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“Knower” as an Ethical Concept: From Epistemic Agency to Mutual Recognition¹

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Abstract

Recent discussions in critical social epistemology have raised the idea that the concept “knower” is not only an epistemological concept but an ethical concept as well. Though this idea plays a central role in these discussions, the theoretical underpinnings of the claim have not received extended scrutiny. This paper explores the idea that “knower” is an irreducibly ethical concept in an effort to defend its use as a critical concept. In section 1, I begin with the claim that “knower” is an irreducibly *normative* and *social* concept, drawing from some ideas in Wilfrid Sellars. In section 2, I argue that one’s being a knower involves demands for various sorts of ethically laden *recognition*. I develop this thought by arguing that Axel Honneth’s threefold typology of recognition—love, respect, and esteem—finds clear expression within the context of socio-epistemic practice. I conclude in section 3 by arguing that Miranda Fricker’s proposed “analogy” between epistemic and moral perception should be modified to indicate a closer relationship than mere analogy.

Keywords: ethics, social epistemology, feminist epistemology, recognition, epistemic injustice

What is a “knower”? There is a strand of ancient thought for which this is an essentially ethical question. The famous opening lines of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* attribute to us a naturally arising “desire to know” (980a21–27), and Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* includes a discussion of intellectual virtues as a proper part of the study of ethics. If becoming a knower is ultimately a matter of shaping a certain kind of desire, and if virtue is understood as the shaping of desires in ways that constitute flourishing, then the process of becoming a knower is inseparable from the broader project of pursuing a flourishing human life. Part of what this suggests is

¹ I am grateful to Paul Giladi, Karen Ng, and Francey Russell for reading earlier drafts and providing helpful suggestions for improvement. A version of this paper was presented at the 11th International Critical Theory Conference of Rome, and I thank the participants for a lively discussion on that occasion.

that the very idea of one's becoming a knower is adequately grasped only against the background of a broader ethical conception of what a flourishing human life involves. More succinctly, it suggests that "knower" is an irreducibly ethical concept.

Though this idea has ancient precedent, it has been raised in a fresh way by recent work in the ethics and politics of epistemology, exemplified by Miranda Fricker's much-discussed work, *Epistemic Injustice* (2007).² There, the idea is developed negatively: the aim is to carve out conceptual space for a distinctive sort of injustice characterized by the fact that its victims are "wronged in their capacities as knowers" (44). This implies that one's acquisition of epistemic capacities involves, in addition to gaining conceptual powers that allow one to relate thoughtfully to the world, a newly acquired form of vulnerability to wrongdoing. This negative thesis, in turn, implies something positive: namely, that being a knower is essentially to bear a normative status that is simultaneously epistemic and ethical: it is epistemic insofar as the label "knower" indicates the roles one may legitimately assume within practices of justification and warrant, and ethical, in the sense that being a knower implicates one within interpersonal relations of answerability that invoke notions of justice and injustice, flourishing and degradation, virtue, and vice, rightful treatment and moral injury. If we take this idea seriously, then simply in describing someone as a bearer of epistemic agency, one thereby ascribes to that person an ethical normative standing.

My aim in this paper is to lend support to the thesis that "knower" is an irreducibly ethical concept by defending a particular account of what is involved in the second-personal act of recognizing another as a knower. Specifically, I develop a picture of the essentially recognitive structure of the concept "knower" via three broad moves. First, I draw from Wilfrid Sellars's claim that epistemological concepts—concepts like *knowledge* and *evidence*—must be understood in irreducibly social and normative terms. Second, I connect this social-normative conception of epistemological concepts with some central themes in Axel Honneth's neo-Hegelian theory of recognition. Epistemological themes arise throughout work in neo-Hegelian recognition theory,³ and several authors have already noted connections between the philosophy of recognition and work on epistemic injustice (McConkey 2004; Pohlhaus 2014, 105–106; Congdon 2017; Giladi 2018; Bratu and Lepold 2018). I add to these efforts by arguing that the essentially recognitive

² The contemporary literature on the ethics and politics of epistemology is immense and growing. See, esp., Fricker 2007; the essays collected in Sullivan and Tuana 2007; Mills 1997; Medina 2013; and the essays collected in Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus 2017.

³ Honneth gives special attention to the "epistemology" of recognition in Honneth 2001 and 2008. For a helpful analysis, see Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007.

structure of the concept of a “knower” offers a compelling framework within which to situate the claim that “knower” is an essentially ethical concept. I develop this thought by arguing that Honneth’s threefold typology of recognition—love, respect, and esteem—finds clear expression within the context of socio-epistemic practice. Third, I ask what sort of perception is involved in recognizing others as knowers in this ethically robust sense, arguing that the recognition-theoretical model should be supplemented with a neo-Aristotelian conception of moral perception, along the lines defended by John McDowell and Iris Murdoch. In this connection, I consider an analogy that Fricker proposes between epistemic and moral perception (2007, chap. 3), and argue that, in order to make good on the claim that “knower” is an ethical concept, this must go beyond mere analogy. On the view I prefer, to perceive another as a knower is already a matter of ethical perception. This brings us back to a variation of the Aristotelian claim with which I began, namely, that the very idea of being or becoming a knower is only graspable against the background of an ethical conception of a flourishing human life.

1. “Knower” as a Normative Concept

In order to build up to the idea that “knower” is an ethical concept, I will start by sketching a version of the more basic claim that “knower” is a *normative* concept. To that end, it will be helpful to follow an approach suggested by Wilfrid Sellars in his famous essay, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (1997).

A central line of thinking in Sellars’s essay runs as follows. In characterizing someone or something in epistemic terms, as when we characterize someone as a knower or something as evidence, we are not just making a claim about what that person or thing is in a merely descriptive sense but ascribing a *normative status* to that person or thing, saying what roles that person or thing may legitimately assume within practices of giving and asking for reasons.⁴ Consider, for example, the contrast between the following two judgments (Kukla 2000, 209–210):

⁴ Sellars (1997) sometimes puts this in terms of a logical distinction between judgments of matters of *natural fact* and judgments of matters of *epistemic fact* (§17). Or, in other places, by contrasting epistemic characterizations with empirical descriptions (§36). Both points of contrast can, however, be misleading, at least insofar as they suggest a strong split between the normative and the natural or empirically available world. I agree with McDowell that Sellars’s insight into the normative status of epistemic concepts can be appreciated without taking on the further commitment that “placing something in the logical space of reasons is, as such, to be contrasted with giving an empirical description of it” (McDowell 1996, 5n4). This technical point is important in light of the form of ethical perception I defend in section 3, below.

