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Hermeneutical Injustice and Animal Ethics: Can Nonhuman Animals Suffer from Hermeneutical Injustice?

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Miranda Fricker (2007) explains that hermeneutical injustice occurs when an area of one's social experience is obscured from collective understanding. However, Fricker focuses only on the injustice suffered by those who cannot render intelligible their own oppression. I argue that there is another side to hermeneutical injustice that is other-oriented; an injustice that occurs when one cannot understand, to a basic extent, the oppression of others. Specifically, I discuss the hermeneutical injustice suffered by nonhuman animals made possible by objectifying concepts available in the collective hermeneutical resource.

Key Words: hermeneutical injustice, epistemology, animal ethics, virtue

INTRODUCTION

Language not only functions to name objects that allows for the communicative power of description and reference, it works also to assign value and status to subjects, consequently playing an essential role in how we make sense of our experiences in social reality. Through a diversity of concepts, we can understand ourselves and our relationship to others in multifarious ways that provide for us manners of social identification (i.e., woman, man) and, moreover, to supply capacities for understanding the kinds of things that constitute “social” experience (i.e., friendship, emasculation).

However, our collective language lacks a power that can properly capture the kinds of experiences of certain groups. A form of epistemic injustice proposed by Miranda Fricker (2007) explains that something goes morally and epistemically wrong when members of a systematically disadvantaged group have their experiences obscured from collective understanding. That is, agents are oppressed further when they cannot find an adequate concept to make sense of their experience of oppression. Put more roundly, it is a moral and epistemic injustice when there is a lacuna in the collective hermeneutical resource that does not allow socially disadvantaged agents to make sense of their subjugation.

With her focus on the inability of an agent to properly understand one's *own* oppression, Fricker (2007) misses out on a kind of injustice that is also hermeneutical in nature: the inability for an agent to properly acquire basic understanding of the oppression of *others*. While it is important that the hermeneutical resource provide concepts that allow agents to accurately understand their experiences (especially the subjugation that puts them at a disadvantage), Fricker's version of hermeneutical injustice seems not to examine the possibility of those subjugated minorities who suffer from hermeneutical injustice yet do not have the capacity for linguistic representation; Fricker misses out on the injustice suffered by nonhuman animals.¹

In this article, I will argue that Fricker's (2007) definition of hermeneutical injustice leaves open the possibility for nonhuman animals to suffer from hermeneutical marginalization. However, Fricker's primary interest, and sole focus, is directed toward an agent's inability to make sense of one's own oppression. In this sense, the type of hermeneutical injustice that Fricker discusses is *self-oriented*—an injustice that occurs when the concepts available in the hermeneutical resource are not adequate to capture the oppression that one experiences. I will argue that there is an alternative type of hermeneutical injustice that concerns the other—an *other-oriented* hermeneutical injustice. My overall aim is to argue that this type of hermeneutical injustice is something that nonhuman animals suffer from that contributes to their ongoing and pervasive oppression, and such injustice requires careful attention in order to revise the structures that permit the objectification, fragmentation, and consumption of nonhuman animals.

HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE

Traditional analytic philosophy attends to our capacity as knowers, attempting to discern under what conditions we can be attributed knowledge properly. Postmodern philosophy obsesses over the structures of power (and the power of structures) and understands human agency in the context of a constructed reality. Where analytic philosophy treats people as knowers, it forgets to place this epistemic capacity in the context of social life, and where postmodern philosophy has its eye on structure, it forgets that people, despite their sociality, are epistemic agents capable of knowing.

Attempting to bridge this divide is Miranda Fricker. In her influential work "Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing" (2007), Fricker gives a detailed analysis explaining how epistemology and ethics collide at the intersection of postmodern thought and analytic epistemology; it matters that we are both social creatures and knowers. At this intersection, two forms of *epistemic injustice* emerge: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.

Briefly, since I do not wish to dwell on this form of epistemic wrongdoing, testimonial injustice denotes a form of agential vice responsible for a deflation in the attribution of credibility to a knower owing to identity prejudice. For example, the kind of injustice that occurs when the credibility of women is deflated due to an association with inferior belief-forming methods such as "women's intuition" (Fricker, 2007, p. 14). Fricker (2007)

argues that social agents are afflicted by credibility deficits in virtue of belonging to certain social kinds.

