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Exploitative Epistemic Trust

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Abstract. Where there is trust, there is also vulnerability, and vulnerability can be exploited. Epistemic trust is no exception. This chapter maps the phenomenon of the exploitation of epistemic trust. I start with a discussion of how trust in general can be exploited; a key observation is that trust incurs vulnerabilities not just for the party doing the trusting, but also for the trustee (after all, trust can be burdensome), so either party can exploit the other. I apply these considerations to epistemic trust, specifically in testimonial relationships. There, we standardly think of a hearer trusting a speaker. But we miss an important aspect of this relationship unless we consider too that the speaker standardly trusts the hearer. Given this mutual trust, and given that both trustees and trusters can exploit each other, we have four possibilities for exploitation in epistemic-trust relationships: a speaker exploiting a hearer (a) by accepting his trust or (b) by imposing her trust on him, and a hearer exploiting a speaker (c) by accepting her trust or (d) by imposing his trust on her. One result is that you do not need to betray someone to exploit him – you can exploit him just as easily by doing what he trusts you for.

1. Introduction

Relationships of trust incur vulnerability, and vulnerability can be exploited. Epistemic trust is no exception. This chapter maps out four forms of exploitation in epistemic-trust relationships involving testimony. Several theses of relevance to social epistemology emerge.

One important form of trust in testimony consists in a hearer trusting a speaker for knowledge: he believes what she says on the basis of the fact that she says it, making himself vulnerable to insincerity or error on her part. Less discussed but equally important is that speakers standardly trust hearers too: testifying makes a speaker vulnerable in various ways, for example to not being taken seriously (Hinchman 2005; Dotson 2011; M. Fricker 2007; Frost-Arnold 2016; Medina 2013); so a speaker standardly trusts her hearer for epistemic recognition. Since both hearers and speakers are vulnerable in their capacity as trusters, each can have their trust exploited by the other.

But it is not just a trustee who can exploit a truster – a truster can also exploit someone whom he trusts. After all, accepting trust is burdensome: it incurs an obligation and so makes a trustee vulnerable to difficulties that may arise in discharging it. This holds for both parties to a testimonial relationship: a hearer, in his capacity as a truster, can exploit a speaker by imposing his trust for knowledge on her, and a speaker, in her capacity as a truster, can exploit a hearer by imposing on him her trust for epistemic recognition. Since both speakers and hearers are vulnerable in their capacity as trustees, each can be exploited in their acceptance of the other's trust.

Four possibilities for epistemic exploitation in relationships of testimony have emerged: (a) A speaker can exploit a hearer by accepting his trust for knowledge or (b) by imposing on him her trust for epistemic recognition, and (c) a hearer can exploit a speaker by accepting her trust for recognition or (d) by imposing his trust for knowledge on her.

One might think that exploiting a truster – forms (a) and (c) – involves *betraying* him (or at least letting him down). One might also think that exploiting a trustee – forms (b) and (d) –

involves imposing your trust under false pretenses (for example, pretending to trust when you are really out to manipulate). These two suggestions are right insofar as betrayal and deceit are much loved tools of exploitation. But as we will see, they are not necessary: a trustee can exploit a truster by fulfilling his trust, and a truster can exploit a trustee by trusting her in good faith.

This chapter forges links between discussions about trust in general (Baier 1986, 1991; Jones 2004; Hinchman 2017; Hawley 2014), about testimony (E. Fricker 2006; M. Fricker 2007; Goldberg, unpublished manuscript; Hinchman 2005), and about the epistemic effects of power dynamics in social contexts (M. Fricker 2007; Mills 2007; Spelman 2007; Dotson 2011, 2012, 2014; Medina 2013; Berenstain 2016; Frost-Arnold 2014). Section 2 discusses trust and exploitation in non-epistemic settings. Section 3 introduces exploitative trust in testimony. Section 4 discusses how a speaker can epistemically exploit a hearer, and section 5 how a hearer can return the favor. Section 6 concludes.

2. Exploitative Trust

2.1 Trust

The form of trust at issue is interpersonal: one person trusts another person. It is also a three-place relation: one person trusts another for some end. Trust involves *relying* on the trustee for the end in question; but trust is more than reliance, for you can rely on a person without trusting him. You can rely on me not to steal your cake, on the grounds that I wouldn't touch lemon drizzle anyway. But if your cake is amaretto, which you know is my favorite, then you cannot merely rely on me – you had better trust me. The difference? Mere reliance is a matter of planning on someone's predictable behavior, whereas trust involves a cooperative relationship, in which she accepts your trust.

One characteristic feature of this relationship is that it is governed by special norms, above and beyond the norms governing mere reliance (Baier 1986, 1991; Holton 1994; Becker 1996; Jones 2004; Hinchman 2005; Faulkner 2007; Nickel 2007; Darwall 2017). We can see this by imagining that I do steal your cake. If you were merely relying on me not to (as in the lemon-drizzle case), I violate the moral prohibition on stealing, but nothing more – I might not even know the cake is yours. When you trust me (as in the amaretto case), I violate this prohibition, but I also violate a second norm: I betray your trust.

Trust relationships come with their own package of norms. One mandates that the trustee do whatever she can, within reason, to come through for the truster (Hinchman 2017); I'll refer to this as the *trying-your-best-within-reason* norm. Another, which I'll call the *authenticity norm*, forbids either party from deceiving the other (Frost-Arnold 2014, 791). Additional norms permit (or perhaps mandate) reactive attitudes, such as feelings of betrayal or gratitude (Baier 1986; Ruokonen 2013; Holton 1994).

What sort of norms are the norms of trust? I suggest (and others agree¹) that they are for the most part a special kind of moral norm, making the betrayal or letting down of trust a special kind of moral violation. This might sound strange – for surely it can be *good* to betray trust and *bad* to fulfill it, for example when it sustains a mafia or other immoral enterprise (Baier 1986; Frost-Arnold 2014; Jones 2017). But this observation does not show that the norms of trust are not moral; it shows only that they are *pro tanto*: they can be outweighed by stronger moral norms.

