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Knowledge and Trust

What We Can Learn From the Debates About Epistemic Injustice

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Knowledge and Trust: What We Can Learn From the Debates About Epistemic Injustice

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Abstract. My aim in this paper is to make the debates about epistemic injustice fruitful for an analysis of trust in the knowledge of others. Epistemic trust is understood here in a broad sense: not only as trust in scientific knowledge or expert knowledge, but also as trust in implicit, positioned and experience-based knowledge. Using insights from discussions of epistemic injustice, I argue for three interrelated theses:
1. Questions of epistemic trust and trustworthiness cannot be answered with reference to individual virtue alone; rather, they have a structural component.
2. The rationality of epistemic trust must be analyzed against the background of social structures and social relations of domination.
3. Epistemic trust is (also) a political phenomenon and epistemically just relations depend on political transformation processes that promote equality.

Keywords. trust, knowledge, epistemic trust, epistemic (in)justice, social epistemology

Introduction

Trust and knowledge stand in a complex relationship to each other.[1] Broadly speaking, trust presupposes a form of belief and thus justified trust requires a justified belief. Therefore, being able to trust another person is based on a certain amount of knowledge if trust is not to be "blind" but justified. However, this knowledge must also limited in a way because trust presupposes that the other person's motivations and perspective are not fully epistemically transparent for the trustor. In this respect, trust is a phenomenon characterized by conditions of uncertainty. The precarious interplay and fragile balance of trust and knowledge is explored in Richard Wagner's opera "Lohengrin" (1850) in the relationship between the eponymous protagonist and Elsa von Brabant. Lohengrin, an otherworldly, messianic savior figure rescues Elsa in a "trial by combat" (lit. "battle of God"—*Gotteskampf*) from being convicted for the false accusation of having killed her brother Gottfried. As a condition for his act of redemption, which is then sealed by marriage, Lohengrin formulates a prohibition: Elsa must not ask him about his name and his origin. Starting from this prohibition of questions, a conflict arises between the two, because Lohengrin and Elsa have different understandings of what knowledge Elsa's trust should be based on. Lohengrin demands that Elsa trust him "without fear and horror" and considers his act of rescue and his trust in Elsa's innocence to be sufficient reason: "Greatest of trusts, oh, Elsa, I have shown thee, When I believ'd thee true from ev'ry stain!" (Wagner 1890: Act Three, Scene Two) Elsa, on the other hand, demands a stronger epistemic basis for her marriage alliance and wants information from Lohengrin about his identity as proof of his trust in her: "Oh, make me glad with thy reliance; Humble me not that bend so low! Ne'er shalt thou rue thy dear affiance—Him that I love, oh. Let me know!" (Wagner 1890: Act Three, Scene Two) For her, the possibility of trust is tied to knowing who her partner is in the first place.

In essence, their debate is about the following: What basis of knowledge does (justified) trust require, to what extent does the sharing of knowledge—in this case about one's own identity—constitute itself an act of trust, and where does trust become "blind" and the demand for it unjustified because of missing knowledge? The struggle between Lohengrin and Elsa over the epistemic grounding of trust is interesting mainly because their relationship is embedded in a specific context that co-determines their respective reasons and perspectives. Wagner's Lohengrin myth, set in an early medieval historical environment, clearly exhibits patriarchal and Christological traits. Elsa, as a "weak" and "needy" woman, is in this setting not entitled

1 Thanks to Chiara Destri and Lukas Sparenborg for their helpful comments.

to violate the male savior figure's prohibition of questions, and her reasons are reinterpreted against the backdrop of a misogynistic cultural setting as curiosity. Therefore, in the logic of the plot, she makes herself guilty and provokes the catastrophe by being disobedient, by insisting on a minimum of knowledge in order to be able to justify her trust. In addition, whether Lohengrin's belief in Elsa's innocence can really be said to be trust must be questioned, given that, as an otherworldly being, he knows perfectly well that Elsa did not kill her brother. That he demands "blind" trust from Elsa on this very basis appears in this light to be an authoritarian and presumptuous gesture of power. The relationship between knowledge and trust and the determination of their conditional relationship are thus, as the Lohengrin saga illustrates, deeply impregnated by social positionings and the resulting dependencies and asymmetries, political circumstances, cultural role attributions, and historically conditioned norms.

In this paper, my aim is to shed light on this social-contextual conditionality and the structural dimension in the relationship between knowledge and trust. Starting from the debates on epistemic (in)justice(s), as they have emerged in the context of feminist theory and science criticism, as well as discussions on social epistemology and standpoint theory, I aim to sharpen a social philosophy perspective on the relation between trust and knowledge and the phenomenon of epistemic trust. By systematically interrogating the role of trust in the context of knowledge relations in social and political space, the contours of a critical concept of epistemic trust will emerge.

The concept of epistemic trust refers to how trust relations are influenced and shaped by knowledge or are directed toward knowledge positions. In the latter case involving trust in knowledge or knowledge bearers, the relationship between trust and knowledge becomes conceptually complicated, because here questions of knowledge acquire relevance in two respects. On the one hand, the question is how much or what kind of knowledge is required in order to be able to trust a person (or institution). On the other hand, it remains open to discussion on which conditions justified trust in the knowledge of others depends. Knowledge appears here twice, both as a basis and as an object or goal of trust. Such epistemic trust (or mistrust) has become relevant during the Covid pandemic, for example, when the expertise of scientists and virologists is doubted by parts of the population (the so-called "Querdenker" or "lateral thinkers"). However, epistemic trust or mistrust is by no means limited to expert knowledge, but also becomes important in more everyday cases involving the credibility of other people, be it testimony in court, the report of a victim of a violent crime, or a child's account of experiences of bullying at school. The questions that arise in this context are: What factors influence whether we trust the witness, victim, or child – as they all occupy knowledge positions in a broad sense? What is the role of the identity or group membership of the person involved and the stereotypes (implicitly or explicitly) harbored concerning their gender, religion, or ethnicity? And what are the implications of these credibility relations for macrostructural trust relations in a society?

In certain fields of analytic philosophy that deal with questions of testimonial credibility and its contextual conditions, the term "epistemic trust" is already clearly defined—what is meant by it is trust in the testimony of another person, "the dimension of trust that has to do with our coming to believe through reliance on other people's testimony" (Origgi 2020: 88). However, the analysis should not be limited to purely epistemological questions such as: To what extent can I trust the testimony of my counterpart, what conditions are his/her credibility subject to, and how are these conditions accessible to me? For the (often idealized) situation of a dyadic encounter between two persons, in which the trustworthiness of their utterances and the reasonableness of trust in the testimony of the other(s) are at issue, never takes place in a vacuum, but is already embedded in a historically, culturally, socially, and politically preformed context (Vogelmann 2022: 542ff.). This was made clear in the Lohengrin example cited above. These contextual social circumstances shape the way in which we (can) trust the testimony and knowledge of others and hence are essentially involved in the constitution of the trust relationship. The reasonableness of trust in an utterance or in the knowledge of the other(s) cannot therefore be determined in purely theoretical, statistical terms but is itself subject to structural distortions and power relations. If a man in a patriarchal society enjoys excessive trust based solely on his identity or, conversely, if the credibility of people of color in a racist society is doubted in principle, the supposedly rational foundation of trust relationships is itself deformed and privileges dominant social groups over others.