Let's now turn to hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice denotes a structural inequality, inhibiting an agent's ability to make sense of his or her experience due to a conceptual deficiency in the collective language; one's *social experiences are "obscured from collective understanding owing to structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource"* (Fricker, 2007, p. 155). To make this clearer, take an example provided by Fricker (2007). After 8 years of working, Carmita Wood finally quit her job after being at the receiving end of sexually inappropriate and aggressive treatment from one of her male colleagues. When she went to the unemployment office, she was required to list reasons for why she had quit her job. Though she was able to reflect broadly on the sorts of bad experiences that she had, she could only write that her reasons were "personal." That is, Carmita could not find an adequate concept to *understand* her own experiences.

According to Fricker (2007), Carmita suffered from hermeneutical injustice; she suffered as a result of a lacuna in her interpretive assets that would allow her to make sense of her own experiences. In order to understand what had gone wrong, Carmita needed a conceptual innovation, the introduction of a new concept that would fill the lacuna: Carmita needed the concept of *sexual harassment*.

The locus of the epistemic-moral wrong of testimonial injustice occurs at the level of individual agents; people suffer from testimonial injustice because they are not given fair credibility assessment (Fricker, 2007, p. 17). In contrast to this, hermeneutical injustice is a structural problem (Fricker, 2007, p. 161). Members of social groups are disadvantaged by hermeneutical lacunas insofar as they cannot make intelligible their experiences, despite it being in their best interests to. For example, Carmita could not make sense of her experience of sexual harassment, though it is very much in her interests to understand the severity of this grave wrongdoing. Along with this primary harm, there are other obvious secondary harms too, all of which stifle one's ability to flourish in a social environment (i.e., joblessness, anxiety, depression, etc.).

HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE: SELF-ORIENTED AND OTHER-ORIENTED

Fricker (2007) tells us that the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice "consists in a situated hermeneutical inequality: the concrete situation is such that the subject is rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which is particularly in his or her interest to be able to render intelligible" (p. 162). In other words, "the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice concerns exclusion from the pooling of knowledge owing to structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" and "the first prejudicial exclusion is made in relation to the speaker, and second in relation to what they are trying to say and/or how they are saying it . . . prejudicial exclusion from participation in the spread of knowledge" (Fricker, 2007, p. 162).

From these statements, Fricker's (2007) intentions are reasonably clear; she seeks only to explain the injustice suffered by oppressed individuals who can't make intelligible their experiences. That is, members of disadvantaged groups suffer because they cannot participate in the spread of knowledge since they cannot make intelligible their own oppression. This kind of hermeneutical injustice I call self-oriented. It is self-oriented because it concerns one's *own* experience of one's social subjugation; it refers to one's inability to understand one's own oppression.

What is unclear about Fricker's (2007) primary interest is why this is her only concern. To get a better idea of what I mean, let's look more closely at Fricker's (2007) definition of hermeneutical injustice, which is "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (p. 155).

There is no doubt that according to this definition, hermeneutical injustice occurs when an agent cannot render intelligible his or her experience of oppression; however, the definition presented here does not preclude the possibility of those social experiences that are obscured from collective understanding yet do not concern one's ability to interpret, understand, or make intelligible one's *own* experience of oppression. That is, Fricker's (2007) definition of hermeneutical injustice applies equally well to those who are affected by the concepts available in the hermeneutical resource yet do not and cannot have the capacity for linguistic representation of such experiences.

When the concepts available in the hermeneutical resource do not represent the oppression of members of certain groups to the extent that others cannot acquire basic understanding of such oppression, then this marks a kind of hermeneutical injustice that is other-oriented. It is other-oriented insofar as it concerns an agent's inability to understand, to some basic extent, the oppression of members of disadvantaged groups (owing to structural identity prejudice).²

This kind of oppression might be familiar. Men fail to understand the oppression of women, owing to a belief based in a conceptual resource that forms certain expectations of what it means to be a "woman" (i.e., being a nurturer, an object of sexual desire, etc.). We can think of other examples too; we fail to understand, in a basic sense, the oppression of people of color, people living with disabilities, people who are older, and the like. What is evident in these examples, which I will bring out in a general sense in the next section, is that our collective language discriminates against members of these groups insofar as they are unfairly conceptually misrepresented, and hence this informs our beliefs about what are "appropriate" ways to interact with such people (i.e., men objectify women; white people treat people of color as criminals; employers do not hire people with disabilities for certain jobs).

