars, and change makers who put their finger in the wound so that the pain becomes impossible to ignore. We thank our philosophical ancestors who paved the way for critical thinking and analysis. We thank our spiritual ancestors, families, and friends who support us doing this work.

We thank all authors of the anthology for their valuable contributions, flexibility in the working process and courage to leave the familiar path. We specially thank Peter Hoffmann-Schoenborn and Anna Paßlick for the design of the cover and Peter Hoffmann-Schoenborn's powerful pictures of the forum theatre workshop.

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We thank the organizers of the World Congress of Philosophy who accepted our offer to host a Round Table on Epistemic Injustice and Violence in Philosophy in Rome in 2024. This gives us an opportunity to meet in person for the first time and discuss questions that came up during this publication process with an international audience.

Last but not least, we thank you, the reader. We hope that we can learn together and inspire one another to shift with participative and reflective agency towards change – in academic philosophy and beyond.

Lena Schützle, Munich the 10th of April 2024