(a) “x is green.”

(b) “x is evidence.”

Both judgments have normative dimensions, but in importantly different ways. Judgment (a) is normative in the sense of being *subject to normative assessment* in its meaning and use: it can be interpreted, evaluated as correct or incorrect, and can justify other claims via logical relations of material implication and exclusion. It bears normative relations with other possible judgments, for example, “x is the same color as Kermit” (material implication) and “x is colorless” (exclusion). It may also bear rational relations to practical commitments in the domain of action, for example, if x is a traffic light just ahead. The judgment is, in this fashion, embedded within a normative space that defines a set of rational relationships it has to other possible judgments and actions. But judgment (b), by contrast, is normative in deeper sense. For in addition to being susceptible to all the *first-order* forms of normative assessment just mentioned, it also serves the *higher-order* task of purporting to describe the conditions of normative assessment themselves. In this case, “x is evidence” forms part of a description of the rational relations that branch off from our judgments about x into a surrounding set of possible judgments and actions. Perhaps x’s being green is the result of a chemical reaction that confirms a scientific hypothesis, and so to characterize this as “evidence” is to make explicit a role it plays within a network of rational relations between epistemic commitments (in this case, supporting a particular theory). So, while judgment (a) is a move *within* normative space, judgment (b) makes a claim about the *layout* of normative space itself. It serves to articulate some corner of the “logical space of reasons,” to borrow Sellars’s well-known metaphor.

The concept “knower,” like the concept “evidence,” is essentially normative in this latter sense, yet involves additional nuance owing to the fact that, unlike the concept “evidence,” it (i) ascribes *agency* to its target and (ii) situates that agency within *social practices* of giving and asking for reasons. We may understand the sort of agency at stake in terms of one’s capacity to make moves in the space of reasons that render one answerable to rational sorts of criticism (McDowell 2009, 6). In characterizing *K* as a knower, we ascribe to *K* capacities to acknowledge the authority of, and thus move responsibly within, the rational relations that constitute the space of reasons, which in turn entails the possibility of judging *K* to be susceptible to various sorts of epistemic failure and dysfunction—ignorance, false belief, bad reasoning—as well as *K*’s vulnerability to socio-epistemic pathologies like

bad prejudice and ideology.⁵ This presupposes, on the part of those who regard *K* in this way, certain *normative expectations* concerning *K*'s epistemic doings: for example, that *K* will be rationally sensitive to relevant forms of evidence and counterevidence; that we may legitimately ask *K* to provide reasons for what she says and does; and, reciprocally, that she may legitimately ask the same of us.

The normative and social characterization of epistemic terms has precedent extending back to influential lines of thought in Kant and German idealism and has many contemporary advocates.⁶ Our concern, however, is with the stronger thesis that “knower” is normative not only in a narrowly epistemic sense but in a broader sense that includes irreducibly ethical dimensions. There are several ways we could put this point. Borrowing Fricker's language, we could express it by saying that certain judgments and inferences having to do with *epistemic injustice* and *epistemic justice* are a proper part of the conceptual content of the concept “knower,” such that a decent understanding of that concept invariably involves a grasp of our ethical relationship to those we recognize as knowers. By way of analogy the idea would be this: in the same way that certain material inferences are part of the conceptual content of the concept “green” (e.g., inferences like “If *x* is green, then *x* is not colorless,” etc.), certain material inferences concerning ethical conduct are part of the conceptual content of the concept “knower,” such that one's recognizing *K* as a knower cannot be separated, even notionally, from an acknowledgment of *K*'s warranting certain forms of ethical treatment and regard.⁷

We might take either of two opposed reactions towards this stronger ethical thesis right off the bat. On the one hand, one may find this thesis fairly unsurprising, especially given the recent explosion of interest over the past decade or so in the ethics and politics of epistemology.⁸ For someone immersed within this body of work, for whom the idea of a “socially situated knower” is familiar and self-evident, the thought that epistemic agency has irreducibly ethical dimensions is an

⁵ On the idea of a “social pathology,” see Honneth 2014, 86. On the role of ideology in connection with the strand of social epistemology under discussion here, see, e.g., Mills 1997, 2007, and 2017.

⁶ For two variations on the Sellarsian story just sketched, both of which foreground connections with Kant and post-Kantian idealism, see McDowell 1996 and Brandom 1998.

⁷ Though I put the thesis in terms of material inference here, a point I endorse in section 3, below, is that value-laden judgments concerning knowers may also be available noninferentially via perception.

⁸ See note 2.

indispensable foundational notion.⁹ Why think we could separate, even for purposes of analysis, one's standing as a knower from the embedded ethical-political context in which actual epistemic practice takes place, from the complex relations of power and vulnerability that shape basic epistemic features like credibility, trust, belief, and testimony? And yet, from an equally familiar philosophical point of view, one can find this thesis preposterous. Surely we can formulate an abstract picture of an epistemic agent, who endorses certain true beliefs in the right ways or for the right reasons and thereby counts as a knower, without presupposing anything distinctively ethical. That, after all, is what conceptual analysis is for: it lifts basic notions like "knower" out of the murky depths of lived experience and into the light of conceptual clarity. We might even grant that "knower" is an irreducibly *normative* concept, implying notions of agency and answerability, while nevertheless maintaining that these notions are normative in a sense that can be grasped fully outside the perspective of an ethical outlook.¹⁰

My view is that the stronger ethical thesis can be defended against the latter reaction, but that it might not be as self-evident as the former reaction makes it seem. To defend it, some of its theoretical underpinnings need to be made explicit. In order to begin building a bridge between the Sellarsian "space of reasons" and this more ethically robust claim, we may highlight two points that follow from the normative characterization of the concept "knower."

(i) First, if "knower" is a normative concept, then to conceive of oneself as a knower is a distinctive sort of *positive self-relation*, for it involves ascribing to oneself a normative standing in relation to others, one that denotes certain normative powers and responsibilities in the context of practices of justification and warrant. In conceiving of oneself as a knower, one assumes a complex practical identity, viewing oneself as meriting certain kinds of treatment that follow from one's rightful inclusion within socio-epistemic practices. In this way, regarding

⁹ The concept of the "situated knower" has a long history, developed through a combination of Marxian, feminist, and critical race theory perspectives. See, e.g., Lukács 1971; Harding 2004; Mills 2007; and Collins 2000, chap. 11.

