

Adjust Both: Adjusting Credibility Excesses for Epistemic Justice

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ABSTRACT

Epistemologists and those involved in feminist philosophy have expanded philosophical analyses of epistemic injustices and its subparts over the last decade. In doing so, such authors have thoroughly discussed the role of credibility deficits and the harms they cause for those receiving the deficits. In this literature, however, credibility excesses have not received as much attention owing to their tendency to be socially advantageous for those receiving them. In this paper, I show that epistemic justice relies in part on taking these excesses into account. More specifically, I illustrate how adjusting only credibility deficits leads to a two-fold problem. On the one hand, it leads to an epistemic harm insofar as not taking the excesses into account can cause us to draw the wrong conclusion from furnished testimonies. If one person's testimonial excess is still greater than another's corrected deficit in a certain way, then the person with the excess will be favored over the other person even once the deficit is corrected. On the other hand, it can also lead to a moral harm that wrongs the person who received the eventually corrected deficit in their capacity as a knower. It does so in instances when it undermines the person's self-trust. As such, if we are willing to adjust credibility deficits up in the project of epistemic justice we also have to be willing to adjust credibility excesses down in at least some cases.

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(General audience)

Think of a time when someone did not believe you. For some persons holding historically marginalized identities, it is a fairly common occurrence to not be believed just because one is, or is perceived to be a woman, a person of color, queer, and immigrant etc. In philosophy, epistemologists have discussed these testimonial deficits and furnished solutions that call for adjusting such deficits up in the project of justice. However, testimonial deficits are not the only instances when a person may receive a non-proportional amount of credibility. For other persons holding historically majoritized identities, it may also be fairly common to be believed *just because* one holds or is perceived to hold an identity such as man, white, straight, etc. The presence of credibility excesses is not as discussed in philosophical literature and what, exactly, we ought to do about these excesses is an open question. In this paper, I argue that adjusting credibility deficits up is not sufficient for reaching a just state if or when we leave the excesses unadjusted in certain circumstances. While adjusting the credibility deficits up is part of the picture, we also have to be willing to adjust the credibility excesses down in at least some cases.

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1 Introduction

In this paper I examine the role of adjusting credibility excesses and argue that epistemic justice can require adjusting excesses down just as it typically requires adjusting deficits up. In the last decade, epistemologists and those involved in feminist philosophy have expanded philosophical analyses of both epistemic injustice and more specifically testimonial injustices.¹ These are injustices in which a person is wronged in “a capacity essential to human value” and, in the case of testimonial injustices, due to a negative identity prejudice on the part of the hearer.² Within this literature, authors have thoroughly discussed the role of credibility deficits and the harms they cause for those receiving the deficits. However, very little literature has addressed the possible role of credibility excesses in instances of testimonial injustice. The primary exception is José Medina and those who subsequently cite, and usually only cite, passages from his 2011 paper ‘The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary’ or 2013 book *The Epistemology of Resistance* when discussing credibility excesses. This paper examines the leading philosophical discussions of credibility deficits, the lesser emphasized scholarship by Medina concerning the excesses, and argues specifically that if we are willing to adjust credibility deficits *up* in the project of epistemic justice we also have to be willing to adjust credibility excesses *down*.

In doing so I argue, *pace* Miranda Fricker, that credibility deficits and excesses can be interactive even if or when they are independent. *Pace* Medina, I locate the injustice of credibility excesses not with the person receiving the excess as I do not see it as primarily a concern about the instantiation of a character vice for the person receiving the excess. Rather, I see the injustice as instantiated by both epistemic and, plausibly, moral problems. It is an epistemic problem in that we reach an incorrect all-things-considered judgment. It would also be a moral problem if those excesses lead to a harm against another person even if the initial deficit that person received has been adjusted up. In locating it as a dual problem, I defend what I call ADJUST BOTH which is a possible way of accounting for the dual harms instantiated by the credibility excesses though I leave it an open question as to whether there are alternative views that could accomplish the same end result. This proposal, ADJUST BOTH, is the view that we not only have to adjust credibility deficits *up* but would also have to adjust credibility excesses *down* in order to reach a just relation among knowers in which a) knowers’ testimonies are given the weight they ought to be given independently of other testimonies and b) in which we do not reach decisions by comparing incorrectly weighted testimonies. While ADJUST BOTH represents a relatively small contribution to the extant epistemic injustice literature, it is a contribution that matters insofar as it allows us to reach the correct conclusion in cases that other approaches would get wrong and highlights an under-discussed element of testimonial justice that warrants further discussion.

