

## A Political and Ameliorative State of Nature

Miranda Fricker

Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007) has enjoyed far more attention than the genealogies of Craig and Williams it builds on. Yet surprisingly little of that attention has been directed towards Fricker's own genealogical narrative in that book, which has left many wondering what the genealogy is supposed to add to Fricker's case. Her genealogy is clearly a pragmatic genealogy, which uncovers the practical origins of what she calls 'the virtue of testimonial justice'. We exhibit this virtue when, in assessing the credibility of those who impart information to us, we reliably correct for the influence of prejudice. The virtue of testimonial justice fills a need to fend off 'testimonial injustice', which occurs when someone's word is not given the credibility it deserves. An example of testimonial injustice is the way in which, in Anthony Minghella's screenplay for *The Talented Mr Ripley*, the wealthy businessman Herbert Greenleaf reacts to the testimony of Marge Sherwood, the fiancée of his murdered son. When Marge voices her well-founded conviction that the murderer is the eponymous Mr Ripley, Herbert Greenleaf brushes her off with the line: 'Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts' (Minghella 2000, 130).

The insight that Fricker's genealogy pursues is that prejudices such as this one exert a counter-veridical pressure which interferes with the practice of information pooling envisaged by Craig and Williams. By abstracting entirely from social categorization in their state-of-nature model, Craig and Williams ignore the ways in which, in any human community, identification with certain groups and political relations between groups are bound to exert a distorting influence on the communal practice of acquiring and sharing truths. It is as if they considered the skills involved in archery without factoring in the wind. Once we factor in the confounding influence of social categorization, Fricker argues, we come to see that a third fundamental virtue of truth—the virtue of testimonial justice—is required to maintain one's aim at the truth in the face of gusty prejudice.

Since Fricker's genealogy is a seamless continuation of the project begun by Craig and Williams, much of the material in Chapters 6 and 7 also applies to her genealogy, and rather than repeat it, I shall focus on what is specific to Fricker's genealogy. Two features in particular stand out. First, her signature move is to de-idealize her state-of-nature model just enough to introduce *social and political categorization* into it. This brings into view the practical challenges that social and

political relations between groups raise for the practice of information pooling. Second, her use of the state-of-nature model is in important respects *ameliorative* rather than explanatory. All the genealogists we considered so far reverse-engineer the points of concepts or virtues that already figure prominently among the ideas we live by. Fricker's genealogy of testimonial justice is different: it is not about a deeply familiar and ubiquitous trait whose very ubiquity calls for explanation; it is about a trait that is as yet insufficiently familiar and not ubiquitous enough. Her genealogy issues in a model of epistemic division of labour that is offered as a corrective, indicating respects in which our conceptual practices fall short of serving some of our needs as well as they could. Fricker thus goes beyond her predecessors by introducing a political dimension into her state-of-nature model and by using that model to show how we can improve our practices. In her hands, more so even than in the hands of her predecessors, genealogy is conceptual reverse-engineering in the service of ameliorative conceptual engineering.

### 8.1 Good Recipients of Information

Let me begin by giving a slightly idiosyncratic reconstruction of Fricker's genealogy and pointing out where it branches off from its predecessors. We saw in Chapter 7 how Williams moves in his genealogy from the need for an epistemic division of labour to the need for good contributors to the pool of information—people who are able and willing to acquire new information and to pass it on to others. It is at this point that Fricker parts company with Williams. The need for an epistemic division of labour, Fricker suggests, entails not only the need for good contributors to the pool of information, but also the need for *good recipients* or, as Fricker calls them, 'hearers' of information—people who are able and willing to receive information through testimony. It seems to me that the notion of a *recipient* of information should not simply be identified with the Craigean notion of an *inquirer*, since that would make inquiry in one respect much easier and in another respect much harder than it can usefully be represented as being. It would be much easier—ludicrously easy—if being an inquirer as to whether *p* were sufficient to make one a recipient of the truth as to whether *p*. But it would also be much harder if being the recipient of a piece of information required one to stand to it in the relation of an inquirer, for it is one mark of an effective system of epistemic division of labour that people can gather and preserve information as to whether *p* without necessarily being themselves in the position of inquirers as to whether *p*. The communal availability of information is greatly increased by the fact that each of us picks up more of it than we intentionally seek out.

Nevertheless, the practical demands on good recipients of information overlap to a large extent with those on inquirers, and as Craig shows, an inquirer minimally needs a concept by which to pick out good informants on a given

matter—a concept tracking indicator properties that correlate with being right as to whether *p*. Now Fricker’s guiding insight is that *being suitably sensitive* to the presence of these indicator properties is more work than it appears on Craig’s telling. There is more to it than just possessing the concept of proto-knowledge, for wielding the concept properly requires resistance to a number of confounding factors.<sup>1</sup>

These confounding factors only come into view once we de-idealize the state-of-nature model a little further and factor *social categorization* into it, thereby introducing ‘the relations of insider and outsider that human groups generate, and the relations of allegiance and enmity that naturally spring from them’ (Fricker 2007, 115). Carl Schmitt rather sinisterly said that the fundamental political relation was that between friend and enemy, and in this sense of ‘political’, we might say that Fricker gives her state-of-nature model a political dimension.<sup>2</sup> As soon as we take social categorization into account, our state-of-nature community breaks up into groups with distinct identities.

But with social categorization, we also introduce the potential for *prejudice* into our state of nature. Fricker explores in rich detail how stereotypical images of social types prejudice us and influence our epistemically charged perception of others, i.e. our perception of them *as credible* to this or that degree. Through these mechanisms, the mere fact that someone belongs to a certain group—‘ignorant outsiders, rivals out to trick one’ (Fricker 2007, 116)—can dispose us to give them either *more*, or, in the case Fricker focuses on, *less* credibility than we would otherwise have given them. This pressure towards ‘prejudicial stereotyping’ (2007, 116) poses many problems, but the one that the genealogy sheds light on is the problem it poses for the epistemic division of labour. This division cannot function well if participants are insufficiently receptive to testimony, refusing to take on board information that is offered to them. This hampers the flow of information through the epistemic community.

