

Lysistrata's Lament: Interrogative Analogues of Testimonial Injustice

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When a person commits a testimonial injustice, the unjust thing they do consists in their reaction to an assertion (theorists diverge on the details; paradigmatically the relevant unjust thing consists in *prejudicially refraining from believing* the assertion). Whatever reactions to *questions* are analogous to these reactions to assertions, *those things are interrogative injustices*. I explore some models of those things and apply them to some non-ideal cases.

One of the models appeals to mental states like curiosity and wonder, telling us that interrogative injustice occurs when hearers prejudicially refrain from adopting those mental states. Other models appeal to common conversational goals – these goals including *the answering of questions*. On these models, interrogative injustice occurs when a person asks a question, and another person prejudicially blocks the answering of that question from joining the common goals. Or, if they don't *block* said answering, perhaps they *believe* that it *should* be thus blocked. Or perhaps they merely *resist* the question, not fully blocking its answering from joining the common goals but instead pushing back against it in some other way. Or perhaps they merely *believe* that they *should* resist the question. I endorse a pluralism on which each of these things can be an interrogative injustice.

0. Stage Setting

In Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata*, set and produced during the Peloponnesian war, the women hatch plan to stop the fighting. The young women will withhold sex from the men. The old women, occupying the Acropolis, will withhold funds from the military. They implement the plan and hilarity ensues.

Like many comedies, *Lysistrata* uses the softening cushion of humor to deliver sharp moral criticism. Some of that criticism appears when, arguing with a magistrate, Lysistrata (the main character) says

All along we kept our silence,
 Acquiesced as nice wives should ---
 or else! --- although we didn't like it.
 You would escalate the war;
 we would ask you so politely,
 even though it hurt inside,
 'Darling, what's the latest war-news?
 What did all you men decree?
 Anything about a treaty?'

Then you'd say, 'What's that to you?
 Shut up!' And I'd shut up...
 Then we'd hear some even worse news,
 so we'd say, 'How stupid, dear!'
 Then you'd give us dirty looks and
 say, 'Go mend my cloak or else!
 War is strictly for the menfolk.'¹

The Athenian husbands rejected their wives' questions about the war, prejudicially construing women as unfit to inquire into the matter. An unlikely ally of Aristophanes is Harper Lee, whose novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* displays the trial of Tom Robinson, a Black man, for raping Maya Ewell, a White woman. Ewell was beaten in the attack. The assailant led with his left fist. Robinson, disabled, has no use of his left hand. This fact (along with others) demonstrates Robinson's innocence. The all-White jury still convicts him, sincerely believing that he is guilty. They reject his assertion that he is innocent and many other assertions he makes, prejudicially refraining from believing them.

While Robinson's *assertions* are rejected, the Athenian wives' *questions* are rejected. While Robinson is a victim of "testimonial injustice", the Athenian wives are victims of "interrogative injustice". I use the latter phrase as a term of art for whatever phenomena stand to questions as testimonial injustices stand to assertions.² I'm going to theorize these phenomena by modeling them in several different ways.³

At first I'll present the models as real definitions of interrogative injustice, attempts to limn its essence *in toto*. Ultimately, though, I'll claim that each of them yields something more modest: an illuminating sufficient condition. These conditions represent landmarks in a complex terrain; together they form a partial map of it.

1. Interrogative Attitudes

The standard (though challenged) model of testimonial injustice comes from Fricker (2007). It says that for testimonial injustice to occur is for the following things work in the following ways:

¹ Henderson (1988: 115-116). Beauvoir (1949/2011: 98) uses this passage to illustrate Greek misogyny.

² As a simplifying assumption, I'll identify assertion with testimony. For discussion see Goldberg (2015).

³ Central works on testimonial injustice include Fricker (1998, 2007), Dotson (2011, 2012, 2014), Pohlhaus (2012), and Medina (2013). Many earlier works, especially by Black Feminists, discussed similar topics; see e.g. Hill Collins (1991). For a recent overview see McWilliams (forthcoming). On epistemic injustice and questions see Fricker (2007: 52, 130), Hookway (2010), Fricker (2010), Medina (2013: 92), Davis (2016), Spewak (2021), and Dembroff and Whitcomb (2023).

Table 1: Fricker’s (2007) model of testimonial injustice

Part of the model	How that part works
Speakers	These people produce speech acts.
Speech acts	These acts are assertions.
Hearers	These people react to the speech acts.
Reactions	These consist in the hearer rejecting the speaker’s assertion; and “rejecting an assertion” is refraining from believing it.
Motivations	These consist in identity-prejudicial credibility deficits the hearers attribute to the speakers.

For instance, the *speaker* Tom Robinson *asserts* that he’s innocent; the *hearers* (the jury) *react* to this speech act (by refraining from believing Robinson) because they are *motivated* in certain ways (in particular by prejudicially construing him as deficiently credible).

This model can’t accommodate interrogative injustice, since the speech acts involved in the latter are not assertions but questions. Indeed, one might doubt that question-rejections can even *be* epistemic injustices. But those doubts are misplaced. Questions, or at least paradigmatic kinds of them, amount to *inquiry* – to attempts to get *knowledge*.⁴ This makes questions an “epistemic affair” in the sense Dotson (2012: 34) seems to have in mind when she writes

Epistemic oppression... is primarily characterized by detrimental exclusions from epistemic affairs... [it] concerns routine and harmful exclusions from some domain of knowledge production. All the forms of epistemic injustice introduced here involve some form of pervasive, harmful epistemic exclusion. As such, they are all species of epistemic oppression.

Since questions are an epistemic affair, question-rejections exclude people from epistemic affairs. Thus, following Dotson on epistemic oppression, I think question-rejections can be epistemically unjust. But what *are* question-rejections? What did the Athenian husbands do to their wives’ questions, which was analogous to what the jury did to Robinson’s assertions?

