

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING GUIDE #5

EPISTEMIC VIRTUE & VICE

WHEN doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

READING

Medina, J. (2013). Active ignorance, epistemic others, and epistemic friction. In *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and resistant imaginations* (pp. 27–55). Oxford University Press.

QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. In the opening section, José Medina claims that “inequality is the enemy of

knowledge” and that “social injustices breed epistemic injustices” (p. 27).

Generally speaking, how can social (and political) phenomenon make us all cognitively worse off, both as individuals and as a society?

2. In section 1.1, Medina fleshes out this idea by focusing on how possessing privilege and power creates serious epistemological disadvantages, which he calls epistemological vices.

What is meant by an epistemological vice? What three vices does Medina focus on? Why are those with privilege and power at grave risk of developing such vices? How do these three vices come together in what Medina calls “active ignorance” (p. 39)?

3. How does Medina justify his claim that “gender- and color-blindness are forms of active ignorance” (p. 38)?
4. In section 1.2, Medina focuses on how being the subject of oppression and subordination creates valuable epistemological advantages, which he calls epistemological virtues.

What is meant by an epistemological virtue? What three virtues does Medina focus on? Why do the oppressed and subordinate have the opportunity to develop such virtues? How do these three virtues come together in what Medina calls “subversive lucidity” (p. 44)?

5. How might the murder of George Floyd on May 20, 2020 serve as a powerful example of a moment of subversive lucidity in the United States?

6. In section 1.3, Medina develops the idea of an epistemology of resistance and how this may help explain the development of epistemic virtue and vice.

What does Medina seem to mean by an epistemology of resistance? What are its “two guiding principles” (p. 50)? How do these seem to explain the conditions under which epistemic virtue and vice may develop?

7. Medina concludes this chapter with a discussion of various epistemic and testimonial responsibilities.

What are these responsibilities, who or what has them and why?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.