As I have mentioned before, my interest is in the hermeneutical injustice suffered by nonhuman animals. The profound experiences of pain, anxiety, and depression of nonhuman animals in factory farms and the like are obscured from the collective understanding. They are obscured precisely because of structural identity prejudice, and our conceptual resources have reduced nonhuman animals to an improper, and gravely immoral, use

value; a Searlean imposition of function is unfairly thrust upon nonhuman animals with the terms “food,” “clothing,” and cognate terms.³

Before I go on to discuss in detail how it is that the experiences of nonhuman animals are obscured from collective understanding, and precisely how this relates to language, I want to give some explanation of how it is that the concepts available in the hermeneutical resource influence our behavior. This will require discussion of certain concepts or constructs in the social sciences.

SCHEMAS AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Sally Haslanger’s (2012; 2016) recent work on ideology and social behavior, in particular in relation to feminism, makes use of a taxonomy that I believe will help us understand the relationship between language and social domination. Hence, I will make use of (some of) the taxonomy that Haslanger employs in her work.

The first concept or construct that Haslanger (2012; 2016) makes use of is taken from the social sciences, called a *schema*. In psychology, schemas are psychological structures that enable social agents to organize and respond to information efficiently; schemas work through psychological methods of categorization and inference. According to Judith Howard (2000), schemas are usually defined by their functional roles. They are responsible for the conceptual content of our memory and the formation of expectation, and they also guide information gathering, direct our attention, and provide the basis for inferences “such as predictions, decisions, or causal attributions” (Hollander & Howard, 2000, p. 343).

In sociology and anthropology, schemas are public. According to William Sewell (1992), they are culturally shared meanings, or publicly accessible rules and social scripts.

How these two ways of understanding schemas is important. Judith Howard (1994) writes: “Social cognition explains how presumably external social structures become part of individual actors’ cognitive structures and in turn how social actors’ cognitive practice both reconstitutes and unsettles social structure” (p. 213).

In other words, publicly shared categories, social scripts, and rules are *internalized* by members of a society and used as a basis for communication and coordination that in effect reinforces social structure or else challenges it. Schemas provide the basis for social interaction. According to Zadwidski (2013), this internalization occurs through capacities for imitation, pedagogy, conformity to norms, and narrative self-regulation.

The second important concept employed by Haslanger (2012; 2016) is a *resource*. Again, this term is also used in the social sciences. William Sewell (1992) tells us that there are two types of resources, human and nonhuman:

Non-human resources are objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured, that can be used to enhance or maintain power; human resources are physical strength, dexterity knowledge, and emotional commitments that can be used to enhance or maintain power. . . . Both types of resources are media of power that are unevenly distributed. But however unequally resources may be distributed, some measure of both human and non-human resources are controlled by all members of society, no matter how destitute or oppressed. Indeed, part of what it means to conceive of human

beings as agents is to conceive of them as empowered by access to resources of one kind or another. (p. 20)

Sewell's (1992) distinction of resource types marks a difference between the possession of an internal quality, such as physical strength, and access to an external source that gives one power over others, such as a natural resource. Resources generally, according to Giddens (1979), are "the media whereby transformative capacity is employed as power in the routine course of social interaction" (p. 92). In short, resources are anything that can serve as a source of power. Something becomes a resource when its *use value* is recognized, and its usefulness is something to be managed precisely because access to it is a source of power.

This is particularly troubling when we think of nonhuman animals. While Sewell (1992) provides an optimistic end for subjugated minorities to overcome their oppression, namely by control of some resource, his positive outlook falls short of giving hope to nonhuman animals. Nonhuman animals are considered to be a resource themselves; however, they are without control of a resource that might empower them. The serious problem with this is that nonhuman animals are widely regarded to *only* have a use value, and their exploitation is a product of our "recognition" of this use value. I will have more to say on this in the later sections of this article.

The last concept that we need to understand is a *practice*. For Haslanger (2012; 2016), interdependent schemas and resources constitute a practice "when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time" (Sewell, 1992, p. 13). That is, practices depend on shared schemas, but they require individuals to enact and reenact them. Ewick and Silbey (1998) write: "Social structures, while they confront us as external and coercive, do not exist apart from our collective actions and thoughts as we apply schemas to make sense of the world and deploy resources to affect people and things" (p. 41).

According to Haslanger (2012), it is the dependence on reiterated human action that allows for revisions of both schemas and resources, making individuals potential agents for social change.

