

POLITICAL AGENCY IN NON-IDEAL CIRCUMSTANCES: THE EPISTEMIC DIMENSION OF POLITICAL EQUALITY AND THE EPISTEMIC FORMS OF INJUSTICE

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Abstract: This paper has two fundamental goals. First, I argue that the contemporary political debate concerning the implementation of the ideal of equality within liberal democracies has been overlooking the epistemic dimension of the basis of equality and the influence that such dimension has on different models of democratic legitimacy. Second, once the epistemic dimension of political equality is correctly laid out, it follows that epistemic forms of injustice are detrimental to the very ideal of equal political agency as an essential feature of a liberal conception of democracy.

Starting from the proceduralist tenet according to which the non-instrumental value of equality that fair procedures incorporate acts as a justification of democracy, the paper argues that the political equality of citizens hinges on the acknowledgment of both normative and epistemic standards that should be met by citizens while debating together over public matters. However, since justice is not always realized in real-world democracies even when procedures are designed to be fair, then it is fundamental to consider the limitations of the ideal of political equality under non-ideal circumstances. It is along these lines that the inquiry regarding specific epistemic aspects of structural injustice kicks in. Facing non-idealized constituencies, it is not enough to establish fair procedures for collecting preferences and neutrally respecting any member of the society. Indeed, to fully respect the ideal of political equality in non-ideal circumstances, it is necessary to concentrate our efforts in highlighting and fighting the asymmetrical relations of power that constantly endanger the very notion of equal political agency.

Keywords: basis of equality; disagreement; epistemic peerhood; epistemic injustice; non-ideal circumstances of justice