But equally, though Fricker does not emphasize this much, recipients of information can be overly receptive by giving informants more credibility than they deserve. Fricker acknowledges that credibility attributions can be biased in the direction of excess as well as deficit, and that in localized contexts, this can be a problem (2007, 17–21): she gives the example of a doctor who is burdened by the fact that his patients expect him to advise them on medical matters which call for more specialist training than he possesses, and of a professor who is given so much

<sup>1</sup> This is the starting point of Elgin’s (2019) critique of Craigean epistemology which we encountered in Chapter 6.

<sup>2</sup> Schmitt (1996, 26, 35). Williams (2005c, 77–8) incorporates this into a broader characterization of the political, which notably includes the idea that the political is focused on disagreement about what to do under political authority (paradigmatically, state power). But the notion of political authority, so central to Williams’s political thought and to the Hobbesian tradition it stands in, does not yet figure in Fricker’s state-of-nature model. In this sense, her state of nature is still pre-political.

benefit of the doubt by admiring colleagues that they effectively let her down by being insufficiently critical. On the whole, however, excess credibility will tend to work to the speaker's advantage, and Fricker concludes from this that we need not worry too much about it. But while the effects of excess credibility may well be net positive if we look only at the speaker, as Fricker's two examples do, there are other ways in which excess credibility might prove problematic.<sup>3</sup> Most basically, the division of epistemic labour cannot function well if recipients are overly receptive, gullibly accepting whatever is thrown their way, because this vitiates the pool of information by introducing falsehoods into it. Excess credibility also turns out to be problematic in further respects once we consider the connection—which it is very much in the spirit of Fricker's account to consider—between knowledge and power. It is a guiding idea of Fricker's book that a power deficit entrains a knowledge deficit in the sense that it leads to knowledge attributions being unjustly withheld, which in turn exacerbates the power deficit by giving one less of a say in the run of things. The flipside of this idea, however, is that to treat people as more knowledgeable than they really are is to grant them more power than they deserve. And this notably involves a loss in *freedom* on the part of the recipients who defer to the experts, a fact that becomes visible in the state-of-nature model as soon as we factor in even a primitive form of the need for freedom. Insofar as deference to experts can be reconciled with freedom at all, it will be on the back of the idea that the deference is warranted by the fact that the experts *merit* special credibility. By definition, *excess* credibility cannot be redeemed this way. Credibility excesses are thus likely to have not only epistemic costs, but also costs in freedom.

Whether we consider distortions of credibility judgements in both directions or only in the direction of deficit, however, it is clear that recipients of information need to resist prejudicial distortion—they need something that equips them 'to neutralize the impact of all sorts of prejudices endemic in the climate of testimonial exchange' (Fricker 2007, 96). A salient way of filling this need, Fricker argues, is to cultivate, alongside the proto-virtues of Accuracy and Sincerity, the proto-virtue of *Testimonial Justice*—the capitals again marking the fact that we are dealing with 'the abstracted virtue proper to the State of Nature scenario' (2007, 118). It is a virtue that can take two forms. It takes a *reflexive* form when its manifestation involves becoming aware of the likely impact of social identities—both one's own and that of the testifying party—and attempting to reverse and neutralize, through reasoning along the lines of 'Just because he's not one of us doesn't mean he's a liar/a fool' (2007, 116), any distortion in one's credibility judgements that may have been the result of prejudice. But the virtue can also take a spontaneous form when recipients of information perceive others through a

<sup>3</sup> For an influential discussion of the problem of credibility excess, see Medina (2011); see also Medina (2013, ch. 2) and Davis (2016).

‘well-trained testimonial sensibility’ (2007, 71) *from the start*, resisting rather than correcting the counter-veridical influence of social categorization. Either way, the point of the virtue of Testimonial Justice is to facilitate accurate judgements concerning the credibility of informants despite the distorting influence of prejudice (2007, 92). The virtue derives its point ultimately from the very same need for an epistemic division of labour from which Craig and Williams derive the need for the concept of proto-knowledge and the virtues of Accuracy and Sincerity. It is just that for the need for this third virtue of truth to come into view, we need to factor in, if only in its most schematic form, the fact that any epistemic division of labour will be complicated by the politics of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

## 8.2 De-Idealizing as Far as Necessary and as Little as Possible

If we juxtapose this brief reconstruction of Fricker’s genealogy of testimonial justice with the genealogies of Williams and Craig, it becomes apparent that all three genealogies highlight closely intertwined aspects of one system of epistemic division of labour, namely what has recently come to the forefront of epistemology as the institution of *testimony*.<sup>4</sup> The three genealogies complement each other, showing how the concept of knowledge, the virtues of accuracy and sincerity, and the virtue of testimonial justice all have their *raison d’être* in the fact that they are indispensable cornerstones of a system of epistemic division of labour. The three genealogists thereby work towards a comprehensive pragmatic genealogy of our epistemic practices, and in so doing, they erode the boundary between traditional philosophical epistemology that reflects a priori on our most basic epistemic concepts and the more empirically informed investigations into our actual epistemic practices pursued by social epistemology and the sociology of knowledge. Not only can we not understand our epistemic concepts in complete abstraction from contingent facts about human beings and their needs in the kinds of environment they live in, these genealogists maintain; we also cannot understand them in abstraction from the fact that human beings are *social* creatures who interact in and as groups.