This last thought fits nicely with Judith Butler's (1989) notion of *performativity*. For Butler, it is not culture that is causally responsible for individual action; culture does not causally determine our actions to do certain things or be certain ways. Instead, culture *frames our agency*; it delimits the possible ways that one can act appropriately in a system of social relations. That is, culture provides patterns of performances that conform to certain rules or social scripts, and we enact such performances by *constrained choice* or, in our current taxonomy, *practicing schemas*.

Importantly, in the context of gender, Butler (1989) brings into disrepute the idea that gender is an identity and instead argues that there is nothing beyond the acts that supposedly *express* gender, and that such actions constitute the illusion of stable gender identity. Butler (1989) writes:

If one becomes a woman, according to Beauvoir, then one is always in the process of becoming a gender. . . In this sense, then, gender is a project, a skill, an enterprise, even an industry, the aim of which is to compel the body to signify one historical idea rather

than another. . . . One does not become a gender through a free and unconstrained choice, for gender identity is governed by a set of stringent taboos, conventions, and laws. There are punishments for not doing gender right. (p. 256)

What is important about Butler's (1989) words is that the normative force of culture is powerful only in virtue of compulsion for reiteration or citation and that we hold the potential for disruption of such reiteration. Agency, which is constitutive of gender, is a source of transformative potential:

Gender is a mundane drama specifically corporeal, constrained by possibilities specifically cultural. But this constraint is not without some moments of contingency, of possibility, of unprecedented cultural confusion that will invariably work to destroy the illusion that gender constraint is a dictate from nature. (Butler, 1989, p. 261)

How this relates to the subjugation of nonhuman animals is important. While "meat-eating" may not be a matter of *identity*, it is certainly a pattern of performances in the guise of natural inclination—a pattern of satisfying social expectations of what constitutes an appropriate meal. That is, our ability to choose what we eat is greatly constrained by schemas involving normative expectations about food and consumption. However, if the act of eating meat, or wearing leather, or participating in any other way that exploits nonhuman animals is a matter of stifling reiteration, then there is hope to revise the structures responsible for the abhorrent ways that nonhuman animals are treated.

SCHEMAS AND THE HERMENEUTICAL RESOURCE: LANGUAGE AND NONHUMAN ANIMALS

As we saw, schemas are both public and private structures responsible for efficient interpretation and organization of information that undergird our various social behavioral dispositions; schemas provide the basis for successful social interaction. How do schemas relate to the concepts in the hermeneutical resource? Some, if not all, concepts in the hermeneutical resource can be understood as schemas; concepts in the hermeneutical resource function as a means of interpreting information as social phenomena.⁴ For example, take the concept "dog." A dog is not itself a resource; dogs do not have a use value in and of themselves. However, the information stored in the concept "dog" can be fed through different schemas that will interpret "dog" as having particular useful functional properties, and moreover to affiliate dogs with certain institutions. Depending on the schema, a dog can function either as a companion animal or as food; either as belonging to the institution of animal "ownership" or cuisine. In Western cultures, dogs are primarily taken to be companion animals, and typically our moral senses kick in and fill us with disgust when people treat dogs as objects for consumption.

In this example, schemas are responsible for how social agents interpret information; specifically, how the concept "dog" can be interpreted as having various use values, whether good or bad. This is precisely how the concepts in the hermeneutical resource function. Our hermeneutical capacities concern a social agent's ability to make sense of

the world in one way or another.⁵ Schemas allow us to understand things as resources (i.e., as having a use value), or in an alternative formulation, concepts in the hermeneutical resource function as interpretative tools to understand information as being social phenomena. This “understanding” influences our social practices. That is, social agents will act only in accordance with the way that they interpret the world, for it is this interpretation that constitutes appropriate ways of behaving (i.e., one won’t eat dogs because one believes that dogs are not food). Practices reiterate norms that regiment our schemas; practices solidify the concepts available in the hermeneutical resource.

According to Butler (1989), the contingent aspect of social behavior opens the possibility for conceptual revision so long as our reiterative practices come to a halt. For William Sewall (1992), however, this might only be possible if oppressed agents have access to a resource that empowers them. Disconcertingly, this spells trouble for nonhuman animals. Though they are (unjustly) a resource themselves, they lack even access to their own bodies. So, what can we do to ensure their liberation?