¹⁰ For a discussion of this tendency in modern epistemology, which emphasizes the decoupling of epistemological concepts from "merely human interests," see Habermas 1971. See in particular his discussion of the "ethical neutrality" that is supposed to characterize the ideal knower (303). Mills (2007, 13) suggests that the ethically and politically neutral methodological paradigm in epistemology begins with Descartes. Fricker suggests that the absence of ethical or political considerations in mainstream epistemology results from a "framework of individualism and compulsory rational idealization that epistemology traditionally creates for itself" (Fricker 2007, 2).

oneself as an epistemic agent involves a basic sort of *self-affirmation*. “Knower” is a description under which one values oneself, views oneself as leading a life worth living, and under which one can view one’s activities as worth pursuing (cf. Korsgaard 1996, 101) Insofar as a basic reflexive grasp of oneself as a knower is a prerequisite for epistemic agency at all (as in Kant’s notion that the “I think” must be capable of accompanying all my representations [Kant 1999, Ak. B131–132]), one’s being a knower and one’s capacity to reflexively affirm oneself as a knower are two sides of the same coin.

(ii) The second point is closely related to this. If “knower” is a normative concept in the sense sketched above, then to regard another person as a knower is a matter of adopting a particular *normative attitude* towards that other, one that apprehends its target as appropriately subject to distinctive sorts of criticism and as bearing the positive self-relation just described. We can push this slightly further by noting that to be judged a knower is to be regarded not only as subject to normative appraisal but as capable of *subjecting* other knowers to the same sorts of normative appraisal. So, A’s regarding B as a knower presupposes B’s capacity to regard A as a knower in turn. Their reciprocal regard situates the pair within a shared space of reasons, one defined by the sorts of rational relations (e.g., material implications and exclusions) that are in principle sharable and equally authoritative for A and B alike. The result is a “bipolar” or *two-way relation of answerability* running between epistemic agents (Thompson 2004).

Combining these two points already brings us close to the concerns of neo-Hegelian recognition theory, for one of its central claims is the absolute dependence of one’s positive relation-to-self upon one’s standing in essentially social relations of recognition with others.¹¹ One’s possession of a positive self-relation involves normative expectations concerning the sorts of treatment one merits from others in virtue of one’s status. Recognition theory seeks to explain the normative significance of those expectations in terms of a basic need for recognition from others, such that the disappointment of those expectations typically or paradigmatically involves the perception that due recognition has been denied or withheld. In our case, viewing oneself as a knower will involve normative expectations concerning the forms of interpersonal treatment that are consistent with due recognition of that status. It is within the reciprocal normative relations of answerability just described that struggles for epistemic recognition can arise. My aim in the next section is to elaborate, with the help of Honneth’s threefold typology of recognition, a

¹¹ The general premise that one’s relation-to-self is fundamentally dependent upon relations-to-others is central for Honneth (see, esp., 1995 and 2008) but is also a key feature of non-Honnethian approaches to recognition, e.g., Butler 2004; Bernstein 2015; and Brandom 2007.

framework for theorizing what sorts of epistemic recognition might be thought of as due to persons in virtue of their normative standing as knowers.

First, however, a terminological clarification about the term, “recognition.” The term is sometimes used to refer to the basic practical attitude involved in regarding another as a bearer of normative statuses at all. Robert Brandom uses the term in this fashion: “Taking someone to be responsible or authoritative, attributing a normative deontic status to someone, is the attitude-kind that Hegel (picking up a term of Fichte’s) calls ‘recognition’ (Anerkennung)” (2013, 70). This use of the term tracks the sort of normative attitude I was just describing in points (i) and (ii). However, “recognition” is sometimes given a more demanding interpretation, requiring on the recognizer’s part not only a practical attitude that ascribes a normative status, but also an *expressive act* or *treatment* whereby the recognizer publicly demonstrates acknowledgment of the validity of that status, for example, through concrete, communicative gestures of respect the recognizee can understand. Quietly thinking to myself that you are a good chess player is not yet *recognizing* you as such in this more demanding sense: I need to tell you, give you a trophy, and so forth, in order for recognition to take place. Axel Honneth uses the term this way, emphasizing that recognition “is dependent on media that express the fact that the other person is supposed to possess social ‘validity’” (2001, 115) and involves “affective approval or encouragement” (1995, 95; cf. 2002, 505–506). In sum, what Brandom calls “recognition”—that is, the attitude of ascribing a normative status to a person—is a necessary but not sufficient condition for what Honneth calls “recognition,” which involves an additional expressive or communicative act of affirmation.¹²

I am going to use the term “recognition” in the more demanding sense. As I understand it, “recognition” is a complex phenomenon involving at least (i) a practical attitude whereby one regards a recognizee as bearing a normative status and (ii) an expressive communicative act whereby the recognizer publicly validates that status by treating the recognizee in ways appropriate to it. I’ll reserve the term “regard” for the more basic and less demanding practical attitude of ascribing to one a normative status in the first place.¹³

¹² Some accounts specify further conditions beyond these. For instance, some views hold a “mutuality requirement,” i.e., that *A* has not recognized *B* unless *B* is in some way receptive to, or identifies with, the form of validation that *A* offers. See, e.g., Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007, 37–39.

¹³ Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007) take a different view: “we argue that actions . . . are not a necessary constituent of recognition at all. Rather, the recognitive attitudes that are a necessary constituent of recognition are motivators of actions” (44n17).

2. Epistemic Recognition and Its Failures

Once one has entered into the two-way normative relation implied in *regarding* another as a knower, one faces the question of whether and how to *recognize* that other, which is to say, whether and how to behave in ways that convey one’s acceptance, affirmation, and validation of the other’s normative status *qua* knower. My aim in this section is to provide a framework for thinking about what *epistemic recognition* might amount to, that is, what forms of recognition might be understood as properly merited by one’s standing as a knower.