¹ These authors include Fricker (1999, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2013) and Dotson (2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2014). Preceding Fricker and Dotson, women of color scholars such as hooks (1992), Collins (2000), Lorde (1984), and Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) also discussed what we now call “epistemic injustice”. See fn.7 in McKinnon (2016) for a more encompassing list of early scholars whom we tend to be less familiar with.

² Fricker (2007), p. 5, p. 44. See McKinnon (2016) for an overview and discussion of recent developments in epistemic injustice literature.

2 Fricker's View

In this section, I do two things. First, in §2.1, I explain Fricker's views about credibility excesses, credibility deficits, and testimonial justice. Second, in §2.2, I first lay out the court case from *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960). Then, I apply Fricker's account of testimonial justice to illustrate that her approach is insufficient for reaching the correct outcome in the *To Kill A Mockingbird* court case; that is, a conclusion free of a certain kind of moral wrong and problematic epistemic outcome.

2.1 The View

In "Epistemic Injustice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing" (2003), Fricker says "[testimonial] injustice occurs when prejudice on the part of the hearer leads to the speaker receiving *less credibility* than he or she deserves".³ That is, due to an identity prejudice a hearer grants a *credibility deficit* to a speaker. For example, if a flight attendant asks if there is a doctor on board and then does not believe someone is a doctor *only because* they are a woman, that would be an instance of testimonial injustice due to a credibility deficit owing to a negative identity prejudice.⁴

It is also possible to grant speakers credibility excesses. For consistency, let us construe *credibility excesses* as instances when prejudice on the part of the hearer leads to the speaker receiving *more credibility* than they deserve. For example, if I believe someone is more knowledgeable about physics just because they are a man that would be an instance of credibility excess due to a positive identity prejudice.

While Fricker delineates credibility deficits as instances of testimonial injustice, she does not view credibility excesses in the same way. Rather, she says "The primary characterization of testimonial injustice...remains such that it is a matter of credibility deficit and not credibility excess".⁵ Even though she grants that, perhaps, *cumulatively* credibility excess could harm the recipient of the excess in an analogous fashion to those of credibility deficits and lead to a "malformed epistemic character," a character vice if you will, these cases are rare and not representative of the typical cases of credibility excesses since "none of [the excesses] wrongs [the recipient of the credibility excess] sufficiently in itself".⁶ In defending these assertions, Fricker assumes a non-distributive view of credibility and an independence view of excesses and deficits.⁷ Specifically, she says:

"...credibility is not a good that belongs with the distributive model of justice. Unlike those goods that are fruitfully dealt with along distributive lines...there is no puzzle about the fair distribution of credibility, for credibility is a concept that wears its proper distribution on its sleeve...Those goods best suited to the

³ Fricker (2003), p. 154. (emphasis mine)

⁴ See 'Flight attendant to black female doctor: 'We're looking for actual physicians'' for more information regarding a similar case.

⁵ Fricker (2007), p.21.

⁶ Ibid., pp.19-21.

⁷ She notes that if credibility were distributive then credibility excesses could more easily count as instances of testimonial injustice since, in the cases of excesses, "someone has got more than his fair share of a good" (p.19) But she denies that it is distributive and as such has an additional reason to discount the import of credibility excesses.

distributive model are so suited principally because they are finite and at least potentially in short supply...By contrast, credibility is not generally finite in this way, and so there is no analogous competitive demand to invite the distributive treatment.”⁸

The main take away is that credibility does not meet the necessary conditions for a distributive good in that it is not a finite good or a scarce resource that we must allocate according to a rule of equal distribution.⁹

Fricker also believes in an independence view. By this I mean that, first, Fricker rejects the idea that there must be a credibility excess for there to be a credibility deficit. On her view, someone can grant a credibility deficit about β without granting someone else a credibility excess about β (and vice versa). Second, as Medina points out, on Fricker’s view “giving a particular degree of credibility affects not at all my other attributions of credibility to other speakers”.¹⁰ On this view, the fact that I grant Sam a credibility excess about β has no bearing on whether, or why, I grant Sally a credibility deficit about β .