A second distinguishing feature of trust, beyond having special norms, is that it is characterized by a certain psychological profile. The truster for his part premises his reliance on the trustee on the assumption that she will be responsive to some aspect of their trust

¹ Baier (1986), McLeod (2000), Nickel (2007), Faulkner (2011), Ruokonen (2013), and Darwall (2017) take the norms of trust to be moral; Jones (2017) argues that they are not.

relationship. This might be himself personally (Baier 1986; Darwall 2017), the fact that he is depending on her (Jones 1996; Faulkner 2011), a shared project (Baier *ibid.*), or simply the obligation or commitment that she has incurred by accepting his trust (Nickel 2007; Hawley 2014). A trustee who accepts the trust, for her part, characteristically is responsive in these ways.

Although thinner construals of trust relationships are possible (see the Introduction), I will characterize them in terms of the abovementioned norms and psychological profile. For my aim is to show that relationships of trust are compatible with exploitation; if I can show this for a strong notion of trust, it will automatically hold for weaker ones.

In preparation for the following we must clarify how a trust relationship might succeed or fail. In the paradigm case of a trust relationship gone right, one party trusts another in good faith, and the latter, doing her best within reason, delivers the end that she is being trusted for. For example, I fulfill your trust to pick you up at the airport by double-checking your arrival time, leaving in time to beat the traffic, and waiting at our arranged spot. In such cases we may say that the trustee has *fulfilled* the trust.

We may contrast this with two ways in which the trustee may fail to fulfill the trust: by *disappointing* it or by *betraying* it.² One disappoints trust by failing to deliver the end in question. One betrays it by not trying one's best, within reason, to come through (thus violating the trying-your-best-within-reason norm). Disappointment and betrayal often overlap, but neither entails the other. In our airport case, I would disappoint your trust by failing to turn up. If I do this because I failed to try my best (say, I lost track of time because I was engrossed in a novel), then it is also a betrayal. But some disappointments of trust are not betrayals (Hinchman 2017): I might fail to make it to the airport because I had a flat tire or had to witness to a car accident. Similarly, one can – at least arguably – betray trust without disappointing it (Hinchman *ibid.*). For example, I could pick you up at the airport after all, but accidentally: having forgotten our arrangement, I went there seeking my lost briefcase and happened to see you waiting. Although I delivered the end that you were trusting me for, I did it despite my carelessness, and so arguably wound up betraying you (even if you never find out).

To simplify matters, in the cases discussed below, all betrayals of trust will also be disappointments: the trustee's culpable behavior will result in her failing to deliver the end that she is being trusted for; and all cases in which the trustee delivers the end in question, it will be a case of trust fulfillment: he will have delivered it by trying his best within reason.

An important issue in the following concerns what distinguishes a relationship as one of trust. This matters, because I want to show that bona fide trust relationships can be exploitative – and I want to do so without needing to appeal to borderline cases. I have already said that trust is governed by special norms and is characterized by a cooperative, other-directed psychology. Yet sometimes a case might diverge from the ideal without thereby ceasing to count as a relationship of trust. For example, the truster might violate the “no-nagging” norm too much, or the trustee may flag in his sense of obligation or enthusiasm for the common project. Yet I will suppose that a necessary condition for a relationship to count as one of trust is that *both parties obey the authenticity norm*: both agree, and intend, to abide by the norms of trust. This criterion for bona fide trust includes any relationship in which the trust is fulfilled, but it also includes some cases in which it is betrayed: namely, those in which the betrayal is unintentional. Cases of intentional betrayal, by contrast, do not count as trust relationships – for the trustee cannot truly be said to *accept* the other's trust. That bona fide trust relationships admit of exploitation should not come as a surprise. For interpersonal relationships, including trust relationships, encompass many dimensions of

² (Darwall 2017) argues that trust, because it is more like love than obligation, cannot be *betrayed*, but only *let down*. I will stick with the notion of betrayal, but the notion of letting down could easily be substituted.

power and vulnerability (Baier 1986, 1991), which are already two of exploitation's main ingredients.

I will discuss how relationships of trust in general can be exploitative, and will then move on to epistemic trust in particular.

2.2 Exploitation and Trust

The account of exploitation best suited to understanding this phenomenon in trust relationships is Wood's (1995, 2014, chapter 12).³ One person exploits another when he takes advantage of her vulnerability, typically by exercising power over her, in order to achieve some gain. The exploited person typically gains too, though at a gouging price. For example, a water seller encounters a hiker lost in the desert and exploits her by selling her a bottle of water for €1,000.⁴ I'll use *exploiting a person* and *exploiting his vulnerability* interchangeably.⁵

There are many forms of power and vulnerability that can feature in exploitation. One example is social; think of supervisors and students, members of majority or minority ethnicities, and so forth. Another is legal; think of someone's legal claim being upheld and enforced against another. Another form of power and vulnerability is emotional: one person might be manipulative, whereas another is emotionally needy and so vulnerable to manipulation. Exploitation can occur along these dimensions of power and vulnerability, as well as others.

Vulnerability might come about as a result of coercion or manipulation. Coercion forces a person's will by narrowing his acceptable alternatives, and manipulation covertly influences the deliberations that shape his will (Wood 2014, chapter 12). The water seller might have the hiker brought to the desert at gunpoint, or slyly convince her that the trail is lined with potable streams. But vulnerability can arise independently of coercion or manipulation: one party may simply enjoy a powerful bargaining advantage. The seller for instance might set up shop and wait for desperate hikers.

Exploitation is sometimes used as a moral concept, implying the badness of the situation that it applies to (e.g. Wertheimer 1996; Sample 2003). But it can also be used neutrally: a debater exploits the weaknesses in her opponent's argument; a rescuer exploits a kidnapper's vanity. This neutral sense is what I am interested in here. What typically distinguishes bad from neutral or good exploitation is that, in the former, the exploiter disrespects or degrades the exploitee (Wood 1995). Though most of my examples are of bad exploitation, I'll discuss one virtuous case.

Relationships of trust necessarily incur vulnerability. They do so for the truster, because by definition he puts himself in the hands of the trustee – and she might fail to come through with the trusted-for end, or hurt him emotionally by not doing her best for him. On top of these vulnerabilities incurred by trust, the truster might have vulnerabilities that pre-exist it; they might even have made trust the best course of action to begin with (Baier 1986). The truster may for instance badly need the thing for which he trusts, and be unable to obtain it alone.

³ One reason is that Wood's account allows for morally neutral or even good cases of exploitation; another is that it captures exploitation in market as well as non-market circumstances. Wood makes a few distinctions that for simplicity I omit here. A close relative is the account of Sample (2003), except that she takes exploitation to be necessarily bad, which Wood (and I) deny. One way in which my view might be read as departing from Wood's is that I allow for the possibility that one person can exploit another by accident.