At the heart of recognition theory is the thesis that one’s positive self-relation is bound up with, and in fundamental ways dependent upon, the receipt of certain basic types of recognition from others. According to Honneth’s influential version, individuals first acquire positive understandings of themselves only thanks to a developmental process of socialization whereby others confer recognition of their worth and social standing through affirmative expressive gestures and acts (Honneth 1995, chap. 5). Even once a practical self-conception is more or less firmly established in adulthood, an individual’s positive self-relation remains vulnerable and dependent upon ongoing recognition from others. It is because of our dependence upon initial and ongoing relations of recognition that interpersonal interactions in which one perceives others as withholding or denying relevant sorts of recognition can be experienced as moral injuries (Honneth 2007a). That is, the reason human beings are capable of experiencing distinctively *moral* sorts of pain—as in experiences of being insulted, humiliated, excluded, dominated, or degraded by others’ treatment, which are irreducible to nonmoral feelings of misfortune or bad luck—is that they arise from social interactions perceived as attacks upon the intersubjective preconditions for achieving a positive self-relation in the first place (2007a, 137). This, Honneth urges, best accounts for what separates our typical attitudes towards accidental injuries, which we may experience as mere ill luck or constraint, from those we take towards distinctively *moral* injuries that seem to attack our very identity or integrity as persons, which typically give rise to negative moral emotions, like resentment and indignation (2007a, 133–134; cf. Strawson 2008, 6). In serious cases, the denial or withholding of recognition can lead to the total destruction of the victim’s positive self-understanding. As Honneth puts it, “Because the normative self-image of each and every individual human being . . . is dependent on the possibility of being continually backed up by others, the experience of being disrespected carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse” (1995, 131–132).

This characterization strikes me as wrong, at least insofar as they purport to be analyzing the concept of recognition as it appears in Honneth’s theory.

So, according to this line of thought, a set of recognition-theoretical concepts are tightly interconnected and mutually imply one another: (a) one's *positive self-relation*, (b) the relations of *recognition* one needs in order to develop and uphold that self-relation, and (c) the corresponding *failures of recognition* (mis-, non-, or ideological recognition¹⁴) that can be experienced as a moral injury and, in extreme circumstances, contribute to the breakdown of one's positive self-relation altogether.

Now I want to suggest that the basic Sellarsian framework I introduced in section 1 can be transposed into these recognition-theoretical terms. Regarding oneself as a knower is (a*) a form of practical self-relation that (b*) comes along with normative expectations concerning others' recognition of that status and (c*) generates a distinctive sort of vulnerability to corresponding sorts of recognition failure, that is, one's susceptibility to being "wronged in one's capacity as a knower," to put it with Fricker (2007, 44). Indeed, Fricker echoes Honneth in her claim that repeated acts of testimonial or hermeneutical injustice can threaten one's very identity as a knower, and thus "can inhibit the very formation of self" (2007, 55). In order to give the idea of *epistemic recognition* some determinacy, I want to develop three basic types of epistemic recognition along with corresponding types of *epistemic recognition failure*. I'll do so by following Honneth's own threefold typology of recognition.

Taking his cue from Hegel's identification of the family, civil society, and the state as the three fundamental social spheres constituting modern ethical life (Hegel 1991, §§158–360), Honneth elaborates three fundamental sorts of recognition: love, respect, and esteem.¹⁵ These correspond, in turn, to three fundamental sorts of

¹⁴ The term "misrecognition" is sometimes used as a catch-all term for all instances in which due recognition is distorted or withheld. I prefer the broader label "failures of recognition," which includes several varieties, including: (i) *nonrecognition*, in which people are treated as if socially invisible or worthless, (ii) *misrecognition*, in which people are treated in ways that only partially or distortedly do justice to their worth, and (iii) *ideological recognition*, in which apparently affirmative gestures strengthen conditions of oppression. On nonrecognition (understood in terms of "social invisibility" and "reification") see Honneth 2001 and 2008. On ideological recognition, see Honneth 2007b; Young 2007; Celikates 2009; and Worsdale 2018. On the connection between misrecognition and moral injury, see Bernstein 2005 and Honneth 2007a.

¹⁵ See, esp., Honneth 1995, chap. 5. For one of the clearest reconstructions of the three types of recognition (along with a feminist critique), see Young 2007. Honneth's theory is sometimes contrasted with "one-dimensional" theories of recognition, which treat recognition without differentiating between subspecies.

positive self-relation they help develop and sustain: basic self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. (i) *Love* is the form of recognition that affirms human beings in their neediness and vulnerability within the context of intimate relationships (Honneth 1995, 95–107). A caretaker’s love for a young child first enables the beloved to develop the basic self-confidence involved in feeling that one’s needs merit others’ caring attention. In order to count as loving care in the sense of recognition, the caretaker must not simply ensure that the child’s needs are met, but meet those needs in a way that conveys to the child a sense that her needs *deserve* to be met, that she is *worth* caring for. It is thanks to such relations of loving care, Honneth argues, that humans first come to emerge in early adulthood as individuated, autonomous, self-confident beings. (ii) *Respect*, in contrast with the particularistic intimacy of love, is a universalistic form of recognition that affirms persons in their standing as legal and moral equals (1995, 107–121). We may think here in Kantian terms of the demand to respect the humanity of all persons as ends-in-themselves. Respect for a person’s moral standing in this sense is dependent neither upon special relations of affection and intimacy nor upon the subject’s individual accomplishments or contributions to the social good. One is recognized as bearing a normative standing simply in virtue of one’s humanity or intrinsic dignity. The positive self-relation sustained by respect is self-respect, one’s capacity to view oneself as belonging to a community of moral equals. (iii) Finally, subjects desire to be recognized not only for who they are (whether in their particular neediness or in their universal moral personhood) but for the things they *do* that distinguish them as individuals. *Esteem* is the form of recognition that affirms individuals insofar as they make unique and valuable contributions within the cooperative sphere of social life (Honneth 1995, 121–130). The form of practical relation-to-self developed and sustained by esteem is self-esteem, the sense that one exists within a community that values one’s contributions to it. In contrast with respect, esteem is nonegalitarian and indexed to individual achievement. Esteem requires that recognizer and recognizee share a “horizon of value,” within which certain projects and pursuits are mutually regarded as meaningful, beneficial, enriching, or admirable.

Now, we can take Honneth’s threefold conception of recognition as a guiding thread in order to articulate the way these forms are at work within the context of epistemic practice.¹⁶

See Ikäheimo and Laitinen, 2007, 39–42. The account of recognition offered by Brandom (2013) appears to be one-dimensional in this sense.

¹⁶ I also develop a threefold schema of “epistemic recognition” based on love, respect, and esteem in Congdon 2017.