It is this last line of thought that Fricker pushes further than Craig and Williams. She shows how the dynamic model of the system of epistemic division of labour can be further refined through de-idealization, i.e. by bringing the model one step closer to the complexities of our actual situation. In particular, the need for the virtue of testimonial justice only comes into view once we de-idealize our model far enough for our epistemic agents to be socially situated. As Fricker notes,

<sup>4</sup> See, *inter alia*, Kusch (2004), Gelfert (2014), and Moran (2018). Kusch (2009b), Fricker (1998, 2012, 2016a), Reynolds (2017), and Hannon (2019) develop the genealogical approach to the institution of testimony even further.

‘a philosophical framework that prescind from matters of social identity and power could never give an account’ (2007, 177) of that virtue. Much as the mature Nietzsche of the *Genealogy* finds he can improve on his predecessors by replacing their socially homogeneous models with a socially heterogeneous one (*GM*, I, §2), Fricker finds she can add to the genealogies of Craig and Williams by uncovering the practical origins of testimonial justice in social categorization and the prejudicial pressures it brings.

But why stop there with the de-idealization? Is the general methodological lesson of Fricker’s advancement over Craig and Williams not that we should de-idealize our pragmatic genealogical model as far as possible, to approximate the intricacies of our social and political reality?

It would be a mistake to conclude that we should always try to de-idealize our pragmatic genealogical model as far as possible. This would be to surrender part of the point of telling a genealogy in the first place; quite certainly, it would be to surrender part of the point of Fricker’s genealogy, for it is essential to Fricker’s purpose in telling her genealogy that the model be *as generic and idealized as possible*. Having spent a large part of her book showing why cultivating the virtue of testimonial justice would be a good thing for us given the prejudiced climate in which we live, she turns to pragmatic genealogy to situate this demand in a broader philosophical and historical space, relating it to other human needs and purposes and gaining a sense of the extent to which the need for testimonial justice depends on contingencies of our history. Her declared aim is to ‘reveal how far the virtue of testimonial justice is a fundamental epistemic virtue—that is, an epistemic virtue serving a purpose which transcends history in that it arises out of an epistemic need that is present in any human society’ (2007, 108). This is in line with her characterization of the genealogical method in an earlier piece, where she notes that ‘a good genealogical explanation . . . helps us understand to what extent features of our actual practice are necessary, and to what extent they are contingent’ (1998, 165). The species of necessity at stake in *Epistemic Injustice*, Fricker tells us (2008, 48; 2010b, 65–6; forthcoming, 9), is the *practically* necessary—not the metaphysically necessary or the ‘humanly necessary’ (Strawson 1961) that arises out of ‘human emotional nature’ (Fricker forthcoming, 9). Fricker’s genealogy appeals only to ‘basic survival needs plus some further social pressures that grow directly out of them’ (Fricker forthcoming, 9). This strengthens the genealogy by rendering it less vulnerable to empirical refutation.

Yet it also serves her aim of showing that testimonial justice is not just some twenty-first-century fetish, but is practically necessary given needs that humans have anyway. If the problem to which the virtue of testimonial justice forms a solution were as socio-historically local as that virtue itself—in particular, if testimonial injustice appeared as a problem only to someone who already valued testimonial justice as a virtue—then this practical vindication of the virtue would be too internal to have much force, much as a justification of liberalism that

rested essentially on what people need according to a liberal conception of the person would amount to little more than liberalism patting itself on the back.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Fricker's genealogy aims to show that the virtue can be practically vindicated in more external terms, as serving 'a purpose which transcends history in that it arises out of an epistemic need that is present in any human society' (2007, 108).

Given this aim, it is clear that we should de-idealize as much as we need to, but as little as we can. For it is in virtue of its abstraction from our concrete situation that the state of nature can lay claim to representing not just a predicament we happen to face given the particulars of our current situation, but one we are bound to face given some of the most general features of the human situation.

### 8.3 Pairing Genealogical Explanation with a Theory of Error

In Fricker's genealogy, the claim that the virtue of testimonial justice is practically necessary sits alongside the claim that it has in reality largely failed to be realized. In this respect, her genealogy is importantly different from the genealogies we considered in previous chapters in that it presents the virtue of testimonial justice as something that we *should* adopt, but that we have in large part *failed* to adopt. 'History', Fricker wryly remarks, 'has not yet done very much for the virtue of testimonial justice' (2007, 118). Instead of starting from the ubiquity of a conceptual practice and explaining that ubiquity in terms of the importance of the needs to which it answers—as Craig does, for example—Fricker does the reverse: going back to the most general practical origins of our epistemic concepts and virtues, she traces out the development that these would have needed to undergo rather than the development they have in fact undergone, suggesting that testimonial justice is 'something that we can and should aim for in practice' even if we are 'able to achieve it only rather patchily across different sorts of prejudice' (2007, 98–9).

There might seem to be a tension involved in maintaining both that the virtue of testimonial justice is practically necessary given universal and basic human needs and that it has in fact only patchily been achieved. If testimonial justice is practically necessary in the fundamental way Fricker suggests, why has it not materialized more consistently? Its absence might be thought to cast doubt on its alleged practical necessity, inviting much the same concern as that which Émile Faguet expressed when confronted with Rousseau's assertion that man is born free and yet is everywhere in chains: 'it would be equally reasonable to say that sheep are born carnivorous, and everywhere nibble grass' (1891, 41).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Williams (2005c, 94; 2005i, 8).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Berlin (1997, 519).

