TRUSTING DESPITE IMPAIRMENT:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE INJUSTICES FACED BY THE AUTISTIC IN TRUSTING WISELY AND BEING APPROPRIATELY RECOGNISED AS TRUSTWORTHY

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Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
November 2013

Honours Thesis
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Word Count: 10, 301 (excluding quotes)
Does the failure to extend trust to individuals on the basis of their inherent, non-chosen characteristics constitute an injustice? If so, is it still an injustice where those non-chosen characteristics may impair the individual’s capacity to be trustworthy? These questions both arise when considering the failure to extend trust to those with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).

The autistic are often stereotyped as dependent rather than dependable. As such, they are perceived as less trustworthy than neurotypicals, being those who show typical neurological states and development. Where the autistic are trustworthy but are not seen as such due to stigmatisation, trust has not been extended appropriately. Neurotypicals commit an injustice against the autistic by failing to extend trust appropriately towards them. Building upon the work of Miranda Fricker, this injustice is referred to as a trust injustice. Assessing whether the autistic are indeed subject to trust injustice, however, is complicated by the social and behavioural impairments that typify ASC.

This thesis will examine the difficulties autistic individuals encounter in extending their trust wisely and being appropriately recognised as trustworthy. In doing so, I will argue that the failed extension of trust towards the autistic reveals the important role trust justice plays in countering discrimination. Further, the compensatory capacities used by the autistic in overcoming their own difficulties in trusting wisely, constitutes a model for those wishing to be just in their trust.

CONTENTS

I Autistic Experience .................................................................6
  Temple Grandin .................................................................6
  Autism Blogs ......................................................................7
  Jim Sinclair .........................................................................8
  Implications for Trust and Trustworthiness .........................9

II Prejudice, Power and Injustice...............................................11
  The Lens of Ableism ..........................................................11
  Epistemic Injustice ............................................................12
  Trust Injustice ...................................................................16

III Autistic Trust: A Problem Space .........................................18
  Trust and Trustworthiness ..................................................18
  Autism Spectrum Condition .............................................20

IV Trusting Despite Impairment ..............................................23
  Motivation and Recognition ..............................................23
  Empathising or Systemising .............................................24
  Rich Trustworthiness ........................................................25

V Lessons from the Autistic ...................................................29
  Justice Through Empathy .................................................29
  Identity Prejudice as Impaired Empathising .......................30

VI Trust Justice .................................................................32
  The Virtue of Apt Trust ......................................................32
  Discrimination and Disability Rights ................................34

VII Conclusions ..................................................................36
TRUSTING DESPITE IMPAIRMENT:
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Privilege constructs a lens through which we view the world. The neurotypical, being individuals who show typical neurological states and development, occupy a position of social privilege. Neurotypicals, through their lens of privilege, see the autistic2 primarily as dependent rather than dependable. The autistic, viewed through this stereotype of dependence, are perceived as less trustworthy than had the stereotype not been in force. Where the autistic are trustworthy, but are not seen as such due to stigmatisation, trust has not been extended appropriately. The privileged, in failing to extend trust appropriately, commit an injustice against the autistic. This injustice is referred to as a trust injustice.3

Assessing whether high-functioning autistic and Asperger Syndrome individuals are indeed subject to trust injustice is complicated by the social and behavioural impairments that typify Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).4 ASC impacts one’s empathising capacities.5 Trustworthiness, however, relies on our cognitive and affective capacities for empathy.6 Where the autistic are impaired in their ability to

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1 I wish to acknowledge Karen Jones for her direction, comments and support throughout the process of writing and researching this thesis. I also wish to thank my parents and Martin Clark for their feedback, the 2013 Philosophy Honours Cohort, and my sister for opening my eyes to the injustices faced by the autistic.

2 There is much debate and controversy regarding this term and whether one ought to use it, person-first (individual with autism) or identity-first (autistic individual) forms of reference. I have chosen this term along with identity-first terminology as I find the position that autism is an inherent and inseparable part of one’s identity best captures the nature of autism.

3 The term ‘trust injustice’ has been used before, see: Gerald Marsh, "Trust, Testimony, and Prejudice in the Credibility Economy," Hypatia 26, no. 2 (2011).