⁴ This example comes from Zwolinski and Wertheimer (2016).

⁵ Some argue that exploitation entails that the exploited person is treated *unfairly* (e.g. Wertheimer 1996). But unfairness is hard to cash out, and may exclude the possibility, which I discuss below, of morally virtuous exploitation; for discussion see (Wood 1995).

Yet trustees are vulnerable too (Baier 1986, 1991). Accepting trust incurs obligation, which is a mental and emotional burden, and perhaps, should things not go to plan, inconvenience.⁶ In addition to vulnerabilities incurred by trust, a trustee may have vulnerabilities apart from it, perhaps even accepting trust on account of them; she might for instance be lonely and welcome the emotional connection of being trusted, or might need the truster's financial support.

Since both truster and trustee are vulnerable to the other, each might be exploited by the other. I'll discuss two ways in which a trustee can exploit a truster, and one in which a truster can exploit a trustee.

A trustee can exploit a truster, first, by betraying him. She might do so by signaling acceptance of his trust while having no intention of fulfilling it – but since this sort of betrayal violates the authenticity norm (and hence is not a bona fide acceptance of trust), I will not discuss it here. Instead I will focus on betrayals that are *unintentional* – in which the trustee intends to deliver what she is being trusted for, but culpably fails to do so. For example, a contractor might use the cheapest available paint in a house without bothering to look into its chemical composition, inadvertently covering the occupants' walls with toxins. Each element of exploitation is present: the occupants who trusted the contractor for a safe paint job pay a gouging price in the form of their future health (though they may not realize it), while the contractor gains financially as a result (though she may not realize the extent of the price that she has negligently imposed).

The second way in which a trustee can exploit a truster may come as a surprise: she might do so by *fulfilling his trust*. For example, a grown son might trust his parents for financial support, yet feel guilty about doing so; his parents might exploit his guilt at their acceptance of his trust by pushing him to end an engagement with a fiancée who displeases them.⁷ The son pays the price of his ruined relationship, while the parents gain by exerting control over the constellation of their extended family.

Exploitation in trust relationships can run in the other direction too, with trusters exploiting trustees – indeed, simply by trusting them. If someone asks you to accept his trust, refusing can be difficult, yet accepting, as we saw, can be burdensome. For example, a CEO trusts an unpaid intern, who needs this step-up in his career, to manage her ill-advised love affairs. Or you might trust your friend, who has a hard time saying no, to drop what she is doing and drive you to the airport. You can exploit someone, then, by *imposing your trust on her*.

The three forms of exploitation I will discuss, in summary, are those in which a trustee exploits a truster by betraying him unintentionally or by fulfilling his trust, and in which a truster exploits a trustee by imposing his trust on her.

One might object that the cases of exploitation I have described do not really involve relationships of *trust*. For trust relationships are characterized by cooperative submission to the norms of trust and by responsiveness to the relationship, whereas exploitation, at least of the bad variety, seems to involve *violating* norms for how to treat people and responding only to self-interest.

But our examples show that this objection is mistaken. The contractor authentically intends to perform a safe paint job, even though she does so with culpable incompetence. Moreover, she can do so in response to an aspect of her relationship with the occupants, such as their need for a paint job, or the obligation that she has incurred by accepting their trust. A similar point holds for the parents: they authentically want to financially support their guilt-ridden son; and they do so in response to their relationship with him, whether they are motivated by their goodwill toward him or his future, or are simply committed, as his parents,

⁶ Trusting incurs vulnerability by necessity; being trusted standardly does, but I will leave open whether it does so necessarily.

⁷ This example is inspired by (Origgi 2009).

to coming through for him. They might even know (and indeed feel guilty) that they are exploiting him. And the son, even if he is aware that he is being exploited, nonetheless relies on his parents to respond to the relationship in these ways. Finally, consider the CEO. She is authentic about wanting her intern's help, cooperates with him, and is disposed to gratitude when he takes her unfortunate paramours' calls. Moreover, she can rely on him to be responsive to their relationship, which extends its tentacles deeper than his contract – he may pity her, be constitutionally unable to see a need go unmet when he can help, or experience goodwill toward the company with which he has cast his lot.

Exploitation, then, is compatible with relationships in which one person trusts another and the latter accepts his trust. I will turn now to exploitation in relationships of *epistemic* trust.

3. Exploitation in Epistemic-Trust Relationships

I'll assume that epistemic trust is a species of trust generally, as opposed to mere reliance.⁸ I'll focus on epistemic trust in testimony, in which a speaker tells something, say *p*, to a hearer. At least in the cases that I am interested in here, this amounts to the speaker's inviting the hearer to trust her for knowledge that *p* (Hinchman 2005), and trusting him in turn to accord her epistemic recognition concerning her knowledge that *p*. To avoid confusion, I will refer to speakers of testimony as "she" and to hearers as "he".

Consider first the hearer's trust in the speaker. The epistemic goods that he trusts her for, such as knowledge or evidence, are what we may call *representational*. These either represent the world accurately, or indicate that a belief is likely to do so. A hearer who trusts a speaker for representational goods makes himself vulnerable – to misinformation, to practical mishaps, or to a strained relationship with the speaker should her testimony turn out false or careless. But the speaker, as trustee, is vulnerable too: having accepted the hearer's trust, she has committed to providing him with knowledge. Should her testimony (to her surprise) turn out false or unfounded, she is vulnerable to the hearer's reactive attitudes or to damage to her epistemic reputation.

It is standard for discussions of testimony, if they thematize trust at all, to focus on the hearer's trust in the speaker (e.g. Faulkner 2007; Hinchman 2005; McMyler 2011); but the speaker too must typically trust the hearer (Dotson 2011, 238; Frost-Arnold 2016, 519-520). The epistemic goods for which she trusts him are what we may call *recognitional* (Hinchman 2005, 565; M. Fricker 2007, 142-146). Recognitional epistemic goods consist in the right response to a person's epistemic agency or to her status as a knower (Dotson 2011, 2014). They come in several forms. One amounts to ascribing a speaker the credibility that she deserves; another is crediting her when appropriate;⁹ another involves regarding her as the authority on how her words should be interpreted and on which third parties may be told them. The speaker, in trusting the hearer for these goods, makes herself vulnerable to the hearer (Dotson 2011). His disappointing or betraying her trust may dent her epistemic self-confidence, or the confidence of onlookers in her (M. Fricker 2007; Hinchman 2005). It may inhibit her from sharing knowledge in the future, compromising epistemic agency (Dotson 2011). She might even risk practical harms from the exposure of her sensitive information.