To relieve this tension, Fricker needs to buttress her genealogy with a *theory of error*, i.e. an explanation of why testimonial justice failed to become ubiquitous despite its alleged practical importance. This is an obligation not incurred by genealogies that start out from the ubiquity of a conceptual practice and seek to explain it by appealing to the practical need for such a practice together with the assumption that this need registered in the actual development of the practice. But Fricker takes the widespread *lack* of testimonial justice—and the corresponding near-ubiquity of testimonial injustice—as her starting point. She argues from the (genealogically derived) practical need for testimonial justice, together with the assumption that this need failed to register sufficiently, to the conclusion that we should do more to cultivate and promulgate testimonial justice. But why did this need fail to register sufficiently? Why has history ‘not yet done very much for the virtue of testimonial justice’ (2007, 118)?

Though she does not present it under this description, Fricker in fact provides material for a theory of error. First, she highlights the covert and protean nature of the prejudices that testimonial justice aims to eradicate: the virtue of testimonial justice is ‘bound to be hard to achieve’, she notes, ‘owing to the psychologically stealthy and historically dynamic nature of prejudice’ (2007, 98). Second, what renders the virtue of testimonial justice especially hard to achieve is its dependence on the socio-historical availability of the relevant forms of critical awareness. Gender prejudice, in Fricker’s example, can only be reliably neutralized by someone who possesses a critical consciousness of gender dynamics. ‘There are circumstances’, Fricker remarks, ‘under which the virtue *cannot* be achieved, for it is an ethically significant feature of this virtue that it displays a special sort of cultural-historical contingency’ (2007, 99). The achievability of the virtue is contingent on the availability in one’s society of critical concepts and insights that put one in a position to *know better*. The contingency is ethically relevant, according to Fricker, because one is only *culpably* at fault in failing to exhibit testimonial justice if the relevant form of critical consciousness is available (2007, 100).<sup>7</sup> If testimonial justice failed to materialize as widely as the virtue of respect for property or the concept of knowledge, then, this is because prejudices often work surreptitiously, assuming ever-shifting forms, and thriving unhindered as long as critical awareness of them is lacking. Moreover, the power of prejudice ‘is markedly increased in the transition from the State of Nature to historical society’ (2007, 120), because with greater social and political complexity comes new fuel for prejudice. And third, our reliance on prejudices in assessing testimony is partially explained by the fact that in the absence of a great deal of background information about a given speaker, we inevitably need to rely on heuristics, including notably stereotypes, in our assessments of credibility. This renders us

<sup>7</sup> But see Fricker (2016a), where, mirroring Williams’s account of moral responsibility, she allows for a form of *epistemic agent-regret* even where one is not epistemically at fault.



perpetually susceptible to mistaking a prejudiced stereotype for an empirically reliable stereotype (2007, 30).<sup>8</sup>

Owing to this tripartite theory of error, Fricker's genealogy can still be said to be genuinely explanatory of the actual state of testimonial justice: it accounts for the merely partial emergence of testimonial justice by highlighting not only pressures driving its emergence, but also pressures hindering it.

#### 8.4 Making Ameliorative Use of Pragmatic Genealogy

Although it can be seen to have an explanatory aspect once paired with a theory of error, it is the ameliorative aspect of Fricker's genealogy that makes it stand out: it is more indicative of what we should strive for than vindicatory of what we have. The pragmatic genealogies we have considered so far have focused on making sense of why we have the concepts we have rather than on (re-)engineering better concepts—in Carnapian (1950, 6) terms, they have been about why we think in terms of *fish* in the first place rather than about getting us into the scientifically fruitful habit of thinking in terms of *piscis*. This changes with Fricker, who thereby brings the pragmatic genealogical tradition into the vicinity of Sally Haslanger's work. Haslanger explicitly discusses the possibility of using genealogy for ameliorative purposes. She even gives a characterization of ameliorative genealogy that is broad enough to encompass Fricker's genealogy. An '*ameliorative genealogy*', Haslanger writes, 'undertakes to evaluate the point of having a concept or structure of concepts (along with related practices) and proposes improved resources to fulfill them' (2012a, 372).

Yet a gap between Haslanger's and Fricker's way of combining pragmatic and genealogical approaches remains. For one thing, Haslanger's genealogical approach is modelled on the rational reconstructions of Carnapian explication (2012b, 367n1), which means that while it combines an interest in how to define a given concept with a pragmatic concern for how well candidate definitions will serve our purposes, it remains primarily in the business of providing answers to Socratic 'What is X?' questions.<sup>9</sup> More significantly, the genealogies Haslanger appears to have in mind are firmly historiographical rather than state-of-nature based—closer

<sup>8</sup> An important complication, which I cannot pursue further here, is that even empirically reliable stereotypes may present problems of their own once we consider *why* they are empirically reliable, and what harm even a reliable stereotype may cause. See, e.g., Basu (2019).

<sup>9</sup> Haslanger distinguishes between a *conceptual*, a *descriptive*, and an *ameliorative* approach to 'What is X?' questions (2012b, 367). The first looks at our *intuitions* about a concept and what falls under it; the second looks at what *kinds* (if any) a concept tracks; the third inquires into the *point* of the concept. On Haslanger's view, all three approaches can be transposed into a genealogical key (2012b, 371). See Brun (2016, 2020), Dutilh Novaes (2018), and Mühlebach (2016) for discussions of Haslanger's view and its Carnapian roots.

to Foucault and Hacking than to Fricker and Hume.<sup>10</sup> On Haslanger's conception, ameliorative genealogy seeks to identify the point of a concept by considering its workings in a series of different but real historical circumstances. Despite these differences, however, both Fricker and Haslanger propose to use genealogy in order to improve our conceptual resources so as to better fulfil our critically examined needs and purposes.