The discussion of questions of identity-based epistemic imbalances was largely initiated by Miranda Fricker's 2007 monograph *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Fricker 2007). In this book, Fricker argues that questions of justice and injustice concern not only the distribution of (material) goods or the justification of political power, but also of socially conditioned knowledge positions.[2] She shows that participation in the game of being a reliable knowledge partner is already shaped by social exclusions and social power relations. Epistemic injustices in the broadest sense are at work precisely when people are unjustifiably disadvantaged and devalued as subjects of knowledge because of their identity or their membership in certain marginalized groups (race, class, gender, religion or disability, for example). They denote a "wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (Fricker 2007: 1). Fricker's analysis of epistemic disadvantage as a distinct form of injustice responds not only to a missing element in debates about justice in political philosophy, but also to the failure to address questions of injustice in epistemology. Thus, Fricker's intervention can be interpreted as a seminal contribution to the development of a political epistemology

2 This does not exclude the possibility that all forms of injustice might have an epistemic component or that material, political and epistemic injustices are deeply intertwined. However, in the case of epistemic injustice, the epistemic dimension is the primary one in an analytical sense.

that describes questions of knowledge and the "efficacy of knowledge" (Vogelmann 2022) taking as its starting point a political understanding of the subject and the world, mapping the epistemological as political as well as the political as epistemological (Herzog forthcoming: 19; Vogelmann, 2022: 7). Fricker states that the entanglement of epistemic questions with questions of power—"[i]deas with a politicizing portent for how we think about our epistemic relations—ideas such as that epistemic trust might have an irrepressible connection with social power, or that social disadvantage can produce unjust epistemic disadvantage" (Fricker 2007: 2)—has so far not been sufficiently addressed in (political) philosophy. By interpreting these kinds of (implicit) epistemic hierarchies as explicitly unjust, a normative perspective is inscribed in the epistemic (in)justice debate from the outset.

The question of the ways in which epistemic trust is at play, or the determination of the relationship between knowledge and trust as it interests us in the ConTrust project (working group 4), has a more modest claim, since the concept of trust on which it is based initially remains neutral (Forst 2022: 2). Whether trust relations are productive or instead problematic because they are reactionary, ideological or oppressive depends on the context or the respective conception of trust and is not already inscribed in the concept of trust itself. Nevertheless, the socio-philosophical questioning of epistemic trust and its conditions of success can benefit substantially from the debates on epistemic (in)justice. They help us to better differentiate problematic trust relations from normatively successful ones.

This paper will explore three dimensions of how the understanding of epistemic trust can be informed by the literature on epistemic injustices. These three dimensions are the socially situated character of trust relations, the development of a critical concept of trust, and a politicization of the perspective on successful and failing trust relations:

1. First, the connection to discussions about epistemic (in)justices makes it possible to understand epistemic trust in a way that does not remain bound to the abstraction of an ideal situation, but instead focuses on the structural framing of trust relationships. Whatever perspective we take on relations of epistemic trust—whether we consider a testimonial situation between two persons, whether the focus is on a witness's testimony in court, or on the question of trust in scientific expertise in the context of the development of vaccines against the COVID-19 virus—an approach that only asks about the individual trustworthiness of the recipient of trust, and thereby leaves social power and control relations unconsidered, remains reductive (because it fails to thematize the social and societal framing of trust relations).

2. In addition, the debate about epistemic injustice allows a critical perspective on questions of trust in knowledge and others as subjects of knowledge. This makes it possible to grasp the phenomenon of trust in a differentiated way regarding its reasons. The "negative" perspective informed by how epistemic trust can be undermined by social-structural factors shows where trust can acquire a productive and integrative power and how the subjectivizing effect of the unjustified withholding of epistemic trust undermines people's relationship to themselves and the world (thereby fostering a critical understanding of epistemic trust).

3. Finally, starting from a mutual interrogation of relations of trust and of epistemic power, the paper will outline how a perspective focused on individuals and their trustworthiness, which is predominant in studies of trust in moral philosophy, can be overcome. In this way, we can transcend a purely virtue-ethical determination of trust and trustworthiness in favor of a more politically oriented view of the enabling and disabling conditions of social relationships of trust. Potentials of resistance against unjust and oppressive epistemic orders, such as José Medina outlines in terms of "epistemic resistances" and "epistemic frictions" and the accompanying conflicts of trust (Medina 2013), also become relevant here.

In the following, I will first explain the notion of epistemic trust (1) and then briefly outline the debate on epistemic injustices (2). Subsequently, I will show how the systematic insights of this debate can be made fruitful for a better understanding of relations of epistemic trust (3).

1. The Notion of Epistemic Trust

1.1 The trust component

Epistemic trust, in a broad sense, refers to trust in the information, expertise or knowledge of other actors.[3] It is motivated by the fact that knowledge always involves asymmetries of knowledge and that, since we do not have comprehensive access to knowledge, we must trust the statements and testimonies of other knowledge subjects concerning matters about which we do not have direct knowledge.

According to a four-place definition of trust proposed by Rainer Forst (Forst 2022: 4), trust relationships can be understood as follows: Subject A trusts subject/institution/process (B) in a context (C) with respect to an object of trust (D). In the case of epistemic trust, the D place of this schema is occupied by a form of knowledge. Subject A trusts subject/institution/process B insofar as they consider B to be trustworthy and their knowledge D to be credible. For a better understanding of the phenomenon of epistemic trust, both the relation between A and B must be clarified and D—i.e., the knowledge to which the trust relation applies—must be brought into sharper focus. The context C will be clarified later when I discuss the social and political conditions of successful or failing trust relations, as analyzed in the epistemic injustice debate. In this paper, I am specifically interested in interpersonal trust and therefore leave out cases where B is an institution.

Trust as an "experiential relationship" (Forst 2022: 3) presupposes certain beliefs and attitudes towards other persons or institutions and is often defined in contrast to

3 "Expertise," in contrast to the more general term "knowledge," refers to expert knowledge that is generated for the purpose of a concrete context of application, for example in the field of politics, or is at least used with a specific focus (Münkler 2020: 97).

related but different phenomena such as hope or religious faith. While hope is characterized by a moment of groundlessness or non-justifiability, as in the case of religious hope, trust has a certain rationality. When I trust someone, I have reasons or intimations for my trust. At the same time, trust also has an affective and surplus moment—I can never be entirely sure whether my trust is justified, and that is precisely why trust has an emotive side that is not exhausted by its cognitive component and escapes complete predictability.[4] If my trust is violated, this cannot be reduced to a failure of rationality alone; rather, reactions such as disappointment or a feeling of betrayal seem appropriate because, affectively speaking, I have gone out on a limb and my expectation has not been fulfilled.[5] Even if one starts from a widespread definition of trust in moral philosophy, according to which a well-meaning intention on the part of the trust recipient[6] is at the core of the definition of trust and not simply certain behavioral regularities (cf. Baier 1989: 235), the affective moment remains decisive. It points to a specifically second-personal expectation that cannot be detached from the actors involved (Darwall understands trust as a specific second-personal participant attitude, cf. Darwall 2017). Trust as a relational attitude, stance or reference is thus characterized by both a cognitive and an affective moment (this does not already commit us to an overelaborate definition; cf. Jones 1996; McLeod 2021; Medina 2013: 80).

The cognitive moment of trust refers to the—also epistemically guided—reasons on which trust as a form of belief is based and the resulting possibility of choice. Thus, trust involves a moment of decision,[7] and this could also end up being against trust if the reasons for it are not sufficiently strong (Hartmann 2015: 14). However, this decisional moment of trust is not purely epistemically defined by reasons alone, but also shaped by the social situatedness of persons and cannot be understood simply in terms of an atomic subject detached from social context (on this see 3.2).

The affective moment of trust denotes the side that is to some extent surplus compared to that of cognitive rationality.[8] In this sense, trust is a matter of a leap of faith (*Vertrauensvorschuss*) (Hartmann 2011: 31), because I can never be completely certain whether my counterpart will live up to my positively connoted expectations. Therefore, I make myself vulnerable to him/her and, as it were, hand myself over to him/her. Because of this combination of vulnerability and its conscious acceptance, Baier refers to the phenomenon of trust as "accepted vulnerability" (Baier 1986: 235).[9]

The dimension of vulnerability that has to do with the fact that I hinge on the recipient of my trust and enter a situation of affective dependency points to a *circularity* that is inherent in the phenomenon of trust. Trust must be based on certain grounds without which it would be irrational, but at the same time it also transcends these grounds and initiates an emotionally colored expectation that is not (yet) fulfilled. Whether trust turns out to be justified and well-grounded retrospectively depends not (exclusively) on external factors, but also on trust and the relation initiated by it. The relationship of trust, at least in an interpersonal interpretation, affects the trust recipient and his/her actions: "It is because the one trusted is viewed through the affective lens of trust that those who trust are—usually cheerfully, and often on the basis of the smallest evidence—willing to risk depending on the one trusted" (Jones 1996: 12). Making oneself vulnerable in relations of trust thus transforms the grounds on which that trust is based—as well as the original justifiability of the trust itself.[10] Instead of circularity, one could speak here of the *processual* character of trust that reshapes the original reasons for trusting themselves: Through a leap of faith (*Vertrauensvorschuss*) that one person makes to another (place B), something new comes into the world. Indeed, a trust relationship and an accompanying (reciprocal) commitment emerge, which may also have an effect back on the context (C) of this trust relationship. Martin Hartmann therefore addresses a "practice of trust" (*Vertrauenspraxis*), in which the reasons that can justify the trust in retrospect first emerge (Hartmann 2011: 18). This shows that trust cannot be just reduced to an "accepted vulnerability," i.e. the establishment of a hierarchical or one-sided dependency.