Yet the hearer too, in his capacity as a trustee for epistemic recognition, may also be vulnerable. If he fails to accord the speaker recognition that she deserves (say, he harbors unconscious prejudicial biases or accidentally lets slip her private information), he risks being targeted by her reactive attitudes, damaging his relationship to her, or gaining a reputation as closed-minded, untrustworthy, or even bigoted.

⁸ For discussion see the Introduction to this volume, and (Frost-Arnold 2013).

⁹ This is the flipside of Goldberg's observation that the buck stops with the testifier (2006, 134; cf. Hinchman 2005, 568): the testifier does not just *bear responsibility*, but also *deserves credit*.

So epistemic trust in testimony is bi-directional: the hearer trusts the speaker for representational goods, and the speaker trusts the hearer for recognitional goods. Both parties are vulnerable to each other in their capacities as truster and trustee alike.

As we saw with trust in general, so too with epistemic trust: its vulnerabilities can arise from the epistemic-trust relationship itself, but need not. They can also precede or motivate it. For example, I trust you for knowledge *because* I am in ignorance, and you trust me for epistemic recognition *because* you need your story told.

Each party to an epistemic-trust relationship may be in a position to exploit the other. Since both speakers and hearers are trusters and trustees, and since exploitation can go both ways between truster and trustee, the following possibilities arise for exploitation in epistemic-trust relationships:

Types of Exploitative Trust in Testimony

The speaker exploiting the hearer:

- (1) A speaker exploits a hearer's trust for representational epistemic goods.
- (2) A speaker exploitatively trusts a hearer for recognitional epistemic goods.

The hearer exploiting the speaker:

- (3) A hearer exploits a speaker's trust for recognitional epistemic goods.
- (4) A hearer exploitatively trusts a speaker for representational epistemic goods.

I'll consider (1) and (2) as a unit, envisioning cases in which speakers exploit hearers by accepting their trust for knowledge, or by imposing trust for recognition on them (section 4). I will similarly examine (3) and (4) together, focusing on a case in which a hearer exploits a speaker by accepting her trust for recognition and by imposing on her his trust for knowledge (section 5).

The exploitation that I will discuss is epistemic. By this I mean that the core, or definitive feature, of the exploitative interaction is one party's acceptance of the other's trust for epistemic goods. *A speaker epistemically exploits a hearer* just in case the hearer's trusting belief in her testimony, and his acceptance of her trust for epistemic recognition, benefits the speaker and costs the hearer in a way that takes advantage of a vulnerability of the hearer's. *A hearer epistemically exploits a speaker* just in case the speaker's trusting the hearer for recognition, and accepting his trust for knowledge, benefits the hearer and costs the speaker in a way that takes advantage of a vulnerability of the speaker's. Finer distinctions can doubtless be drawn, but my present aim is to sketch the broad contours of a phenomenon which further research can fill in more precisely.

4. The Speaker Exploiting the Hearer

We saw two ways in which a speaker can exploit a hearer: in her capacity as a trustee for knowledge, and in her capacity as a truster for epistemic recognition. These forms of exploitation are conceptually distinct, but they typically intermingle. In this initial exploration I will consider cases in which they go together. I will consider two types of case: one in which the speaker betrays the hearer by testifying falsely and irresponsibly, thus failing to deserve the epistemic recognition that she trusts him for (section 4.1), and another in which the speaker testifies truly and responsibly, and does deserve his recognition (section 4.2).

4.1 Betrayal of Trust for Knowledge, Failure to Deserve Epistemic Recognition

A speaker betrays a hearer when she lies to him or testifies a belief that she has formed carelessly. We may automatically exclude a lie from the cases of interest here, since a deceitful speaker violates the authenticity norm and hence is not even trying to do her part in the trust relationship. Testifying a belief that she has formed carelessly, by contrast, is compatible with a measure of trying, and so can be an unintentional betrayal. I will focus for simplicity on cases in which this unintentional betrayal is also a *disappointment* of the hearer's trust: here, a failure to give him knowledge.¹⁰ One way in which this might happen is if the speaker holds the belief so carelessly that, even if it is true, she herself does not count as knowing it.¹¹ Another way is for the belief to be false. In all of the cases I consider, the belief testified by the careless speaker disappoints the hearer's trust by being false.

In the type of example that I will work with, the speaker is in a position of social power and the hearer is in a position of social vulnerability. More specifically, the speaker belongs to a group that is dominantly situated, and the hearer belongs to a group that is non-dominantly situated.¹² In the example, this situation is upheld by systemic injustice. What the speaker testifies to the hearer is a false and disempowering narrative about the latter's circumstances. This narrative, or *legitimation myth* (Stanley 2015, 211; cf. Dotson 2012; Collins 2000, 27), whitewashes the injustice of the situation and the responsibility borne by the speaker's own group, instead casting blame on external circumstances, or more typically on the hearer's group. For example, before women's suffrage, democratically empowered men justified denying women the vote on the grounds that women were supposedly constitutionally unsuited to engaging in the public sphere – which many female opponents of suffrage accepted. For another example, it is not uncommon for the fantastically wealthy to excuse eye-watering economic disparities by claiming that their society is a pure meritocracy, implying that the economically disadvantaged simply do not work hard enough (Stanley 2015).

Testifying a legitimation myth is not always a matter of stating it in so many words, but can also involve the use of loaded concepts, including stereotypes, in a way that assumes the hearer's agreement. This happens when the speaker talks about something ostensibly different but builds the concept into her assertion in a way that presupposes the hearer's acceptance of it (Collins 2000, 27; Stanley *ibid.*). Think of a well-meaning father talking about his political activities in martial terms that signal the inherent unladylikeness of politics to a daughter raised to aspire to ladylikeness.