Fricker’s understanding of credibility excesses and credibility deficits contributes to her positive thesis about testimonial justice. Fricker says the following about adjustments to (what I call) “credibility differentials”:

ADJUST UP—“[t]he guiding ideal is to neutralize any negative impact of prejudice in one’s credibility judgments by compensating upwards to reach the degree of credibility that would have been given were it not for the prejudice.”¹¹

This approach to testimonial justice corrects for negative identity prejudices that lead to credibility deficits. The hearer who exhibits this virtue, in Fricker’s framing, habitually has a “reflexive critical awareness”¹² that allows them to realize and correct those instances when they deflate a speaker’s testimony.¹³ Given her earlier commitments, unsurprisingly ADJUST UP does not address credibility excesses. However, one of my claims, which I show below, is that letting credibility excesses go unadjusted can contribute both an epistemic problem, in that we reach an incorrect all-things-considered judgment, and could constitute a moral wrong. I try to motivate this moral element by looking at a several conditions for being a moral wrong, seeing how these conditions could be present in at least some instances of credibility excesses, and by motivating reasons for thinking that, in those cases, the excesses lead to a harm against a person who received a corrected deficit. I return to this after showing how using ADJUST UP does not allow us to reach the correct conclusion; that is, one free of a certain kind of wrong indicated above.

⁸ Fricker (2007), pp.19-20.

⁹ See Medina (2013), pp. 62-63 for a more in depth discussion about why it is not a distributive good.

¹⁰ Medina (2013), p.62.

¹¹ Fricker (2007), pp. 91-92.

¹² Ibid., p.92.

¹³ See McKinnon (2017) p.5 for a similar approach.

2.2 A Case Example

Consider

Mockingbird— A member of the jury is in the deliberation room after listening to testimonies from Mr.Ewell and Tom Robinson. They are trying to decide whose testimony to believe and whether or not to find the defendant, Tom Robinson, guilty. During the trial, Mr.Ewell testified that he found his daughter, Mayella, beaten, bloodied, and assaulted by Tom Robinson. Tom testified that he did not assault Mayella but, rather, was kissed by Mayella and then ran when Mr.Ewell discovered them kissing. Assuming the jury member has some biases, what would they have to do in order to be just in interpreting the testimonies and to vote correctly on Tom’s guilt or innocence?

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we know the trial ends with a guilty verdict for Tom Robinson even with robust evidence of his innocence. Here, however, let us assume that a not-guilty verdict, or vote, is still on the table, that the juror in Mockingbird knows that they tend to devalue the testimony of black men and, moreover, is able to compensate upwards to reach the level of credibility that would have been present if it were not for the operative influence of an identity prejudice. This would be in keeping with Fricker’s thesis. However, as I show below it does not guarantee that the juror reaches the correct conclusion concerning whether to vote guilty or not guilty for Tom Robinson and that this can lead to an epistemic injustice for Tom.

Let us assume that we could know the correct testimonial weights to give the speakers. For the sake of simplicity, let us call such ascriptions “credibility points” or CPTs for short. With this in mind, we can diagram the testimonial weights and shifts in weights with the following chart:

Speaker	Correct Testimonial Weights	Testimonial Weights Due to Bias	Testimonial Weights With ADJUST UP ¹⁴ (end state)
Tom Robinson	+30cpts	+20cpts	+30cpts
Mr. Ewell	+10cpts	+35cpts	+35cpt
Judgment	Not Guilty	Guilty	Guilty

In this scenario, the second column represents the correct testimonial weights. If these weights were to apply to the reasoning of jury members, a juror would believe Tom over Mr.Ewell and vote not guilty. However, due to biases the testimonial weights change to the ascriptions in the third column and, if left uncorrected, would indicate that the juror would believe Mr.Ewell over Tom and vote guilty. Knowing that they are biased against Tom Robinson, the juror corrects for the credibility deficit to the weights indicated in the forth column. This represents the “end state” and ultimately the juror predictably votes guilty. Although the juror accounts for and corrects the credibility deficit as necessitated by ADJUST UP, Fricker’s account is not sufficient for reaching the correct conclusion since it incorporates an insufficient adjustment that fails to take biases

