

Epistemic injustices, religious identities and religious education

How alertness to epistemic injustices targeting religious people gives ground for a religious education that promotes epistemic justice

Abstract

In this paper, I propose to take a fresh look at the issue of religious education using the conceptual tools developed by the field of epistemic injustices. I argue that alertness to epistemic injustices targeting religious people gives ground for a religious education that promotes epistemic justice. To show that, I first argue there can be forms of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice that target religious people *qua* religious people due to prejudices targeting their religiosity in general or their specific religious affiliation in particular and due to a form of active religious ignorance that I named post-Christian ignorance. From there, I argue that, on the one hand, an inadequate religious education would contribute to testimonial injustice through the perpetuation of identity prejudice and that, on the other hand, a lack of religious education would contribute to the hermeneutical marginalization of the religious other and would serve the self-protecting purpose of post-Christian ignorance to avoid friction and maintain its invisible privilege. This will lead us to consider if a certain form of religious education could promote epistemic justice and that would thus ground part of its legitimacy in the desire to counter epistemic injustices. I finally argue that religious literacy will promote epistemic justice and hence counter both forms of epistemic injustice.

Introduction

In January 2020, the government of the Canadian province of Québec announced that they would thoroughly reform the ethics and religious culture course and that the new course would give significantly less attention to religion (Pilon-Larose 2020). In reaction to this announcement, voices for and against religious education in public schools of secular societies expressed their disagreement. The question still raises passions: which role, if any, should religion play in the public school curriculum? Should religious education be part of the curriculum in secular societies and if it does, which form should it take?

When addressing the question of the role, if any, for religious education in public schools, numerous aspects have to be considered, but we should not ignore issues of epistemic injustice that can take place

in a pluralist society either. As Ben Kotzee writes: “Educationalists alert to epistemic injustice ask how decisions about the curriculum enable or block students’ understanding of particular social experiences and encourage or inhibit the ability of students from particular cultures to express their particular understanding of the world.” (Kotzee 2017, 327) In this paper, I argue that religious people can suffer from both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, and I argue that inadequate religious education and a lack of religious education would both contribute to those epistemic injustices, but that, on the contrary, a religious education that would seek to develop the competency of religious literacy would promote epistemic justice.

More precisely, in the first section of the paper, I argue that religious individuals can suffer testimonial injustices due to identity prejudices that target their generic religiosity or their specific religious identity as belonging to a particular community, and that, accordingly, a religious education that would transmit, reinforce or fail to confront religious stereotypes would contribute to testimonial injustice. In the second section, I argue that in Québec, and presumably in other secular societies, religious people can suffer hermeneutical injustices due to a form of active religious ignorance that I name post-Christian ignorance, and that, accordingly, an absence of religious education would favour the *status quo* and contribute to maintaining the privileges of those who live and understand religion in a certain way and contribute to maintaining their blindness to the discriminatory effect of the structure of the secular society. In the third section, I argue that religious literacy will promote epistemic justice and hence counter both forms of epistemic injustice.

1. Testimonial injustice and prejudices against religious people

In this section, I employ Miranda Fricker’s conception of testimonial injustice to argue that religious individuals can suffer from testimonial injustices based on identity prejudices that target their generic

religious identity or their specific religious affiliation. On this basis, I argue that we should reject any form of inadequate religious education that transmits, reinforces or fails to address religious identity prejudice.

It is generally admitted in social psychology that most credibility judgments are made automatically and unconsciously using heuristics, and those heuristics rely on stereotypes. Because they are not always bad or unreliable, Fricker defines stereotypes in a neutral manner: “stereotypes are widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes.” (Fricker 2007, 30) Stereotypes are not always held at the conscious level of belief; they can also be “in other dimensions of cognitive commitment: notably those that may have an affective aspect such as commitments which derive from the collective imagination and which may permit less transparency than beliefs.” (Fricker 2007, 30–31) Stereotypes can be negative or positive, empirically true or false. In the case of testimonial injustices, it is false and negative stereotypes that are at play. Those stereotypes are resistant to counter-evidence and they track the individual in different spheres of life. Fricker calls those stereotypes “identity prejudices” which are “prejudices against people *qua* social types” (Fricker 2007, 4). Following Fricker, we can say that a speaker suffers a testimonial injustice when the hearer makes a deflated credibility judgment based on identity prejudice: “The speaker sustains such a testimonial injustice if and only if she receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer” (Fricker 2007, 28).

In other words, in a testimonial exchange – where a speaker aims to convey information to a hearer – if the hearer evaluates the credibility of the speaker to a lower level than it truly is on the basis of identity prejudice, we can say that the speaker suffers a testimonial injustice. Fricker illustrates the case of testimonial injustice with an exchange between Herbert Greenleaf and Marge Sherwood from Anthony Minghella’s screenplay *The Talented Mr Ripley* (Fricker 2007, 9). In the example, Mr Greenleaf dismisses Marge’s testimony on the basis of identity prejudice against women that identifies them as unreliable knowers. ““Marge, there’s female intuition, and then there are facts”” (Fricker 2007, 9) says Greenleaf.

The identity prejudice at play in testimonial injustice does not have to necessarily relate to the epistemic reliability or capacity of the agent as it was the case in this example. If Greenleaf thought that “women are frivolous”, he could have made a deflated credibility judgment on the basis of this prejudice that does not directly target the epistemic reliability of women. What matters is not the content of the prejudice, but the impact it has on the credibility judgment.