The claim that Fricker's *genealogy* is ameliorative should not be confused with the claim, which is also true, that its *object*, the virtue of testimonial justice, is ameliorative or corrective. The virtue serves to counter pressures towards testimonial injustice, and this has implications for Fricker's approach: the point of testimonial justice only reveals itself against the background of an understanding of *what can go wrong* in the system of epistemic division of labour. It is by first grasping what the pressures towards failure are that one can come to see 'what counter-pressures the structure needs persistently to exert in order to stave off collapse into the negative' (Fricker 2015, 73); the 'functional forms of things need to be seen as successfully staving off or coping with endemic problems and difficulties' (Fricker 2017, 57). This is what Fricker elsewhere calls a 'failure-first approach' (2015, 73). She writes that 'a philosopher who only aimed to understand and represent epistemic practices in their most functional forms, perhaps even in some notionally ideal form, would still need to do so by looking first at what potential collapses into dysfunctionality are being perpetually staved off, and by what mechanisms' (2017, 57). The idea here is presumably not that we should identify the function of something by looking first at what—in relation to this function—would count as instances of malfunction, since this would presuppose what it is trying to show. Rather, what is being recommended is an approach akin to the one characterized at the beginning of this book: in trying to understand a conceptual practice, we begin by looking for *problems* that it might form a response to, and let our understanding of its function grow out of our understanding of these problems. But although testimonial justice is a corrective virtue, it is not the corrective nature of its object that makes the genealogy itself corrective; accuracy and sincerity both centrally involve resisting various pressures towards laziness, wishful thinking, and deception, and yet Williams's genealogy is for the most part vindicatory of what we already have rather than indicative of what we should strive for.

The ameliorative argument at the heart of Fricker's genealogy is the following: (i) if the system of epistemic division of labour that we are all committed to already in virtue of our most basic human needs is to *function well*, it needs to be free of the distorting influence of prejudice; (ii) the practices we in fact have *fall far short* of achieving this even approximately; (iii) a *salient remedy* to this problem,

<sup>10</sup> See Haslanger (2012a, 19, 369–79) and Hacking (1999, 10–14).

which we have a *pro tanto* reason to adopt already insofar as we have an interest in participating in a well-functioning epistemic division of labour, is to cultivate the virtue of testimonial justice to counteract the distorting influence of prejudice.

What this argument suggests is that a system of epistemic division of labour that was maximally efficient would also need to be maximally resistant to confounding influences, and would therefore see the virtue of testimonial justice at work everywhere and all the time, completely neutralizing the impact of prejudice (though not necessarily the impact of stereotyping). As Fricker demonstrates in the rest of her book, there are a number of reasons to want to avoid testimonial injustice—many of them more ethical than epistemic or prudential in character; but what the genealogical story in particular underlines is that there is a rationale for the virtue of testimonial justice that is baked into our epistemic division of labour already at its most basic level. This is a reason to cultivate the virtue that even people who are otherwise unmoved by the various ethical reasons to avoid testimonial injustice—people who do not care about, or stand to profit from, the harm done to the victims of testimonial injustice—could in principle recognize as a reason for them. The genealogy appeals to an uncontroversial because extremely widely shared element in the motivational set of human agents, namely the interest that all human agents have in getting at truths about their environment, and hence in participating in a well-functioning practice of information pooling. As Fricker puts it,

it could not be controversial to assume that epistemic subjects considered as such possess in their actual set of motivations some general motivation to truth, and *a fortiori* some motivation to more proximal ends which are in the service of truth (such as neutralizing prejudice in one's habits of trust, for instance)... All may agree that, in general, any epistemic subject will have a reason to get at the truth... Even the most virulent, dyed-in-the-wool sexist version of Herbert Greenleaf, possesses a motivation (to truth) from which there is a sound deliberative route to questioning his spontaneous lack of trust in Marge. (2007, 102–3)

In short, the genealogy identifies a motive for neutralizing prejudice which even the most unabashedly prejudiced person is likely to share. Being prejudiced has epistemic costs. One loses out on many truths that might be important to one, but also on other epistemic goods such as fruitful questions, suggestions, and objections.

On balance, of course, this genealogically derived insight into the epistemic costs of being prejudiced may not carry all that much weight with the prejudiced person, and I believe Fricker is under no illusion that the fear of missing out on a few truths will convert such a person into a paragon of testimonial justice. This, presumably, is why so much of the book is devoted to explicating the various other

things that are wrong with being prejudiced besides the epistemic loss it entails. Fricker is aware that to *reduce* the phenomenon of testimonial injustice to a problem of epistemic loss is *already* to be prejudiced. The persuasiveness of Fricker's case for testimonial justice stems from the cumulative force of the various reasons she works through—some weaker but widely shared, some stronger but less widely shared. Most of these reasons have no immediate connection to the genealogical story. The weightiest among them have to do with the various forms of harm incurred by those who are unjustly deprived of the credibility they deserve.

The genealogy nonetheless achieves several things that could not have been achieved simply by examining the harms done by testimonial injustice. One is that it presents testimonial injustice as an *utterly basic* form of epistemic injustice—indeed as 'being, at least genealogically speaking, the most basic of all' (Fricker 2010a, 174). This lends succour to Fricker's claim that 'the relevant category of epistemic injustice under which to gather a range of wrongful exclusions from the discursive practice of inquiry is indeed "testimonial injustice"' (2010a, 176). We shall come back to the question of what something's being basic in a genealogical story really tells us about its position within our actual practices, but for now let us note that Fricker's genealogy serves to 'establish the taxonomical propriety of gathering diverse forms of prejudicial exclusion from discursive participation under the general head of "testimonial injustice"' (2010a, 176).