4 I have chosen the term Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), rather than Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as it better captures the specific area of the autism spectrum that I refer to in this thesis, being high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger Syndrome (AS). While the term ASC is somewhat more controversial, than ASD, it emphasises that for HFA and AS individuals autism is a difference rather than a deficit. This thesis and this term cannot be applied to the autism spectrum as a whole. Severe autism, especially when language has not developed or when it is accompanied by intellectual disability, cannot be referred to as a mere difference. Further, the impact this level of autism has on one’s communicative abilities, social awareness and subjectivity means that trust and trustworthiness are unlikely to develop. I do believe there is much to be considered in how disability impacts the identity power of the family of the disabled more broadly, whereby trust deficits do not merely impact the individual but also the family at large, this topic however, will not be explored in this thesis.


6 This can be seen through accounts of trustworthiness that rely on Theory of Mind (ToM), such as Karen Jones'. ToM is a cognitive component of our broader empathising capacities. The role ToM plays in trustworthiness will be discussed in part III. See also: Simon Baron-Cohen and Sally
empathise, they may be impaired in their abilities to trust and act as trustworthy. If this is the case, neurotypicals may be justified in their failure to extend trust to the autistic. However, the impaired empathising capacities of the autistic, I will argue, do not necessarily preclude trusting and being trustworthy.

This thesis will consider whether neurotypicals’ failure to extend trust on the basis of the inherent, non-chosen characteristics of the high-functioning autistic and Asperger Syndrome individuals constituting an injustice. In doing so, I will examine the difficulties these autistic individuals encounter in extending their trust wisely and being appropriately recognised as trustworthy. From this, I will argue that the perceived untrustworthiness of the autistic reveals the important role trust justice plays in countering disability discrimination more generally. Further, the compensatory capacities used by the autistic in overcoming their own difficulties in trusting wisely, constitutes a model for those wishing to be just in their trust. As such, while this thesis explores one aspect of discrimination levelled against one marginalised group, thinking about autism and trust has application for the trust injustices faced by other stigmatised groups.

Part I of this thesis will look at the difficulties autistic individuals face in trusting wisely and being recognised as trustworthy. Part II will examine the connections between stigma, trust and credibility in order to develop a better understanding of the nature of the injustice that is levelled against the autistic. By adapting Miranda Fricker’s concept of epistemic injustice, I argue that the failed extension of trust towards the disabled is a trust injustice. Part III will consider whether the impaired empathising capacities that typify ASC, negatively impact upon the ability of the autistic to trust and be trustworthy. Part IV argues that the autistic are able to develop strategies for overcoming empathising impairments in order to trust wisely and be trustworthy. This section also argues that, while the autistic may signal their trust and trustworthiness in ways that are not recognised by neurotypicals, this miscommunication does not justify trust deficits. Part V will argue that the miscommunication of trust and trustworthiness between autistic and neurotypical individuals is not the result of non-culpable ignorance. Rather, these deficits are best explained as resulting from epistemic and trust injustice. I will also consider the


Henceforth, unless explicitly stated otherwise, I refer only to high-function autistic and Asperger Syndrome individuals when using the terms autistic and ASC.
methods through which the autistic come to be wise trusters. These methods, I will argue, constitute a model for overcoming trust injustice. Part VI will conclude by stating why we ought to be just in our trust. This final section will also consider the benefits trust justice will have for disability rights movements and society more broadly.
SECTION I

AUTISTIC EXPERIENCE

The autistic may not always signal their trustworthiness in ways that are recognised by neurotypicals. Behavioural traits that typify Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) can be misread as signifying untrustworthiness. Fidgeting, social discomfort and lack of eye contact are traits that are common to both ASC and the untrustworthy. While a neurotypical may recognise that such behaviour is due to ASC, they may still fail to trust. This is due to the stigma of dependence that is attached to ASC. This stigma obscures the assessment of trustworthiness, leaving the extension of trust limited or blocked. This is the case even where the autistic individual is not trustworthy, as the match between mistrust and untrustworthiness is accidental.

For the autistic, it is not merely being appropriately recognised as trustworthy that is difficult. The impact ASC has on the empathising capacities of the social brain renders knowing whom one should or should not trust a fraught task. Many autistic individuals may be unable to extend trust wisely because the ability to recognise trustworthiness or the need to be trustworthy is highly dependent upon cognitive-empathising. Thus, the impact ASC has on trusting and being trustworthy is complex. Examining the experiences of autistic individuals highlights this complexity.