Different instances of testimonial injustice can have different impacts on one life and we can differentiate between primary and secondary harm. When one suffers an epistemic injustice, one is primarily wronged in *one's capacity as a knower*. This wrong relates to a fundamental human capacity, that of reason and knowledge, and consequentially has the social meaning that “the subject is less than fully human” (Fricker 2007, 44). In failing to acknowledge the proper credibility to a speaker, the hearer is failing to show proper respect for the speaker's humanity. The secondary harms are either epistemic or practical, but what makes them secondary is that they causally stem from the primary kind of harm (Fricker 2007, 46). For example, if one suffers a testimonial injustice in court, it can have the secondary practical harm of being unjustly incarcerated.

Fricker's paradigmatic cases of testimonial injustice target racial and gender identities and they are both *systematic* – i.e. it follows the individual in numerous spheres of social life – and *persistent* – i.e. it happens repeatedly (Fricker 2007, 29). Testimonial injustices can also be incidental when it does not follow the individual in different spheres of social life and it can also vary in persistence, but even though those cases are still wrong, they are not the focus of Fricker's analysis. People can be affected by multiple prejudices and stereotypes that target (part of) their identities. For our purpose here, the relevant question is: are religious people *qua* religious people subject to negative stereotypes and identity prejudices that would cause a deflated credibility judgement in the hearer? In other words, can the religious identity of a speaker lead a hearer to make a deflated credibility judgment based on prejudice about that identity? It seems

that we can distinguish between two levels on which religious individuals can be subject to identity prejudice: a *generic* level for the mere fact of being religious – which even though is systematic, may not be so persistent – and a more *specific* level that targets their particular religious affiliation which may be very much persistent for particular religious groups. In other words, a Muslim woman and a Christian man could be both the target of the same systematic identity prejudice for their mere religiosity, i.e. their generic religious identity, but they could be subject to different identity prejudices that would target more precisely their Muslim or Christian identities that would vary in persistence.

Consequently, even though the injustices lived by different religious individuals may be of the same kind, i.e. epistemic, they can vary significantly in intensity depending on the persistence of the identity prejudices. Further, when religious identities intersect with other parts of identities that can be marginalized, e.g. gender or racial identities, it can cause greater – primary and secondary – harm. However, the difference in consequences should not prevent us from seeing that the mere fact of being religious, with no regard to the specific religious affiliation, can systematically trigger identity prejudice that will lower one's credibility. In other words, even though a Muslim woman may suffer greater primary and secondary harm due to the persistence of prejudices against minority religions and due to the intersection with her gender identity, testimonial injustices can also stem from generic religious identity prejudices that can affect a Christian man.

Ian James Kidd (2017) identifies two of what he calls “background convictions” about religious beliefs and religion¹ that I believe can serve as negative stereotypes about religious individuals identifying them as bad epistemic agents across the board which could target the generic religious identity or a specific

¹ Kidd identifies does background assumptions in the context of debates about the epistemological status of religious beliefs, but I think they are more widely shared and that they have a larger impact on religious individuals than only in epistemological debates.

religious group more specifically. The first conviction “is that religious belief is epistemically suspicious, reflective of ignorance, superstition, or of the persistence of a set of psychosocial needs.” (Kidd 2017, 391–92) If that concerns religious beliefs, then by extension, we may think that those holding religious beliefs are epistemically suspect and thereby show their ignorance, superstition, etc. This characterization of religious individuals undermines their status as epistemic agents and will most likely result in a deflation of credibility. To put it baldly, there is simply not much to learn from bad epistemic agents. This identity prejudice can track the religious individual and it will lead a hearer to make a deflated credibility judgment of what she is saying, even if it is unrelated to religious matters. However, even if religious beliefs were effectively irrational or unjustified, it would not follow that a particular religious individual would be a bad epistemic agent across the board.

The second conviction “is that religious beliefs, institutions, and traditions have been and continue to be epistemically deleterious at the individual and social levels [...] If so, then religion is liable to be interpreted as the source, not the victim, of epistemic injustices.” (Kidd 2017, 392) This seems especially relevant in Québec where a whole generation sees the Catholic Church as having kept people deliberately in ignorance until the *Révolution tranquille* when the people escaped the power of the oppressor. It thus seems common to hold that religion is rather a factor that constrains epistemic agency, and real epistemic agency can only be attained by going beyond religion.

However, the fact that religious systems and individuals may be the source of epistemic injustices against others does not render religious individuals immune from being the victim of epistemic injustices themselves. Even more, it seems that some prejudices that the individual suffers in her own community can be translated outside her religious community. For example, imagine a religious system where women are seen as unreliable epistemic agents and in constant need of male supervision. When a woman would speak on her own, her words would not receive the appropriate uptake amongst her community members

because her credibility would be deflated by the aforementioned prejudice. In this case, the religious belief in the unreliability of women would be the source of a testimonial injustice that the religious woman would suffer *as a woman*. However, it then seems plausible that when the same woman would speak in the larger secular society, she could receive a deflated credibility judgment on the basis of a similar identity prejudice but with a shift of focus from her identity as a woman to her identity as a *religious* woman. If members of the larger the society believe that, in her religion, women are not allowed to have epistemic agency and are always under the supervision of a man, then the words she utters may still not be taken as her own and her credibility may be diminished based on a very similar prejudice. Thus, the identity prejudice that would cause her to suffer testimonial injustice in her own community *as a women* could be translated in the larger society in society to cause her to suffer testimonial injustice *as a woman member of that religious community*. In this fictive example, the woman is twice the victim of testimonial injustice; on the one hand, it is caused by other members of the religious community and their religious system, and on the other hand, it is perpetrated by members of the larger society that share similar identity prejudice but with a shift in focus. In the larger society, the prejudice would not merely affect her in her identity *as a woman* as it is the case in her community because, in the larger society, not every woman suffer the credibility deficit, but only women *belonging to that community*. The dynamic of epistemic injustices is very complex and epistemic wrong can be present at multiple levels; seeing a certain failure at a given level should not make us blind to the possibility of other failures at other levels.