4 In this sense, Luhmann defines trust as a reduction of complexity (Luhmann 2014: ch. 4).

5 Referring to "reactive attitudes" in Strawson, Holton describes this as follows: "I think the difference between trust and confidence is that trust involves something like a participatory attitude towards the person you are trusting. When you trust someone with something, you rely on them to do it, and you look at that trust in a certain way: One is prepared to feel betrayal when it is disappointed, and gratitude when it is upheld. In short, one adopts an attitude of trust towards the person on whom one relies. It is the attitude that makes the difference between trust and reliance. If the car breaks down, we may feel angry; but if a friend lets us down, we feel betrayed" (Holton 1994: 66f.). In this sense, reliance does not involve the same risk of failure or betrayal as trust (Forst 2022: 5).

6 The prerequisite of positive intention on the part of the trust recipient is described by Karen Jones as "the expectation that the other person will be directly moved by the thought that we are counting on them [and...] this expectation must be part of our trust" (Jones 1996: 10).

7 See Hawley 2017: 76.

8 Of course, the distinction between a cognitive and an affective moment of trust is an analytical one. Both components are deeply intertwined. This becomes apparent, for example, when we consider that affects themselves have a cognitive component, since they imply judgements, convictions, and valuations.

9 However, Baier denies that trust can be willed. She conceives of it rather as a form of ur-confidence (Baier 1986: 244). Thus, I re-interpret her understanding of "accepted vulnerability" here.

10 Mackenzie argues that trust and vulnerability are intertwined in an ambivalent way. We have to trust since we are vulnerable but trust also reinforces dependence and vulnerability: "Trust is a response to ontological vulnerability. In trusting others, we mitigate the potential risks and insecurity arising from our vulnerability and from our inescapable dependence on others. At the same time, in trusting others we make ourselves vulnerable to them and hence to the possible betrayal, abuse, or exploitation of our trust" (Mackenzie 2020: 635).

Rather a new form of relationality can be constituted in trust processes. J. M. Bernstein emphasizes the affective and existential component of trust more strongly than Hartmann: We trust, although this trust often proves to be insufficiently justifiable. In other words, it is not completely recoverable by reasons: "Trust cannot be trusted, accepting, and open and blinkered in its interpretive outlook, without some degree of what retrospectively looks like gullibility or naiveté, without, in the light of particular failure, the possibility of retrospectively appearing to be too trusting, too lacking in the vigilance proportional to the harm possible" (Bernstein 2011: 403).[11]

The fact that trust, according to this praxeological-procedural understanding, depends on preconditions that it creates itself and that ground the original trust ex-post, also has a downside. The practice of trust, which is first initiated by trust relationships, becomes a second nature to people. As a result, they engage in habitual practices and emotive attitudes that are not always consciously accessible (on the notion of trust as second nature, see Hartmann 2011: 19; Hartmann 2015).[12] Conversely, however, this means that relationships of trust often only become apparent at the very moment when they break down and lose their apparent self-evidence.[13] And already the attempt to explicate the practice of trust and the reasons that are effective in it affects the trust relationship: "If doubts about the trustworthiness of the other arise, it may become necessary to clarify these doubts with reference to the reasons that determined the trust relationship. And this in itself changes the relationship" (Hartmann 2011: 53). In the reflexive interrogation of the practice of trust, this practice itself shifts. The moment when Elsa asks Lohengrin about his identity in order to be assured of his trust in her, the relationship of trust breaks down.

The surplus, bridging moment of trust, which requires good reasons but is not exhausted by them, and therefore involves an affective element that in turn helps to shape its reasons, outlines a dimension of uncertainty and not-knowing in the relationship between A and B. As Georg Simmel states: "Trust, as the hypothesis of future behavior that is certain enough to base practical action on, is, as a hypothesis, a middle state between knowing and not knowing about man. The completely knowing man need not trust; the completely not-knowing man cannot reasonably even trust" (Simmel 1908: 275). Trust thus has a specific relationship to knowledge in the sense of a middle position between complete ignorance and comprehensive knowledge. In the former case, our trust would be groundless or irrational, because it would be based on no evidence at all; in the latter case, the motivation falls away, because if I already know it all, there is no reason to trust the knowledge of the other; there trust becomes meaningless. In the case of epistemic trust, however, knowledge not only plays the role of a ground of trust, which gives it a certain saturation, but itself becomes the object of trust (in the schematization above, this is the place D). In order to be able to better describe this specific form of trust, which applies directly to knowledge positions, the component of knowledge in the notion of epistemic trust will be illuminated in the following.

1.2 The component of knowledge

According to a standard philosophical definition, knowledge is described as "justified true belief," i.e., a belief that is true and, moreover, one based on good reasons (Herzog forthcoming: 35). Knowledge is thereby distinguished from mere pieces of isolated "information," "as it is embedded in broader sets of beliefs that allow us to make sense of it" (ibid.: 34); in other words, knowledge is always to be located in its relation to a broader context of knowledge.[14] The standard definition of knowledge as justified true belief has come under pressure in epistemological debates on account of so-called Gettier counter-examples—i.e., cases in which we are dealing with justified true beliefs, but which nevertheless do not constitute knowledge. Their truth character and their justification are both fulfilled, but they only correlate fortuitously (Herzog forthcoming 35f.; Vogelmann 2022: 473ff.). Such epistemological questions concerning a generally valid definition of knowledge, however, are of no further interest for the aim of this paper, because in the context of questions about epistemic trust and epistemic injustice, a socially and politically impregnated concept of knowledge is relevant from the outset. An individual and atomic perspective on knowledge in the sense of true justified beliefs of individual knowledge actors is thus transcended and the social situatedness of the production, communication and confirmation of knowledge, which refers to a plurality of actors and their social embeddedness, comes into view (Vogelmann 2022: 549). This insight into the social and relational nature of knowledge and its production, as well as the dependence of its content on the social positioning of subjects of knowledge, has been prominently articulated by social epistemology as well as feminist standpoint theory (Harding 1991).[15] Knowledge is hardly ever acquired solely from an isolated outsider

11 Overall, Bernstein is very sceptic about the rational interrogation and retractability of trust: "To ask for rational reasons for trusting another is practically tantamount to taking the standpoint of distrust, for it presupposes withdrawing from the other, keeping him at a distance and looking for reasons why it would be rationally appropriate to let him near, dangerously near" (Bernstein 2011: 205).

12 In contrast, Pedersen (2015) argues that trust always needs a reflexive component ("reflective trust").

13 This also applies vice versa in the case of mistrust: Unconscious distrust of certain people as members of social groups and prejudices held against them often only become apparent when routine practices break down and seemingly self-evident facts are questioned.

14 Vogelmann also argues convincingly that knowledge is not primarily given in the individual proposition—A knows that p—but that this represents an abstraction insofar as it is detached from a larger network of knowledge: "Knowledge is normally given to us in whole bodies of knowledge, as a network of propositions complementing each other and mutually constituting each other in their respective content, which cannot be isolated from each other without changing their content" (Vogelmann 2022: 544).