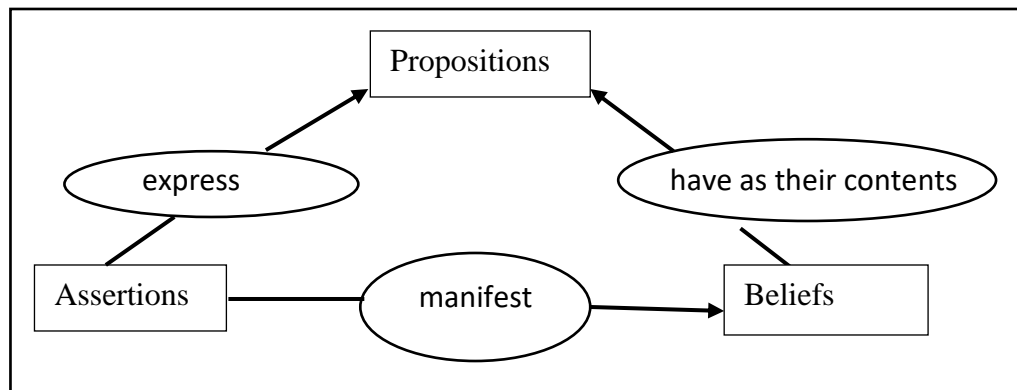
A too-simple view is that just as the reactions involved in *testimonial* injustice consist in the hearer rejecting the speaker’s *assertion* by refraining from *believing* it, the reactions involved in *interrogative* injustice consist in the hearer rejecting the speaker’s *question* by refraining from believing *it*. The problem with this view is that questions, unlike assertions, aren’t the sort of things that can be believed in the first place. The view makes a category mistake.

⁴ Whitcomb (2010, 2017); compare Friedman (2020), Thorstad (2021), and Falbo (forthcoming).

Let's start again more carefully. We can think of *assertions* as speech acts involving both a *mental state* and an *informational content*. The mental state is *belief*; when one asserts, one displays or evinces or manifests *belief*. And the content is a *proposition*, that is to say, an informational item which can be believed and asserted and can be true or false. When one asserts, one puts forth or conveys or expresses a *proposition*.

I'll reserve the term "manifest" for the relationship between assertions and the beliefs they (in some sense) evince or display, and I'll reserve the term "express" for the relationship between assertions and the propositions they (in some sense) put forth or convey. And I'll use the phrase "have as their contents" for the relationship between beliefs and the propositions expressed by assertions manifesting those beliefs. Assertions "manifest" beliefs and "express" the propositions those beliefs "have as their contents". See figure 1.

Figure 1: Terminology



On the standard view in epistemology, rejecting an assertion amounts to refraining from believing the proposition it expresses. As we've seen, though, question-rejection can't consist in "refraining from believing the proposition a question expresses"; questions don't express propositions. Could question-rejection consist in refraining from adopting some *other* propositional attitude (other than belief) having as its content propositions the rejected questions express? No, because questions *don't express propositions*. The things questions express – the things we *ask* – can't be believed or asserted or true or false.

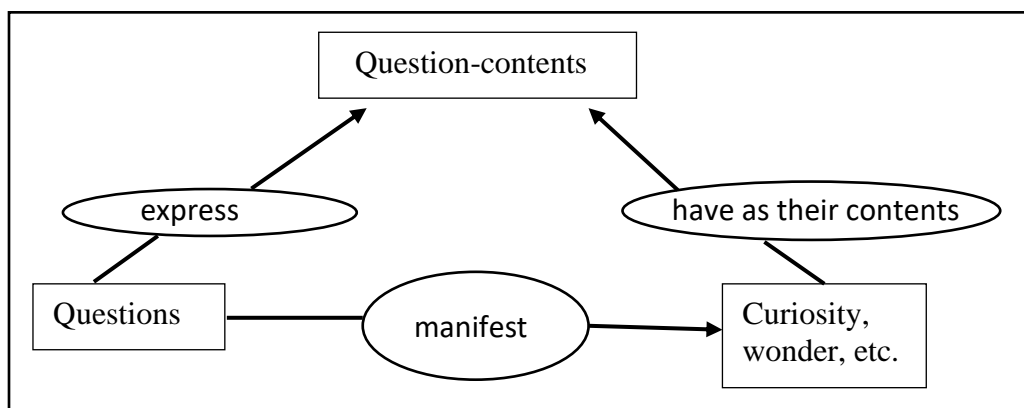
The things questions express are in ordinary language *also* called "questions". For clarity I'll reserve "questions" for the speech acts and "question-contents" for the things expressed. Using this terminology, we can say why question-rejection does not consist in refraining from adopting *any* attitude towards "the propositions a question expresses". It's because *there are no such things*: question-contents aren't propositions.

Question-rejection isn't refraining from believing; nor is it refraining from having any *other* propositional attitude whose content is (allegedly) expressed by the question one

rejects. What is it then? One approach would identify it with what one does when one refrains from adopting the mental states manifested by the questions one rejects. This approach has it that, much like (on the standard view in epistemology at least) one rejects an *assertion* when one refrains from adopting the mental state it manifests, one similarly rejects a *question* when one refrains from adopting the mental state *it* manifests. But what is the mental state manifested by questions? What mental state stands to *asking Q* as *believing P* stands to *asserting P*? Is there a mental state satisfying this description? Is there a *unique* mental state satisfying it?

Many theorists think there is a class of mental states whose contents are what I've called question-contents – a class of “interrogative attitudes” like curiosity and wonder.⁵ Appealing to this class, we might conjecture that questions manifest curiosity, wonder, or other similar mental states having as their contents the things I've called “question-contents”. See figure 2.

Figure 2: More Terminology



Building on these ideas we might add that, with questions as well as assertions, rejections of the speech act are what you do when you refrain from adopting the mental state manifested by it. Thus, while rejections of the assertion that P consist in refraining from believing the proposition expressed by this assertion, rejections of the question Q consist in refraining from having interrogative attitudes towards the question-content expressed by this question. For example, you might reject the question of whether cats are sinister by refraining from having interrogative attitudes towards the question-content of whether cats are sinister.