Further, numerous more obvious stereotypes targeting specific religious groups that are not primarily about their epistemic capacities, but that still inspire contempt – e.g. Muslim men are misogynistic, veiled women are dominated by their husbands, Evangelicals are conservative, Jews are rich and greedy – can affect their credibility and their ability to be heard in the appropriate way. Those negative identity prejudices track the religious individual in different spheres of their life.

Prejudices against religious people and inadequate religious education

How is the claim that religious people can suffer testimonial injustices related to religious education? To address this, we first need to acknowledge that education can have an impact on the stereotypes that students and citizens hold either by addressing them, by failing to do so or by transmitting new ones. Students do not enter school as blank slates; they bring with them prior knowledge and capacities, but also stereotypes and prejudices that were transmitted to them by their parents and their surroundings. However, public education in a democratic society that values equality and freedom should also aim to mitigate the effects of those prejudices and stereotypes and ultimately aim at eliminating identity prejudice altogether. Further, it should aim to develop virtuous epistemic habits that would limit the use of stereotypes. Indeed, it seems that an individual that would have developed the epistemic virtues of humility, curiosity/diligence and open-mindedness (Medina 2013, 40-48) through friction with alternative and diverging views and ways of life would not overtly use stereotypes and would especially avert to use identity prejudices; she would rather be attentive to the other and beware of making credibility judgment too quickly and based on identity prejudice.

To see the duty to address prejudices, consider an analogy with racism: in a society where racism is at play – arguably every society – children will enter elementary school holding multiple racist identity prejudices, some consciously and others unconsciously. Democratic education in a pluralist society could not merely ignore this. The role of democratic education is to educate students in a way to eradicate racist identity prejudices or at least to mitigate their effects hoping to, in the long run, reduce racism in society. A public education that would reinforce those racist identity prejudices or transmit new ones, purposively or uncarefully by failing to confront them, would fail in its democratic purpose of promoting freedom and equality.

There are many kinds of inadequate religious education, but what I want to insist on here is that any religious education that transmits, reinforces or fails to challenge stereotypes will fuel testimonial injustices because the identity prejudices that religious people are subject to threaten their credibility as epistemic agents in various spheres of social life.

Here are some examples of inadequate forms of religious education that could fuel testimonial injustices. First, the oversimplification of religions runs the risk of transmitting stereotypes. When trying to present what Buddhism or Islam is or how Buddhists or Muslims are, it is almost inevitable to fall back on stereotypes about the religion and its adherents because you have to construct a *typical* Muslim and a *typical* Buddhist, and the “typical” is always stereotyped. Then, later, when a student would be confronted to a Muslim in the real world, this preconceived image and conception of what a Muslim is would be triggered and would greatly influence her perception of the human being in front of her. A religious education that would fail to represent the internal diversity of religions and religious movements and that would fail to show that religions do change over time will fuel testimonial injustice through the transmission of identity prejudice. Second, since students enter school already holding prejudices about religion, failing to address and confront them in religious education also constitute an inadequate way to teach about religion. Lastly, inadequate religious education does not only happen in religion classes, it can happen in any classes where the teacher is inattentive to her implicit assumptions. Uncareful assumptions about religion and religious individual in teaching about history, science, geography, etc. can serve to nourish stereotypes and identity prejudice.

In this section, I argued that religious individual can suffer multiple testimonial injustices owing to identity prejudice and that an inadequate religious education that presents religion or religious people in a stereotypical manner or that fails to confront those stereotypes would contribute to testimonial injustices. In response, it might appear that to avoid inadequate religious education which fuels

testimonial injustices, we could either have adequate religious education or no religious education at all. However, in the next section, I will argue that a lack of religious education could serve to reinforce hermeneutical injustices which will lead us to consider religious literacy as an adequate form of religious education in the third section of the paper.

2. Hermeneutical injustice and post-Christian ignorance

In this section, I present Fricker's conception of hermeneutical injustice that I supplement with Medina's dynamism to include in instances of hermeneutical injustice cases of active ignorance and I employ Medina's discussion of white ignorance to argue that there exists a sort of religious ignorance in Québec, and presumably in many secular societies, that I label post-Christian ignorance. I further argue that in the context of post-Christian ignorance, an absence of religious education would contribute to maintaining the active religious ignorance in avoiding epistemic friction with competing conceptions of what religion can be and how one can be religious.

Hermeneutical injustice happens when a speaker suffers an unjust deflation of intelligibility, or as Medina puts it: "Hermeneutical injustice is the phenomenon that occurs when the intelligibility of communicators is unfairly constrained or undermined, when their meaning-making capacities encounter unfair obstacles" (Medina 2017, 41). In her pioneering book, Fricker defined the generic form of hermeneutical injustice *per se* as "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization." (Fricker 2007, 158) Fricker's main example of hermeneutical injustice is that of Carmita Wood, a woman experiencing sexual harassment at work who was not able to make sense of her experience or to communicate it to others because the conceptual resources needed to understand and express an experience as an instance of sexual harassment was non-existent owing to the prior hermeneutical marginalization of women.