(i*) *Epistemic love* could refer to those forms of attention, encouragement, and patience required to provide potential knowers with an initial sense of epistemic trust and self-confidence in early childhood. To provide epistemic love is to recognize the manifold ways in which epistemic agency is a fragile and socially dependent achievement. The need for epistemic love, moreover, does not end with a knower's transition to adulthood but persists insofar as we continue to be needy and socially dependent in our capacities as knowers. If assigning a central place to love within an epistemological theory initially sounds eccentric,¹⁷ it is worth recalling that ordinary testimonial exchange between adults typically requires basic forms of sympathy and compassion: for example, showing patience with a speaker who is having difficulty finding the right words; avoiding unnecessary aggression in questioning; realizing that ordinary competent speakers make simple mistakes and skip over important premises in reasoning.¹⁸ This is more than a set of platitudes about polite epistemic conduct: the recipient of epistemic love is given a chance to view herself from the perspective of others as one whose epistemic neediness and social dependence is acknowledged as legitimate, or worth caring for.¹⁹ It also contains the important point that even the most basic testimonial exchanges require complex, socially learned exercises of emotional competence and imaginative identification with others. In this way epistemic love is, far from being an eccentric

¹⁷ Though it has precedent extending as far back as ancient Greek thought. For example, Socrates's conviction that education requires the inspiration and guidance of a certain kind of love (Plato 1997, 201d–212c).

¹⁸ Craig (1999) notes the importance of basic sorts of empathy within testimonial exchange with examples like the following. If I ask you while in a rush, "Where is the bus stop?" and you respond, "It's just around the corner. But the last bus left ten minutes ago," your response demonstrates not only an ability to understand my explicitly voiced question, but also the purpose or importance that question has for me. Thus, Craig concludes, "an informant is a co-operating member of our species. That means that he can often empathize with the inquirer, and react not just to the question but to the presumed purpose of asking it, so giving the inquirer useful information that he didn't know he had need of" (36; cf. 38). See, also, Fricker on the role of empathy in testimonial exchange (2007, 79–80).

¹⁹ Gaita (1998) makes a parallel point about the epistemic role played by love when a teacher demonstrates passion for a particular subject matter. Beyond merely conveying information or skills, a teacher's love for a topic may "teach students about the worth of what they—teacher and students—are doing together" (230). Similar ideas are at work in efforts to extend feminist care ethics into epistemology (see Dalmiya 2002).

philosophical postulate, a fundamental and familiar feature of everyday epistemic practice.

Next, (ii*) *epistemic respect* can refer to those egalitarian forms of recognition owed to any knower whatsoever. The very idea that we owe certain forms of recognition to all knowers universally may initially sound odd, given the evident fact we judge knowers as more or less competent, as having or lacking relevant experience, as having comparatively higher and lower degrees of credibility. All of these factors vary for each individual knower across different areas of knowledge and contexts of testimonial exchange. What might it mean, then, to respect someone qua knower *irrespective* of the differential strengths and weaknesses by which we typically judge knowers? Though this is not an easy point to spell out in fine detail, it turns out to be possible to sketch at least a rough outline of this thought by noting some historical precedent for the idea. At one point in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant describes a duty we have to others that we might understand as a mixture of epistemic respect and epistemic love:

[We have] a duty to respect a human being even in the logical use of his reason, a duty not to censure his errors by calling them absurdities, poor judgment, and so forth, but rather to suppose that his judgment must yet contain some truth and to seek this out, . . . to preserve his respect for his own understanding. (Kant 2017, Ak. 6:463)

The basic principle of generosity Kant is recommending here is echoed in later philosophy, for example H. P. Grice’s (1975) argument in favor of a set of conversational norms derived from a “Principle of Cooperation” that apply to any conversation irrespective of its subject matter, or Nancy Daukas’s (2006) more recent defense of an “epistemic principle of charity,” which she draws out from the thought that “normal practices of epistemic interaction and cooperation require that members of an epistemic community typically extend to one another the presumption that they meet some threshold level of epistemic credibility” (110). These sorts of suggestions, though different in their details, agree at least in the notion that there is some basic form of respect owed to any knower, irrespective of differential factors like expertise. We could also add the following point in favor of a threshold form of egalitarian epistemic recognition. Our discussion in section 1 already suggested that to regard another as a knower is to implicate oneself in a two-way relation of answerability vis-à-vis that other. It is difficult to grasp what this relation could consist in if it did not contain at least the inchoate normative promise that one will be held to the same fundamental rational standards as all other participants in the space of reasons. So, for example, if a particular inference made

by *K* counts as invalid, in a way that other epistemic agents may criticize, then, *ceteris paribus*, *J*'s making exactly the same inference ought not to be credited as a piece of sound reasoning but should be subject to the same sorts of criticism as *K*'s inference. At least in this very basic respect, *K* and *J* are equals in the space of reasons, and to fail to treat *K* and *J* this way can, in certain cases, amount not only to a logical error but to a form of *epistemic disrespect*, a failure to treat them in ways consistent with due recognition of their normative status as knowers in general.

I say only in "certain cases" because a hearer's failure to subject *J* and *K*'s identical inferences to the same sorts of rational criticism can be due to nonculpable contingent circumstances.²⁰ In order to amount to epistemic *disrespect*, this failure must stem from morally culpable grounds. Imagine, for example, that *J* and *K* are, respectively, a man and a woman lecturing on Fichte at a conference. They present essentially the same reconstruction of a particular line of argument from the text. Audience member *A* detects a crucial logical flaw in *K*'s line of reasoning but not *J*'s, despite the fact that they presented the same argument. If *A*'s failure to detect the same flaw in *J*'s argument was due to the fact that, say, *A* was distracted for a moment by a fire alarm, then *A*'s error seems nearer to the nonculpable end of the spectrum. But if *A*'s failure to detect the flaw in *J*'s reasoning has its root in, say, a sexist bias that pays undue reverence to male Fichte scholars in comparison with women in the same field, then we have a case not only of logical inconsistency but *epistemic disrespect*.

(iii*) *Epistemic esteem*, by contrast, could refer to those forms of epistemic recognition that *do* take into account individual knowers' unique strengths, epistemic accomplishments, and contributions to epistemic practice that serve to distinguish them from others. Hard-won expertise in a field, practical knowledge from a lifetime of experience, or the cultivation of a trustworthy epistemic character may be grounds for epistemic esteem. Good grades and academic degrees are obvious (albeit often crude) ways of conferring epistemic esteem, though we may also think of more subtle forms of epistemic esteem that manifest themselves in the course of testimonial exchange. Iris Marion Young offers the following example: "You and I start a conversation about a philosophical problem, we exchange proposals and arguments, and we criticize one another. We esteem one another reciprocally and simultaneously just to the degree that each of us pushes the other to think harder" (Young 2007, 208). The point is that epistemic esteem *can* involve gestures that are grand and flashy (diplomas with Latin phrases specifying one's GPA) but they can also take the form of quiet, subtle indications that one is simply finding the conversation stimulating. The form of positive self-relation this develops and sustains is epistemic self-esteem, one's regarding oneself as having distinct and

²⁰ Cf. Fricker's discussion of epistemic and ethical culpability (2007, chaps. 1 and 4).

valuable contributions to make to collective epistemic practices. Since epistemic esteem is nonegalitarian by definition, indexed as it is to particular valuable epistemic contributions, it is both possible and in line with the demands of epistemic justice to respect *J* and *K* as epistemic equals while esteeming *K* more highly than *J* in a particular area given *K*'s expertise.