A dominantly situated speaker who testifies a legitimation myth to a non-dominantly situated hearer epistemically exploits him, at least as long as he believes her (if he does he suffers from false consciousness). The hearer's belief costs him, because it hides from him the truth about his situation. And it benefits the speaker, because it reduces the likelihood that the hearer will ask uncomfortable questions – and if he won't, then who will? Moreover, the speaker in this case wins the hearer's epistemic recognition, and secures his trust for knowledge, by taking advantage of certain vulnerabilities of the hearer's that arise from his social location. To see this, note that part of what it is to be non-dominantly situated is for the vast majority of the knowledge claims prevalent in your society to be generated and passed on by people outside of your own group – by the dominantly situated (Collins 2000, 3-5; Scheman 2001; M. Fricker 2007; Grasswick 2018). Think of wealthy men, however well-meaning, who indoctrinated their daughters that the rough-and-tumble of politics is better left

¹⁰ Though some argue that the carelessness, or irresponsibility, of the speaker's belief *itself* excludes it from counting as knowledge (e.g. Baehr 2011; Zagzebski 1996).

¹¹ Some argue that a hearer can count as knowing a truth that he receives from a speaker, even if the speaker herself does not count as knowing it; I won't discuss this possibility, but see Greco (this volume).

¹² Talk of dominantly and non-dominantly situated social locations is of course simplistic. There are many respects in which a given person might be one or the other, and these categories admit of degree. I will ignore these complications here.

to the gallant sex. Or think of an affluent, idealistic young teacher working in an economically deprived school, teaching her students – with the best of intentions – that economic success is theirs for the taking as long as they work hard enough, irrespective of what they or their parents would have to sacrifice to afford college tuition in a culture of scant merit scholarships and rampant gaming of the system on the part of wealthy parents.

Of course, non-dominantly situated hearers could in theory find contrary views in critical work authored by non-dominantly situated thinkers, but – not being part of the mainstream conversation – it may take effort and resourcefulness to get ahold of.¹³ This is especially so if your non-dominant position comes with economic challenges, lack of opportunity, or social pressure to conform your thinking, and if the dominantly situated suppress the thought of those like you, for instance by making education hard to access (Collins 2000, 4-13, 33-34).

Non-dominantly situated hearers are not always vulnerable in this way, of course. As I will discuss in section 5.1, being non-dominantly situated can sometimes *help* one appreciate social realities, in ways not easily available to the dominantly situated (Harding 1993; Wylie 2003, Medina 2013; Dotson 2018; McKinnon 2018). It is when these insights, for structural reasons, are hard to come by that epistemic exploitation of the non-dominantly situated is a risk.

In the sort of case I am considering, the speaker exploits the hearer in two ways: first, by acting as a trustee for his knowledge; and second, by trusting him to grant her epistemic recognition – which, in the present case, she does not deserve.

Consider the speaker's role as a trustee for knowledge. The speaker's exploitation of the hearer here amounts to a betrayal of his epistemic trust. For her testimony is not only false; it violates the trying-your-best-within-reason norm. The speaker I am envisioning could and should have done better.¹⁴ This is certainly so if her testimony is a lie – that is, if she herself disbelieves it. Of greater relevance here, however, are cases in which the speaker herself *believes* the myth, but could have disbelieved it had she tried harder – had she thought more about it, regarded with suspicion the myth's upholding of her own privilege, or engaged with non-dominantly situated thinkers who call the myth into question. Her betrayal is unintentional, but no less a betrayal for that.

One might wonder: if *the speaker* could have avoided believing the legitimization myth simply by trying harder, then so surely could the hearer – especially if intellectual groundwork has already been laid by thinkers from his own non-dominantly situated group. Why regard the speaker as blameworthy but not the hearer? In response, it is possible for a hearer to be blameworthy for his own false consciousness – anyone is capable of epistemic irresponsibility. Such cases aside, however, we have seen that, in the cases I am considering, there is a structural asymmetry between the epistemic situations of the dominantly and non-dominantly situated. The former set the agenda for mainstream research programs and media offerings, whereas the latter must source their information from informal community channels, and may face practical barriers to doing so.

Let's turn to the second way in which the speaker exploits the hearer: in her capacity as a truster for epistemic recognition. In their self-appointed role as the disseminators of knowledge-claims in their society, the dominantly situated impose this trust on everyone else. The well-meaning father schools his daughters to look to him for guidance about what interests to pursue; the affluent and idealistic teacher uses her influence to instill in her economically disadvantaged students the transformative belief in the power of hard work. Yet both speakers wind up taking advantage of their hearers – to impose trust for epistemic

¹³ A situation which in our social-media age is fortunately changing in many parts of the world – though one must still have reliable internet access and the time to invest, neither of which is a given.

¹⁴ We may grant that exceptions are possible: some dominantly situated speakers may simply see the world through the lens of the myth (Srivinasan 2016), so that even their best efforts do not yield evidence against it. Such speakers would disappoint hearers' trust, but do not count as betraying it.

recognition which, in this case, neither speaker deserves on the topic at hand, and from which each benefits by upholding the status quo with their testimony.

In summary, a speaker can exploit a hearer by betraying his trust for knowledge, and by imposing on him her trust for epistemic recognition which, when she is disposed to irresponsibly testify falsehoods, she does not deserve.

4.2 Fulfillment of Trust for Knowledge, Imposition of Trust for Deserved Recognition

A speaker can exploit a hearer without testifying carelessly, or even falsely. She can do so *in fulfillment* of his trust for knowledge, and by imposing on him trust for epistemic recognition *that she also deserves*.

Consider a board meeting, where each person is of equal rank, equally qualified, and supposed to be accorded an equal voice. Yet the creative director, who skillfully wields her off-the-charts charisma, speaks disproportionately often. She happens also to be highly knowledgeable and hence, in this regard, deserving of significant epistemic recognition. But her disproportionate occupation of the conversational space prevents the other group members from asserting their knowledge. The creative director's emotional power thus cultivates in her emotionally vulnerable (because timid) hearers an epistemically vicious habit of cognitive subservience. In this way the speaker epistemically exploits her colleagues. Their acceptance of her trust for epistemic recognition feeds her narcissism, and their belief of her testimony shapes the group's decisions to her interests. It is true that the other group members gain knowledge, but they also pay a steep price, in the form of a surrender of their epistemic and practical agency within the group.

Cases like this have consequences for an important idea in the epistemology of testimony. This idea is that a speaker, simply in virtue of testifying, is entitled to expect epistemic recognition from the hearer. More specifically, she is entitled to expect a hearer, not to believe her automatically, but to treat her testimony as a serious candidate for belief (Goldberg, unpublished manuscript). Her testimony exerts "moral pressure" on him to "tailor his doxastic reaction" to her epistemic credentials, "so as to reflect a proper estimate of the epistemic goodness of [her] claimed [epistemic] authority".¹⁵ In other words, the speaker is entitled, simply in virtue of testifying, to expect the hearer to open himself up to the possibility that he ought to believe her, by duly considering her credentials; and if they are good, then she is entitled to expect the additional epistemic recognition of being believed. I will call this the *speaker-expectation claim*.