TEMPLE GRANDIN

Temple Grandin, well known for her work with the cattle industry, exemplifies the capacities for trust that the autistic maintain. Oliver Sacks saw Grandin as epitomising the autistic individual originally described by Hans Asperger; having ‘a particular originality of thought and experience, which may well lead to
exceptional achievements later in life.' In Grandin’s case these exceptional achievements include revolutionising the cattle industry in terms of animal welfare, achieving a PhD in animal science, and being a sought after speaker and advocate both within the cattle industry and within autism advocacy. 

Despite her success, Grandin had great difficulties in identifying the feelings and intentions of others. As Sacks describes:

...In her ingenuous and gullibility, Temple was at first a target for all sorts of tricks and exploitations; this sort of innocence or guilelessness, arising not from moral virtue but from failure to understand dissembling and pretence...is almost universal among the autistic.

With time, Grandin learnt to better identify where someone’s intentions towards her were not positive, connecting action to internal motivation. A ‘vast library of experiences’ that she built up over the years supported this ‘strictly logical process’. These experiences were ‘like a library of videotapes, which she could play in her mind and inspect at any time – videos of how people behaved in different circumstances.’ In learning to read others, and from this learning where and where not to extend her trust, Grandin would play these videos over and over in her mind. In this she would ‘learn, by degrees, to correlate what she saw, so that she could then predict how people in similar circumstances might act.’

Grandin, despite learning to trust more wisely, still acknowledges that this process is far from second nature to her. Grandin still feels excluded from the implicit knowledge of social conventions and codes, of cultural presuppositions that come naturally to the neurotypical. Lacking this knowledge she instead has to ‘compute others intentions and states of mind, to try and make algorithms, to make explicit what is second nature to others.’

AUTISM BLOGS

As Ian Hacking claims, ‘No aspect of the phenomenon of autistic narrative is more influential than the Internet, a lot of which is biographical or autobiographical. It

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12 Ibid., 234.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 248.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
is a place for autistic people to “come out.” Discussing the trust issues that often accompany autism, one blogger claims:

A lot of aspies, including me, have big, big issues with trust. We generally start out in life very naïve, wide-open and totally trusting, taking people and situations at face value, and willing to believe whatever people say. Lying and deceit don’t come naturally to us, and it never occurs to us that others might do it. In consequence, we have often been used, abused, tricked, deceived, maltreated and betrayed, over and over again.

The same blogger goes on to claim that, having been let down again and again, realisation follows that trusting is misplaced and dangerous. As a result, ‘many of us come to view… neurotypicals… with a great deal of suspicion, resentment and anger.’

Another blogger goes on to claim that, when young she ‘readily accepted what people told [her] about themselves and the world…desperately clinging to the belief that people were reliable.’ Feeling as if she were ‘free-falling’ she found that:

Thinking literally, misjudging situations, misunderstanding the people around me and being misunderstood by them quickly brought the frightening realization that nothing was as it seemed. There was no order or consistency. There were rules, but nobody followed them. Actions hardly ever matched words. I often missed or misread subtext, so the signs and signals that I thought I was reading from people weren't consistent with their behaviours or emotions. It seemed as if everyone acted randomly, without warning or clues to their motives.

Jim Sinclair

Jim Sinclair, an autistic man with multiple qualifications in psychology and rehabilitation counselling, has worked professionally with the autistic and autism advocacy groups, and has pioneered the use of service dogs for autistic people. Like many autistic individuals, Sinclair struggled greatly against the stigma that often accompanies being identified as autistic. Similarly to the previous cases mentioned, Sinclair found himself ‘terribly ill equipped to survive in this world, like an extra-terrestrial stranded without an orientation manual.’