15 See Vogelmann's critique of the term "standpoint" in Vogelmann 2022: 362ff.

perspective of the individual, but is—even in the case of "hard" scientific (such as natural science) knowledge—positioned and, moreover, dependent on the involvement of a multitude of actors: "[I]t is because we are members of linguistic communities and are socialized into certain cultural groups that we can know" (Herzog forthcoming: 37). This intersubjectivity of knowledge is by no means exclusive to practical knowledge (knowing how), such as craft skills or the transmission of local and cultural bodies of knowledge, but also affects "hard" scientific research in the laboratory (knowing that). Here, too, different areas of expertise and experience come together, and their interconnection alone can lead to the development of new knowledge—not to mention the training and guidance required to be able to conduct experimental research independently.[16]

For this reason, Lorraine Code emphasizes the second-personal character of knowledge, speaking of a "conception of knowers as social beings and of knowledge seeking as a communal, dialogic activity marked by interdependence and intersubjective critique in which inquirers are, plainly, second persons" (Code 1991: 123). The second-personal character of knowledge is emblematic of its social nature. It is not solely or exclusively through another person that we can know, but knowledge is constituted only at the interface of a plurality of "second persons" in the context of processes of communication or even conflict: "[K]nowledge is simply our word for describing what happens when processes of communication about our shared human world go well" (Herzog forthcoming: 37). For these reasons, it makes sense not to identify individuals as the primary and exclusive bearers of knowledge, but rather to understand communities or collectives as producers of knowledge: "It is communities who are the knowledge producers, since it takes social processes of critical engagement to transform beliefs and theories into knowledge" (Grasswick 2018). In classical epistemology, testimonial knowledge is understood as that specific form of knowledge that has an intersubjective dimension from the outset, because it is acquired through the utterances of others. However, the notion of "testimonial knowledge" remains attached to an individualistic model. It suggests that socially situated knowledge is merely a kind of extension and derivation of "actual" knowledge, although it is rather the monological knowledge subject that constitutes the derivative abstraction (Herzog forthcoming: 36). In contrast, social epistemology assumes that knowledge is never created by individuals alone, but that the knowledge subject is always involved in intersubjective processes. However, we do not only become subjects of knowledge in exchanges with others; the content of our knowledge often depends on how and where we are situated within a plurality of actors and social structures as members of social groups[17] and which modes of access to the world are available to us as a result.

The social and intersubjective situatedness of knowledge also affects the definition of what counts as knowledge at all. Without running the risk of falling into a vulgar constructivist arbitrariness, according to which no criteria for objectivity and generality of knowledge claims can be formulated,[18] a social perspective on epistemological questions must be accompanied by an expansion of the concept of knowledge and its subject area. Thus, not only propositional knowledge in a narrow sense of "justified true beliefs" can be described as knowledge; rather, practical and situated forms, such as experiential, implicit and everyday knowledge, must also come into view. Such a broad concept of knowledge should not be understood to imply relativity. Instead, it must still be possible to deny knowledge claims on a justified basis and to formulate criteria for when such claims are false. However, the criteria for the adequacy or truth of knowledge cannot be determined in the same way for all kinds of knowledge; rather, they vary with the different knowledge claims, or they are subject to different negotiation processes, depending on the sphere of knowledge.

A pluralization of the concept of knowledge, therefore, does not imply a diffuse arbitrariness; rather, it aims at the insight that knowledge is not only linguistically and propositionally constituted—e.g., "I know that the earth revolves around the sun"—but can also take other forms, for example, as affective, embodied or somatic knowledge. This is not necessarily or exclusively defined propositionally but has to do with specific perspectives of experience and social positioning. An example of this is knowledge about social norms and evaluation schemes, which are directly linked to a first-personal and embodied horizon of experience: "Embodied knowing stems from the body as socially positioned. For example, one's experience of a gendered or racialized body corresponds to an embodied kind of knowing, which is neither primarily nor necessarily understood in a propositional way, but rather in an embodied way" (Catala 2020: 760). One could think of the embodied knowledge of People of Colour to be particularly vulnerable and at risk for police violence. This knowledge can be of course articulated, but it precedes its propositional explication and manifests itself in unconscious behaviors and bodily response patterns.

The two characteristics of such a broad concept of knowledge—namely, the transgression of exclusively propositional forms of knowledge to implicit, situational, somatic or affective ones, on the one hand, and the socially and politically situated character of this knowledge, on the other—are intertwined. A comprehensive concept of knowledge that also includes positional and experiential knowledge must consider the social situation of the producers and bearers of knowledge. It is from there that certain knowledge contents arise in the first place.[19] Conversely, social positions contri-

16 Relevant here are Latour's studies on the settings in which scientific knowledge is generated (Latour 2000).

17 Belonging to social groups cannot be understood primarily in terms of a fixed identity, but rather as a matter of being situated in structures (Young 1990: 42ff.).

18 See the discussions in Latour 2004: 227 and Vogelmann 2022: 565ff.

19 The interweaving of epistemology and social theory was already strongly emphasized by Adorno, among others, who pointed out that the possibilities of knowledge and knowledge acquisition are co-determined and co-shaped by social circumstances. Cf. the 22nd and 23rd lectures in Adorno 2018.

bute significantly to the negotiation process and the constitution of what counts as knowledge and is recognized as such, and for what reasons. Furthermore, social structures and orders of power influence which knowledge questions or concerns, in contrast, remain systematically unaddressed. Thus, feminist philosophy of science and standpoint theory have pointed out that specifically female health issues, for example, have long been medically under-researched because predominantly male physicians and researchers have ignored them, so that they have not come into view as research topics at all.[20] Social positionality not only constitutively shapes the production or ignorance of knowledge, but is equally decisive for the question of authority as to what has a claim to be considered legitimate and well-founded knowledge in the first place.

Because knowledge is not an attribute of monological individuals who know autonomously but is dependent on human plurality both in its genesis and its content, because it has a social nature and is impregnated by social formations, it is constitutively related to trust. McLeod speaks of a "relational view of epistemic agency" and an epistemic dependence on others (McLeod 2021), which is essentially based on relations of trust. Such trust refers not only to the direct testimony and knowledge of others, but also to shared and common interactions in which knowledge emerges. Here, trust does not simply add to epistemic processes, i.e., the production and communication of knowledge, but makes them possible in the first place.[21] Such situations of epistemic trust are characterized by "a special sort of cooperation" based on trust, in which knowledge is successfully shared. But when such trust is absent, we cannot understand statements by others as cases of 'telling,' and we cannot assume that knowledge has indeed been transmitted" (Herzog forthcoming: 41 with reference to Greco).

The question of when such knowledge cooperations are successful and which bodies of knowledge we trust, and why, does not depend exclusively on epistemic criteria, but also on social and political ones. This dependence of epistemic credibility attributions on social hierarchies and group affiliations has been elaborated by the epistemic (in)justice debate that was initiated by Fricker. The insights that have emerged in this debate are highly relevant for a better sociophilosophical understanding of epistemic trust.

2. Making the Debates about Epistemic Justice Fruitful for Questions of Trust

The social and intersubjective understanding of knowledge outlined above implies that epistemological questions are not simply normatively neutral, but may be influenced by biases in the perceptions of other knowledge subjects and by the unequal starting conditions of subjects of knowledge: "[I]f one starts from the assumption that we acquire and hold knowledge as members of social groups, it comes as no surprise that injustices from the social realm often translate seamlessly into injustices in the realm of knowledge and ignorance" (Herzog forthcoming: 33). Social and political injustices, such as social marginalization of certain groups and their powerlessness that manifest themselves in discrimination, stereotyping, or prejudiced attributions, have a direct impact on questions of knowledge. Here, I am particularly interested in *structural* epistemic injustices. Structural "epistemic injustices," which manifest themselves in unjustified and unfounded devaluations (but also in exaggerated valorizations) of people as subjects of knowledge or epistemic exclusions based on social group membership, can be divided into distinct subtypes, namely testimonial, hermeneutic, and participatory injustices.