Fricker is fairly strict in her definition and at least five requirements have to be met for a hermeneutical failure to count as an injustice. It (1) has to concern some significant area of one's social experience, it has to (2) involve a paucity of concepts (Fricker 2016, 170) and the gap has to (3) be in the shared pool of hermeneutical resource understood as "contain[ing] only meanings that just about anyone can draw upon and expect those meanings to be understood across social space by just about anyone else." (Fricker 2016, 163) This hermeneutical gap has to (4) be the result of hermeneutical marginalization which is the unequal participation to the formation of the hermeneutical resource. Finally, (5) "the uncomprehending hearer is normally epistemically non-culpable" (Fricker 2016, 170). Hermeneutical injustice is fundamentally a structural problem; and the solution requires individual virtue, but also structural change to reduce hermeneutical marginalization (Fricker 2016, 175).

The criterion of hermeneutical marginalization helps differentiate hermeneutical injustice from epistemic bad luck. In the case of epistemic bad luck, a lack of conceptual resources makes it hard or impossible for one to communicate one's experience or even to make sense of it for oneself, but the hermeneutical gap is not the result of unequal relations of power. Thus, even though it may be harmful, it is not wrongful. For example, when an individual suffers from an unknown medical condition, she may have trouble making sense of what she lives and she may experience unintelligibility when expressing herself to others, but the hermeneutical gap itself is not a sufficient condition for hermeneutical injustice. In order to differentiate hermeneutical injustice from mere epistemic bad luck, we need to "focus on the background social conditions that were conducive to the relevant hermeneutical lacuna." (Fricker 2007, 152) There needs to be a history of social powerlessness where one group is prevented from participation on equal terms to the formation of the meaning-making resources, and this unequal participation is the *hermeneutical marginalization*. If there were no such history, then the resulting ignorance may undermine understanding and communication, but it is not a hermeneutical injustice in Fricker's framework.

Medina advocates for an expanded account of hermeneutical injustices that is pluralized and more polyphonic. After several years of debate between Fricker and him, it seems that one of the main differences between their accounts of hermeneutical injustice is that Fricker sees hermeneutical injustice as “a purely structural phenomenon with no individual perpetrator” (Fricker 2016, 172), but for Medina, there is an important agential aspect involved and an individual can be complicit in and can co-perpetrate a hermeneutical injustice (Medina 2012, 217–18).

Also, hermeneutical resources and gaps are less fixed and more pluralized and dynamic on Medina’s account. For Medina, there is no single set of conceptual resources in a society that would be shared by all because different groups in society develop different hermeneutical practices from their lived experience. This pluralized conception of hermeneutical resources also leads to a dynamic view of hermeneutical gaps: “Our communicative interactions can work to accentuate or to alleviate the hermeneutical gaps and silences that our cultures have created over time. Hermeneutical gaps are performatively invoked and recirculated—*re-enacted*, we could say—in the speech acts of our daily life.” (Medina 2012, 216) In other words, the hermeneutical gaps “require collective and sustained efforts across temporally and socially extended contexts” and are the result of “*patterns* of impoverished communication with specific hermeneutical insensitivities” (Medina 2012, 218), but they also are reinforced in failed communicative attempts between individuals.

Therefore, hermeneutical resources are not fixed and stable through time as a concrete wall in which there would be cracks and holes – hermeneutical gaps – that would need to be filled, and once filled with the new resources, i.e. new concrete, they become as fixed and stable as the rest of the wall. Rather, it seems more accurate to compare hermeneutical resources to wet sand that is continually moving and shifting because those conceptual resources are held by people – they are not independent of people – and people learn and forget, live and die, make up and change their mind, etc. Through time, when

relations of power change, the sand also moves and some prior hermeneutical gaps are filled and new gaps are created.

Medina includes as hermeneutical injustices instances of active ignorance such as white ignorance. “Active ignorance involves being hermeneutically numbed to certain meanings and voices” (Medina 2012, 213). It is a kind of insensitivity to the meanings that are advanced by others in communicative exchanges. One becomes actively ignorant through distorted social scripts and a vitiated epistemic character. “The social imaginary produces *active ignorance* by circulating distorted scripts [...] Those under the sway of this social imaginary—essentially all those who have been raised under the influence of these imaginings and the cultural representations they produced—are likely to develop epistemic habits that protect established cultural expectations and make them relatively blind and deaf to those things that seem to defy those expectations.” (Medina 2013, 68) The vitiated epistemic habits that are developed and that serve to maintain their privilege by ignoring it and avoiding confrontation with competing views are arrogance, laziness and closed-mindedness.

Fricker is reluctant to include white ignorance in hermeneutical injustice in part because she sees white ignorance as mainly involving “a dysfunction at the level of belief and evidence rather than the level of conceptual repertoire and intelligibility.” (Fricker 2016, 173) And one of Fricker’s criteria for hermeneutical injustice is that the resources that are lacking need to be *conceptual* and not merely knowledge or beliefs. On Fricker’s account, there could be an overlap between white ignorance and hermeneutical injustice if the white ignorance involved some suppression of *concepts* requisite for that knowledge (Fricker 2016, 174). The instances of active ignorance that I will consider below do involve the

suppression of concepts and should thus rightly be considered as instances of hermeneutical injustice², even on Fricker's account.

Factual knowledge can be seen through different conceptual lenses; so if the gap were merely in facts, then learning them would lead to the understanding of the social reality because the facts would be conceptually interpreted in the right way. However, if there is a gap in conceptual resources, the facts will be interpreted in a prejudiced way that will not reflect the social reality, but they will rather be interpreted in ways to reinforce the social positionality of the powerful ignorant. And conceptual inability (or insensitivity), combined with vitiated epistemic habits, allows the powerful to discard the meanings put forward by the resistant knowers.