Once we have elaborated these three sorts of epistemic recognition, we can see a set of corresponding types of *epistemic recognition failures*. *Epistemic neglect* can refer to the unjust exclusion of potential knowers from educational opportunities and other forms of epistemic love in early childhood (cf. Haslanger 2014). I already briefly discussed the notion of *epistemic disrespect* above, which I characterized as a violation of the implicit normative promise that all knowers be subjected to the same basic standards of criticism within the space of reasons. *Epistemic disesteem*, in turn, can refer to acts that convey the notion that one's distinctive contributions to cooperative epistemic practice are undervalued or viewed as worthless.²¹

In sum, extending Honneth's typology of recognition into the epistemic domain allows us to elaborate three forms of epistemic recognition and three corresponding forms of epistemic misrecognition. The twin notions that one can *merit* such forms of epistemic recognition and that such forms of epistemic misrecognition can be *criticized* presupposes that the hypothesis we raised in section 1 is true: that “knower” is an ethical concept, such that to regard adequately one as a knower implicates one within an ethical relation.

3: Epistemic Perception as Ethical Perception

I proposed in section 1 to explore the claim that “knower” is not only a normative concept in a narrowly epistemic sense but an irreducibly ethical concept. My discussion of epistemic recognition in section 2 was meant to contribute to this task in a partial manner, by offering a story of the sorts of ethical contents we might view as a proper part of the concept “knower.” According to this story, to regard another as a knower is to adopt a normative attitude that involves, internal to it, an acknowledgment of an ethical status that merits particular forms of recognition. In this section, I try to lend support to the notion that what's involved in offering due epistemic recognition to another is, in fact, a matter of rational responsiveness to

²¹ These are not the only ways in which epistemic recognition can fail. We should also allow for the notion that certain acts which appear to convey social validation of others' standings as epistemic agents in fact serve to reinforce conditions of oppression. These would be instances of *ideological epistemic recognition*. Davis 2016 provides a helpful analysis of cases that fall within this category as part of her discussion of “identity-prejudicial credibility excess.”

(or, indeed, perception of) ethically significant qualities persons possess qua knowers. I will do so by way of a comparison with Fricker's own discussion of what is involved in perceiving others as credible informants.

Before turning to Fricker, however, we may note that there is a closely related debate within recognition theory surrounding the nature of the evaluative qualities that a potential recognizee must possess in order to merit recognition. Honneth himself has proposed two competing models for addressing this issue. On the one hand is what he calls the "perception model," according to which due recognition is understood as a matter of rational responsiveness to evaluative qualities that others objectively possess and which provide a rational ground for our distinguishing between due recognition and misrecognition. On the other hand is what he calls the "attribution model," which holds that persons do not possess evaluative qualities in an objective sense but rather receive, or are granted, such qualities as a result of standing within relations of recognition.²²

The Sellarsian framework I sketched in section 1 could be taken in either direction. On the one hand, John McDowell's elaboration of the idea of the "space of reasons" moves in the realist direction of the perception model, which I will return to in a moment. On the other hand, Robert Brandom moves in different direction, one that hews closer to the attribution model. As he puts it, "Someone becomes responsible only when others *hold* him responsible, and exercises authority only when others *acknowledge* that authority. . . . No one has authority over me except that which I grant by my recognitive attitudes" (2013, 70–71). Receiving recognition, on this model, is a matter of being *granted* a normative status or evaluative significance, analogous to one's being granted a particular legal status by a governing authority.

A point that might appear to speak in favor of the attribution model is its capacity to capture the *transformative* power of acts of recognition and misrecognition, the fact that the recipient of recognition or misrecognition can be altered or shaped in ways that appear to conform to the positive or negative image projected onto her. Indeed, Fricker notes that one of the insidious effects of testimonial injustice can be to shape the speaker's behavior and self-conception in ways that end up, to some degree, fulfilling the hearer's prejudiced expectations of her. She gives the example of a woman who, as a result of continually being treated as "irrational" and "hysterical," develops such self-doubt and internalized frustration that she actually comes to resemble the gender-based stereotype of the "hysterical

²² For these labels, see Honneth 2002, 506–507 and Honneth, 2007b, 331. For more detailed discussion, see Laitinen 2002 and Ikäheimo 2002.

woman” her hearers have unjustly foisted upon her.²³ In cases like this, misrecognition has a self-fulfilling power: a diminished representation of her standing as a credible informant has succeeded in *actually* lowering that credibility by damaging the speaker’s epistemic self-confidence. So, it is possible that a failure to recognize certain evaluative qualities possessed by *K* (in this case, *K*’s credibility) can actually succeed in destroying or diminishing those same evaluative qualities. Fricker is right, however, to caution against taking the “self-fulfilling power” of epistemic misrecognition too far. She distances herself from what she views as a Foucauldian conception of power that makes no room for the realist premise that misrecognition might in fact distort “who the subject really is” (2007, 55). Insofar as we are concerned to criticize the hearer’s prejudicial construction of the speaker as hysterical, we need to find a balance between the ideas that misrecognition simultaneously constructs *and* distorts the speaker’s identity. It should be clear that once we appeal to notions of “distortion” and notions of “who the subject really is,” we presuppose some minimally realist commitment: namely, that even when complex forms of social construction and ideological distortion are in play, there can nevertheless remain a fact of the matter about whether a failure of recognition has occurred.

This helps indicate the direction we should take: the right sort of view will be able to accommodate the notion that both due recognition and failures of recognition can have transformative effects upon the recognizee’s normative status, without relinquishing the realist premise that due recognition is a matter of rational responsiveness to evaluative qualities not wholly determined by the attitudes and actions of the recognizer.²⁴ What we need, then, is a subtle version of the *perception model* that can capture recognition’s simultaneously transformative and rationally responsive aspects. In order to clarify this thought, it is helpful to turn to Fricker’s discussion of the role of virtuous perception in our interactions with others *qua* knowers.