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21 Ibid.
Sinclair felt commonly misunderstood by neurotypicals. Such neurotypical misconceptions included stereotyping autistic individuals as *not caring*, rather than as *not understanding*.\(^{25}\) While Sinclair may not feel as if he ‘needs social contact,’ he is capable of caring.\(^{26}\) What is lacking, rather is what is known or understood ‘without learning.’ Sinclair has great difficulty with these ‘simple, basic skills … such as knowing how to attach meaning to visual stimuli.’\(^{27}\) Without this skill, trusting appropriately becomes more difficult. Equally, the trust and trustworthiness extended to Sinclair, and the autistic more broadly, is limited. As Sinclair reports:

> Not all the gaps are caused by my failure to *share* other people's unthinking assumptions. Other people's failure to *question* their assumptions creates at least as many barriers to understanding. The most damaging assumptions, the causes of the most painful misunderstandings, are the same now as they were when I was a child who couldn't talk, a teenager who couldn't drive, and a college student who couldn't get a job: assumptions that I understand what is expected of me, that I know how to do it, and that I fail to perform as expected out of deliberate spite or unconscious hostility.\(^{28}\)

In a more extreme, but sadly not wholly unusual case, when Sinclair extended his trust to the wrong individual and found himself physically, sexually and emotionally abused, attempts to report these crimes to others were dismissed.\(^{29}\) Rather than being taken seriously, Sinclair was assumed to have simply misunderstood the situation and that the other man was merely trying to help him.\(^{30}\) This instance can show the seriousness of consequences that result from deficits in autistic credibility. As Sinclair again reports, the assumptions about his own person override his own testimony:

> I am not taken seriously. My credibility is suspect. My understanding of myself is not considered to be valid, and my perceptions of events are not considered to be based in reality. My rationality is questioned because, regardless of intellect, I still appear odd. My ability to make reasonable decisions, based on my own carefully reasoned priorities, is doubted because I don't make the same decisions that people with different priorities would make.\(^{31}\)

**Implications for Trust and Trustworthiness**

These cases show that ASC can result in an impaired ability to recognise where trust is or is not appropriate. Despite this, ASC does not appear to block the ability to trust altogether. Rather, difficulties in trusting and being recognised as

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 295.  
^{26}\) Ibid.  
^{27}\) Ibid.  
^{28}\) Ibid., 296.  
^{29}\) Ibid., 302.  
^{30}\) Ibid.  
^{31}\) Ibid., 298.
trustworthy emerge due to stigmatisation, misunderstanding, or the outright manipulation and abuse of the autistic by neurotypicals. Neurotypical attitudes towards the autistic reflect societal attitudes towards the disabled more generally. These attitudes are influenced by a long history of marginalisation and mistreatment of the disabled. This mistreatment has seen the autistic stigmatised as inferior, second-class citizens. From this, autistic trustworthiness and credibility ‘becomes suspect,’ requiring verification from a neurotypical third-party in order to be recognised as legitimate.

All of the individuals described above faced difficulties in extending their trust wisely. The difficulties faced by the autistic in successfully entering into trust relations’ affects their wellbeing. As the bloggers articulated, the failure to extend one’s trust wisely results in confusion, pain, and a sense of constant betrayal. These experiences, point to the deep injustice that arises where such difficulties can be alleviated yet remain a common feature of autistic experience.

For Grandin, while knowing where and where not to extend her trust does not come naturally to her, the ‘vast library of experiences’ she has built up over the years has enabled her to be wise in her trusting. This is demonstrated by her increasing ability to connect behaviour to intention. This has allowed her to better recognise when she is being tricked or when others are being genuine.32

Despite difficulties in trusting wisely, none of these cases indicate that the autistic are incapable of trusting or being trustworthy. Rather, as Sinclair’s example emphasises, many of the problems surrounding the recognition of autistic trustworthiness are due to stigmatisation and neurotypical misunderstandings. From these examples, it remains unclear whether neurotypicals’ failure to extend trust is due purely to the stigmatisation of the autistic as untrustworthy. The difficulties faced by the autistic in recognising where to trust or be trustworthy may indeed legitimise trust deficits between neurotypicals and the autistic. This brings us to the questions at hand: Does the failure to extend trust to individuals on the basis of their inherent, non-chosen characteristics constitute an injustice? If so, is it still an injustice where those non-chosen characteristics may impair the individual’s capacity to be trustworthy? Focusing on the connections between stigma, trust and credibility, the next section will consider these questions in order to develop a better understanding of the nature of the injustice that is levelled against the autistic.