Since hermeneutical injustices are always situated, we cannot assess if religious people suffer hermeneutical injustices in abstraction. We rather need to examine a particular context with its relations of power that determine the opportunities that people have to influence the shared hermeneutical resources. I will accordingly centre the discussion to the context of Québec. The question then is are religious individuals in our society suffering from a deficit of intelligibility and, if it is the case, is that deficit unjust and not merely the result of epistemic bad luck? In response to that question, I contend that, in Québec, there is a kind of active ignorance about religion that I label *post-Christian ignorance* that renders most individuals insensible to certain meanings about being religious and about religious experiences.

I understand post-Christian ignorance as having a very similar structure to white ignorance but with a different object. Medina defines white ignorance as a “kind of hermeneutical inability of privileged white subjects to recognize and make sense of their racial identities, experiences, and positionality in a racialized

² For the time being, I put aside the question of responsibility since I consider that the question of responsibility should not be considered as a *condition* for hermeneutical injustice, but rather that the responsibility should be assessed contextually.

world.” (Medina 2012, 202) In a society where white ignorance is at play, the hermeneutical gap about race and racism in the collective hermeneutical resource are not the result of mere epistemic bad luck, it is inscribed in relations of power. This conceptual suppression of race and racism serves the purpose of maintaining the racial social system in place.

Following the format of Medina’s definition of white ignorance, I define post-Christian ignorance as the kind of hermeneutical inability of the privileged post-Christian subjects to recognize and make sense of their secular/post-religious/post-Christian identities, experiences, and positionality in secular society.

The post-Christian understands religion in Christian terms, but does not consider herself religious and does not hold Christian views or beliefs. The post-Christian has her worldview shaped by some form of Judeo-Christianism but is blind to this fact. Post-Christian ignorance does not merely involve a lack or a suppression of propositional knowledge about other religions, it involves a lack of conceptual resources, an insensitivity to other ways of understanding and living religion and religiosity. Most importantly, the post-Christian fails to see the privilege that the *structure* of the secular and post-Christian world provides to those who experience religion (or no religion) in a particular way, and that the structure has discriminatory effects upon those that do not live or experience religion in this way.

This can be seen in the debates surrounding bill 21 and the *Act respecting the laicity of the state* where a particular version of neutrality, more precisely the appearance of neutrality, is used to justify the ban of religious symbols for public servants in position of authority. In Québec, some non-Christian religious symbols that are worn by individuals – e.g. the hijab, the burqa, the turban and the kirpan – are conspicuously seen as religious and as a threat to the state neutrality, but for a long time, the government failed to see the crucifix at the National Assembly as a religious symbol. It has often been alleged that the law was neutral because it applies to the symbols of every religion. However, the mere fact of focusing on the religious symbols that are worn by individuals, and not other visible religious symbols like crosses on

public buildings, shows non-neutrality at the level of conception of the law. Furthermore, the law has discriminatory effects since it burdens more heavily the individuals who conceive exterior wearable symbols as part of their religious identity and who cannot merely leave their religious symbols home. And to refuse to see the discriminatory effects³ shows a kind of active ignorance about other ways of being religious.

In other words, what I argue here is that failing to see that the structure of the secular society, notably in the *Act respecting the laicity of the state*, privileges those who have no religion or whose religion is invisible in their daily wearing is a sort of active ignorance that serves to maintain the privileges of the post-Christians. Further, the refusal to acknowledge this undermines the epistemic character of the post-Christians in encouraging arrogance, laziness and closed-mindedness which further prevents them from being sensitive to the experience of the religious other in a secular society.

In the case of post-Christian ignorance, the missing resource is no mere factual knowledge. There really seems to be some kind of deficit of intelligibility involved, some conceptual resources lacking, because when the post-Christian subject is told about a religious experience that does not fit the post-Christian conception of what religion is, it is not understood. There is not simply a lack of knowledge, but there is a lack of conceptual resources to understand the experience. Alternative conceptions of religion are put forward, but it is still misinterpreted.

Post-Christian ignorance and absence of religious education

Before arguing that, in the context of post-Christian ignorance, an absence of religious education contributes to hermeneutical injustice and is no mere unfortunate consequence of secular institutions, it

³ Minister Simon Jolin-Barette repeatedly refused to acknowledge that the law burdened more heavily Muslim women who wear the hijab. [reference to be added]

seems that we need to acknowledge the importance of public education in shaping the shared epistemic⁴ and hermeneutical resources of a society, and the influence that such education has on the formation of the epistemic character of citizens.

Because hermeneutical resources and gaps are dynamic and more akin to wet sand than concrete, hermeneutical marginalization should not be understood as something that can be overcome for good, once and for all. The epistemic resources that are shared in society are not a fixed entity that stays in place independently of the people; rather, they are held in place by the individuals and they have to be transmitted to and re-enacted by future generations. Epistemic resources, knowledge and conceptual resources, have to be continually re-enacted. Thus, when we address hermeneutical marginalization, we have to be attentive not only to who is participating in the *formation* of hermeneutical resources – as if once concepts were formed they were there once for all – but we also need to be attentive at how it is re-enacted through education. In other words, we need to be attentive to what is deemed worthy of being transmitted to the future generation and who is involved in deciding that. It seems that public education can have a central role in reducing hermeneutical marginalization, but that it can also help to sustain and even to create it. For example, education may not be the right tool to address the maximal case of hermeneutical injustice – where even the concerned individuals are not able to make sense of their own experience, and where the conceptual resources need to be *created* – but it seems to be very appropriate for the midway cases where marginalized groups understand very well their experience but are not able to share it with the larger population because non-group members are lacking the relevant hermeneutical resources. Education could serve accordingly to disseminate the relevant concepts in the shared hermeneutical resources.