Second, the genealogy provides us with a powerful integrative model through which to discern and connect the various ways in which testimonial justice does something for us. Function ascriptions are inevitably holistic, which is to say that something has a determinate function not intrinsically and in isolation from everything else, but only as part of a certain natural and social environment.<sup>11</sup> This can make it difficult to identify the various beneficial effects of something in the overwhelmingly complex environment we actually live in. It is even more difficult when we are asking what beneficial effects something we largely lack *would* have. It can therefore be helpful to *construct* a simplified state-of-nature environment that perspicuously displays the various beneficial effects of something—especially if, as in the case of testimonial justice, the function ascription operates with a novel concept, so that a firm conceptual grip on the relevant phenomena cannot be taken for granted. It is fairly obvious that testimonial justice does something for the person who is at the receiving end of it. What is less obvious is that it also does something for the individual who cultivates it and for the flow of epistemic goods in the community as a whole (which in turn tends to

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Kincaid (2020, 24). See also Hufendiek (2020, 101), who argues on this basis that, especially when functional explanations are offered to promote self-understanding rather than to facilitate precise prediction or manipulation, it makes sense to resort to the rational and interpretive modelling exemplified by state-of-nature models.

benefit its members). Neutralizing their prejudices gives individuals access to truths they would otherwise miss out on, and as the case of Herbert Greenleaf poignantly illustrates, some of these truths may be of great value to these individuals. But even where they are not, the individual's cultivation of the virtue of testimonial justice serves a function from a social point of view, because as the genealogy makes clear, testimonial justice is a key contributor to the success of collaborative inquiry—any prejudice among the members of the epistemic community is a weak spot in the system, a flaw that threatens to hamper the growth or vitiate the quality of the pool of information. The genealogical model helpfully renders these relations between prejudices, individuals, and social needs perspicuous.

A third and related feature of the genealogical model is the one familiar from Chapter 7 on Williams—that it can help us understand why testimonial justice really needs to be a *virtue* rather than a mere disposition. Fricker does not directly address this issue, but it is clear that she takes testimonial justice to be a 'virtue of truth' (Fricker 2007, 6) in something like Williams's sense. Drawing on Linda Zagzebski's (1996) account of virtue, Fricker writes that 'to qualify as possessing the virtue', a person 'would need to have a suitably entrenched general motivation to make unprejudiced credibility judgements' (2007, 93). This, by itself, does not yet tell us whether the motivation is to be instrumental or intrinsic—one might be motivated to neutralize prejudice and be reliably successful at it for purely instrumental and self-regarding reasons, driven solely by a concern to garner information that is useful to oneself. But of course, from such an instrumentalizing stance, only certain prejudices would seem worth neutralizing in the first place, and then only when doing so happened to align with one's own interests on a given occasion. As a result, all the benefits *to others* that a less selective form of testimonial justice might have carried would be lost. One might object that such selective testimonial justice is barely intelligible, since beliefs are not subject to the will in a way that would allow one to *decide*, once one became aware of the possible influence of prejudice on a given occasion, whether or not to bother neutralizing it—to become aware of a looming prejudice is *already* to question one's initial credibility judgement, and there is little room for the thought 'I'm prejudiced here, but I'll discount her testimony anyway'. But it remains the case that a voluntary effort is often involved in first bringing oneself to even consider the possible influence of prejudice on a given occasion. The purely self-regarding practitioner of testimonial justice may simply not bother to make this effort unless driven by personal interest. Critical reflection is work, and there is nothing unintelligible about the person who is content to be comfortably uncritical unless they are jerked out of their complacency by the realization that their own welfare depends on their getting it right.

Since Fricker explicitly builds on Williams's genealogy, it is therefore natural to see her account as buttressed by his genealogical explanation of why the virtues of

truth really need to be *virtues* if they are to fulfil their function. It is only if testimonial justice is valued *for its own sake*, as an expression or realization of truthfulness, that it can motivate people to neutralize prejudice even when they have otherwise no reason to do so. In line with this, Fricker notes that the aim of neutralizing prejudice is a ‘proximal’ aim which is in turn made sense of as conducive to achieving a further end, namely truth (2007, 99). And as we saw Williams maintain, to value the truth intrinsically is to value the various expressions of what he brings under the heading of truthfulness. Fricker demonstrates that an important expression of truthfulness is the neutralization of one’s prejudices. If Williams’s genealogy shows that we need to value the truth intrinsically and that this comes down to understanding truthfulness as a virtue, as a disposition worth realizing for its own sake, Fricker’s genealogy shows that this includes regarding testimonial justice as a virtue: like accuracy and sincerity, testimonial justice should be regarded as an intrinsically valuable expression or realization of truthfulness.<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, the genealogy shows us the deeper ramifications of testimonial justice and injustice, and thereby reveals the cultivation of testimonial justice to be connected, in potentially unsuspected ways, to other things that we value, such as free speech, equality, and non-domination. The neutralization of prejudice is shown to be a fundamental functional demand on any system of epistemic division of labour, and once we grasp the fundamentality of testimonial justice to human life—its basic role at the very root of a system we all have an interest in being part of—we come to see the many ways in which it ties in with other things that we value. This means that testimonial justice also derives value from other goods whose realization partly depends on the realization of testimonial justice. For example, Fricker (2013) argues that once we appreciate the fundamental practical significance of testimonial justice, we can come to recognize its connection with the capacity to make one’s voice heard and to achieve a culture of free speech; we can likewise come to recognize its connection with the capacity to contest domination and to achieve political freedom and equality (2015). Reconstructing the exact manner in which she draws these connections would take us too far afield, but the important methodological point is that the normative conclusion that we should cultivate testimonial justice is supported not just by the basic epistemic needs that demand an epistemic division of labour, but also by more local needs, such as the needs for free speech, equality, and non-domination. The genealogical model helps us to see the internal relations between the pursuit of these goods and the cultivation of testimonial justice.