The first two subtypes were introduced into the debate by Fricker. Testimonial injustices occur when a person's testimony is given less credence because of his or her identity or membership in a socially oppressed and disadvantaged group, such as when women's credibility is challenged in patriarchal societies or when there is a credibility deficit vis-à-vis black people in racist societies.[22] Fricker describes this as "identity prejudice" (Fricker 2007: 4).[23] Hermeneutic injustices, by contrast, concern the availability of conceptual resources to name injustices as such in the first place. Here, Fricker gives the example of a sexist society in which sexual harassment cannot be articulated because the concept of "sexual harassment" itself does not yet exist at all (Fricker 2007: 6).[24]

Following Hookway, Medina adds a third category of epistemic injustice, namely that of participatory injustice. Participatory injustices arise when members of socially disadvantaged groups are prevented from contributing equally to epistemic processes and are not taken seriously as knowledge producers.[25] Epistemic justice includes "being

20 An example of such "undone science" is the systematic under-research of endometriosis (Hudson 2022).

21 Even if there are strict scientific standards, we have to trust our fellow researchers to stick to them.

22 A sub-form of testimonial injustice is pre-emptive testimonial injustice. In this case, stereotypes on the part of the hearer prevent testimonial statements being made at all, because those affected are not given the opportunity to express their positions (see Fricker 2007: 130).

23 I am interested here in systematic epistemic prejudices against members of socially stigmatized groups. Fricker distinguishes these from "incidental," i.e. random testimonial injustices that are not owing to structural relations of domination in a society (see Fricker 2007: 27).

24 This is an analytical distinction—testimonial and hermeneutic epistemic injustice are interrelated (see Medina 2013: 95; 110ff.).

25 Structurally speaking, the academic exclusion of knowledge from the global South, for example, in the formation of the canon is also such a form of participatory injustice (see Santos 2014). It is not just a form of testimonial injustice as this knowledge is judged as *less* reliable or relevant. Rather, the specific dimension of participatory injustice here concerns the fact that it is not considered as relevant academic knowledge *at all*. Likewise, the non-acceptance of the experiential perspectives of socially oppressed groups and the negative evaluation of their ability to speak for themselves (also from the perspective of critically oriented theorists) plays a decisive

trusted in one's overall epistemic competence and participatory skills, and not just as a possessor of knowledge but also as a producer of knowledge: that is, not just trusted as someone who can answer questions about one's experiences and available information, but also trusted as someone who can formulate her own questions, evaluate evidence, consider alternative explanations or justifications, formulate and answer objections, develop counterexamples, etc." (Medina 2020: 55).

More generally, Medina has made an important contribution to the epistemic injustice debate through his structural extension of Fricker's analysis. He shows that testimonial injustice not only takes the form of credibility deficits, but that credibility excesses[26] toward members of socially dominant groups, which then in turn influence the (comparative) epistemic status of the underprivileged, also constitute forms of epistemic injustice (Medina 2013: 61). Medina transcends Fricker's individualistic understanding of epistemic injustice with regard to socially effective imaginative horizons and imaginary constellations, too: "[T]he social imaginary renders certain things (experiences, events, problems, etc.) unintelligible and, as a result, subjects become meta-blind to their lack of empathy and inability to trust when it comes to those things" (Medina 2013: 82).[27]

Epistemic injustices are negatively associated with trust: "[E]pistemic injustices are rooted in (and also deepen) the erosion of trust and the perpetuation of dysfunctional patterns of trust/distrust" (Medina 2020: 57). The damage to trust relationships is not one-sided but affects both sides. When members of socially marginalized groups are unjustifiably deprived of trustworthiness and their epistemic competence is called into question, this can have a damaging effect on their own (epistemic) trust in society as well as on their self-confidence. The familiarity of one's own epistemic standpoint in the world becomes fragile through systematically withhold epistemic trust.[28] Epistemic injustice can thus be understood as an unjustified withdrawal of epistemic trust, or as a distorted assessment of epistemic trustworthiness—namely, in the form of testimonial, hermeneutic,[29] and participatory trust. Unwarranted epistemic trust, or the lack of it, happens not only based on conscious stereotypes and devaluations, but also when the biases are implicit, unconscious, or even denied. Medina's reference to the imaginary framing of what is thinkable and imaginable within a society illustrates this structural and not always consciously accessible aspect of an "inability to trust."

Because of their embeddedness in social horizons of imagination and action, epistemic injustices are not simply individual moral errors, but have a structural and political relevance. They do not exclusively affect the individual subject of knowledge or the individual speaker, but this person as a member of a whole group: "[T]he object of the unfair treatment … is not just the speaker, not the speaker *simpliciter*, but the speaker as a member of a group—of a hermeneutically marginalized, disadvantaged group; therefore, social relationality is thus compromised and vitiated …" (Medina 2013: 88).

Epistemic injustices and social domination are intimately entangled: Social macrostructures and contexts of domination, which are not only political but also cultural, obstruct an adequate and justified view of knowledge, knowledge subjects, and trustworthiness.[30] Conversely, such trust deficits and undermining of credibility also re-reaffirm problematic power relations (cf. on the interconnectedness of trust and social power Allen 2017). When epistemic trust is unjustifiably withheld, this can itself be read as a form of social oppression.

Epistemic injustices, and the distorting stereotypes toward members of stigmatized groups that accompany them, produce their own form of epistemic reactions and consequences. Underprivileged and oppressed groups must adopt strategies to navigate within oppressive social structures and cannot afford certain forms of ignorance of privileged members of society, for example, "white ignorance."[31] Charles W. Mills therefore speaks of those "who are in the social darkness, but the epistemic light" (Mills 2017: 108). The social position of underprivileged groups and the experiences that come with it *can* give them a special perspective and insight into power structures and relations of domination. Medina interprets the epistemic gains or losses that arise as a result of epistemic injustice as "structural distortion of epistemic trust" on a higher level, as "meta-ignorance" or "meta-blindness" on the part of the privileged as well as "meta-lucidity" on the part of the oppressed (Medina 2013: 108). By this is meant the insight, or lack of insight, that arises where epistemic injustices take place. Thus, paradoxically, epistemic injustices *can* give rise to a privileged epistemic (meta-)insight on the part of devalued groups.

The circularity of trust described above also becomes relevant regarding epistemic trust injustices. Misplaced epistemic trust or mistrust partly undermines the very grounds on which credibility distortions were originally made, leading to fragmentation and thus to a downward spiral of

role here (Mcnay 2022).

26 Fricker considers credibility excesses to be normatively rather unproblematic (Fricker 2007: 19–20).

27 The often-cited literary example introduced into the debate by Fricker refers to Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the court case against Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping the white girl Mayella Ewell. The one-sided horizon of the jury's imagination makes clear how a black man's credibility is limited in a racist society.

28 For a discussion of the consequences of epistemic violence, see Hark 2021: 87ff. Honneth, starting from a comparison of the debate on epistemic injustices and theories of recognition, shows how both the undermining of credibility and the withholding of recognition damage the self-relationship of those affected (Honneth 2023).

29 Medina describes injustices with regard to hermeneutic trust as those injustices that take place "when subjects get unfairly distrusted in their meaning-making and meaning-expressing capacities" (Medina 2020: 56).

30 Robin Celikates uses the terminology of ideology for this (Celikates 2017).

31 See Mills 2021 [2007].

mistrust.[32] Ex post, epistemic suppressive structures and those of silencing certain voices can thus in some cases lead to distrust proving to be seemingly "justified."

3. Three Systematic Insights from the Debate on Epistemic (In)Justice

3.1 The structural and contextual dimensions of epistemic trust

Looking at epistemic injustices constituted by social, cultural or economic hierarchies, attributions and imaginaries makes it clear that trust or distrust in the knowledge, testimony or interpretive perspective of others is not exclusively owing to epistemic reasons. Instead, it also depends on social structures and power relations that influence the reasons for trust or distrust.[33] Context C, within which epistemic trust is located in the fourfold scheme, therefore does not simply mean a neutral knowledge framing or a local, geographical, temporal, or institutional referent, but also social and political structures together with their normalizations and power asymmetries. A first systematic insight I gain from the epistemic injustice debate for questions of epistemic trust can be formulated as follows: The trustworthiness of persons as knowledge subjects and the assessment of this trustworthiness cannot be analyzed independently of social structures and contexts. A, B, and D cannot simply be located in a neutral context C, but C co-constitutes how the other variables can be filled—namely, who can be trusted and why (A), who is trusted and why (B), and what counts as knowledge in the first place and what knowledge is marginalized (D).