¹⁴ Let’s assume that, taken independently of the Mr.Ewell’s testimony, the juror does indeed afford Tom Robinson’s testimony the proper level of credibility and is able to correct for their bias. I am not making claims here about *how* the juror might go about adjusting for the biases. I am just assuming that it is possible. For a more in depth discussion about implicit biases and how to adjust for them see Holroyd (2012).

beyond deficits into account and leads to a credibility differential in the end state.¹⁵ This is the epistemic concern.

Before I move on to discuss a way of parsing the moral concern, a quick note about the end state. This end state, as I am using it, is limited to epistemic evidence at hand and is not necessarily related to big “T” truth. For example, let us say that I am listening to two physicists, Sam and Alex, talk about quantum entanglement. I have no experiences with physics so I defer to Sam and Alex but notice that they are saying different things about the same phenomenon. Sam says that α is the case while Alex says it is β . By various metrics, Sam appears more qualified in the field than Alex since they have a PhD, have taught courses for years, published papers, etc. while Alex is a first year student and new to the discipline. In weighing the evidence at hand, it seems that I would be justified in believing Sam instead of Alex and my end state of belief would reflect this. However, it turns out that they are both wrong and the answer would actually be θ . In this case there is a mismatch between my end state belief of α concerning quantum physics and the truth of θ but I was justified within the constraints of the case in deferring and believing Alex over Sam. While they were both wrong, that is a different concern and separate from the end state within the scenario.

The moral problem, however, is a bit more difficult to parse. For Fricker, the moral harm is that “any epistemic injustice wrongs someone in their capacity as a subject of knowledge, and thus in a capacity essential to human value”¹⁶ and later on she notes that there is a harm of this sort if a person is “undermine[d] [in their] general status as an epistemic subject”¹⁷. However, her view is restricted to accounting for credibility deficits and the onus is on me to show that it is applicable to instances when there is a person no longer receiving a deficit but not correcting for the excesses of another can still lead to a moral harm for the person with the (now corrected) deficit, etc.

One model that could serve to illustrate a moral type of harm would be the framework of social justice espoused by Iris Marion Young in her 1990 book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. In the book, Young furnishes an account of social justice that accounts for dignity, self-respect, and recognition, among other things, and frames failures to instantiate the realizability of those elements, especially those that are the results of systemic constraints, as a failure of justice.¹⁸ Concerning the elements of recognition and self-respect, we can understand these as elements of self-trust and the moral harm as an undermining of that self-trust. That is, we can imagine that this case can lead to a “[distortion] in the economy of credibility”²⁰ for Tom Robinson when his reliability is not confirmed and his pleas of innocence are not “confirmed by...being seconded by trusted figures”²¹. These could undermine his capacity as a knower especially if these incidents are not one-off instances of prejudice and occur systemically. This is

¹⁵ If this is correct then McKinnon’s 2017 account also doesn’t work. McKinnon’s account relies on an ADJUST UP approach. As such, it doesn’t work because the problem is *not* just that the listener fails to give adequate epistemic weight to those holding historically marginalized identities (as is usually the case in instances of epistemic injustice of the testimonial sort); they can grant adequate epistemic weight and yet fail to adjust credibility excesses such that the adjustment for the deflation fails to overcome the excess.

¹⁶ Fricker (2007), p.5

¹⁷ Ibid., p.135.

¹⁸ Young (1990), p.39, p.41, and especially Young’s discussion of marginalization on pp.53- 55 where she discusses the relational dependency of recognition and interaction.

²⁰ Jones (2012), p.238.

²¹ Ibid., p.245.

not to say that these conditions are going to be present in every instance of an uncorrected credibility excess. However, for those cases where this condition is met there would be a moral harm in addition to an epistemic harm. In the next section, I will unpack this point and clarify my use of “end state”.