Finally, perhaps the most fundamental motivation for tracing the pragmatic genealogy of the virtue of testimonial justice and connecting it with its Williamsian

<sup>12</sup> One could also imagine classifying testimonial justice as an important but easily overlooked elaboration of Williamsian ‘Accuracy’ rather than as a separate virtue of truth.

and Craigean prequels is that it vindicates social and feminist epistemology against the more classical forms of epistemology that have tended to ignore matters of social identity, power, and prejudice. Fricker's genealogy vividly reveals questions of social identity, power, and prejudice to be not just peripheral or epiphenomenal to epistemology, but to cut to its very root: even the most basic and primitive form of the concept of knowledge imaginable already requires one to negotiate the distorting influence of social categorization, and the proto-virtue of Testimonial Justice is revealed to be (along with Accuracy and Sincerity) among the absolutely basic epistemic virtues. In light of this genealogical understanding of our system of epistemic division of labour, Fricker concludes, we come to see that

what the recipient of a prejudicial credibility deficit is excluded from is the single practice that dramatizes the origin of what it is to be a knower at all. Testimonial injustice denies one access to what originally furnishes status as a knower. No wonder, then, that even relatively inconsequential testimonial injustices can carry a symbolic weight to the effect that the speaker is less than a full epistemic subject: the injustice sends the message that they are not fit for participation in the practice that originally generates the very idea of a knower. (2007, 145)

Of course, just *how much* weight this point carries will depend on how central to our epistemic practices the institution of testimony actually is, and as we saw in previous chapters, the mere fact that testimony is at least usefully *modelled as* originally central does not by itself suffice to show that it *still* is. For her part, Fricker follows Craig in thinking that the prototypical epistemic practices of the state-of-nature model also form the core of our actual practices: 'When someone is excluded from the relations of epistemic trust that are at work in a co-operative practice of pooling information, they are wrongfully excluded from participation in the practice that defines the core of the very concept of knowledge' (Fricker 2007, 145). Yet if one thinks of pragmatic genealogy as presenting us with a prototype and its actual elaboration rather than with the core of our actual practice and its additional layers, this overstates the case. It is one thing to show that testimony figures centrally at the base of a plausible model of why we came by various elements of our epistemic practices; it is quite another to show that it also figures centrally in the epistemic practices we actually have. Indeed, as Kusch (2009a, 173) highlights, the originally close connection between the concept of knowledge and testimony is *weakened* in the course of Craig's story, so that his genealogy itself suggests that testimony would in fact end up being less central than it initially was. Once Craig factors in the possibility of group actions, it becomes clear that there are contexts in which inquirers care only about whether *someone* in the group proto-knows (think of mushroom picking, where only one person needs to know which mushrooms are edible). Inquirers 'cease to care

whether the needed information is accessible to them as individuals; they are satisfied if it is accessible to someone in the group', and 'speak of protoknowledge even outside the context of testimony' (Kusch 2011, 9). As a result, the necessary connection between being a proto-knower and giving testimony is lost. Even on this dynamic model interpretation of Craig's genealogy, however, we can still conclude with Fricker that to be excluded from the system of testimony is to be excluded from the practice that 'dramatizes the origin of what it is to be a knower at all' (2007, 145).

In sum, there is plenty in Fricker's genealogy—not to speak of the non-genealogical parts of her arguments—to support the conclusion that we should do more for testimonial justice. This ameliorative conclusion is supported not just by the genealogical insight into its foundational role in the practice of information pooling, but also by the various concerns it ties in with in virtue of that foundational role. If testimonial justice is crucial to the practice of pooling information, and this practice is in turn crucial to other goods, then testimonial justice is crucial also to these other goods. It is not least by highlighting this dependence structure and channelling the normative force of seemingly unrelated concerns towards the increased cultivation of testimonial justice that the genealogy acquires its persuasive power.

From a methodological point of view, the genealogy vividly shows how much additional insight can be drawn out of a genealogical model merely by factoring in social categorization and breaking up the homogeneity of the state-of-nature community. But the genealogy's more ground-breaking contribution to the pragmatic genealogical tradition is that it shows how genealogical reverse-engineering can feed into forward-looking conceptual engineering by encouraging us to cultivate something we at least partly lack. Fricker uses the genealogical method to dig up the important function that testimonial justice *would* discharge within the system of epistemic division of labour *if* that system developed in more effective ways; she diagnoses and explains the widespread failure of the system to develop in that way and the corresponding lack of testimonial justice it entrained; and she then uses this idealized, counterfactual pragmatic genealogy as a guide to the amelioration of our practices.<sup>13</sup>

With Fricker's strategy, there are thus three ways in which conceptual reverse-engineering can feed into conceptual engineering. First, in revealing *what the point* of a conceptual practice is and *which instances* of the practice paradigmatically serve that point, one also marks out the instances in which it is *pointless* or *overreaches* itself. With a critical eye for pointfulness comes a critical eye for pointlessness, and amelioration can take the form of cultivating the pointful at the expense of the pointless. Second, in revealing the importance of the *context of*

<sup>13</sup> This 'reverse-engineering as a guide to engineering' strategy is explicitly recommended by Thomasson (2020).