⁴ I use “epistemic resources” here in a larger sense to include conceptual resources, factual knowledge, and approaches to knowledge.

The converse is also true; when some part of the human experience is deliberately left out, or mostly left out, of public education, it will most likely lead to the formation of gaps in the collective shared epistemic resources of a society and it could lead to epistemic habits of arrogance, laziness and closed-mindedness unless there are some important counterforces in society to supplement education's limitations. For Medina, epistemic friction (or a lack thereof) will be determinant for the development of epistemic virtues or vices that form one's epistemic character. Good epistemic friction is achieved by acknowledgement and engagement with external cognitive forces (e.g. diverging views) and in searching epistemic equilibrium between the external and internal cognitive forces (Medina 2013, 50). It is through this epistemic friction or resistance that one forms a virtuous epistemic character and the corresponding virtues of open-mindedness, curiosity/diligence and humility. On the contrary, "absence of or insensitivity to epistemic resistances promotes active ignorance and the epistemic vices that support it" (Medina 2013, 51) In sum, education can have an impact in shaping hermeneutical resources and in shaping student's epistemic character in providing (or failing to provide) opportunities of friction and confrontation between competing views.

A lack of religious education would no doubt lead to some kind of gap in the collective resources, but the question is whether this would constitute a wrong or if it would merely be an unfortunate consequence of secular institutions, i.e. a mere case of epistemic bad luck. In the context of post-Christian ignorance, a lack of religious education could not be a mere case of epistemic bad luck because the avoidance of friction with diverging and competing religious views and ways of conceiving religion and religious practices serves the purpose of active ignorance from post-Christians. This purpose is to maintain the privileges of those who live and conceive of religion in a particular way and to be blind to the discriminatory effects that the structure of the secular society can have on others.

Compare this again to race and racism. In a racist society where white ignorance is at play, not addressing race and racism in schools would not be a case of epistemic bad luck. Ignoring race and racism would serve to maintain the privilege of those who benefit from the racialized society and who refuse to see it. This hermeneutical insensitivity serves to maintain the racial social system. Accordingly, a lack of education about race and racism would contribute to the perpetuation of this active ignorance.

Analogously, in the context of post-Christian ignorance, a lack of religious education maintains the *status quo* and the current hermeneutical gaps and hermeneutical insensitivity to diverging conceptions of religion and religious practices. It would reinforce blindness to the religious other and blindness to the religious structural discrimination that is at play in the society.

3. Epistemic Justice as the End of Religious Education

Thus far, I have argued there can be forms of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice that target religious people *qua* religious people due to prejudices targeting their religiosity in general or their specific religious affiliation in particular and due to a form of active religious ignorance that I named post-Christian ignorance. I also argued that, on the one hand, an inadequate religious education would contribute to testimonial injustice through the perpetuation of identity prejudice and that, on the other hand, a lack of religious education would contribute to the hermeneutical marginalization of the religious other and would serve the self-protecting purpose of post-Christian ignorance to avoid friction and maintain its invisible privilege. This leads us quite naturally to consider if a certain form of religious education could promote epistemic justice and thus ground part of its legitimacy in the desire to counter epistemic injustices.

In this last section, I argue that religious literacy will promote epistemic justice and hence counter both forms of epistemic injustice. Religious literacy incorporates basic knowledge about world religions, an adequate approach to religion and the competence to engage with the religious other in a dynamic

manner. This should be done in fostering explicitly the epistemic virtues of epistemic humility, intellectual curiosity/diligence, and open-mindedness. I will proceed by first offering an account of epistemic justice based on Fricker's account of testimonial and hermeneutical justice supplemented with the Medina's conception of a virtuous epistemic character. I will then offer a conception of religious literacy based on Diane Moore's account and show how it can promote epistemic justice.

On Fricker's account, testimonial and hermeneutical justice are distinct, but also similar in that they both require sensitivity or alertness from the hearer to her own potential identity prejudice affecting her credibility judgments and to the potential limitations or inadequacy of hermeneutical resources that the hearer and speaker have access to. The virtues of testimonial and hermeneutical justice are both "virtues of reflexive social awareness." (Fricker 2007, 170)

For Fricker, there is a naïve form of testimonial justice where the hearer is prejudice-free and accordingly does not have to monitor nor to correct one's credibility judgment because it is not influenced by identity prejudice (Fricker 2007, 93). This naïve form could be present in a young individual whose judgment has not been yet influenced by the identity prejudices of the society she lives in, but when growing in a prejudiced society, the possibility to possess this naïve form of virtue diminishes as one gets older. We could not rely on the naturally unbiased judgment of some children to attain testimonial justice in society. Another possibility for the naïve form of testimonial justice is that it could be present in a prejudice-free society (if there were such a thing), or when a subculture have no conscience the social reality of other subcultures where a given identity prejudice happens (Fricker 2007, 93). In other words, the ignorance of social phenomenon seems to be conducive to a naïve form of testimonial justice. One could be tempted to argue from this that by taking religion out of public schools, it might create this sort of religion-free – and thus religious prejudice-free – subculture where students would make undeflated credibility judgement on religious matters and individuals.