In chapter 3 of *Epistemic Injustice*, Fricker defends a “virtue epistemological account of testimony,” which holds that our judgments of speakers as more or less credible can be understood as noninferential, socially trained *perceptions* of the

²³ I am thinking of Fricker’s treatment of the character Marge Sherwood from *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (2007, 88).

²⁴ This realist premise is debated in the context of critical social epistemology. Mills (2007) and Alcoff (2007) both express commitment to the idea that a critique of structural ignorance necessarily requires a critical framework that involves notions of objectivity, truth, and the world as it actually is. For attacks on these realist commitments from pragmatist directions, see Cormier 2007 and Dieleman 2017. I discuss these issues and defend a realist view in Congdon 2015.

prompts and cues that bear on epistemic trust. Such “credibility judgments” are called for in all instances of testimonial exchange, insofar as a speaker must always be assessed, whether implicitly or explicitly, as more or less credible in order to count as a good informant. On Fricker’s noninferentialist account, such judgments are not (at least not typically or exclusively) the result of inferences that apply rules to cases, but are “theory-laden” perceptions, which bring to bear on a particular instance of testimony a body of generalizations concerning human cognitive abilities and motivational states relevant to the two primary elements of epistemic credibility: competence and sincerity (2007, 66). As Fricker is careful to note, she is using “theory” here in a very broad sense, referring not to a fully articulate and systematic set of principles governing what sorts of acts and behaviors count as competent and sincere, but rather, a noncodifiable, pragmatic background comprehension of the place various epistemic acts occupy within the broader context of the human form of life. So, on Fricker’s view, what allows us to see others in “epistemic color,” as she puts it, is a background theory involving generalizations concerning various probabilistic factors that help determine “the probability that someone like that would (be able and willing to) tell someone like him the truth about something like this in circumstances like these” (71). The probabilistic factors consist of generalizations about the likely competences and motivations of different social types in different settings, and result in one’s ability to read the subtle cues and prompts at work in a particular discursive performance as having a particular epistemic salience.

Fricker’s strategy for substantiating this notion of a noninferential, theory-laden perceptual capacity for judging others’ credibility is to draw an analogy with the notion of *moral perception* as it appears in certain strands of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (see, e.g., Murdoch 1970; McDowell 1998, esp. chaps. 1–3; and Nussbaum 1992). She develops the analogy by articulating five points of parallel between the virtuous perception of the moral agent and the virtuous perception of an epistemic agent: in both contexts, she argues, virtuous judgment is (i) perceptual, and thus noninferential; (ii) uncodifiable, that is, not susceptible to formulation into rules from which right judgments could be deductively produced; (iii) intrinsically motivating; (iv) intrinsically reason-giving; and (v) typically involves a form of emotional attunement or affective sensitivity that is a proper part of the judgment itself (Fricker 2007, 72). Fricker’s elaboration of each of these five points is illuminating in many respects, yet it is not the specifics that concern us here but the more general shape of the thought. By way of a process of “moral training” in an Aristotelian sense (or *Bildung*, as McDowell often puts it [see, e.g., 1996, 84, 87–88]), virtuous individuals’ perceptual capacities are habituated and sharpened to the point at which a broad background understanding of various nuances of human motivation and behavior make possible noninferential judgments concerning the

moral and epistemic qualities of others. Through one’s process of socialization or *Bildung*, individuals’ moral sensibilities are, first of all, shaped by the form of life or “tradition” they have inherited and, second of all, subject to ongoing refinement through reflexive self-criticism. When this process goes well, a virtuous moral agent is able to see the world “in moral color,” and the virtuous epistemic agent is able to see the world “in epistemic color.” As a result, Fricker concludes, we may view “testimonial sensibility as a part—indeed, an essential part—of our epistemic ‘second nature’” (Fricker 2007, 85).

Here is how this links up with our previous discussion of epistemic recognition. We were looking for some way of substantiating the notion, presupposed above, that our *regard* for others as knowers involves, internal to that very regard, the potential for a rational receptivity to evaluative features that call forth ethically robust forms of *recognition*. The perceptual model that Fricker adapts from neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and extends to the case of credibility judgments provides, I think, the right basic sort of framework for developing this perception-based model of epistemic recognition. However, in order for the model to work in the present context, we need modify Fricker’s account in two ways.²⁵

First, I suggest that the background theory or virtuous sensibility Fricker elaborates should be seen as contributing to a form of perceptual discernment that takes place a step *earlier* than the sorts of credibility assessment that are her primary concern. For if we possess a perceptual capacity to discern others as more or less credible across various contexts, this in turn presupposes a more fundamental perceptual capacity to discern others as bearing epistemic significance *at all*. For we can raise questions of the following sort: what is it to comprehend some bit of behavior *as* a bit of testimony (credible or not) in the first place, as opposed to, say, a meaningless aggregate of bodily movement and noise? How is it that I perceive your nod as answering my question in the affirmative, rather than being a mere twitch or a greeting, or that I perceive a particular discursive performance on your part as an attempt to convey knowledge by telling? What sort of knowledge do we exhibit when we successfully perceive some bit of behavior as having this very basic sort of epistemic significance?

The right sort of answer, I think, continues to follow the neo-Aristotelian vision of virtuous perception that Fricker suggests for the later case of credibility assessments: successfully apprehending some bit of behavior as epistemically significant invariably draws upon a background conception (or “theory” in Fricker’s broad sense) of the place of that bit of behavior within the human form of life. By

²⁵ The two modifications I propose are meant as friendly amendments to Fricker’s view, as neither point undermines the virtue epistemological account of testimony that is her primary concern in chapter 3.

contrast, an inferentialist or rule-based view appears less plausible. If that sort of view were correct, then the knowledge we manifest when we successfully apprehend behavior as epistemically expressive would have to be a rule-governed sort, implying that our capacity to “see the world in epistemic color” is the result of our learning a set of antecedently available principles governing what sorts of behavior correspond to what sorts of epistemic significance. This seems on the wrong track, for reasons similar to those that make it right to say that virtuous perception is “noncodifiable”: not only is human expressive behavior too variable and context-dependent for any such rules to be definitively recorded and learned in a way that would render their deductive application in all instances possible, but our epistemic competence must be capable of extending to new cases, that is, it must include the capacity to discern forms of epistemic significance we have not previously encountered. Hence, our capacity to grasp others’ behavior as expressive of epistemic significance presupposes antecedent knowledge, but not in the form of a set of antecedently available rules from which epistemic significance could be simply deduced. The antecedent knowledge in question must be such as to enable a practical sensitivity to the manifold ways epistemic significance may be manifest in behavior in an indefinite range of contexts and situations. This presupposes a subtle sort of pragmatic background understanding of the way testimony is used, its purpose, and its place within the broad context of the human form of life.