Thus, we have to transcend an individually oriented or transactional perspective in the analysis of epistemic trust relations. From an individualistic perspective, the comprehensive assessment of B's trustworthiness could be attributed to person A without reference to biases or blind spots. However, an assessment of the epistemic counterpart's trustworthiness may be false even if person A thinks of herself to be competent and informed, but nevertheless cannot correctly assess her bias toward B, for instance, because of her membership in a privileged group and her social positioning: "Even when we suspect ourselves to be affected by prejudice and take measures to block its discriminatory effects, the virtue of testimonial justice is largely forced to operate in the dark: we do not know how much we are prejudiced against a speaker, and so do not know how much to correct for this bias" (Anderson 2012: 168).[34]

Moreover, concerning questions of epistemic credibility, addition problems can arise. Even if the individual assessment of the trustworthiness of the counterpart may be justified in each case, the summation of such assessments can still ultimately lead to structural distortions: "The cumulative effects of how our epistemic system elicits, evaluates, and connects countless individual communicative acts can be unjust, even if no injustice has been committed in any particular epistemic transaction" (Anderson 2012: 164f.) (cf. also Hawley 2017: 76f.).

On top of this, the conditions for being *able* to trust others are structurally preformed. To be able to trust others not merely blindly presupposes a specific standing within society and a certain amount of autonomy. Think again about the example of Elsa: If the subjectivizing effects of power structures are as strong as in her case (living in a misogynist society), how can her trust ever be justified? Isn't it the force of a lack of alternatives that predetermines her options for trust or mistrust? In light of this, Elsa's resistance against Lohengrin's demand for trusting him, seems highly and unexpectedly emancipatory.

The structural influence of epistemic trust, however, does not only concern A, but B as well. Moral philosophical arguments about trust relations are often guided by a virtue ethics perspective and emphasize the obligation of, or expectation toward, the recipient of trust to prove to be trustworthy.[35] In the case of socially and epistemically marginalized groups, this individual endeavor often falls short, or proves impotent, because epistemically distorted contexts of domination can prove the more powerful than the virtuousness of the individual. In this respect, insisting on the virtue of trustworthiness, which leaves out of consideration the extent to which individuals are enabled to be trustworthy in the first place, has a reductionist component. Moreover, the orientation to the norm of trustworthiness quickly acquires a subjectivizing and disciplining trait. Medina also offers such a critique of Fricker's emphasis on epistemic virtues and responsibilities, stressing that epistemic responsibilities cannot be attributed equally to diffe-

32 Medina states: "Social injustices typically have a negative impact on our epistemic relations to each other (deteriorating epistemic trust, endangering impartiality, weakening the credibility people ascribe to each other, etc.), and also on our epistemic relations to ourselves (undermining our epistemic confidence, self-trust, and self-reliance; compromising our epistemic goals and projects; weakening our motivation for learning and cognitive improvement, etc.)." (Medina 2013: 27)

33 Origgi shows that there are many other conditions that play a role in the evaluation of trustworthiness, such as social reputation, emotional ties, moral obligations, etc. (Origgi 2012).

34 This is not to say that (implicit) biases towards others as subjects of knowledge are a complete black box that we are simply at the mercy of. Mills shows how conscious and unconscious processes intertwine in socially anchored forms of epistemic injustice such as "white ignorance." In relation to racism, he states that, in order to qualify as white ignorance, "the racialized causality needs … to be expansive enough to include both straightforward racist motivation and more impersonal social-structural causation, which may be operative even if the cognizer in question is not racist" (Mills 2007: 21). See also Honneth's corresponding analysis of how the conscious and the structural go together (Honneth 2023: 21).

35 Potter insists on the virtue of trustworthiness but takes into account that socio-political situatedness significantly influences the initial conditions for the formation of such a virtue (Potter 2002: IXff.).

rent actors[36]: "… differently situated subjects and groups can bear very different burdens and responsibilities with respect to the minimization of hermeneutical gaps and obstacles; and …, occasionally, these hermeneutical obligations can be suspended and even reversed in order to allow for cases in which contributing to maintain a social silence or to reinforce the hermeneutical gaps of certain communities may not be blameworthy and unjust, but the ethical thing to do" (Medina 2013: 117) (see also Anderson 2012 for a similar critique). An example are the current debates about gender-sensitive language use in German. Those who have been discriminated against by a generic masculine form in traditional language use, like women or non-binary persons, are frequently under pressure to justify the presumed "complication" of language through its gender-sensitivity. They are accused of demanding privileges or of destroying a cultural heritage. However, the burden of justification and of bridging hermeneutical gaps should not lie with those who demand egalitarian inclusiveness, but with those who want to preserve their privileges.

The structural predetermination of epistemic trust relations and the different positioning of various social groups within this structure allows the aspect of vulnerability outlined above to appear once again in a different light. There I pointed out that the trustors—i.e., A in the scheme—always make themselves vulnerable to a certain extent by their trust. Drawing on the insights from the epistemic injustice debate, it becomes clear that this vulnerability also affects B—i.e., the trust recipients—insofar as trust or epistemic trust is unjustifiably withheld from them, thereby cementing and exploiting social and epistemic vulnerabilities.[37] B's vulnerability is here dependent on social positions and epistemic injustices that prevent trust being given to him/her.

This first insight can be summarized as follows: The conditions of success of trust in the knowledge of others are essentially determined by social structures and contexts as well as by their systematic distortions.

3.2 A critical understanding of epistemic trust

The foregoing reflections about how epistemic trust relations are shaped by social power structures and patterns of racist, sexist or classist discrimination demonstrate that the question of how to justify trust depends not only on purely epistemic but also on social and structural factors. Therefore, trust in the knowledge perspective of other actors cannot be analyzed from an epistemological perspective alone, but also has a normative dimension. This normative dimension can swing in different directions, insofar as epistemic trust relations can be emancipatory, but also reactionary, authoritarian, or fragmenting. An example of fragmenting epistemic trust is the protests of the "Querdenker," whose trust in their own positioning and group is essentially based on demarcations—not only vis-à-vis virologists and medical expertise, but also toward emancipatory social movements such as "Black Lives Matter" (Hentschel 2021: 72ff.). According to my thesis, the enabling or occluding twist of epistemic trust and the rationality or irrationality of trust and mistrust relations becomes understandable only from a socio-philosophical perspective that takes epistemic injustice into account when questioning "good" and "bad" epistemic trust or mistrust relations. Such an understanding is critical because the theoretical perspective does not simply analyze existing epistemic trust constellations between individuals or actors conceived atomistically in a detached and uninvolved way, but by describing unjustified power asymmetries as problematic and detrimental to successful epistemic trust. This critical perspective on trust in the knowledge, utterances and experiences of others enables a specific access to its rationality. Whether trust is accordingly blind or justified, whether it draws on good reasons or disregards these reasons, cannot be answered with reference to the individual characteristics of the persons involved alone, but must also take into account social, societal and political structures. I cannot offer a comprehensive account of the coupling of rational trust and its social and political preconditions in what follows. Rather, I will only briefly outline the main features of such a critical understanding and its normative implications and distinguish it from a conventional interpretation.

The rationality of trust is often assessed in the relevant literature based on specific criteria. Carter and Meehan, drawing on the "performance normativity framework," introduce three characteristics by which the success of trust relationships can be judged, namely success, competence and a resulting aptness (Carter and Meehan 2022). Their guiding thesis is that epistemic injustices can be addressed through individual formation of the ability to trust meaningfully or "skillfully." For such normatively successful trust, first, the outcome is crucial, i.e., that person B lives up to the trust placed in him/her; second, that A is competently informed in trusting—as a counter-example of incompetent trust, Carter and Meehan refer to entrusting a child with a secret—and third, the interplay of successful and competent trust leads to its aptness, namely, when the act of trust was successful because it was competently performed (Carter and Meehan 2022: 3). On this basis, Carter and Meehan describe credibility deficits and excesses as incompetent acts of trust, because the trustworthiness of individuals is misjudged due to their identity or social positioning, which then also undermines the adequacy of trust. Viewed against the background of the previous considerations, this analytical grid proves to be limited, however, since the individual actors are ascribed an exaggerated, because isolated, ability to assess trustworthiness and their own capacity to reflect on this ability. Even if all of the conditions for rational trust or mistrust that can be grasped from an individual perspective are fulfilled and trust appears to be appropriate in this respect, it can still be unjustified. This happens when the rationality has itself been formed on the basis of problematic arrangements. Structural factors that can influence the criterion of competence and thus also the appropriateness of trust, such as biases, positionally induced ignorance or a double consciousness, then remain unthematized. Just think of the introduction of women's suffrage at the beginning of

36 See Celikates 2017: 59 for a similar critique.

37 See also Mackenzie 2020: 639f.

the 20th century. There was a great fear of public decline because—according to a prevailing opinion—women simply did not have competent political skills.