However, this strategy is not plausible in the current state of the world at least for the following three reasons. First, especially in pluralist societies, some students will bring their religious identity with them. Given this, being silent about religion would not suffice to have a religion-free school. There would be a need to actively hide and silence the religious identity of individuals, but it should now be evident that this is not testimonial justice. Second, even if all students of a particular school were not religious, most of them would still hold views, stereotypes and prejudices about the religious others and their religions. This will prevent the school from being a naturally religion-free environment. Third, given the world history and the pervasiveness of religion, it is simply not possible to be silent about religion. As Diane Moore writes: “religion is *already* being taught in classrooms across the globe in intentional and unintentional ways. Uninformed and often unconscious assumptions about religion are transmitted on a regular basis to students who, in turn, absorb these assumptions without interrogation.” (Moore 2006, §10) Not paying attention to religion in the curriculum is most likely going to lead teachers to be uncareful about the kind of assumptions they have and transmit about religion. We could summarize these points in saying that the actual state of the world, and especially in pluralist societies, renders the naïve form the virtue of testimonial justice impossible to happen, at least not in a reliable and durable way; consequently, it is rather the corrective form of the virtue that we should aim at. As Fricker writes: “generally speaking too, the virtue will take corrective form, because human societies have prejudices in the air” (Fricker 2007, 96).

The corrective form of testimonial justice is an “anti-prejudicial virtue that is distinctively reflexive in structure” (Fricker 2007, 91). Accordingly, “the virtuous hearer *neutralizes the impact of prejudice in her credibility judgements.*” (Fricker 2007, 92) The virtuous hearer first needs a sensitivity that will alert her that her spontaneous credibility judgment might be affected by identity prejudice, and then, she “should shift intellectual gear out of spontaneous, unreflective mode and into active critical reflection in order to identify how far the suspected prejudice has influenced her judgement.” (Fricker 2007, 91)

To compensate the deflated credibility judgment, the speaker should give more credibility than what seems intuitively appropriate at first glance: “The guiding ideal is to neutralize any negative impact of prejudice in one’s credibility judgements by compensating upwards to reach the degree of credibility that would have been given were it not for the prejudice.” (Fricker 2007, 91–92) Being aware of identity prejudices is not enough to counter their effects on credibility judgment, but it should give the virtuous hearer a reason to compensate the credibility deficit that might happen unconsciously.

Through time and habituation, the virtuous hearer will get better at correcting credibility judgment, and it might even become spontaneous. It can become so through “plain personal familiarity” (Fricker 2007, 96), that is when the “initially socially loaded accent gets normalized with habituation” (Fricker 2007, 96). In this case, prejudices stop having an effect on credibility judgements: “the prejudiced first impression melts away, and the hearer’s credibility judgement corrects itself spontaneously.” (Fricker 2007, 96) However, whether spontaneously or conscientiously, what matters for testimonial justice “is that somehow or other one succeeds, reliably enough (through time and across a suitable span of prejudices), in correcting for prejudice in one’s credibility judgements. If one succeeds in that, then one has got the virtue of testimonial justice.” (Fricker 2007, 98)

For the virtue of hermeneutical justice, the sensitivity that is needed is an “alertness or sensitivity to the possibility that the difficulty one’s interlocutor is having as she tries to render something communicatively intelligible is due not to its being a nonsense or her being a fool, but rather to some sort of gap in collective hermeneutical resources.” (Fricker 2007, 169) Tying this conception of hermeneutical justice with the epistemic virtues identified by Medina (Medina 2013, 40–48), one needs the *epistemic humility* to recognize that one does not have the hermeneutical resources to make sense of all experiences and that a lack of understanding may be caused such a lack in hermeneutical resources. When alert to this, one needs the *intellectual curiosity or diligence* to seek to understand what is being expressed or tried to be

expressed. In some cases, when the speaker is also lacking the hermeneutical resources to make sense of her experience, the virtuous hearer should try to hear above what is being said and contribute with the speaker to try to forge conceptual resources in cooperation with the speaker. In doing so, one will also need to be *open-minded* because the meaning that is put forward may challenge one's views and positionality. Thus the hermeneutically virtuous hearer will have "capacity for indefinitely context-sensitive judgement" (Fricker 2007, 171).

In exercising the virtue of hermeneutical justice, the hope is that new meanings can be created to help overcome the communicative difficulties caused by the hermeneutical marginalisation and that the marginalized hermeneutical resources that are already available may be integrated to the conceptual resources of the larger population. In doing so, "the exercise of the virtue ultimately aims at the actual elimination of the very injustice it is designed only to correct for." (Fricker 2007, 174) In addition to individual efforts, reducing hermeneutical marginalization would require structural changes to make equal participation in shaping the shared hermeneutical resources possible. As Fricker points to: "Shifting the unequal relations of power that create the conditions of hermeneutical injustice (namely, hermeneutical marginalization) takes more than virtuous individual conduct of any kind; it takes group political action for social change." (Fricker 2007, 174)

With this account of epistemic justice on hand, we can now consider how it could constitute the end of religious education. In what follows, I contend that an adequate religious education that seeks to develop a competence of religious literacy (defined in the appropriate way) would promote epistemic justice because it promotes the virtues required for epistemic justice and reduces the potential for epistemic injustice in rejecting stereotypical conceptions of religion and in expanding hermeneutical sensibilities and resources.