This claim has much going for it. A speaker arguably has a right to be offended if her testimony is ignored or epistemically downgraded without due cause (Faulkner 2011; Goldberg, unpublished manuscript; Moran 2005) – and if a hearer does this because of prejudice, he commits an epistemic injustice to boot (M. Fricker 2007).

But the speaker-expectation claim, as Goldberg himself acknowledges,¹⁶ needs qualification. For competing considerations can sometimes override the moral pressure to meet a speaker's expectation. I will discuss two; both become apparent when we consider ways in which a knowledgeable speaker can exploit a hearer by imposing on him her trust for epistemic recognition, and by accepting his trust for knowledge.

The first circumstance in which the speaker-expectation claim can be voided arises when the speaker already commands a disproportionate amount of epistemic airtime. This is illustrated by our narcissistic-speaker case, in which the creative director, though

¹⁵ This response need not be a conscious evaluation of her epistemic credentials; Goldberg intends this claim to be compatible with any theory of testimonial justification.

¹⁶ Personal communication.

knowledgeable, drowns out other equally deserving voices.¹⁷ In such cases hearers surely have a right or even a duty to disappoint the speaker's expectation to be heard – any teacher who has had confident students stifle class participation can sympathize. The very fact that someone testifies does not suffice to license prioritizing *her* claim to supply knowledge over others'. On the contrary: the epistemic airtime should be more evenly apportioned among those equally deserving of being heard. There are moral reasons for this, but also epistemic ones: a variety of knowledgeable perspectives is likely to be more epistemically enriching than one (Longino 2002; De Cruz and De Smedt 2013; Dormandy 2019)

A second circumstance in which the speaker-expectation claim can be voided arises when the hearer has a right not to know what the speaker testifies. The following case of epistemic exploitation brings this out. Imagine two friends, a speaker and a hearer. The speaker is a reservoir of lascivious secrets – about herself, about mutual friends – and her exhilaration in knowing them is incomplete until she gains a feeling of self-importance by sharing them with someone else. Her friend the hearer is caring, but has trouble setting boundaries. Knowing his friend's secrets, let alone keeping them confidential, makes him desperately uncomfortable. What he gains is the feeling of being important to his friend; but he pays the steep price of his peace of mind. The speaker is knowledgeable and fulfills the hearer's reluctant epistemic trust – but in doing so, and in imposing her trust for epistemic recognition on him, she epistemically exploits him.

This scenario generates a second exception to the speaker-expectation claim. The secret-teller is not entitled to expect her friend to hear her testimony at all, let alone attend to her epistemic credentials; the reason is that he has a right not to know the secrets.¹⁸ Asking her to stop testifying would not amount to an epistemically reprehensive silencing, but would rather protect both himself and the dignity of the subjects of the secrets.

The right not to know is not absolute. There are truths that ought to be known, and hearers who ought to know them. A criminal hearer arguably lacks the right to be ignorant of how he has harmed a victim, especially if his knowing this can contribute to her healing. There may even be truths, for example about genocides, that there is an intrinsic moral or epistemic impetus for human beings to know. So there is no across-the-board right not to know; but the fact that there is in some contexts is enough to provide a second exception to the speaker-expectation claim.

In summary, there are at least two circumstances in which the speaker-expectation claim does not apply: those in which the speaker occupies a disproportionate amount of conversational space, and those in which the hearer has a right not to know what is being testified.

We have reached this conclusion by exploring cases in which speakers exploit their hearers by testifying knowledgeably. But epistemic exploitation does not always override the speaker-expectation claim. The exploitation might for instance be virtuous. Think of a truth and reconciliation commission empowered to hold perpetrators to account, which gives victims the opportunity to testify about their suffering at their hands. The perpetrators, now under arrest, are legally and physically vulnerable. Many would not have decided to use this situation to turn their lives around were they still on the loose, but imprisonment has jolted them to reflect on the direction of their lives and they are willing, though emotionally conflicted, to try. So even though the speaker's trust for recognition is imposed, the criminal hearers choose optimistically to accept it, taking a positive attitude toward the project of truth and reconciliation or even (perhaps begrudgingly) toward the speaker herself. And in the

¹⁷ Frost-Arnold (2014, p. 794) characterizes the behavior of overly vocal testifiers as “occupying space in [epistemic] trust networks”.

¹⁸ This right may be moral, insofar as being told things can have practical or emotional consequences. But it might also be epistemic, insofar as a person is entitled to prioritize knowing some things over others. Watson (2018) introduces the notion of an epistemic right, but does not discuss a right *not* to know certain things.

same way that one chooses a painful dental procedure, the perpetrators choose to trust her for knowledge about how they harmed her, relying, if not on her goodwill, then at least on her commitment to the common project. This scenario has all the ingredients of epistemic exploitation: the speaker takes advantage of the hearers' vulnerability in order to extract something from them (in this case the emotional and moral closure supplied by their epistemic recognition and belief) – but at great cost to them (in this case forcing them to confront their own worst selves). And the speaker-expectation claim holds: the hearers do not have a right to remain in ignorance of her testimony. Epistemic exploitation, then, does not automatically yield exceptions to the speaker-expectation claim – but it certainly can.

In summary, a speaker can epistemically exploit a hearer by fulfilling his trust for knowledge, and by imposing on him her trust for epistemic recognition. The stiff price paid by the hearer can take any number of forms, including his knowing things that he does not want to know – though if these are things that he epistemically or morally ought to know, the exploitation can be virtuous. These considerations indicate that speakers are *often* entitled to epistemic recognition from hearers, and thus to their epistemic trust, but not all the time.

This leaves us with two ways in which a speaker can epistemically exploit a hearer: first, by betraying (and disappointing) his trust for knowledge and by imposing on him her trust for epistemic recognition that she does not deserve; and second, by fulfilling his trust for knowledge and imposing on him her trust for epistemic recognition that she does deserve.

This ends my initial exploration of how speakers can epistemically exploit hearers. I'll now turn to the way in which hearers can reciprocate.