SECTION II

PREJUDICE, POWER AND INJUSTICE

THE LENS OF ABLEISM

Few non-disabled people interact directly with the disabled on a regular basis. As such, the non-disabled rely heavily upon stereotypes in their response to disabled individuals. These stereotypes reflect the long history of mistreatment, fear and marginalisation that has been directed against the disabled. Where strength, health, youth and independence are idealised, the disabled are looked upon with pity and fear by broader society.33 Not being able to fit the normative ideal, the disabled are ‘othered’ by the non-disabled, constructed as an antithesis of the ideal, being the very thing one aims not to be or become.34 This prejudice directed against the disabled, referred to as ‘ableism,’ is seen as the systematic production of ableist regulatory norms. These norms establish a ‘network of beliefs, processes and practices that cast disability as a diminished state of being human.’35

Ableism is more than simply a fear or hatred of difference. Ableism is also a mechanism through which the able-bodied and neurotypicals try to suppress a terror of infirmity and their own mortality.36 The process of categorisation and regulation creates marginalised groups who are defined and understood by labels rather than being recognised as dependable individuals and legitimate knowers.37 Marginalisation blocks the potential for true understanding, empathy and trust between marginalised and normative groups. This ensures difference remains at the centre of perception.

Perceived difference is positioned within a hierarchy of social powers. The hierarchy creates and reinforces the standard of ‘normal,’ privileging certain ways of being and certain ways of acquiring knowledge over others.38 Trust and trustworthiness are positioned within this social hierarchy. This sees individuals or groups with large shares of social power more readily perceived as trustworthy than

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
those with limited social power. Included within and established by social power is one’s credibility or privileged epistemic position.

The ability to send out and receive social signals regarding credibility and trustworthiness is limited by prejudice, one’s social powers and proximity to normative ideals. Identifiers such as white, wealthy, able-bodied, straight, neurotypical, male, and so on, all increase one’s proximity to this normative ideal. Those who belong to non-normative identity groups such as disabled, female, LGBTIQ, Black, poor, immigrant, and so on, are less readily recognised as trustworthy. Our proximity to the normative ideal influences how we acquire knowledge and the authority that knowledge is given. Occupying a privileged social position, our knowledge will reflect that idealised perspective. The perspectives of non-normative individuals, on the other hand, are unable to reflect this normative authority. This is not to say that only those closest to the norm can be trusted. Rather, our proximity to others within the social hierarchy influences the perception of credibility and dependability. Thus, those whose level of normativity is greater than our own are seen as more credible than those who acquire knowledge in a non-normative way.\textsuperscript{39}

Trust, as a source of both social power and risk, enables individuals to bind their agency to others and achieve goals they would be unable to achieve alone.\textsuperscript{40} Mistrusting the disabled, while explainable, cannot be seen as morally justified. The failure to extend trust where it is due further ostracises disabled individuals. As such, the unjust perception of untrustworthiness, or more simply, the failure to recognise the disabled as trustworthy when they are, further limits and silences individuals. This silencing effect is felt especially where stigma blocks or limits the credibility or intelligibility of the individual’s testimony. This deficit in perceived credibility or intelligibility due to stigma is referred to as an epistemic injustice.

**EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE**

Our decision to accept and act on the word of another agent leaves us vulnerable to the potential of being let down. In trusting another agent’s testimony we risk the time, effort, resources, relationships, or reputations we may put on the line on the basis of their word. Because indiscriminate trust is quickly broken, we need to

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Jones, "Trustworthiness," 63.
know whom we can and cannot trust. As we are unable to read minds or learn the entire back-story of every speaker we encounter, our credibility judgements must typically resort to generalisations.\textsuperscript{41} Without so doing, we would be unable to achieve the usual spontaneity of credibility judgements characteristic of testimonial exchange.\textsuperscript{42}

Miranda Fricker argues that generalisations regarding the epistemic trustworthiness of speakers, including their competence and sincerity, rest on stereotyping. Fricker defines stereotypes as the ‘widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes.’\textsuperscript{43} A negative identity prejudice is in place where these widely held attributive associations are disparaging.\textsuperscript{44} Stereotypes construct and reinforce social power relations.