This account of question-rejection suggests a model of interrogative injustice. On this model there are askers, questions, hearers, and question-rejections; the question-rejections consist in the hearers refraining from adopting the interrogative attitudes the

⁵ Whitcomb (2010), Friedman (2013), Carruthers (2018), Ciardelli et. al. (2018: 148-162). Brentano's heirs discussed similar views; see Mulligan (2018).

questions at issue manifest; when appropriately motivated these question-rejections are interrogative injustices.

What would the motivations be? With *testimonial* injustice as Fricker (2007) theorizes it, the motivations are “identity-prejudicial credibility deficits”: deflated levels of credibility that the hearer prejudicially attributes to the speaker. Similar motivations might drive a hearer to reject a *question*. These motivations would consist in what we might call “identity prejudicial *inquiry* deficits”: deflated levels of ability to seek knowledge, which levels the hearer prejudicially attributes to the speaker. Whereas Fricker’s (2007) identity prejudicial *credibility* deficits stereotype *asserters* as bad *sources* of knowledge, identity prejudicial *inquiry* deficits stereotype *askers* as bad *seekers* of knowledge.

How might you be bad at seeking knowledge? Perhaps you lack important background knowledge, for instance asking questions without knowing their presuppositions.⁶ Perhaps you lack certain skills necessary for gaining the knowledge you seek (wholly unable to do algebra, you try to solve algebra problems). Perhaps your questions themselves tend to be bad objects of inquiry (e.g. by being confused, loaded, trivial, distorting, distracting, impertinent, irrelevant, leading, misleading, misguided, unilluminating, uninformed, or shallow).⁷

If someone prejudicially stereotypes you (on account of your identity) as being bad at seeking knowledge in these ways or others, they attribute an identity prejudicial inquiry deficit to you.⁸ These deficits round out what I’ll call the “Interrogative Attitude” model. This model tells us that to be an interrogative injustice is to be a certain sort of reaction to a question, a reaction that’s motivated in a certain way – the way specified in table 2.

⁶ Willard-Kyle (forthcoming) argues that we should know the presuppositions of our questions. Spewak (2021: 601) observes that “A question might be judged inappropriate because the hearer assumes the speaker lacks the required background knowledge.” This observation anticipates the idea of epistemically unjust question-rejection. Hookway (2010) also anticipates that idea; see below.

⁷ Hookway (2010), Whitcomb (2018), Siegel (forthcoming), and Habgood-Coote (MS) engage in question-criticism using these terms. Watson (2021a) theorizes what *good* questions are.

⁸ A complication: the prejudice might target not your *competence* but your *sincerity*, construing you as not aiming at knowledge but, say, just showing off (Whitcomb (2023)). Perhaps this too should count as an identity prejudicial inquiry deficit.

Table 2: Interrogative Attitude Model

Part of the model	How that part works
Speakers	These people produce speech acts.
Speech acts	These acts are questions.
Hearers	These people react to the speech acts.
Reactions	These consist in the hearers rejecting the questions; and “rejecting a question” is refraining from adopting the interrogative attitudes manifested by it.
Motivations	These consist in identity-prejudicial inquiry deficits the hearers attribute to the speakers.

This model is illuminating. Sometimes hearers refrain from adopting the interrogative attitudes manifested by questions they are asked, because they harbor identity-prejudicial inquiry deficits about the askers. The model rightly deems this is an interrogative analogue of testimonial injustice. When all of the model’s parts are present and work in the specified ways, an interrogative injustice does indeed occur: the model successfully identifies a sufficient condition for interrogative injustice.

But its construal of question-rejection is suboptimal. If you asked me where I was born, I would *not* become curious about where I was born or adopt any similar interrogative attitude. Instead, I’d just tell you the answer. I would do that, not because of any sort of prejudice, but because I know where I was born and I’d be happy to share. On the Interrogative Attitude model’s construal of question-rejection, this reaction of mine would *count as rejecting* your question. But in telling you the answer to your question, without in the process adopting interrogative attitudes, I’m *not* treating you in a way that is analogous to the way we treat people when we refrain from believing what they assert; I’m *not* rejecting your question.

To be sure, the Interrogative Attitude model is not mistaken about *whether I commit an interrogative injustice* in the foregoing case: it tells us, correctly, that I don’t. But it reaches this correct verdict via an incorrect account of question rejection: an account on which I reject your question if you ask where I was born and, knowing the answer, I just tell you. Perhaps, then, we can improve upon the Interrogative Attitude model by altering its account of question-rejection.

How might we do that? One approach is to analogize (a) refraining from believing assertions to (b) refraining from *answering* questions. This analogy suggests that rejecting a question amounts to refraining from answering it. But this account of question-rejection is suboptimal. Suppose that you ask me where the campus is. I might respond by honestly saying “That’s a great question. I was about to ask it myself!”. Now, if I made this response, I would not count as *answering* your question. I would rather have refrained from doing as much; I would have *refrained from answering* your question.

Yet I would not count as *rejecting* it, at least not in any sense propitious for underwriting an interrogative analogue of testimonial injustice.

I would at least count as *responding* to you. This suggests that rejecting a question is *refraining from responding* to it. This may be what Carnap (1934: 21) had in mind when he wrote

...we put forward no philosophical theses whatsoever...we give no answer to philosophical questions and instead *reject all philosophical questions...* (italics in the original).

Similarly, it may be what Larcides and Asher (2009: 17) had in mind when they wrote

“...an agent can choose to address the issues raised by the questioner; he can also choose to reject them.”

But again the view is suboptimal. Three people are conversing: X, Y, and Z. X asks a question; Y refrains from responding to it because they don't know the answer but do know that Z knows it; Z answers right away. Y has refrained from responding to X's question without rejecting it.

