

David Bordonaba-Plou, Víctor Fernández-Castro,
and José R. Torices

Editor's Introduction

The analytic tradition in philosophy is often characterized by the goal of clarity and the insistence on explicit argumentation (ESAP 2021), but also by the recognition of names like Frege, Wittgenstein, Russell, and Carnap among the figures that established the disciplines and that spread their ideas, methodologies, and positions in the English-speaking world during the twentieth century (Beaney 2011). This tradition has framed its activity within disciplines such as the philosophy of language, science, metaphysics and epistemology and has oriented its research to central concepts like truth, objectivity, knowledge, reality, and meaning. In recent decades, we have witnessed a growing interest in the political meaning and consequences of some of these key concepts. In this sense, questions such as “What is knowledge?” and “How do our speech acts mean?” have given rise to questions like “Who has the voice and power to transmit knowledge?,” “Who is being unfairly disbelieved in our epistemic practices?,” and “Can speech acts be distorted due to the speaker’s membership in a disadvantaged group?”

This change of perspective aims at elucidating how fundamental concepts of philosophy of language, science, metaphysics and epistemology can shed light on different sources of oppression and injustice is what we call the political turn in analytical philosophy. This volume aims to be a collection of original essays providing extensive contributions to this political turn by using relevant tools in contemporary analytic philosophy for social and political change. Since the first chapter of the volume is devoted to elucidating the characteristics and historical frame of the political turn, we will devote this introduction to survey the content of the volume.

Part I: “Analytic Philosophy and Social Involvement” contains two chapters dedicated to foundational and historical issues regarding the political articulation of analytic philosophy. In the first chapter, “Analytic Philosophy as Philosophical Activism,” David Bordonaba-Plou, Víctor Fernández-Castro, and José R. Torices aim at characterizing the political turn and how it can be distinguished from its historical precursor and other intersections between politics and analytic philosophy. They argue that we can distinguish the contemporary political interest of analytic philosophers as a form of political activism, that is, as being motivated by the ambition of resisting oppression and injustices and being committed to orient their theories or analysis to such a purpose.

In chapter 2, “Conceptual Engineering and Neurath’s Boat,” Audrey Yap returns to one of the most prominent figures of the Vienna Circle to secure helpful tools for the political turn in contemporary analytic philosophy. Specifically, Yap advocates two ideas. First, she defends the view that Carnapian conceptual engineering can alleviate some problems of ameliorative projects. Second, she contends that a Neurathian approach can be better for feminist empiricism than a naturalized epistemology, because it can help us decide between alternative argumentative strategies and competing scientific theories.

Part II: “Mind, Knowledge, and the Social World” offers different insights from epistemology and philosophy of mind to oppression, activism, and injustice. In particular, these chapters explore how the understanding of mind and epistemic agency can illuminate different phenomena involved in oppression and injustice like implicit bias, narcissism, servility, and value monism. Furthermore, this part proposes different strategies for epistemic resistance like epistemic de-platforming, self-empowerment, structural transformation, and the use of the ameliorative project as a way to confront conservative epistemologies.

In chapter 3, “Political Epistemology,” José Medina reflects on the recent shift in the literature on epistemic injustice from an ethics of knowing to a politics of knowing. Miranda Fricker’s (2007) seminal work on epistemic injustice is focused on the epistemic life of individuals. In contrast, Medina’s work normatively assesses the supra-individual level of epistemic injustice, that is, the epistemic dynamics of institutions and groups. Concerning the former, Medina distinguishes three criteria to assess the epistemic behavior of an institution: action protocols, staff training, and accountability procedures. Then, he defends two kinds of epistemic activism to fight institutional epistemic injustices: epistemic self-empowerment and epistemic structural transformation.

In “Intellectual Vices in Conditions of Oppression” (chapter 4), Alessandra Tanesini explores the idea of epistemic oppression and the psychological effects that this kind of oppression has both in the privileged, depicted as vices of superiority such as arrogance and narcissism, and the oppressed, depicted as vices of inferiority such as timidity and servility. Epistemic oppression, a broader concept than epistemic injustice, involves “unfair distributions of epistemic goods (such as information) and resources (like education) and/or failures to recognise fully the epistemic abilities of epistemic subjects belonging to some underprivileged social groups.” She applies Iris Young’s (1990) taxonomy to distinguish five different types of epistemic oppression: epistemic exploitation, epistemic marginalization, epistemic powerlessness, epistemic subordination (or cultural imperialism), and epistemic violence.

In chapter 5, “Epistemic De-Platforming,” Neftalí Villanueva and Manuel de Pinedo begin by showing how paradoxical it is to consider, as recommended by

epistemic contextualism, that we should reject certain epistemic possibilities when the context becomes more or less demanding and that it is considered bad epistemology to ignore certain kinds of arguments when they come from a group that we have good reason to ignore, for example, groups with fascist worldviews. In contrast to the outlined view, the authors argue that we should consider the epistemic politics of ignoring and opposing a theory if it is associated with people or other theories that you have every reason to distrust not only a good epistemic practice but also a good political practice.