To start with an example of religious literacy that would fail to promote epistemic justice, I introduce the account of Stephen Prothero as presented in *Religious literacy, what every American needs to know – and doesn't* (2008). Prothero defines religious literacy as “the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life.” (Prothero 2008, 17) This religious literacy includes knowledge and understanding of doctrines and narratives (Prothero 2008, 18). “It is the ability to participate in our ongoing conversation about the private and public powers of religions. But that ability itself *depends on knowing basic information about Christianity and other religions*” (Prothero 2008, 18, emphasis added). This form of religious literacy has a civic purpose: “the civic purpose should be to produce citizens who know enough about Christianity and the world’s religions to participate meaningfully – on both the left and the right – in religiously inflected public debates.” (Prothero 2008, 22)

Beyond the (over)emphasis on the context of the United States, I want to highlight two problems of Prothero’s account of religious literacy for the purpose of epistemic justice. First, it relies primarily on factual knowledge. While it is true that some factual knowledge is important, insisting that a set of propositions is foundational seems to lead us again to stereotypes and to consider religions to be uniform and unchanging. This difficulty may be overcome, but it seems that any religious education that does not seek to directly challenge stereotypes will contribute to their reinforcement or to the formation of new ones. Second, taking the understanding of the religion of the majority – in the American case, Christianity – to be foundational to religious literacy does not seem to lead us toward the epistemic friction, through the acknowledgement and engagement with diverging views, that would be needed for the development of the epistemic virtues of humility, curiosity and open-mindedness. It might even reinforce the post-Christian ignorance that formats every religious experience through a particular understanding of what religious experience can consist of.

A more promising conception of religious literacy for epistemic justice was proposed by Diane Moore (2006; 2007). She defines religious literacy in the following way:

Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place. (Moore 2007, 56–57)

This conception of religious literacy include some basic knowledge about religion, but it is far from limited to doctrine and traditions, and most importantly, to avoid stereotypes, it recognizes the diversity of religious expression through time and places, and the impact that the contexts have on religion itself. Religion is not seen in a fixed and stable way, unaffected by the epoch and the context, and unchangeable by the religious members themselves. On this conception of religious literacy, it would be unhelpful to characterize what a *typical* Buddhist would do, believe or look like because it recognizes that there is no such thing as a typical member of a uniform and unchanging religion. This approach seeks to prevent the understanding of religion in a stereotypical manner. In reducing stereotypical conceptions of religion and identity prejudice about religious people, religious literacy would thus contribute to reducing instances of testimonial injustice.

This account of religious literacy also recognizes the pervasiveness of religion and encourages the ability to discern the influence of religion in other spheres of life which prepare students to avoid the temptation of ignoring religion altogether that would serve to reduce epistemic friction and conserve privileges of post-Christians. It would also expand hermeneutical sensibilities in providing multiple occasions for friction with competing religious views and conceptions of being religious. Ideally, it should also provide opportunities for encounter and engagement with religious others to both break stereotypes and expand hermeneutical resources and sensibilities.

Furthermore, religious education that seeks religious literacy would promote the opportunities to develop a virtuous epistemic character. The virtuous hearer would seek to engage in dialogue with others to experience epistemic friction and thus expand her hermeneutical sensibilities and develop her epistemic virtues. In discussion with others, the virtuous hearer would be careful not to apply her prior religious knowledge blindly on someone, but would rather be attentive to what is being said (and what is not said) and would use her prior knowledge to help make sense of what the person is saying without imposing a given meaning on her. Religious literacy should help to make sense, but above all should prevent the hearer from unjustifiably frame the religious experience in her prior conceptual schemas. In working toward hermeneutical justice, religious literacy provides some basic conceptual knowledge, but also should help the virtuous hearer to develop a sensibility to the possibility that the lived religious experience might not fit within her previous knowledge and conceptual resources.

Moore also underlines the conduciveness of religious literacy to developing virtuous epistemic habits: “Promoting religious literacy in the schools will enhance intellectual rigor, sharpen critical thinking skills, and further advance deep multiculturalism by giving students the tools to understand religion and the plurality of religious experiences across the curriculum and within the school community itself.” (Moore 2007, 33)

I think Moore’s conception of religious literacy is heading the right way for an adequate religious education because of the sort of character it seems conducive to develop in students. However, we cannot merely hope that epistemic justice will spontaneously emerge, even in conducive circumstances. The stakes are too high, we should explicitly aim at it and aim to educate students into virtue. Accordingly, I contend that an adequate religious education would also explicitly aim toward epistemic justice and the formation of virtuous epistemic habits in addition to religious literacy, or even better, it would explicitly incorporate the virtues of epistemic justice into the competence of religious literacy.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, alertness to epistemic injustice in the context of education leads us to consider how “decisions about the curriculum enable or block students’ understanding of particular social experiences and encourage or inhibit the ability of students from particular cultures to express their particular understanding of the world.” (Kotzee 2017, 327) Religious education is no exception, and when considering the role, if any, of religion in public schools, we need to pay attention to the impact it can have on the capacity of members of the society to understand the social experiences of others. To organize a society in ways that protect the freedom and equality of its citizens, we first need to understand those citizens, and understanding requires hermeneutical tools and appropriate credibility judgments.

In this paper, I argued that, amongst the many epistemic injustices in society, there are forms of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice that religious people suffer *qua* religious people because of identity prejudice and post-Christian ignorance. I also argued that those epistemic injustices give us reason to reject religious education that presents religion in a stereotypical manner or fails to confront religious stereotypes and an absence of religious education. Lastly, I argued that religious literacy is heading toward epistemic justice because it promotes the formation of a virtuous epistemic character and it can counter stereotypes and contribute to the expansion of hermeneutical sensibilities. This gives us ground for religious education in public schools that would aim to the development of this competence of religious literacy.

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