For a critical understanding of epistemic trust, therefore, a praxeological and procedural perspective, such as the one developed by Hartmann, seems more appropriate. However, this perspective must be complemented by a systemic view on power asymmetries and structural distortions as provided by the debate on epistemic injustice (3.1). A temporally constituted and dynamic practice of trust leading to more just, emancipatory and equality-promoting relations of trust thrives on transformational possibilities in which existing injustices are broken up and changed (3.3).

For a better understanding of this proceduralist account of trust and the reasons that make trust rational or irrational, it is helpful to refer to Sally Haslanger's concept of the "loopingness" of mental images and social norms in how they co-form social reality.[38] Haslanger describes the loopingness of social structures as follows: "We respond to the world that has been shaped to trigger those very responses without being conscious of the shaping, so our responses seem to be called for by the way the world is" (Haslanger 2013: 468). Our mental images shape our perception of the world, which at some point congeals into habitualized practice, so that we are no longer even aware of the shaped nature of our access to reality. This idea can be tentatively inverted: A changed reality can affect our mental images and shift them.[39] With regard to successful epistemic relationships of trust, a virtuous circle as opposed to a vicious circle would then be at work (Herzog forthcoming: 316). By breaking down stereotypes, prejudices and social hierarchies and enhancing the trustworthiness of underprivileged groups—such as through successful social struggles—the reasons for justified trust are themselves dynamized and reinterpreted.[40]

In investigating the reasons for justified trust, it is important to distinguish an instrumental dimension from a normative one, even though the two are entangled. The instrumental dimension is expressed in Carter and Meehan's criterion of success and refers to whether the act of trust is directed toward a goal, i.e., whether B can also redeem the trust placed in her/him. As the foregoing argumentation should make clear, however, it would be truncated to reduce acts of trust to their instrumentality, because one would thereby overlook that trust relationships are embedded in a larger social structure and its problematic inequalities. Therefore, the instrumental dimension of trust must be seen against the foil of a normative horizon. This is precisely the perspective that can be gained from the debate on epistemic injustices. For the normative vanishing point sketches an emancipatory and equality-oriented picture that expresses the egalitarian idea that all members of a society have basic authority in matters that concern them. Epistemically, this image is specified by the idea of epistemic justice, namely that people should not be systematically devalued, disregarded, or silenced in their perspectives of knowledge and experience. Trust relations that undermine this basic equality cannot claim to be justified in a basic sense. Think again of police violence against Persons of Colour in the U.S. For black persons it seems highly unreasonable to trust the police since a basic respect towards them is not given.

The instrumental and normative components of the justification of trust are deeply intertwined, because the former can only be adequately interpreted in conjunction with the normativity of epistemic justice. This means that, while the reasons for trust have an instrumental side, they are not exhausted by it. The changeability and procedurality of these reasons can only be understood if they are interpreted against the horizon of social structures and social struggles or emancipation processes embedded in them.

This can be illustrated by two examples. Medina argues that in unjust and oppressive societies mistrust and a double consciousness of marginalized groups can be rational because it strategically provides the possibility to open up spaces of action and establishes possibilities of resistance (on the concept of strategic ignorance, see Medina 2013: 117).[41] However, precisely such strategic distrust is only justified because it ultimately aims at changing social relations in which oppressed groups struggle successfully for recognition as equals. Similarly, the irrationality of credibility deficits can only be understood with reference to a broader and possibly temporally constituted normative horizon. The unfoundedness of a millennia-old devaluation of women's epistemic perspective, for example, was presumably always latently apparent, but could only come to full evidence with the emancipatory struggles of the twentieth century. This is not to say that the reasons for trustworthiness themselves are shifting; but, first of all, with the transformation of social reality, some reasons can hardly be ignored any longer, i.e. they appear in a changed light. In this context, Frieder Vogel-

38 On how trustworthiness is co-constituted and changed through social attribution processes, see Hawley 2017: 74.

39 The image of loopiness in the context of epistemic trust relations and their social location is also used by Nancy Daukas (Daukas 2006: 116).

40 Karen Jones also refers to self-enforcing loops in the context of trust and distrust; however, she focuses on the affective dimension of trust (and distrust) dynamics: "Trust and distrust are self-confirming because of the way they shape our perception of the evidence available to us: viewed through the affective lens of trust, you will tend to be interpreted as trustworthy; viewed through the lens of distrust, you will tend to be interpreted as untrustworthy" (Jones 2019: 959).

41 That it can be perfectly rational for oppressed groups to distrust is also stressed by Melissa Williams with respect to political representation: "Given deep divisions of interest among groups, then, in an important sense legislators from dominant groups are not subject to the laws they pass, and this undercuts marginalized groups' reasons for trusting government to look after their essential interests. In fact, despite the economy of trust, a markedly unequal distribution of rational trust exists between historically marginalized and relatively privileged groups, at least so long as the latter hold a far more than proportional share of the legislative seats" (Williams 2000: 193f.). The democratic value of distrust in emancipatory struggles is also stressed by Meena Krishnamurthy, who demonstrates its importance for the Black Civil Rights Movement (Krishnamurthy 2015).

mann speaks emphatically of the "disruptive power of truth" and illustrates it with the example of political equality for women: The truth of the "political configuration of the world created by Olympe de Gouges' Declaration of the Rights of Women has changed our subjectivities in such a way that the division of the sensual, which contains no place for 'women' as political subjects, can no longer be understood by us as it was understood before Olympe de Gouges and her contemporary feminism" (Vogelmann 2022: 429).

Such transformation processes, which permanently shape reality, touch not only trust in others, but also one's own self-confidence. This can be fragmented by marginalization and exclusion processes or, conversely, strengthened and upgraded in joint solidary struggles. Intersubjective trust processes, in turn, are not unaffected by this, because self-confidence can also lead to increased trustworthiness in the eyes of others.[42]

Thus, by breaking down stereotypes and traditional attributions toward social groups and their positioning, the evaluation of the reasons for trustworthiness also changes. From the perspective of the actors involved, "the aim is to understand how certain social structures tend to promote these crucially flawed processes, how to personally extricate oneself from them (insofar as that is possible), and to do one's part in undermining them in the broader cognitive sphere" (Mills 2007: 23). It is precisely such a reflection on the justification of reasons for trust and their impregnation by social constellations that a critical notion of epistemic trust should capture. However, the virtuousness of individuals is not sufficient in this regard; changing structural forms of epistemic injustice requires political transformation processes.

3.3 Politics of epistemic trust and mistrust

A critical understanding of epistemic trust that takes into account its problematic—because potentially exclusionary, normalizing and subjectivizing—sides can serve as an analytical basis for considering possibilities of transformation and forms of resistance that can lead to more just and equality-promoting epistemic trust relations. Helpful for thinking about normatively just and equality-promoting epistemic relations of trust is again Medina's contribution to the debate about epistemic injustices and his insistence that the latter cannot be addressed from an ethical perspective alone but require a political perspective (Medina 2013: 86f.).

In the following, I will not comprehensively address why questions of epistemic trust have an explicitly political dimension but will only highlight it by means of two hypotheses. First, equality in political space turns out to be central to successful epistemic trust relations. Second, the realization of this equality and its enabling character for trust relations should not necessarily be thought of in harmonistic terms. According to the overarching thesis of ConTrust, conflictual processes can also play an important role in the constitution of trust relationships.