This leads to the second point of modification, namely, that the relationship Fricker identifies between epistemic perception and moral perception should be viewed as more than a mere analogy. On McDowell’s Aristotelian conception, a virtuous person’s vision of how best to live is uncodifiable in the sense that it cannot be captured in terms that would render it suitable for playing the role of major premise in a deductively valid practical syllogism (McDowell 1998, 57–58). The reasons for holding this thesis are, I think, deeper than the mere fact that the premises in question would be infinitely long once all possible contingent circumstances had been factored in. Rather, the virtuous person’s vision is not susceptible to codification because it embodies a broad sensitivity to the ways in which various actions fit within the human form of life as a whole. It is this sort of background understanding, an ethically saturated conception of what matters in a human life, that is not, even in principle, susceptible to codification into a system of rules. The way particular exercises of perception operate for a virtuous person, then, are by placing particular bits of action and behavior against the background of this ethical conception of the life of the species.

The move that I am now suggesting is that, in order to grasp some individual bit of behavior as expressive of epistemic significance, say, of *testimony*, that bit of behavior similarly needs to be viewed in light of its place within an ethically saturated conception of what matters in the human form of life. What speaks for

this is that testimony, like all epistemic activity, is a purposive activity invariably undertaken within the context of meaningful projects that constitute a life in which certain things are seen as mattering. Purposive human activity is necessarily guided by some sense of goodness, simply insofar as it presupposes an aim or a goal. Insofar as individual performances of purposive activity are always in principle assessable from a wider perspective concerning how they fit within or contribute to a flourishing life, even mundane and seemingly nonethical instances of testimony must somehow be understood as having a place within the broader context of a life worth living. It is in light of this that I suggest that rightly perceiving another’s behavior as epistemically significant requires a broader ethical background conception, where we can conceive of this in the Aristotelian sense of a eudaimonistic vision of the human form of life.²⁶ This goes beyond Fricker’s more modest recommendation, which holds only that the relevant background “theory” contains generalizations that bear on the probability that certain social identities will be counted as trustworthy in various contexts. Taken simply in those terms, it is possible to read Fricker as suggesting that the kinds of generalizations in question could be grasped independently of an ethically shaped sensibility.

The stronger claim I am urging could be put in broadly Wittgensteinian terms. In order to regard some discursive performance on the part of a speaker as in some way epistemically significant, we as hearers must already possess a background comprehension of the sorts of things human beings do with language: give orders, describe appearances, report events, speculate about events, make up stories, sing, make jokes, guess at riddles, curse, greet, apologize, and so on (Wittgenstein 2001, §23). A reasonably mature comprehension of these manifold forms can only be learned as part of a broader process of training or *Bildung* that necessarily includes a set of practical and ethical sensibilities that allow one to place such discursive performances within the broader context of the human form of life. Viewed from this perspective, it is impossible to understand the nature of epistemic concepts and performances, like “knower” and instances of testimony, by pulling them apart from their place within what makes for a flourishing human life (cf. the notion of a “life-form” in Foot 2001, chap. 2; and Thompson 2008).

²⁶ In my view, a broadly Aristotelian approach to ethics fits well with the sort of recognition-theoretical approach described earlier. I understand recognition theory in its best form to be a modern, explicitly intersubjective version of the sort of eudaimonism Aristotle defends. The substantive difference consists in the fact that the table of virtues that together comprise a flourishing life is replaced (or supplemented) with a historicized account of fundamental forms of recognition and relation-to-self that underwrite the possibility of flourishing *Sittlichkeit*.

At one point, Fricker does suggest that the relation between virtuous ethical perception and virtuous epistemic perception may be closer than mere analogy (2007, 76). She points out that *sincerity* is a feature of others to which we must exhibit a rational sensitivity in order to arrive at accurate credibility judgments. Hence, a person with a virtuously trained epistemic sensibility will necessarily possess an awareness of the place of sincerity in the human form of life. Insofar as sincerity is an irreducibly moral notion, it follows that one's virtuously trained epistemic sensibility will necessarily include, at least in part, a virtuously trained moral sensibility. Notice, however, that while this treats ethical and epistemic virtuous perception as having a closer relation than mere analogy—in this case, possession of the former supports the latter—they are nevertheless characterized as two different strands of perceptual sensibility. The suggestion I am making is different: namely, that our epistemic perception of others qua knowers is part of a single capacity for perceptual discernment that is inseparable from our having adopted an ethical outlook. If that is right, then we can clarify how the perception model is supposed to work. The point is not that, in addition to “ordinary perception,” we *also* possess special faculties of “epistemic perception” and “moral perception” that allow us to pick out the relevant evaluative qualities in others. Rather, the point is that our very capacity to engage in *any* sort of perceptual discernment of others, moral and nonmoral, presupposes a broader background sensibility that invariably includes ethical content (cf. McDowell 2002, 301; Crary 2016, chap. 2). In other words, part of what it is to grasp that *K* is a knower just is to grasp *K* in light of a broader ethical understanding of the form of life in which *K* participates, and in light of which certain features of *K* are directly relevant to what we have reason to do.

4. Conclusion

My aim in this paper has been to explore the thesis that “knower” is an irreducibly ethical concept. I tried to lend support to this idea in three ways. In section 1, I tried to show that already implicit within a normative characterization of epistemic terms are implications that help bring together the concerns of critical social epistemology and recognition theory. In particular, I urged that, if “knower” is a normative concept, then regarding oneself as a knower is a distinctive sort of positive self-relation, and regarding others as knowers involves adopting intrinsically practical normative attitudes that situate knowers within reciprocal relations of answerability. My exposition of three types of epistemic recognition and misrecognition in section 2 was intended to develop a concrete picture of what it might mean to regard a knower as meriting ethical treatment. Finally, in section 3, by way of a modification of Fricker's account of virtuous perception, I tried to

deepen the thought that we can only adequately grasp others in their epistemic significance from a perspective that is itself already ethical.

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