2. Blocking

We seek an account of question-rejection that helps us model interrogative injustice. This account should render question-rejection somewhat similar to assertion-rejection. Somewhat similar, but not *too* similar. Rejecting a question can't amount to *refraining from believing* it, or to *refraining from adopting the mental state manifested* by it. Nor can it amount to *refraining from answering* it, or to *refraining from responding* to it. We need to look elsewhere.

Let's look to the philosophy of language. On certain popular views in that field, each conversation has an evolving *common ground* consisting in the propositions the speakers jointly accept and also an evolving set of *common goals* they jointly accept.⁹ Stalnaker (1978/1999) influentially viewed assertions as attempts to add propositions to the common ground. And he had a related view about *assertion-rejection*. On that view, rejecting an assertion amounts to *blocking* the addition of its content to the common ground.¹⁰ I'd like to consider a similar view about *question-rejection*.

⁹ See e.g. Stalnaker (1984, 1999, 2014), Grice (1989), and Roberts (1996/2012).

¹⁰ Stalnaker (1978/1999: 87, 2014: 51).

To build that view, I'll construe questions in a certain way that's useful (despite also being, I think, incomplete).¹¹ On this construal, each question is an attempt to add, to the common goals, the goal of answering that question. For instance, suppose that I ask you whether it froze last night. This question would be an attempt to add (to our common goals) the goal of answering itself: that is to say, the goal of answering my question of whether it froze last night. You might respond by *blocking* the addition of this goal to the common goals. This "blocking", to a first approximation, would amount to ensuring that the common goals do not come to include the goal of answering the question at issue.

That first approximation needs to be refined.¹² But we'll leave the refinements aside, adopting the view that blocking a question amounts to ensuring that its answering does not join the common goals, as well as the view that question-rejection amounts to question-blocking in this sense. This package of views has precedent not only in Stalnaker's writings on assertion-rejection, but also in Millson's writings on *question-rejection*. There, Millson (2021b: 221) - building on work by Roberts (1996/2012) - suggests that "When a question is...rejected...the participants...refuse to allow it to be added to the [questions under discussion]". This suggestion aligns with the blocking account of question rejection we're adopting.

Suppose that you block my question because you attribute an identity prejudicial inquiry deficit to me. Then you've committed an interrogative injustice, at least on the "Blocking model". This model has the same parts as the Interrogative Attitude model and they work the same way except the reactions. Those reactions again consist in rejecting the question at issue, but that phenomenon is theorized differently: it is identified with *blocking the question* in the ensuring-theoretic sense we're currently adopting.

This model avoids the problems we've discussed. It's also genuinely illuminating. I'll bring this out by describing some mechanisms for blocking questions, and some (realistic, non-ideal) cases of those mechanisms at work.

¹¹ See Roberts (1996/2012, 2018) and Whitcomb (2017: sec. 6).

¹² If I have a seizure when you ask Q, I in some sense ensure that Q's answering doesn't join our common goals. But I don't "block" Q in any sense that makes question-blocking analogous to assertion-rejection. A second approximation then: blocking Q is *intentionally ensuring* that its answering doesn't join the common goals. Now, suppose you ask Q. I want to help but I'm wholly ignorant on the matter. I tell you this and we move on. In this case of "cooperative ignorance", I have intentionally ensured that the answering of Q does not join our common goals. But again I haven't "blocked" Q. A third approximation: blocking Q is *fully obstructing* the addition of Q's answering to the common goals. Neither with the seizure, nor with the cooperative ignorance, do I *obstruct*. When politicians obstruct legislation, their actions differ greatly from having seizures and admitting ignorance. (Compare Cassam's (2019) obstruction-talk.)

Redirecting. This is when someone asks a question, and you respond by directing the conversation away from it. Redirections usually come packaged in thin veneers of misleading indications that one is not doing them. True story: someone once told me in frustration that when people apply to her PhD program, their professors always rank them in the top 2% of their students. I asked whether she believed these professors. She replied “I believe that they are being honest”. This reply redirected the conversation away from the question I asked (whether she believed *the recommenders*) and to another (whether she believed that the recommenders *were being honest*).

She made her replacement question similar to the original in certain ways, using one of its words (“believe”) and a pronoun (“they”) for another. This veneer of responsiveness is a routine tool for polite face management.¹³ Of course, people sometimes dispense with it. When Donald Trump was asked (by *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd) if he was “ever involved with anyone who’d had an abortion”, he responded [by saying](#) “Such an interesting question. So what’s your next question?”. This is redirection *sans* veneer, unconcealed.

Intentional Misinterpreting. This is when you know what your interlocutor asked, but you act like they asked something else instead, attempting to add *its* answering to the common goals.¹⁴ Sometimes this is appropriate. If a student asks a confused question, and clearing it up would take a long time, and you can easily direct the class to more important things by misattributing to them a slightly different question, then perhaps you should do so (especially if you can follow up later). But in other cases intentional misattribution is a mechanism yielding interrogative injustice, at least by the lights of the Blocking model. For instance, you might correctly interpret a question, but engage in intentional misattribution because (say) a Black person asked the question and you prejudicially construe Black people as being bad at seeking knowledge.

Criticizing. This is when you respond to a question by criticizing it (or something in its vicinity such as its content or the person who asks it). One way to criticize is to *explicitly assert* that a question is in some sense bad. Examples of this come from Sarah Palin and Joe Biden, [both](#) of [whom](#) have responded to the press by calling their questions “stupid”.

Palin and Biden are unusually direct. It’s more common to *indirectly convey* that a question is in some sense bad. When Pope Francis was asked whether the Church should change its position on condoms in order to limit the spread of HIV, he [responded](#) with “I don’t like getting into questions or reflections that are so technical when people die

¹³ Stivers (2010).