Regarding the first hypothesis, epistemic injustices have a specific relationship to inequality. This can be observed in the three forms of epistemic injustice described above as testimonial, hermeneutic, and participatory injustice. Testimonial injustices arise because social hierarchies marginalize certain identities, and individuals belonging to subaltern groups are not considered equal testimonial authorities. This is similar in the case of hermeneutic injustices: By making certain experiences, such as sexual harassment in a sexist society, unimaginable and inarticulable, those affected by such injustices are devalued in their epistemic status. Finally, participatory epistemic injustices have a specific connection to inequality: they occur when certain groups are systematically worse off regarding their ability to contribute to epistemic processes. The inequalities produced and promoted by epistemic injustices not only have a social and cultural dimension, but also an explicitly political one, because they impair the possibility for members of oppressed groups to participate as equal authorities in political discourses. The role that political equality plays in questions of epistemic trust can be illustrated further by two considerations.

First, in her discussion of classism, Lisa Herzog shows how, in democracies, epistemically just structures and social equality positively influence each other and thus promote trust. The discriminatory form of classism operates through the devaluation of persons as subjects of knowledge who come from "educationally deprived" milieus and whose habitus—their manner of speaking, their accent, their interests, for example—leads to epistemic credibility deficits. Classically fragmented societies, according to Herzog, do not only have a normative problem, because educational opportunities and opportunities for advancement—including material ones—are unequally accessible; they also have an epistemic problem, because stores of knowledge in hierarchical societies are less able to circulate and pluralize, which is an obstacle to the possibility of forming trust: "[T]he trust that is needed to rely on others' testimony—which is inevitably needed in highly differentiated societies—is more likely to be justified, and to remain stable over time, in more egalitarian societies, in which there are multiple networks and points of encounters between citizens" (Herzog forthcoming: 306). "Class" in this sense preforms knowledge positions and knowledge possibilities. Herzog describes the epistemic (trust) losses due to socio-economic inequalities as follows: "The higher the socio-economic inequalities, the more difficult it becomes for citizens to interact in a deliberative way, exchanging arguments on an equal footing. And the more their lifestyles, habits and social circles move apart

42 Danielle Petherbridge, following Bernstein, speaks of an affectively grounded "basic trust" with which we recognize others as others in the first place and acquire the conviction that we ourselves constitute a person in their eyes (Petherbridge 2021). But epistemic biases can challenge this basic trust. Through the experience of not being counted as a participant in a social or epistemic practice at all, or through manipulative acts such as gaslighting, world trust, or at least certain world trust, can also be lost. In this respect, Hartmann's thesis that basic world trust is not systematically interesting for philosophical discussion is perhaps a little too hasty (Hartmann 2015).

from each other, because of socio-economic differences, the less likely it becomes that they trust each other" (Herzog forthcoming: 305). Empirical studies support the finding that, conversely, a reduction in social hierarchies promotes knowledge exchange and thereby epistemic benefits and epistemic trust: "Numerous studies have shown that greater social equality is correlated with higher scales of trust" (Herzog forthcoming: 316). Herzog concludes from this that epistemic trust and social trust are more interdependent than is commonly admitted (Herzog forthcoming: 315).

Second, the thesis that epistemic trust or confidence has a specifically political dimension is illustrated by Vogelmann's discussion of the so-called "postfactual" (*postfaktisch*) age. He argues that this description of a softening and twisting of facts in political struggles correctly identifies a problem but diagnoses it wrongly with the designation "postfactual." According to Vogelmann, examples of the "postfactual" such as the lies of the Trump administration or the conspiracy-theoretical hostility to science of the "Querdenker" do not indicate that knowledge and truth in politics have simply become arbitrary. Rather, the epistemic is mobilized politically in order to create alliances and fight against political opponents. In the case of Trump supporters, Vogelmann shows that it is not a matter of Trump's statements being considered as factually true. Instead, the epistemic is used for political purposes: "[T]he obvious false claims [Trump makes] serve as manifestations of truth by making visible who is loyal and defends Trump's falsehoods—and who is not. They are not only a way of exercising power …, [but] have … an epistemic function. But they can only fulfill this function if they are clearly recognizable as false. Trump's untruths do … not have the goal of blurring the line between truth and falsehood in order to create a new reality. Rather, they need the clear division into true and false as they function only as obvious untruths" (Vogelmann 2022: 368). Here, the epistemic is mobilized to create internal trust alliances and to deepen distrust towards others. In the case of the "Querdenker," there might be some parallels to this interpretation, although the falsehood of their epistemic claims is much less obvious and blatant. The analogy thus does not refer to the strategic play with the obviously false, but rather to the instrumental and political use of the epistemic. For the Querdenkers' common belief content is not simply that the Corona virus does not exist. Instead, it consists of a complex web of opinions about the publicly misjudged dangerousness of the virus, the supposed establishment of a health dictatorship, or an improper exercise of power by medical experts. Thus, the intent seems to be not simply to deny the existence of the Corona virus, but rather to establish a political alliance directed against the "elites," "those up there," or a scientific system perceived as aloof (Hentschel 2021). The point of the epistemic game with the wrong is to strengthen trust internally toward similarly thinking people and members of one's own group, and to express distrust externally, i.e., toward the "others."

Without wanting to justify such exclusionary movements in any way, their expression of distrust toward other parts of society and the epistemic play with "alternative facts" is political insofar as it formulates—albeit distorted and resentment-laden—concerns that struggle to be heard (Vogelmann 2022: 316ff.).

This leads me to the second thesis concerning the political dimension of epistemic trust, namely its conflictual nature. For the promotion of relations of epistemic trust, which are characterized by a certain degree of status equality, usually does not proceed harmoniously, but is often driven by conflict. Whether such conflictual processes, in which status equality and epistemic authority are claimed, consolidate mistrust or instead promote trust cannot be determined in advance but depends on multiple factors. One important factor, however, could be whether exclusionary movements and epistemic resistance and friction (as Medina describes them) that challenge hegemonic norms succeed in the longer term in making their struggles to be counted as equal members of society heard and brought to bear on society, or whether foreclosures are instead resentful and have no interest in social equality and plurality at all. The "epistemic affirmative actions" analyzed by Medina are an example of potentially successful conflict resolution. These actions give members of hermeneutically devalued groups the benefit of the doubt insofar as the listeners first self-critically have to question their own preconceptions and biases. They can strengthen trust because they go hand in hand with a hermeneutic openness and the willingness to accept the position of the other person and to listen to it, even if it still seems unclear from one's own horizon of understanding. In contrast, (epistemic) conflicts are not conducive to trust if they operate exclusively through the unjustified devaluation and exclusion of others, and if there is no struggle about one's own substantive concerns, but instead the focus is exclusively on discrediting others. The "Querdenker" can probably be interpreted in the sense of such a closure of trust, since, as Hentschel points out, they are skeptical of plurality, operate strategically via demarcation from other social movements such as Black Lives Matter, and, beyond their negative engagement against others, do not themselves pursue any articulated goal of their own: "There is no conception of change, no goals that are articulated, or interests that are stood up for in this puzzle mode [of conspiracy theorists] of imagining the world" (Hentschel 2021: 80).

Finally, the successful resolution of conflicts in a way that promotes trust can itself have political consequences, namely in the sense of meta-trust or second-order trust in the ability of institutions to resolve conflicts successfully and in a way that promotes equality (Warren 2017: 48).

4. Concluding remarks

The preceding considerations have shown that an analysis of epistemic trust, i.e., trust in others as subjects of knowledge that is informed by social philosophy, depends on essential systematic impulses from the debates on epistemic injustice. The insights of these debates help to demonstrate the dependence of epistemic trust relations on social relations of dominance and unjust structures. In three respects it can be

heuristically profitable to illuminate epistemic trust relations based on question of epistemic injustices. First, to understand the structural-social conditionality of trust relations, second, to be able to relate the justification of trust back to these underlying structures, and finally to open up possibilities of political action to combat epistemic injustices and create more just trust relations. Future research will have to examine the exact forms that such political action can take, for example, in the sense of Medina's epistemic resistances and frictions, as solidarity-based protest movements, such as Black Lives Matter, or as an assumption of responsibility by privileged and dominant social groups.

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