3 Medina's Critique of Fricker and a Critique of Medina

In this section I do two things. In §3.1, I explain Medina's criticisms of Fricker and examine Medina's account of credibility excesses and their relationship to credibility deficits to set up the foundations for my own view. In §3.2, I note why I find Medina's response to Fricker to be incomplete and where our views begin to come apart. I then highlight two things about credibility assessments that I use for my positive thesis. First, that credibility assessments are non-distributive nature. Second, that they are interactive in the sense that we compare testimonies and the credibility assessments of those testimonies when drawing conclusions, making recommendations for action given credibility differentials, etc.

3.1 Medina's Criticisms of Fricker

In his 2011 article 'The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice' and his 2013 book *The Epistemology of Ignorance*, Medina explicitly disagrees with Fricker on two matters. First, he contends that Fricker gives an insufficient treatment of credibility excesses. Second, he also argues that there can be a relationship between credibility excesses and deficits even while he agrees with Fricker that we are not talking about a distributive model of credibility.

To the first point, Medina notes that Fricker downplays the possibility of credibility excesses contributing to the acquisition of epistemic vices. Even though she briefly acknowledges that those experiencing a credibility excess may "develop such an epistemic arrogance that a range of epistemic virtues are put out of the credibility denier's reach, rendering him closed-minded, dogmatic, blithely impervious to criticism, and so on"²² she does not note that these can be extended over time and meet similar conditions she proposes for credibility deficits and testimonial injustice.²³ With this criticism, it is clear that Medina frames credibility excesses in terms of virtue—namely that it leads to vice for the person with the excess-- just as Fricker frames testimonial justice in terms of virtue. This is a point of tension between our views that I will discuss later.

To the second point, Medina disagrees with Fricker's analysis of the relationship between the credibility excesses and deficits. While he agrees credibility is not a limited resource that is distributive in nature, he nevertheless argues that there *is* a relationship between the excesses and deficits. Specifically, he argues two things. First, that there is a *proportionality* in the interactions among excesses and deficits and, second, that we compare and contrast excesses and deficits when we make credibility assessments.²⁴ By proportionality, he means that we ought to give credibility ascriptions that are in proportion to the "epistemic credentials" of the speakers.²⁵ Not doing so, in his view, is a wrong *to the speaker* and can lead to a "spoil[ed] epistemic character" in the case of credibility excesses.²⁶ As to the comparative nature, Medina means that speakers are judged to be more credible or less credible, more or less worthy of epistemic trust, in *contrast* to other speakers who are judged to be more or less credible.²⁷ These are the main criticisms

²² Fricker (2007), p. 20.

²³ Medina (2013), pp.59-60 and Medina (2011), pp. 16-17.

²⁴ Medina (2013), pp.61-63 and Medina (2011), pp. 19-21.

²⁵ Medina (2013), p.61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.88.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.63.

Medina has for Fricker. While I am sympathetic with his conclusions that credibility excesses matter, I think that ultimately his analysis gets the “why” wrong and I explain this next.

3.2 Some Criticisms of Medina

I share with Fricker and Medina the understanding that credibility assessments are non-distributive. Likewise, I assume that there can be credibility excesses and credibility deficits that are independent of one another in the sense that strict proportionality of credibility and excess does not appear a requisite condition in some, if not many cases. For example, if I grant Sam a credibility excess about β because Sam is a man, and would independently have granted Sam that excess absent additional interlocutors, and I grant Sally a credibility deficit about β because she is a woman, and would independently have granted Sally that deficit absent additional interlocutors, then those are independent credibility excesses and deficits. However, I side with Medina on the interrelatedness of the excesses and deficits. To return to the above example, the excess and deficits may be interrelated in the sense that I would reach an end state judgment by comparing and contrasting the credibility ascriptions I independently granted when deciding what course of action to take regarding β . Due to the interrelatedness and comparative nature of credibility excesses and deficits, I argue that we should not reach Fricker’s conclusion regarding the irrelevancy of credibility excess to achieving a just system of knowers even when we reject a distributive model of credibility. That said, I take an approach that differs with Medina about the wrong of credibility excesses.