¹⁴ On epistemic injustice and misinterpretation see Pohlhaus (2012), Medina (2013), and Peet (2017). On question-interpretation see Munton (forthcoming). Hookway (2010: 155, 158, 160) suggests that we can commit epistemic injustices by taking questions to be simpler than they are, or to be irrelevant.

because they don't have water or food or housing". What Francis explicitly asserts here is *that he does not like* getting into certain questions under certain conditions. In and of itself, this is simply a statement about his own mental states. But of course, by explicitly asserting what he did about his mental states, Francis *indirectly conveyed* the thought that the question at issue was in some sense bad. Another case: in the TV show *Lucifer*, Satan asks a priest a question; the priest says "How about I not dignify that with an answer", indirectly conveying that the question was in some sense bad.¹⁵

Sometimes criticism doesn't target a question *per se*, but instead targets a *person* for asking a question. Witness [a classic scene](#) from the Coen Brothers' screenplay *The Big Lebowski*:

The Dude: ...Yeah, man, it really tied the room together.

Walter: This was a valued, uh ...

The Dude: Yeah.

Donny: [*Donny takes a seat*] What tied the room together, Dude?

The Dude: My rug.

Walter: Were you listening to The Dude's story, Donny?

Donny: What?

The Dude: Walter ...

Walter: Were you listening to The Dude's story?

Donny: I was bowling.

Walter: So you have no frame of reference here, Donny. You're like a child who wanders into the middle of a movie and wants to know -

The Dude: Walter, Walter, what's the point, man?

Walter: There's no reason - Here's my point, Dude. There's no fucking reason why these two -

Donny: Yeah, Walter, what's your point?

Walter: Huh?

The Dude: Walter, what is the poin-? Look, we all know who is at fault here - what the fuck are you talking about?

Walter: Huh? No, what the fuck are you... ! I'm not... we're talking about unchecked aggression here, Dude.

Donny: What the fuck is he talking about?

The Dude: My rug.

Walter: Forget it, Donny, you're out of your element!

Walter criticizes Donny for asking certain questions: he criticizes, not the questions *per se*, but the person for asking them. The same thing happens in *Lysistrata*. There, the husbands criticize their wives for asking questions about the war: "War is strictly for the menfolk". These acts of criticism serve to block the wives' questions. Since (presumably)

¹⁵ Season 1, episode 9.

the motivations for them include prejudicial construals of women as being bad at inquiry about war, the Blocking model tells us the husbands engaged in interrogative injustice.

3. Mind and Action

The Blocking model treats interrogative injustice very differently than Fricker (2007) treats testimonial injustice. That treatment makes testimonial injustice a matter of our *mental states*, but the Blocking model makes interrogative injustice a matter of our *actions*. This difference is worth excavating.

In Stalnaker's early work he took common grounds to consist in the propositions the conversationalists commonly presuppose, while analyzing presupposition behaviorally:

...one does make the presuppositions that one seems to make even if one is only pretending... Presupposition is thus not a mental attitude like believing, but is rather a linguistic disposition – a disposition to behave in one's use of language as if one had certain beliefs, or were making certain assumptions.¹⁶

In his later work this focus on behavior is attenuated but not removed. There he defines common grounds in terms of belief and acceptance, while identifying the latter with “a category of propositional attitudes and methodological stances” such that to have one of them towards a proposition “is to act, in certain respects, as if one believed it”.¹⁷ He writes:

To accept a proposition is to treat it as true for some reason...It is common ground that ϕ in a group if all members accept (for the purpose of the conversation) that ϕ , and all believe that all accept that ϕ , and all believe that all believe that all accept that ϕ , etc.¹⁸

Thus, for Stalnaker, you can lie and thereby add a proposition to the common ground without believing it.¹⁹ Similarly, you can dishonestly pretend to believe a proposition someone else asserts, thereby allowing *it* into the common ground without believing it.

Now suppose that a juror refrains from believing Robinson's assertion that he is innocent, while dishonestly acting like *does* believe this assertion. This juror might argue that Robinson is innocent, and vote to acquit, while not believing that he's innocent and

¹⁶ Stalnaker (1974/1999: 52). A complication: in “defective contexts” the conversationalists presuppose different things. See Stalnaker (1978/1999: 86, 2002: 717-719) and Peet (2021).

¹⁷ Stalnaker (1984: 79-81, 2002: 716, 2014: 3).

¹⁸ Stalnaker (2002: 716).

¹⁹ Keiser (2023: 73).

indeed believing that he's guilty. (The juror might combine these beliefs and these actions for any number of reasons; perhaps militant anti-racists have made him an offer he can't refuse.) This juror would treat Robinson's assertion as true for the purposes at hand. In other words, he would "accept" Robinson's assertion as Stalnaker uses that term. But not as Fricker (2007) uses it: in *her* terminology he would *reject* that assertion. She writes (2007: 25-26) that

"...when it comes to the verdict, the jurors....do not privately find [Robinson] innocent yet cynically convict him anyway...it is crucial that they genuinely fail...in their duty to believe Tom Robinson."

The Blocking model, a descendent of Stalnaker not Fricker, construes rejection behaviorally not cognitively. Of course, it deals with *question*-rejection instead of assertion-rejection. But the behavioral focus remains: (question)-rejection, as the Blocking model construes it, is a matter not of what we believe but of what we do. To illustrate this, suppose that Lysistrata's husband acts like our dishonest juror. Here, he would refrain from believing that (the answering of) her questions should join the common goals - while dishonestly *acting* like he *did* believe they should join them. (Perhaps Spartan spies, sowing malcontent among the Athenians, have made him an offer he can't refuse.) Here the husband would *not* count as blocking Lysistrata's questions. He would thus *not* commit an interrogative injustice on the Blocking model.

This is an asymmetry. Our dishonest juror *would* count (for Fricker 2007) as committing a testimonial injustice; our analogous dishonest Greek husband *would not* count (for the Blocking model) as committing an interrogative injustice. Testimonial injustice for Fricker (2007) turns on what we believe is true, not on what we treat as true for the purposes at hand. The Blocking model makes interrogative injustice turn on what we treat as being the purposes at hand, not on what we believe those purposes *should* be.