5. The Hearer Exploiting the Speaker

A hearer of testimony can also epistemically exploit a speaker. He can do so in his capacity as a trustee for epistemic recognition, as well as in his capacity as a truster for knowledge. I will consider a single example that features both forms of exploitation simultaneously.

The speaker I am thinking of is non-dominantly situated, whereas the hearer is dominantly situated.¹⁹ The speaker's testimony concerns what it is like to swim against the current of a legitimation myth, and the social insights that she has gained from having to do so. That non-dominantly situated people are often in a position to acquire social knowledge of this sort, indeed a better one than dominantly situated people, is a possibility from section 4.1 that we will now consider more closely. One reason for this is negative: being dominantly situated can prevent one from seeing certain things. One is apt to lack the sorts of experiences that would most strongly call the legitimation myth into question. On top of this, one has an interest in upholding the myth – after all, one's own privilege is precisely what it legitimates – so one might fail to find the time to ask certain questions or entertain certain possibilities (Mills 2007; Spelman 2007). Moreover, the legitimation myth is apt to influence one's very perception, making evidence against it difficult even to see (Srivinasan 2016). A second reason why the non-dominantly situated may be in a better position to acquire knowledge of social injustices is positive: their daily lives are impacted by legitimation myths. They are confronted with the effects of implicit prejudices, credibility deficits, or knee-jerk suspicion, which the dominantly situated can afford to ignore. Although they too might, as we saw in section 4.1, perceive the world through the lens of the myth, they are also, arguably, more likely than the dominantly situated to notice ways in which it does not add up – because it is their experiences that it is least likely to match (Collins 2000, 35). A third reason – also positive – is that the non-dominantly situated often live in the same communities, excluded from dominantly situated ones by social or economic pressure, providing the opportunity to discourse together (Collins 2000, 9-13).

¹⁹ See footnote 12 about how this dichotomy is an oversimplification.

The non-dominantly situated speaker I am considering has social knowledge of this sort, and the dominantly situated hearer lacks it. Because of this, the speaker deserves epistemic recognition from the hearer on the scale of an ascription of epistemic authority. I will discuss how the hearer might exploit the speaker by accepting her trust for recognition (5.1) and by imposing on her his trust for the truth (5.2).

5.1 Exploiting the Speaker's Trust for Epistemic Recognition

A hearer might exploit a speaker's trust for recognition by betraying it or, perhaps surprisingly, by fulfilling it. I'll consider each possibility in turn. But first we need a word on the recognitional goods for which the speaker trusts the hearer. I'll discuss the following four:

(i) The speaker trusts the hearer *to assess her credibility accurately*. This includes trusting that he will not, due for example to vices such as epistemic laziness (Medina 2013), simply decline to engage with her testimony, but will respond appropriately given her epistemic credentials: believing her if they are good, and disbelieving her only if they are substandard. It also includes trusting that he will not perpetrate testimonial injustice against her – that is, that he will not, due to epistemically negative stereotypes, assign her less credibility than she deserves (Fricker 2007; Dotson 2011; Saul 2013; Peet 2017).²⁰

(ii) The speaker trusts the hearer *to exercise testimonial competence* (a term coined by Dotson 2011, 245); i.e., to do what it takes to hear what she intends to communicate. This includes working to grasp her concepts rather than expecting her to formulate her claims in his – think of the difference between “flirting” and “sexually harassing”. It includes recognizing that there may not even be concepts adequate to express her meaning; after all, their common conceptual framework is likely keyed to the experiences and concerns of the dominantly situated, including to sustaining legitimation myths (cf. M. Fricker 2007, ch. 7) – think of someone trying to explain that she was sexually harassed before this term was coined (*ibid.*). A testimonially competent hearer is also open to the possibility that any failure to understand is his doing rather than the speaker's (Dotson 2011; Peet 2017). This is important given that the going epistemic norms, also shaped by and for the dominantly situated, are apt to license “default skeptical responses” to the testimony of the non-dominantly situated (Berenstain 2016, 578-581), putting the burden of proof on the speaker to show that her words make sense, rather than on the hearer to understand. Finally, testimonial competence includes the willingness to engage critically, within the confines of ascribing the speaker epistemic authority (Narayan 2004).

(iii) The speaker trusts the hearer *to respect her agency regarding the content her testimony*. This involves, among other things, trusting that he will not spin or “touch up” her story to third parties (even in an attempt to help), and will not take her words out of context (Alcoff 1991/1992, 9). This is important to facilitate the speaker's self-expression, but also because, should the hearer misinterpret her testimony, it is his take and not hers which is apt to gain currency.

(iv) The speaker trusts the hearer *to respect any risks to which her testimony might expose her*. These risks are emotional and may also be practical. It is often emotionally trying to explain experiences of marginalization to someone who is likely to have trouble relating, especially if their shared conceptual framework cannot easily bridge their disparate backgrounds. The emotional risks are greater to the extent that the hearer (even if well-meaning) lacks testimonial competence (Berenstain 2016). The speaker may also face

²⁰ That a speaker trusts a hearer in these ways does not, however, entail that she is always *entitled* to do so; we saw (section 4.2) that the speaker-expectation claim, which says that she is, can be voided. If – and only if – there is a case in which it does not apply, the hearer does nothing wrong by declining to assess the speaker's credibility.

practical consequences, such as being seen as a troublemaker and thus treated with suspicion, for example, in applying for jobs or university admission.

So non-dominantly situated speakers tend to be vulnerable in testifying about their experiences as non-dominant and about the resulting social insights. The situation is ripe for exploitation. I'll start by discussing how the hearer might exploit the speaker by betraying her trust for epistemic recognition. I'll then discuss how he might even exploit her if he fulfills her trust.

One way in which a hearer could betray a speaker is by violating the authenticity norm: accepting her trust for recognition with no intention of delivering. He might solicit it cynically, aiming to discredit her (Berenstain 2016). Or he might aim to come across as socially sensitive to certain third parties without caring to engage with her message. But breaches of authenticity, as we saw, disqualify the relationship from counting as full-fledged trust and hence are not my primary concern. Can a hearer betray a speaker's trust for recognition, even if he accepts it in good faith? He can. Let's take each type of recognition in turn: (i) The speaker might, due to carelessness, culpable ignorance, or prejudicial stereotypes, grant the speaker less credibility than she deserves. (ii) He may culpably fail to exhibit the skills and background information required for testimonial competence. (iii) His good intentions might have a paternalistic edge: he may think that re-casting the speaker's story (a form of silencing) will help her express or even process it. (iv) He may paternalistically think that the speaker's story is too important not to be heard and, naïvely declining to empathize with her situation, share it with others.²¹

Betrayal of trust for epistemic recognition, even when unintentional, can assume even darker forms, if the speaker's testimony surprises the hearer and awakens his baser instincts. He might for instance take offense at feedback about his own unintentional yet problematic behavior, perhaps making the incident about his feelings instead of his misdeed (Pohlhaus 2016); or he might gaslight the speaker, claiming (and falsely believing) that she is overreacting (McKinnon 2017).