In my view, the wrong is not primarily that they constitute an epistemic injustice for those receiving the credibility excess, though I agree that that is a possibility. Rather, the injustice of credibility excesses first in the relationships among the excess and deficit themselves and how such excesses can ultimately prevent us from reaching correct end state.²⁸ This is the epistemic harm. Second, in certain circumstances there could be an undermining of a person’s self-trust and a distortion in the credibility they are able to grant to themselves when they are non-confirmed by their interlocutors. While Medina is right about excesses mattering, they do not matter just because not addressing the excess could lead to a character vice. In at least some cases, credibility excess would have to be corrected since not correcting excesses, especially in those instances when there is an outcome that depends on how independent testimonies were weighted and then compared or contrasted, can lead to credibility differentials. The outcome of these differentials, we have seen, can be outcomes such as the wrong conclusions about whether or not a person is guilty. These outcomes can also be the undermining of a person’s self-trust in at least some cases. As such, the correction of excesses is independent of any bad or epistemic ill they may entail for the recipient of the excess and Medina’s account is missing a crucial element. This element, I argue, is to explicitly adjust for credibility excesses when making credibility judgments. I explain this more in §4.

²⁸ I find the views espoused by Frye (1983), and later expanded upon by Bailey (1998), to be more in-line with my understanding of the excesses and deficits. Although I don’t address this in the paper proper, I also think that Medina’s, and Fricker’s, accounts of excesses miss an opportunity to make claims on those receiving the excess to *use* that excess to make or initiate positive changes. Specifically, to make or initiate positive changes that benefit those who are not heard due to credibility deficits. This is in keeping with liberatory frameworks as espoused by Lorde (1984) and Dussel’s (1985) notion of *habodah* but, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this paper.

4 A Solution and Upshot

In §2.3 I applied Fricker’s ADJUST UP and showed that it does not lead to the correct conclusions in cases like Mockingbird. In part, it does not reach the correct conclusion since it does not account for comparisons of credibility excesses and deficits that lead to credibility differentials in what I called the “end state”. In this section I summarize where my view differs from Fricker and Medina, furnish a possible solution, and use it in a case example.

4.1 Differences in Views

This “end state” account highlights, in part, where my analysis continues to differ from both Fricker’s and Medina’s. Similar to Jones’ (2002) “final assessment of credibility,” the “end state” account shows, via a simplistic calculative approach, the interaction among the credibility deficit and credibility excess in Mockingbird and the all-things-considered judgment that is a result of the relationship between the deficit and excess. Although this all-things-considered judgment operates with respect to the deficit and excess, it operates independently of the individual credibility judgments. Specifically, it does not consider each respective assessment of credibility when determining whether or not the end state is just; that is, free of the wrong at issue. Rather, it looks at the relationship, and contrast, between various credibility judgments and how we reach the all-things-considered judgment using that comparison.

On the one hand, my analysis comes apart from Fricker’s view. It does so by including adjusting a credibility excess in addition to adjusting a credibility deficit. On the other hand, it also comes apart from Medina’s view in at least two ways. First, on this view the deficits and excesses do not have to influence or interact with one another at all in order for an all-things-considered adjustment to take place. Second, the problem of credibility excesses is not just that they lead to character vices, that is habitual patterns of credibility denial leading to unjust outcomes or to epistemic bads for the person receiving the excess. Rather, the problem is that the excesses contribute to an unjust end state and, given the comparative nature of excesses and deficits, contribute to wrong all-things-considered judgments, and, in some cases, the undermining of self-trust.. In order to account for such comparisons in credibility judgments and reach the correct all–things-considered judgments, I propose we *adjust both*.

4.2 A Solution

ADJUST BOTH: the guiding ideal is to neutralize both negative and positive³⁰ impacts of prejudice in one’s credibility judgments by compensating upwards *and downwards* to reach the degree of credibility that would have been given were it not for prejudices.