These approaches deeply differ. One locates its injustice in our mental states, the other in our actions. Suppose that you harbor an identity-prejudicial inquiry deficit against immigrants. An immigrant asks you a question, and you prejudicially think that it shouldn't be taken up (i.e. that its answering shouldn't join the common goals). But you are an excessively polite Midwesterner, and your politeness makes you accept the question despite thinking you shouldn't. You akratically refrain from blocking it, saying to yourself that you'll let the conversation address it against your better judgement.

The Blocking model says you haven't committed an interrogative injustice. And yet, you have refrained from believing that the question should be taken up. This mental state – this state of refraining from believing – is a close interrogative analogue of the mental states Fricker (2007) takes to make for testimonial injustice. Its status as such might drive some theorists to alter the Blocking model by reconceiving the reactions it involves as, not *blockings* of questions, but certain mental states: states of refraining from believing that questions should be taken up.

Call that the “Internalized Blocking model”. Here's a test case for it. Suppose you are the mirror image of our Midwesterner (who has the mental states but doesn't do the acts): you do the acts but don't have the mental states. In particular, you are a well-intentioned but cowardly conversationalist. An unhoused person asks a question. You think it should be taken up. Others on the scene disagree due to identity prejudicial inquiry deficits. Lacking the courage to act on your beliefs, you pile on with the others in blocking the question via the mechanisms above.

If we suitably fill in the details - much is at stake, intervention would likely succeed – then surely your behavior here is unjust. Whether it is also an *interrogative* injustice - an interrogative analogue of *testimonial* injustice – is a theoretical choice point. What, strictly speaking, are the items which possess the property of being an interrogative injustice? Are they mental states, or actions? Are they *both*?

Parallel questions arise with testimonial injustice. Fricker (2007) locates testimonial injustice solely in mental states: if we had two dishonest jurors, one who disbelieved Robinson while acting like they believed him, and another who believed Robinson while acting like they disbelieved him, she would say the first juror committed a testimonial injustice and the second didn't. A diametrically opposed pragmatism would locate testimonial injustice solely in actions, saying the second juror committed a testimonial injustice and the first didn't. Pluralists would say testimonial injustice occurs in both cases, independently instantiating in mind and action both.

For my part, I join the choir of theorists who let testimonial injustice depart from its paradigms.²⁰ I pluralistically think both dishonest jurors did the deed. And similarly with interrogative injustice. Actions (blocking questions) and mental states (refraining from believing that questions should be taken up) should *both* count as interrogative injustices. The Blocking and Internalized Blocking models should thus be combined and reconceived so as to represent, not interrogative injustice *in toto*, but sufficient conditions for it. There are other sufficient conditions too.

4. Vive La Résistance

Theorists often try to de-idealize tools from the philosophy of language - to replace them with others that, having more moving parts, more tightly dovetail the complex contours of the real world. I'll now join those theorists by (mildly) de-idealizing the Blocking

²⁰ Some voices in that choir: Maitra (2010), Dotson (2012 and 2014), Fricker (2017), Pohlhaus (2017), Davis (2021).

model.²¹ Here I hazard the risk that the added moving parts may malfunction. In return for this risk, I hope to secure the reward of increased explanatory power.

The Blocking model construes “answering” in an artificially uniform way. To understand the differences it obscures here, we’ll need to mind the gap between *acts* of answering questions and the *contents* those acts convey. Ordinary language uses the word “answer” for both of these things. I’ll do that too when context resolves the ambiguity. But when it doesn’t, I’ll use “answers” for the contents and “answerings” for the acts.

Answers, the contents, are varied and variously treated. The treatment I’ll use here draws on erotetic logic.²² First, there are *direct answers*. These are whatever things *potentially just-barely resolve* a question. To illustrate them, consider the question *Who was the first US president?*. Its direct answers include the propositions *Washington was the first US president* (a true direct answer) and *Hamilton was the first US president* (a false direct answer). They do not include propositions combining the foregoing ones with further information, such as *Washington was the first U.S. president and snow is white*; those propositions potentially resolve the question, but they don’t potentially *just-barely* resolve it. Nor do the direct answers of *Who was the first US president?* include irrelevant propositions such as *Some yellow things are dangerous*. Nor do they include propositions that are in some sense relevant but are not themselves potential resolvers of the question at issue, such as *Dave knows who the first US president was*. Nor do they include non-propositions such as my walking partners Nettie and Lola (see figure 3).

²¹ Related de-idealizations include Green (2017) and Keiser (2023).

²² See Whitcomb and Millson (forthcoming), Willard-Kyle et. al. (forthcoming), and the references therein.

Figure 3: Some items that are not direct answers



While some questions have unique true direct answers, many don't. For instance, *Who was the first US President?* has a unique true direct answer but *Who are some past US presidents?* has multiple true direct answers. Some questions have *no* true direct answers. Witness *Who is the present king of France?*. Its direct answers are propositions like *Jay-Z is the present king of France* (false) and *Beyoncé is the present king of France* (also false).

There are also *partial* and *eliminative* and *corrective* answers. Partial answers are disjunctions of some but not all of a question's direct answers. A partial answer of *Who was the first US president?* is *Either Hamilton or Washington was the first US president*. Eliminative answers are negations of direct answers (*Hamilton was not the first US president*). Corrective answers are propositions denying a question's presuppositions (*There was no first U.S. President*).²³

For each of these kinds of answers there's a kind of *answering*. You can answer a question by conveying one of its direct answers. But you can also answer a question – perhaps we should say “partly answer” it – by conveying a *partial* or *eliminative* answer to it. Answering might even consist in conveying a *corrective* answer.