*application* in giving point to a conceptual practice, one calls its *tel quel* application beyond that context into question, indicating that if the practice is to have a point in the new context, the practice must be re-engineered and adapted in such a way as to reproduce its pointfulness in the new context. The question then is what new elaboration a practice demands in order to serve the same point in a different context—a question pursued by Damian Cueni (2020), for example, when he asks how we should re-engineer our ideas about what counts as legitimate rule *within* the nation state for use *beyond* the nation state. By reverse-engineering what those ideas do for us in the domestic source context, Cueni argues, we gain a guiding sense of what forms of functionality we should seek to safeguard and recreate as we extend and adapt these ideas of legitimacy to the international target context. Third, as Fricker illustrates, one can identify the practical pressures at the root of a conceptual practice and examine how the practice *would* have developed *if those practical pressures had been given free rein*, and then use that counterfactual genealogy to guide efforts to ameliorate our practice as it actually developed. In each case, to reverse-engineer and go backwards to the practical origins of the practice can be a way of preparing and giving direction to a forward-looking amelioration of the practice. Then, as Nietzsche put it, one goes ‘backwards as everyone goes backwards who wants to take a big jump’ (BGE, §280).

Of course, this prospective exploitation of retrospective genealogical reflection also presents difficulties of its own. Nowhere are these difficulties more vividly illustrated than in the project ostensibly contemplated on occasion by Nietzsche himself, of engineering an entire new set of values *ex nihilo*.<sup>14</sup> We do not fashion our concepts out of nothing, but are bound to draw on the concepts we find ourselves with—both in fashioning new concepts and in evaluating what these concepts should look like. And even if genealogical reflection can yield a fairly specific functional outline of the kinds of ideas we have reason to adopt, there remains a question as to whether the mere recognition that one has good reason to adopt and internalize a particular virtue or value suffices actually to do so. This is not just a matter of the limitations of the individual’s capacity to change what is essentially shared and social. It is also matter of the sense-making constraint we saw Williams highlight—the constraint that for something genuinely to become a virtue or value one lives by, the virtue or value has to *make sense from the inside*, and whether or not something makes sense to us in this way is not a matter of our will, but rather ‘comes as a discovery’ (Williams 2002, 261–2). If the recommended virtue or value is to make sense, it needs to be embedded in a structure that allows it to engage our emotions and us to articulate why it matters.

Yet despite these obstacles, Fricker’s project manages to strike a balance between her ameliorative ambition and the recognition that we must work with

<sup>14</sup> See Williams (2000, 2006i) and Queloz (forthcoming-a) for critical discussions of that project.

the material we find. She does not purport to fashion a virtue *de novo*, but rather aims to strengthen and extend the reach of a virtue that we—as a community, and only *in nuce*—already have. She offers us a vindicatory explanation of why we came to have this virtue at all, and, by relating it to various goods that we already value, shows us why it is worth cultivating more broadly. This makes her ameliorative project look a lot more feasible than the more extreme Nietzschean versions of genealogically informed value engineering. The sense-making constraint is no bar to her enterprise, since, in the form of values such as truth, justice, and freedom, we already possess the material necessary to make sense of testimonial justice as a virtue. By uncovering the ramifications of testimonial justice and the way it contributes to the realization of other goods, the genealogy *shows* us that it makes sense to us as a virtue. And by tracing the virtue's practical origins to basic needs for information and cooperation, the genealogy shows us that it *makes good naturalistic sense* that testimonial justice should make sense to us as a virtue. Like the other vindicatory genealogies we encountered, Fricker's genealogy works to strengthen one's confidence in its object in several ways at once. It presents us with a series of reasons—some widely shared, some less so—to cultivate the virtue of testimonial justice; and it also works to strengthen our confidence in testimonial justice in a subtler way, namely by showing us that this virtue, for all the neologistic and technical character of Fricker's label for it, is really nothing mysterious or new-fangled: it fits seamlessly into a naturalistic picture of humans as cooperative inquirers, and the practical pressures on it to arise become visible as soon as one reflects, even in the most general terms, on the demands of cooperative inquiry in a socially heterogeneous community. Moreover, there is a performative power in the telling of such a genealogical story itself, a power that goes beyond the argumentative force of the reasons to cultivate testimonial justice which the story brings to light. The story itself increases our *receptiveness* to these reasons by dispelling our suspicions and making us comfortable with testimonial justice, assuring us that testimonial justice has a natural and rightful place in human affairs.

But there is also, finally, a performative aspect to Fricker's genealogy which it does not share with any of the other genealogies we discussed, namely that whoever hears or reads the genealogy thereby acquires a new thinking tool: the *concept* of the virtue of testimonial justice as opposed to the virtue itself. Acquiring the concept of testimonial justice renders us sensitive both to the possibility of consciously cultivating it and to its actual presence or absence in ourselves and others. Moreover, having a label by which to express and refer to that new concept further empowers us to engage with others in discerning and encouraging the cultivation of testimonial justice. Reflecting on her book in a later piece, Fricker explicitly notes that one of her chief concerns had been to forge an 'on-the-ground tool of critical understanding that was called for in everyday lived experiences of

injustice' (2017, 56). The already vast and still rapidly growing literature on testimonial justice and its cognates suggests that she has succeeded.<sup>15</sup>

For the philosophical methodologist, this holds two broader lessons. One is that the genealogical method can be used not only to strengthen or weaken our confidence in existing concepts, but also to generate and instil new concepts. The other is that an ameliorative genealogy that advocates a certain improvement in our conceptual practices also has a more immediate ameliorative effect: by telling it, one equips others to pursue the amelioration it recommends.

With this last case study in pragmatic genealogy, we have come all the way from Hume to the present day. It is time to switch back to a more purely systematic perspective to address various objections and to examine in more detail wherein the normative significance of pragmatic genealogies lies.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Anderson (2012); Berenstain (2016); Dotson (2011); Kidd and Carel (2017); Origgi (2012); Pohlhaus Jr (2014); Thomas (2018); Wanderer (2012); see also the dedicated issue of *Episteme* (Alcoff 2010; Coady 2010; Cullison 2010; Fricker 2010a; Goldberg 2010; Hookway 2010) and the essays in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (Kidd, Medina and Pohlhaus Jr 2017).