First, it is important to discuss how language and the social domination of nonhuman animals relate to each other. There is no better explication of this relationship than in the work of Carol J. Adams (1990), who identifies the structural cause of the subjugation of nonhuman animals with the same structural cause of the subjugation of women, namely patriarchal commitments to dominance. For Adams, the locus of the injustice suffered by nonhuman animals is that they are made absent in reality, in our language, and in our metaphors. This is what Adams (1990) calls the “absent referent”:

Animals in name and body are made absent *as animals* for meat to exist. Animals’ lives precede and enable the existence of meat. If animals are alive they cannot be meat. Thus a dead body replaces the live animal. Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food. (p. 21)

In other words, nonhuman animals are made absent in both life and language. We rename dead bodies as “meat,” from subjects who are dead to objects that have use value, before we participate in consumption. Further, we cloud the term “meat” with gastronomic language (i.e., beef, pork, etc.) to create an air of mystery “so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine” (Adams, 1990, p. 21).

Adams (1990) explains that language serves as a mask, and we fail to acknowledge the important qualities of nonhuman animals since our language is human-centered, and subsequently our moral capacities are severely delimited because we lack concepts to fully understand the moral makeup of nonhuman animals. That is, our language objectifies nonhuman animals; we refer to cows, chickens, and pigs as “its” and transform their existence into food through linguistic processes that match physical processes: As an animal’s skin is stripped away in factories, so too are its moral properties abraded through the use of objectifying language.⁶

Adams (1990) argues that “language can make animals absent from discussion of meat because the acts of slaughtering and butchering have already rendered the animal

absent through death and dismemberment” (p. 52). By means of language, we endow to nonhuman animals names that match what we have enacted on their bodies. “When an animal is called a ‘meat-bearing animal’ we effect a misnomer, as though the meat is not the animal herself, as though the meat can be separated from the animal and the animal would remain” (Adams, 1990, p. 52).

In essence, meat disguises our transgressions. It does not allow us to get too close to our immorality so that we can remain oppressors without the burden of knowing that we are oppressing. All of this is made possible through language. The dismemberment of nonhuman animals is shrouded by mystery when we use terms affiliated with food and not terms denoting death. And this contributes to the perpetuation of an abhorrent system. If our actions are influenced by schemas that constrain our choice, and schemas are the conceptual resources that we use to understand ourselves and others, all of which is accessible only through language, then our behavior is a product of a system that allows us to turn a blind eye to the blood shed by innocent beings in order to maintain the consumption of meat with the benefit of not knowing that what we consume are dead bodies.

HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE AND NONHUMAN ANIMALS

Apart from the injustice suffered by nonhuman animals at the hands of those who cause profound pain and suffering, I believe that the language involved in the description of dead bodies is a hermeneutical injustice. It is not the kind of injustice that Fricker (2007) discusses; it does not concern an agent’s inability to render intelligible one’s own experience of oppression—it is not a self-oriented hermeneutical injustice. Instead, it is an other-oriented hermeneutical injustice. Nonhuman animals have their experiences obscured from collective understanding because the schemas responsible for our understanding of nonhuman animals objectify them in a way that make it difficult, if not impossible, for us to comprehend the basic oppression that they are subject to. Moreover, the hermeneutical injustice suffered by nonhuman animals is, in part, causally responsible for the reiteration of immoral practices. We cannot help but see nonhuman animals as a resource, because that’s what our schemas allow us to see; nonhuman animals are reduced to a use value in the context of consumption. Nonhuman animals are perceived to be only as valuable as the legs they bear for food, the skin they shed for clothes, and the milk they pour for thirst.

This marks the primary harm of other-oriented hermeneutical injustice. As with Fricker (2007), I believe that such an injustice occurs when a “collective hermeneutical gap impinges so as to significantly disadvantage some group and not another, so that the way in which the collective impoverishment plays out in practice is effectively discriminatory” (p. 162). Unlike Fricker, I believe that the primary harm of other-oriented hermeneutical injustice is not a matter of one’s ability to spread knowledge. It is an epistemic-moral harm that does not allow agents to properly understand the basic oppression that certain groups are subject to, which in effect contributes to the perpetuation of the oppression of such disadvantaged groups, and hence an epistemic gap continues to plague those already suffering from structural inequality. In short, our epistemic shortfall

means that we will continue to treat nonhuman animals poorly because we cannot grasp entirely their moral properties that have been disoriented by our concepts.