Social power enables agents to influence the social or epistemic environment in which they are situated.\textsuperscript{45} An agent’s social power can arise out of their social role or social identity.\textsuperscript{46} Role-power refers to the impact an agent’s social role has on their ability to influence the social environment.\textsuperscript{47} A senator, doctor or judge for instance has significantly higher role-power than a student, waiter or retail assistant. Social identity, referred to as identity-power, arises out of the stereotypes attached to the social groups an agent occupies.\textsuperscript{48} Abled, white, upper class or male are typical groups with high identity power. Non-normative identifiers such as disabled, LGBTIQ or Black, in contrast, hold low levels of identity power. These social powers, according to Fricker, are reliant upon agents having shared conceptions of social roles and social identity.\textsuperscript{49} These shared conceptions, existing in the collective social imagination, govern the conceived meanings behind social roles and identity types.\textsuperscript{50}

Social power or, more specifically, lack thereof gives rise to negative identity prejudice whereby one is discriminated against qua member of a social group.\textsuperscript{51} These

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{47} Fricker, \textit{Epistemic Injustice}: 13.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 35.
negative identity prejudices influence perceived credibility.\textsuperscript{52} Credible individuals are able to influence the social world via their capacity to control knowledge production. As such, credibility is a form of social power. Deficits in credibility have broad reaching implications for social justice.\textsuperscript{53} Like deficits in social power more broadly, deficits in credibility lead to silencing, marginalisation and a diminished ability to influence the social or epistemic environment.\textsuperscript{54} Identity prejudicial credibility deficits, regardless of whether they result in such harms, are deemed by Fricker to be a specific form of epistemic injustice; namely testimonial injustice.\textsuperscript{55}

Fricker divides epistemic injustice into two subcategories, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.\textsuperscript{56} Testimonial injustice creates an unjust deficit in a subject’s credibility due to their lack of social or identity power, devaluing them as a possessor and giver of knowledge.\textsuperscript{57} For Fricker, while deficits in credibility may be one off or arise through error, testimonial injustice exists if and only if the speaker receives systematic\textsuperscript{58} or persistent\textsuperscript{59} credibility deficits owing to identity prejudice on the part of the hearer.\textsuperscript{60} Such deficits may not amount to the hearer completely rejecting the knower’s testimony, but ensure that it is given less respect than had that prejudice not been held.

Hermeneutical injustice sees a subject wronged in her ability to comprehend, or communicate intelligibly, her social experience.\textsuperscript{61} This form of injustice affects those who belong to social groups that are already hermeneutically marginalised.\textsuperscript{62} An individual that is hermeneutically marginalised will be diminished in their capacity to generate social meanings. That individual will subsequently be at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to making sense of, protesting, or communicating their social experience.\textsuperscript{63}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 28.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 29. Referring to the synchronic dimensions of testimonial injustice.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid. Referring to the diachronic dimensions of the severity and significance of testimonial injustice. Credibility deficits may exist as both systematic and persistent. These persistent systematic credibility deficits result in the most severe cases of testimonial injustice.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 28.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 155.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 152.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 147.
\end{itemize}
Epistemic injustice may be eradicated through the cultivation of the hybrid ethical-intellectual virtues of testimonial and hermeneutical justice.\textsuperscript{64} Testimonial justice requires that hearers be just in their credibility judgements. In possessing this virtue, a just hearer will be critically aware of the influence negative identity prejudice may have on credibility judgements.\textsuperscript{65} This critical awareness is twofold, whereby the hearer understands that it is not only the speaker’s social identity that may influence credibility judgements, but that the hearer’s own identity may also influence these judgements.\textsuperscript{66} In being aware of such influences, the just hearer will ensure that such prejudices do not effect their own judgements of others credibility.

Hermeneutical justice, similarly, requires a reflective awareness on the part of the hearer.\textsuperscript{67} To be a possessor of this particular form of justice, one must be sensitive and alert to the fact that a speaker’s unintelligibility may be the result of a gap in hermeneutical resources. This lack of intelligibility ought to be viewed as an objective difficulty resulting from a gap in the hearer’s hermeneutical resources, rather than the ineptitude of the speaker to communicate effectively.\textsuperscript{68}