ADJUST BOTH is an emended ADJUST UP insofar as it accounts for credibility deficits *and* credibility excesses. In accounting for both the negative and positive biases that contribute to deficits and excesses, ADJUST BOTH allows hearers who are passing credibility judgments to

³⁰ This is related to the idea of “positive” stereotypes such as folks of (East) Asian decent being good at math, tall people being good at Basketball, women being compassionate, men being “more logical”, etc. It is currently accepted that even “positive” stereotypes can have a negative impact on those associated with the stereotype. For implicit discussions about positive stereotypes in philosophy see Saul (2013) and Hasslanger (2008).

reach what I call a “just relation among knowers” in a variety of situations. Namely a relation in which a) knowers’ testimonies are given the weight they ought to be given independently of other testimonies and b) in which we do not reach decisions by comparing incorrectly weighted testimonies. To see this, let us return to Mockingbird and compare the ADJUST BOTH approach and the ADJUST UP approach. Following ADJUST UP we had the following representation of the adjustments and end state:

Speaker	Correct Testimonial Weights	Testimonial Weights Due to Bias	Testimonial Weights With ADJUST UP (end state)
Tom Robinson	+30cpts	+20cpts	+30cpts
Mr.Ewell	+10cpts	+35cpts	+35cpt
Judgment	Not Guilty	Guilty	Guilty

In contrast, under ADJUST BOTH we would have the following representation of adjustments and end state:

Speaker	Correct Testimonial Weights	Testimonial Weights Due to Bias	Testimonial Weights With CTI (end state)
Tom Robinson	+30cpts	+20cpts	+30cpts
Mr.Ewell	+10cpts	+35cpts	+10cpt
Judgment	Not Guilty	Guilty	Not Guilty

Unlike the adjustment under ADJUST UP, the juror would correct for both the credibility deficit against Tom Robinson and the credibility excess for Mr.Ewell and, in doing so, find Tom Robinson not guilty. Likewise, audience members and third parties are not positioned to fail to identify the speaker as a knower in virtue of the outcome of the case nor is Tom likely to have his reliability in self-trust undermined since he is *affirmed* and seconded by persons who should be trusted figures. This is the correct outcome in the court case and an outcome we were unable to reach with Fricker’s corrective.

4.3 An Upshot

One upshot of ADJUST BOTH is that it can correct for excesses and deficits that are independent of one another *and* excesses and deficits that are dependent in some fashion or other. As Medina notes in his interpretation of the trial from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the credibility excess granted to the white witnesses contributes to the credibility deficit given to Tom Robinson.³¹ This is an example of a connected deficit and excess. However, there are other cases in which deficits and excesses operate independently even though they contribute to credibility differentials in the all-things considered judgment. An example of this is Sam and Sally credibility judgments about β from §3.2. This would be an example of an independent credibility deficit and credibility excess. In both cases, ADJUST BOTH requires that we adjust the credibility judgments to their correct level. Specifically, that corrected credibility judgment should reflect the credibility a person is owed, that is be proportionate to their credibility to use Medina’s terms, independent of other credibility assessments.

If excesses and deficits are comparative in end states and lead to credibility differentials, then it is not enough to boost credibility deficits up; we must also be willing to reduce credibility excesses in at least some cases. This meets the requirements for testimonial justice insofar as it incorporates aspects of correcting for, and neutralizing, elements of prejudice within the context of credibility judgments. It is, of course, not without potential problems.

5 Complications and Common Concerns

One objection concerns implementation; we may be worried that the adjustments in credibility assessments found in ADJUST BOTH are not something we, as humans, are able to do. After all, it may be that we do not have direct control over our biases, we wouldn't be able to use a ADJUST BOTH approach consistently in day-to-day interactions, etc. While these are live concerns, and psychological phenomena such as the "rebound effect"³⁵ indicate that we ought to take such concerns seriously, they are concerns that Medina, Fricker, and others who say we ought to correct for credibility deficits share. In defense of our views, there are ways to indirectly address and combat implicit biases. Such approaches include the formation of implementation intentions³⁶ and as such there are at least in-direct, long term approaches that appear to work for addressing negative prejudicial biases, such as those that ADJUST UP corrects for. If they work for credibility deficits, they may also work for adjusting credibility excesses.

Another objection could be that we are unfairly punishing those who have, through no fault of their own, received a credibility excess. This objection is more specific to my approach than to Fricker's or Medina's. Here, the thought may be that we are being "reversely prejudiced" against those who should not be blamed for their excess and that reducing that excess is a type of discrimination. However, I believe this is misguided. As noted in §2.1, the end state credibility judgments are ultimately *comparative*. While they involve credibility judgments that can be independent of one another, the end state credibility judgment looks at the excesses and deficits as they stand with respect to one another. Furthermore, it seems misguided to even grant that adjusting for a credibility excess is unjust to the person holding the excess.