The problem is furthered in our Orwellian world because language itself is oppressed. Oppressed in the sense that it is being underutilized and cannot reach fully its expressive power. To reach this power would mean the capacity for the oppressed to scrutinize those who benefit from the existing collective understanding. But, there is an immense effort to secure a language, through social enforcement and correction, which only permits one to embrace and internalize one's own oppression and to be blind to the oppression of others. Herein lies the great tragedy of the social world; not only are a great many of us oppressed, we do not have the capacity to see our oppression clearly. And this is the point of hermeneutical injustice; we lack concepts in the hermeneutical resource to make intelligible the oppression pervasive in the social world. Or, as Dale Spender (1980) summarizes with precision, "There is not always encouragement and acceptance for those who try to introduce meanings for which there is no conceptual space in the social order" (p. 82).

HERMENEUTICAL OPPRESSION AND HOPE FOR LIBERATION

Earlier we discussed in passing ways that the structure of a culture might be subject to revision. Judith Butler (1989) argued that there are moments of contingency that provide opportunity to rethink and to revise the kind of concepts employed in our language that influences our behavior for better or worse. And today we can see those possibilities being utilized; by no means is our world in a state where it fully accepts the diversity of identities, but it certainly has become more accommodating of the variety of ways that people see themselves, and this is obvious in language use (i.e., terms such as "trans," "non-binary," "non-conforming," "gender-fluid," "people of color," etc., are becoming increasingly more popular as labels of identification). What we are seeing is a hermeneutical revolution; people are starting to take a critical eye to the structures of inequality and providing for themselves ways of navigating their experiences through the introduction of new concepts.

But, as William Sewell (1992) pointed out, this seems only possible because humans have access to resources that provides a means of empowerment. Humans have language, and language is a powerful resource. As we have seen, concepts (schemas) have a significant influence on our behavior, and structural revision is possible if inclusive and accurate concepts make their way into the public language that then can become internalized in the psychological structures of social agents. Without access to such forms of empowerment, how will nonhuman animals, those who are not capable of influencing the collective language, change the way that people relate to them? Better yet, how will they overcome the extremely nefarious oppression that they are subject to?

The short answer is that they can't. Nonhuman animals do not have social power; they cannot impose functions, they cannot change norms, and they cannot converse to sway the minds of those who wish to eat them. However, it seems an odd expectation that empowerment and liberation must be the complete burden of the oppressed. In fact, they're not. The burden of emancipation is shared and should be relative to the capacity of the subjugated group.

For Fricker (2007), self-oriented hermeneutical injustice can be overcome by the cultivation of virtue; in particular hermeneutical *justice* (p. 172). Like Aristotelian virtue ethics, in which the morally virtuous agent “needs a finely honed, moral, perceptual capacity, which is noninferential, uncodifiable, intrinsically motivating, and intrinsically reason giving” (Langton, 2010, p. 461), Fricker argues that these features apply similarly to epistemically virtuous agents; in fact, according to Fricker, to be morally virtuous is to be epistemically virtuous.

In response to testimonial injustice, an agent should seek to exercise virtues of being a receptive hearer, alert to the likely impact of prejudice and stereotype on one’s credibility judgements, able to correct for this by focusing on the attention on positive features, creating a perceptual “gestalt switch” whereby, for example, an apparently less credible woman politician will be heard as she really is. (Langton, 2010, p. 461)

However, Fricker (2007) argues that remedying hermeneutical injustice requires something different. What should be expected of epistemic-moral agents is that they cultivate virtues that produce heightened hermeneutical sensitivity. The aim, of course, is to be aware of, and to correct for, hermeneutical wrongdoings that put members of society at a disadvantage. Examples of this virtue might include “patiently waiting to hear someone out, giving credit, [and] working with a default assumption that they may, despite appearances, be saying something in principle intelligent” (Langton, 2010, p. 461). However, the examples listed here do not apply to nonhuman animals; we cannot converse with a cow and hope that our prejudice doesn’t get in the way. So what can we do?

As has been discussed throughout the article, nonhuman animals are severely burdened and are a group that (arguably) lacks the most social power. Hence, our effort to overcome such oppression needs to lie on the collective itself, since it is the collective that garners the power to relieve oppression, suppression, and coercion. Together, we should liberate nonhuman animals by liberating our language; we should not engage in language that promotes and reiterates the objectification of nonhuman animals, we should not regiment the hermeneutical resource to exclude proper understanding of their suffering, and we should not make exceptions to our behavior that makes permissible consumption in any form. Overcoming hermeneutical oppression requires us to liberate our words, to reach fully its expressive capacity, and to track truthfully the oppression of everyone.