Cristina Borgoni argues that implicit attitude does not need to be biased, and thus, a complete account of the nature of implicit bias needs to incorporate questions about what is biased and what is political in them. In other words, a constitutive account of the nature of implicit biases requires understating the political role of implicit bias in perpetuating injustice. As such, “Philosophy of Mind after Implicit Biases” (chapter 6) attempts to provide some methodological and programmatic insights from the philosophy of mind regarding the study of the implicit bias as biased.

Finally, Emily McWilliams addresses the prevalent belief that, while feminist work is important, it is not a part of epistemology proper, but responds instead to a largely orthogonal set of social and political concerns. According to her, the prevalence of this belief has partly to do with the methodologies used in epistemic theorizing. In “Ameliorative Inquiry in Epistemology” (chapter 7), McWilliams argues that a particular type of methodology—ameliorative inquiry—opens up possibilities for seeing feminist work as not orthogonal, but central to theories of epistemic kinds and epistemic value. Furthermore, ameliorative methodology opens the way toward endorsing pluralism about epistemic value and motivates the claim that the concerns of feminist and liberatory epistemology are a core part of epistemology proper.

Part III: “Meaning, Politics, and Identity” addresses different issues related to the social and political dimension of the meaning of our verbal expressions, concepts, and social practices. More specifically, this part focuses on the oppressive and unjust dimension of the use of derogatory terms and the practices that are embedded in them, but also, about the necessity of providing substantive theories of meaning (e.g. of the term ‘woman’) and conceptual landscaping in order to redress hermeneutical injustices and other forms of oppression.

Deborah Mühlebach argues that the recent interest in analyzing the pernicious political and moral aspects of problematic terms like slurs or derogatory terms is not sufficient to illuminate the sources of injustice or oppression in our social practices. Elaborating on Robert Brandom’s inferentialism, “Tackling Verbal Derogation” (chapter 8) analyzes how the level of social practices and meanings can feed into pernicious linguistic exchanges, and thus, how construc-

tive contestation at these levels could be more efficacious than focusing on verbal actions as the current literature in philosophy of language and semantics do.

“The Power to Shape Context” (chapter 9) considers how presuppositions can mobilize some prejudice and negative attitude, and thus, promote injustice and discrimination via a back door type of testimony even using harmless language. This model presented by Rae Langton, however, cannot accommodate value talk and informative evaluative presuppositions. As such, Bianca Cepollaro presents a model that can account for taste, moral and aesthetic value judgments and dispenses with the notion of testimony.

In “Hermeneutical Injustice and Conceptual Landscaping” (chapter 10), Saray Ayala-López proposes that conceptual landscaping, the practice of crafting our available conceptual resources or generating new ones when a particular worldly phenomena resists conceptualization, needs to go beyond failure-fixing. In other words, we should not limit conceptual engineering to cases where we detect a failure of the existing dominant collective available resources. Two arguments motivate this claim. First, hermeneutical injustice does not always reveal gaps in the collective conceptual sources but also distortions of information. Second, there are contexts that need creativity in order to generate new concepts that help to make sense of new realities such as the contexts of gender open babies.

Finally, E. Díaz-León goes against the idea that feminism does not need to provide a substantive account of the meaning of ‘woman’ in order to describe and fight the oppression of women. As such, “The Meaning of ‘Woman’ and the Political Turn in Philosophy of Language” (chapter 11) aims at providing a new version of contextualism that is able to address some of the challenges in the debate between trans-inclusive and trans-exclusive accounts of the meaning of woman.

Part IV “Epistemology and Polarization” deals with a notion that has received a more than a significant amount of attention from both the research community and the public: polarization. The concept of polarization refers to the abnormal distribution of opinions on a particular issue and seems to be a fundamental phenomenon to understand some political problems such as the rise of populism or the inability of some democratic governments to make their decision-making mechanisms work. This last part of the volume is devoted to exploring the philosophical and epistemological consequences of this concept as well as its role in the generation of certain injustices.

“Affective Polarization and Testimonial and Discursive Injustice” (chapter 12) explores the connection between polarization and testimonial and discursive injustice. Manuel Almagro-Holgado and Alba Moreno-Zurita defend the claim that political polarization can be understood in two ways, as ideological polarization,

that is, as extremism, or as affective polarization, that is, as radicalism. Next, they argue that, only by understanding polarization in this second sense, we can make sense of the relation between polarization and testimonial and discursive injustices.

In chapter 13, “Philosophical Considerations of Political Polarization,” William J. Berger, Daniel J. Singer, Aaron Bramson, Patrick Grim, Jiin Jung, and Bennett Holman illustrate how philosophy and political science can inform one another by providing an overview of the philosophical contributions they have made elsewhere on the topic of political polarization, particularly of the epistemic kind. First, the authors consider ways to provide a more explicit terminology to understand how to measure polarization; second, they discuss precise mechanistic accounts of polarization; and third, they examine a novel normative view about a possible source of polarization that casts polarization as a possible outcome of rational, but limited, agents interacting. Contrary to recent work on this topic, this last contribution illustrates how dynamics akin to epistemic bubbles and echo chambers can develop without associated epistemic vices.”