To de-idealize the Blocking model, then, we should replace its uniform treatment of answering with something more complex. Similarly with its uniform treatment of

²³ This vocabulary differs from the partitionist vocabulary featured in much recent philosophy (e.g. Hoek (2022)). Whitcomb and Millson (forthcoming) give translations. Ciardelli et. al. (2018: 167-172) give different translations using Inquisitive Semantics (a descendent of partitionism).

common goals. Here again there are differences that matter. Some goals are *prioritized* over others; some are *sub-goals* of others; some are *mere means* to others.²⁴ For instance, we might prioritize answering *How can we get out of this rain?* over answering *Where is the nearest restaurant?*. We might take the latter to induce certain sub-goals into our common goals, for instance the sub-goal of answering *Is the nearest restaurant on this block?*. Or we might take it to induce the means-goal of answering *Does anyone have enough reception to search for restaurants?*.

These differences among kinds of goals, and kinds of answering, bring several phenomena into focus. I might acquiesce in adding (to the common goals) the answering of your questions, but nonetheless prejudicially *deprioritize* said answerings relative to other common goals.²⁵ Here, I would go along with answering your questions, but *only after* other peoples' questions have been answered. Alternatively, I might prejudicially *subordinate* your questions, acquiescing in adding their answerings to the common goals, but only *as* sub-goals or means-goals of the answerings of other peoples' questions. Here I would go along with answering your questions, but only insofar as doing so contributes to other agendas. Alternatively again, I might prejudicially *partialize* your questions. Here I would give them partial (or eliminative) answers while I could easily give them direct answers instead.

In addition to *blockings*, then, there *deprioritizations*, *subordinations*, and *partializations*. When hearers do these things owing to identity prejudicial inquiry deficits, they plausibly commit interrogative injustices. The Blocking model hides that fact. So does the Interrogative Attitude model. They're monochrome photographs of technicolor reality, obscuring by the same lens through which they reveal.

Now to corrective answers. Suppose that you are a grade school girl and you ask your teacher what number we get if we divide three by zero; and that they respond by saying that there is no such number, and then moving to a new topic without further explanation. Also suppose that their motivation for doing as much is that they prejudicially think that girls, ill-equipped to inquire into mathematics, should be shut down when they do as much. Then, plausibly, they have committed an interrogative injustice. But, problematically for the Blocking model, they did not block your question. They *answered* your question: answered it by asserting a corrective answer. They

²⁴ Roberts (1996/2012), Habgood-Coote (2021: 235, 2022).

²⁵ Habgood-Coote (forthcoming) discusses question prioritization in search engine autocomplete results.

acquiesced in adding the answering of your question to the common goals. But they did that solely to illustrate the goal's flaws and thereby shut you down.²⁶

Correctively answering a question consists in *denying* one of its presuppositions. A related act consists in *raising doubts* about one of a question's presuppositions. A real-life example of this kind of doubt-raising comes from Ehrlich and Sidnell (2006), who recount an exchange between an attorney and a witness. The attorney asked "Do you have any regret in not intervening in the business plan process and saying: you're going too far?". The witness replied with "Well you assumed that I didn't intervene in the business process and I think that's not an assumption you ought to make".²⁷ Here the witness raises doubts about one of the question's presuppositions, challenging that presupposition without quite committing to its falsity. This kind of doubt-raising could plausibly count as an interrogative injustice when appropriately motivated. And it might thus count even if it does not suffice to block the question at issue.

We can make progress by replacing the notion of blocking with the richer notion of *resistance*.²⁸ If you attempt to get us to adopt a common goal (conversational or otherwise), then I can resist this goal many ways. I can resist it by ensuring that it does not join the common goals, thereby "blocking" it. But I can *also* resist it by acquiescing in adding it to the common goals and

- making sure we first do something else that I take to be more important, or
- generating a partial achievement of it when I could have gone the whole way, or
- demonstrating (what I think are) its flaws.

These modes of resistance might be implemented in any domain.²⁹ In the domain of inquiry, we might implement them by deprioritizing, partializing, and correctively answering questions - or, short of correctively answering them, raising doubts about their presuppositions. These phenomena, hidden by the notion of blocking, are uncovered by the notion of resistance.

²⁶ Millson (2021b) construes corrective answering as a way of *rejecting* a question. I've construed it as a way of *accepting* a question and illustrating its (alleged) flaws. In favor of my construal: corrective answers are answers, conveying an answer suffices for answering, and answering is incompatible with rejecting.

²⁷ Ehrlich and Sidnell (2006: 664); I've removed pronunciation marks.

²⁸ I take resistance-talk from Conversation Analysis, a paradigm combining linguistics and sociology. Huma et. al. (2023) surveys conversation analytic resistance-talk. Nagel (2019), Millson (2021a: 688), Habgood-Coote (2021: 234-235), and Berstler (2023) bridge Conversation Analysis and philosophy.

²⁹ Objection: intragroup resistance renders goals non-common, and so it is impossible for a group's members to resist (what nonetheless remains) one of its common goals. Reply: that's incorrect. If a basketball player starts trying to throw a game, the team does not thereby stop having the goal of winning. See Priest and Gilbert (2013) and Habgood-Coote (2022).

Now suppose that you ask a question and I wholly go along with it at first – but that after awhile I do what McWilliams (MS) calls *hijacking*: I send the inquiry in my favored alternative direction. This too is a way to resist. While I have not blocked (or deprioritized or partialized or correctively answered or raised presupposition-related doubts about) the goal of answering your question, I have resisted that goal another way: by *limiting its amount of time* on the agenda. Resistance-talk again uncovers what blocking-talk hides.

What about subordination? Here you might ask a question that helps with someone else’s inquiry; and the question might be enthusiastically accepted; but you would face (e.g.) deprioritization if you asked questions of *your own*. Subordination is holistic; it involves *patterns* in how your questions are treated. Nonetheless, it can make for interrogative injustices involving resistance.

Another case: *mere attempts* to block. You are teaching Kant; a student asks whether he was racist; another student says that’s irrelevant; you say it *is* relevant and you discuss it. Here, the second student resisted the first’s question. Since (thanks to you) the answering of the question *did* join the common goals, the second student did not block it: they *merely tried* to. Resistance, not blocking, is what’s operative.