Optimistically, and in line with Fricker (2007), the way that our words can be liberated in order to dispel other-oriented hermeneutical injustice is a matter of virtue. What virtue in particular? One that Thomas Aquinas, following Tully, calls *observantia*—the virtue of acknowledging someone’s dignity. Aquinas writes: “It is by *observantia* to that those who excel in some kind of dignity (*homines aliqua dignitate antecedentes*) are treated with dignity (*dignantur*) through worship and honour” (*Summa* II-II, q. 102, a.2, sed contra, as cited in McCabe, 1964).

Observantia is a virtue of justice: “It properly observes a person’s status or dignity, and so pays the person the respect that is his or her due” (Jones, 2015, p. 90). What is particularly important about *observantia* is that it is properly epistemic and properly moral;

it directly concerns our hermeneutical sensitivity and the understanding, recognition, and respect of others. It advises us through our perceptual and moral faculties to pay attention to the fundamental qualities that give an existent its value. Importantly, though it is hermeneutic, it doesn't concern the virtues stated by Fricker (2007). Observantia does not demand that we converse rightly, or that one pay proper credence to subjugated populations, but instead invites us only to consider, truthfully, the dignity of others.

The point that I wish to bring out is that the dignity that observantia implores us to recognize can only be appropriately realized through language. Language is what numbs our moral sensibilities. As Adams (1990) showed us, language makes absent meaningful life in order that we can engage with dead bodies through consumption. Through language, it is possible to see the world less colorful than it actually is. Hence, we must alter our concepts or schemas in order to properly realize observantia, since only through language is it possible to make apparent what has previously made absent.⁷ That is, if our language respects its referent, then so will we. Through virtue, it is possible to liberate nonhuman animals.

CONCLUSION

Hermeneutical injustice comes in two forms. The first is promoted and defended by Miranda Fricker (2007); it is a type of hermeneutical injustice that I have called self-oriented. This type of injustice occurs when an agent cannot make intelligible one's own oppression owing to structural identity prejudice that obscures one's experience from the collective understanding. The second is promoted and defended in this article; it is a type that I call other-oriented. An other-oriented hermeneutical injustice occurs when the hermeneutical resource lacks concepts that allow us to have basic understanding of the oppression of others. Importantly, this lack of understanding becomes seriously unjust when the conceptual resource influences peoples' behavior that contributes to the oppression of already marginalized groups. I have claimed that nonhuman animals suffer from this kind of gross epistemic and moral injustice, and moreover that they lack access to a resource (language) that could empower them to overcome their oppression, and further to convince the broader community that they have more than a use value of consumption. Hence, it is up to the people. I have argued that we should take control of our language and become the guardians of collective understanding. Importantly, I have suggested that we need to exercise observantia; we need to acknowledge the dignity of others. We should all be responsible for the maintenance and development of our language and be careful not to participate in language that contributes to the subjugation of oppressed groups, including nonhuman animals.

Notes

1. I acknowledge that there are others, besides nonhuman animals, who might suffer from this kind of injustice. For example, those with severe disabilities.
2. I want to make it as clear as possible that I am not saying that the oppression of others can be *fully* understood, but simply that the oppression of others can be understood in a basic

sense. I believe that this is especially important if we wish to challenge the structures that make possible this oppression.

3. The form of Searle's (1995) imposition of function to determine institutional facts is "X counts as Y in context C" (p. 43). Hence, we might say that our language imposes a function on animals as roughly something like this: "Cow" counts as "food" in the context of a meat-eating ideology, or *carnism*.

4. It is not clear to me whether *all* concepts in the hermeneutical resources are schemas; however, at least some of them are, and importantly, there are many that are indeed schemas that influence our behavior in ways for better or worse.

5. Importantly, an agent's ability to understand the oppression that he or she or others are subject to.

6. For example, we might use terms such as "white meats" or "red meats" instead of literal phrases such as dead pig flesh or butchered cow.

7. For example, we should revise our gastronomic language that hides the fact that we are consuming dead flesh. Instead of "beef," we should acknowledge that it is a dead cow. By doing this, we have a chance of peeling away our moral callouses that have been made by the corruption of language that makes invisible grave wrongdoings.

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