In order for the adjustment of a credibility excess to constitute an injustice, the person holding the excess would have to have a right to that excess. However, this is odd. If a person receives a credibility excess due to an identity, for example by being a white man, there does not appear to be any merit to granting that excess.³⁷ In fact, the excesses seem arbitrary at best.

An additional concern I have is that this line of argument would have to take the current system of deficits and excesses as constituting an already just system. In order for discounting, reducing, and adjusting credibility excesses to count as unjust, the current allotment of excesses and deficits would already have to be just. Given the pervasiveness of biases in our current systems, such an assumption is all but untenable; the fact that women, for example, historically receive credibility deficits points to the system being unjust. As such, there is little reason to think that the current status quo constitutes a just system or that anyone has a *prima facie* right to a credibility excess within that system.

³⁵ See Galinsky et alia (2000), Macrae et alia (1994), and Monteith et alia (1998) for deeper discussions of the rebound effect. Holroyd (2012) gives a good overview.

³⁶ See Holroyd (2012) pp.287=288 for an overview of implementation intentions as they relate to implicit biases. For in depth discussion see Gollwitzer (2005) and Webb (2007).

³⁷ This is related to what Pohlhaus Jr. (2012) calls *willful hermeneutical ignorance* insofar as an unwillingness to call into question and adjust credibility excesses illustrates an ignorance of the hermeneutical and structural injustices at play in the current system.

6 Conclusion and Future Work

In this paper, I examined Fricker’s approach for reaching a just relations among knowers. In doing so, I showed that her approach was insufficient for reaching that end state. While ADJUST UP accounts for credibility deficits, it leaves credibility excesses at play and can lead to epistemic and, in some cases, moral problems. The interrelated nature between the deficits and excesses in all-things-considered judgments allows for an unjust end state, an epistemic harm, even when there is no deficit owing to ADJUST UP and can lead to the undermining of self-trust. The corrective I propose, ADJUST BOTH, allows for this adjustment to be made and for the credibility judgments to be proportionate across the board in addition to reaching a just end state that incorporates both epistemic and moral elements. As such, the ADJUST BOTH stands as a better corrective than Fricker’s account in at least some cases such as the case of Tom Robinson. In addition to the corrective power of ADJUST BOTH, it is possible that this proposal can aid in our understanding of gaslighting and how credibility excesses, either with respect to ourselves or to third parties who are in absentia, can be at play when passing credibility judgments.

In brief, “Gaslighting” takes its name from the 1944 film called *Gaslight* and, in recent philosophical literature by McKinnon, Abramson (2014), and implicitly in Ruiz (2014), is framed as a type of epistemic injustice. It counts as a type of epistemic injustice in the sense that the testimony of the speaker is questioned, including their ability to properly or correctly perceive events, and this questioning is often a result of an identity prejudice. In her 2017 article “Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice”, McKinnon explicitly notes that it might be that we can interpret at least some cases of gaslighting as a hearer granting themselves excess credibility or that they are granting excess credibility to a third party who is in absentia.³⁸ If this turns out to be correct, then my discussion of adjusting both credibility deficits may be able to help us understand in a slightly different way what is going on in some cases of gaslighting.

Another possible application concerns cases I do not discuss in this paper. For this paper, I only was concerned with cases in which one person received a credibility deficit, another person received a credibility excess, and the deficit was corrected for but not the excess. I did not examine cases where there was no initial deficit but merely one person with an uncorrected credibility excess and another who had already been granted a proportionate level of credibility. If the epistemic and moral harms are present in the former cases, it may be that they are also present in the latter cases. If so, then a result of my view may be that credibility excesses should be adjusted down in those cases as well. That, however, is a question that will have to be addressed in later work as my current approach is, of course, far from complete and open to critique and revision. But, if taken seriously ADJUST BOTH may allow us to better understand and navigate the place of credibility excesses in the perpetuation of epistemic injustices in at least some important cases.

³⁸ McKinnon (2017) p. 137 and especially fn.13 where she discusses Medina (2011).

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