Betrayal of a speaker's trust for epistemic recognition, even when unintentional, can be exploitative. We have already seen what gouging price the speaker might pay, but what can the hearer gain? If he betrays her in a way that is compatible with understanding and believing her testimony, he gains knowledge on an important matter. If he believes what she takes her to have said but in fact misunderstands it, he does not gain knowledge, but he might still experience self-congratulatory emotions, thinking that he is promoting social understanding. What if the hearer's unintentional betrayal involves disbelieving her, for example by culpably ascribing her too little credibility? Here too there are non-epistemic ways in which he might gain. He may experience the self-satisfaction (or self-righteousness) of feeling that he has done his part vis-à-vis the speaker and her social group. Or he might, by reading his own meaning into her words, feel self-righteously that his exchange with the speaker confirms his favorite legitimation myth.

All of the elements of exploitation can thus arise when even a well-meaning dominantly situated hearer accepts the trust for epistemic recognition of a non-dominantly situated speaker.

So far I have discussed only a hearer who *betrays* the speaker's trust for epistemic recognition. But he can exploit her even if he fulfills it – that is, even if he accords her the credibility that she deserves, models testimonial competence, cedes control of her narrative, and honors her risks. He might for example use her trust – even as he fully recognizes her epistemically – to gain access to her bank account. But more interesting are cases in which the

²¹ It is possible for the hearer to merely disappoint the speaker's trust rather than betray it, if he is non-culpably inexperienced. But epistemic culpability can run more deeply than we are inclined to think (Spelman 2007; Mills 2007).

mechanism of exploitation is not the hearer's fulfillment of the speaker's trust for recognition, but rather his own trust in her for her knowledge. I'll turn now to cases like this.

5.2 Exploiting the Speaker by Imposing Trust for Knowledge

Recall that accepting someone's trust can be a burden, even if you do it willingly. If you are a speaker and you accept a hearer's trust for knowledge, there are cases in which *his trusting you* can be exploitative.

Let's continue our example from section 5.1, in which a dominantly situated hearer trusts a non-dominantly situated speaker for knowledge. I'll focus on the case in which what the hearer gains is knowledge, though (as we have seen) there may be secondary benefits such as the feel-good sense that he is helping to right social wrongs. What the speaker gains is the opportunity to shape views on a topic of importance. But accepting the hearer's trust for knowledge can nonetheless be burdensome, coming with significant opportunity costs to her emotional energy, time, and other life-goals (Berenstain 2016, 572-575). She might for instance forfeit the opportunity to develop or express other aspects of her identity beyond those in virtue of which she represents a non-dominant social group. As a result, hearers might perceive her one-dimensionally, as no more than a representative of her group (Collins 2000). And even well-meaning hearers might treat her patronizingly, expecting her to be grateful for their interest or even to drop other activities for the sake of their social education (Berenstain 2016, 572-575). The speaker may accept these costs in the hope of making a positive epistemic difference, but is no less exploited for that.

If even a well-intentioned hearer can wind up exploiting a willing speaker, it might seem that epistemic exploitation is unavoidable in epistemic-trust relationships of this kind. Are there ways of pursuing such relationships while avoiding it, or at least minimizing its impact?

There are. The hearer might first do his research. There is an array of scholarly and popular resources in which non-dominantly situated thinkers from a variety of social locations narrate and systematize their experiences and insights. Rather than expect any given non-dominantly situated person to spontaneously condense and recite these results, the hearer can take advantage of this work. Indeed, given (as we saw in section 5.1) that there may be still evolving forms of expression that many non-dominantly situated people do not themselves have access to, a hearer who does this research could shoulder a large amount of the conversational burden should he still opt for a face-to-face discussion. The hearer might also, instead of expecting the speaker to educate him pro bono, offer a more equitable exchange for the opportunity costs that his epistemic trust imposes. On top of this, he might work independently, through political advocacy or talking to his dominantly situated friends, to put an end to the system that leaves speakers like her at a social disadvantage to begin with.

In summary, even a hearer trusting in good faith can epistemically exploit a speaker, but there are measures that he could take to reduce, and perhaps obliterate, the badness of any given case.

6. Conclusion

I have discussed a phenomenon at the intersection of several independently significant forms of human interaction: trust, testimony, and exploitation. Because the aim was a systematic overview of exploitation in epistemic-trust relationships, it was necessary to leave many details undiscussed. But I hope that this initial systematization will motivate further exploration.

To summarize: in epistemic-trust relationships, a hearer trusts a speaker for knowledge and accepts her trust for epistemic recognition, and a speaker trusts a hearer for epistemic recognition and accepts his trust for knowledge. What marks their relationship as one of trust,

instead of mere reliance, is that each party has normative expectations of the other and is responsive to some aspect of the relationship. There are many ways in which relationships of epistemic trust can be exploitative. A speaker can exploit a hearer by accepting his trust for knowledge (whether she fulfills or inadvertently betrays it), and by imposing on him her trust for epistemic recognition. And a hearer can exploit a speaker through by inadvertently betraying her trust for epistemic recognition, or by imposing on her his trust for knowledge.

Our discussion has yielded a few results for social epistemology more generally. One is that it is not only hearers who trust speakers in a testimonial exchange, but also speakers who trust hearers. Second, although speakers have a prima facie entitlement to have their knowledge claims considered, this entitlement can be canceled if there are other, less vocal, speakers equally deserving of airtime, or if the hearer has a right not to know what is being testified. Third, a hearer can exploit a speaker's trust for recognition in spite of his best intentions not to; this reinforces the idea that testimonial competence is a virtue, or bundle of virtues, that takes work to cultivate. Fourth, epistemic exploitation can take morally virtuous forms. I hope that these results are just the beginning.²²

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