Finally, you might respond to a question by going beyond merely blocking it, reaching further in the same direction. Habgood-Coote (2021: 238) may have this in mind when he suggests that we can “strongly reject” questions by proposing to add *not answering them* to the common goals. These proposals are a form of resistance.

Many phenomena recalcitrant for the notion of blocking are saved by the notion of resistance. I conclude that we should replace the Blocking model with the less idealized *Resistance model* - which follows the Blocking model but for making its reactions consist in resisting the goal of answering the question at issue – in short, in *resisting the question*.

You can resist questions without rejecting them. For instance, when you deprioritize (the goal of answering) a question you do something more subtle than merely rejecting that question. Thus, the Resistance model discards the idea that interrogative injustices always consist in rejecting questions. The notion of rejection, it turns out, is too simple a tool for our theoretical purposes. We need a more complex tool: the notion of resistance.³⁰

5. Vive La Pluralité

³⁰ Perhaps this point projects back onto the testimonial case, so that there are testimonially unjust ways of resisting assertions without rejecting them. Perhaps you can accept an assertion, believing it, while still resisting it by downplaying its “perspective” or “gestalt” or “narrative framing”. See Camp (2017), Fraser (2021), Siegel (forthcoming), and Floweree (forthcoming).

Theorists who would internalize the Blocking model might also internalize the Resistance model, altering it by making its responses consist in *believing* that the asked-questions *should be* resisted (or, perhaps, refraining from believing that they shouldn't). As before, I think this model (the "Internalized Resistance" model) should join the others – and that each of them should be taken to represent, not interrogative injustice *in toto*, but one way for it to occur.

I think there are other ways too. For instance, I think interrogative injustice doesn't require identity prejudice. Consider injustice in general, *sans* modifiers. Acts don't have to be prejudicially motivated to be unjust in general. They can be unjust owing to other features, for instance to their roles in oppressive social structures. Plausibly, if these points hold for injustice in general then they also hold for interrogative injustice. Hence there are interrogative injustices not yet represented by our models. A complete theory of interrogative injustice is not yet in view.

Nor have we brought into view every kind of injustice in inquiry. We've targeted only (mental and action-oriented) *reactions to questions*. There are other items in the vicinity. These items aren't interrogative injustices *per se*; they aren't interrogative analogues of testimonial injustice. Nonetheless, they are epistemically unjust items in inquiry. I'll now end the paper by gesturing at some of these items (*merely* gesturing, sadly; they all merit sustained attention).

Consider *questions themselves*.³¹ Some questions are reactions to questions, and the Resistance model can construe them as interrogative injustices. But other questions are epistemically unjust *without* being reactions to questions. For instance, a question might inappropriately construe you as a spokesperson for a social group.³² Or it might implement an inappropriate pattern of attention on the part of the person who asks it.³³ Or its informational content might reinforce toxic stereotypes.³⁴

You might refrain from asking a question because it will be prejudicially resisted.³⁵ Here, *the prejudice* of the resisters, or even *the resisters*, might be what is epistemically unjust. Or an act of refraining from asking might *itself* be epistemically unjust; suppose I refrain

³¹ On moral hazards of questioning see Watson (2021b), Berstler (2023), and Habgood-Coote (MS).

³² Davis (2016), Salkin (2021). Thanks here to Arianna Falbo and Daniel Friedman.

³³ Smith and Archer (2020), Gardiner (2022 secs. 3.3, 4.3), St. Croix (2022), Munton (2023 sec. 5).

³⁴ Anderson (1995: 45-46), Davis (2021), Dembroff and Whitcomb (2023).

³⁵ Compare Dotson (2011).

from asking you a physics question because you are a woman.³⁶ Similarly with acts of *causing others to ask* (or refrain from asking) questions, or to accept or resist them.³⁷

Many unjust items in inquiry aren't *any* of the foregoing kinds of entities; they aren't mental states *or* actions *or* persons. *Social structures* can be unjust items in inquiry, corrupting it in all manner deep and wide. Witness canonizations of academic disciplines, distributions of agenda-setting power in a research groups, ideologies in general.³⁸ *Material objects* can be unjust items in inquiry; witness classroom chairs too small for large bodies.³⁹ *Absences of material objects* too: maybe you unjustly lack a sandwich, and with low blood sugar struggle to inquire.⁴⁰

These injustices in inquiry, many and important, escape the writ of our models. Those models represent some landmarks; they don't map the whole terrain.⁴¹

³⁶ Fricker (2007: 130), Maitra (2010: 206), Davis (2016: 488).

³⁷ Smith and Archer (2020: 780): "...a newspaper owner could deliberately block their reporters from interviewing asylum seekers." Medina (2013: 92) writes that epistemic injustice can arise "When one is [not] allowed to be an inquirer", and thus excluded from "communicative activities" involving "probing and questioning".

³⁸ Here Hill Collins (1991), Dotson (2011, 2012, 2014), and other Black Feminists are highly relevant. On social structures see Anderson (2012) and Medina (2013); on education see Coady (2010) and Smith and Archer (2020); on agenda setting see Anderson (1995), Kitcher (2001), and Bloch-Schulman (2024).

³⁹ Eller (2014).

⁴⁰ Sandwiches are very important for contemporary epistemology (Horowitz (2019), Singer and Aronowitz (2022)).

⁴¹ Thanks to Heather Battaly, Aaron Creller, Arianna Falbo, Daniel Friedman, Jane Friedman, Samantha Godwin, Christian Lee, Joshua Habgood-Coote, Dan Howard-Snyder, Frances Howard-Snyder, Hud Hudson, Jonathan Matheson, Emily McWilliams, Jared Millson, Dee Payton, Miriam Solomon, Cat St. Croix, Katherine Sweet, Neal Tognazzini, Peter van Elswyk, Ryan Wasserman, and Lani Watson.

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