Epistemic justice can be achieved, in part, through increasing hermeneutical resources regarding autistic signals of trust and trustworthiness. The signals autistic individuals give out to signal trustworthiness are unintelligible to neurotypicals. This is partly due to the differences between autistic and neurotypical signals of trust and trustworthiness (as I will explain in part IV). However, this unintelligibility also arises due to the interceding influence identity prejudices have. These prejudices result in a failure, on the part of neurotypicals, to recognise and take autistic signals of trust and trustworthiness seriously. This can be seen, in part, as a hermeneutical injustice. As such, hermeneutical justice will play a significant role in establishing trust justice for the autistic. To establish what this role is, however, first requires a deeper analysis of the trustworthiness of the autistic and the injustice the results from the failure to extend trust appropriately.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 124 and 76.\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 90.\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 91.\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 169.\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
**Trust Injustice**

Epistemic injustice is a subset of trust injustice.\(^{69}\) Trust judgements, like credibility judgements, are socially situated. These judgements exist between or are directed towards one agent by another agent, owing to their social identities, within a specific domain. Put simply, A trusts B (owing to A and B’s social identity) to do X. Like credibility judgements, these judgements are influenced by identity prejudices, with trust more readily established between or directed toward individuals with strong identity power. Trust, being a form of social good, allows individuals to come together and achieve things they would be unable to achieve alone.\(^{70}\) As social creatures, to deny trust denies a central part of our personhood.\(^{71}\) As such, unwarranted or pre-emptive mistrust expresses a kind of disregard or contempt for the other agent. Thus, even where subsequent harms do not follow trust deficits, denying trust out of prejudice is a wrong in itself.

Epistemic injustice, as a subset of trust injustice, can be understood and alleviated through trust justice. The assessment of testimonial injustice is informed by the connection between trustworthiness and credibility. Where one is not trustworthy, deficits in credibility are justified. However, if a speaker is both competent and committed\(^{72}\) to sharing knowledge with the hearer in question, the speaker ought to be seen as epistemically trustworthy.\(^{73}\) Where a speaker is in fact trustworthy but is not seen as such, factors external to the speaker, that is located within the hearer, provide the clearest explanation for the deficit in trust.\(^{74}\) This trust deficit may be due to identity prejudice alone or hermeneutical injustice may also contribute by rendering signals of trustworthiness or knowledge claims unintelligible.\(^{75}\)

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\(^{69}\) I mark a small departure from Fricker in this claim. Gerald March has similarly argued this point in his article; Marsh, "Trust, Testimony, and Prejudice in the Credibility Economy."

\(^{70}\) Jones, "Trustworthiness," 63.

\(^{71}\) Marsh, "Trust, Testimony, and Prejudice in the Credibility Economy," 286; Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*: 44.

\(^{72}\) Here Fricker uses the terms competent and sincere, see Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*: 32.

\(^{73}\) This is not to suggest that the knower has a right to be trusted. Rather, that a hearer wishing to be just and appropriate in extending trust, ought to extend trust where it is due.

\(^{74}\) As I will consider in part IV, it can be argued that trust deficits may also result from a failure in rich trustworthiness, whereby the agent fails to intelligibly signal their trustworthiness to others. While this is true, in the case of the autistic and many marginalised groups, such failures in rich trustworthiness can be seen as arising out of hermeneutical injustice. Where this is the case, the unintelligibility of signals of trust and trustworthiness is a result of a lack of interpretive resources on the part of the potential truster. Thus, in such cases the cause of trust deficits remains external to the mistrusted agent.

\(^{75}\) Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*: 155.
This section has put forward the view that trust and trustworthiness are positioned within a social hierarchy of identity power relations. As such, trust is more readily directed towards those with high levels of social power. Occupying a position of limited social power, the autistic are subject to deficits in perceived trustworthiness and credibility. An epistemic injustice is, thus, levelled against the autistic where these deficits are purely the result of stigmatisation.
SECTION III

AUTISTIC TRUST: A PROBLEM SPACE

Social signals of trust may be altered or blocked by disability itself, rather than simply not recognised by the potential truster. Where these trust deficits may be caused, in part, by factors internal to the mistrusted agent, the nature of epistemic and trust injustice is made more complex. Autistic individuals can be seen as exemplars of this complexity. Whether the impaired ability to give off and recognise neurotypical signals of trust and trustworthiness renders the credibility deficits of the autistic as any less of an epistemic injustice requires deeper analysis of the nature of ASC and trustworthiness. This section will, therefore clarify the terms ‘trust’ and ‘trustworthiness’ and analyse the impact ASC may have on trusting and being trustworthy.

TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

It is relatively uncontroversial to claim that trust and trustworthiness in the interpersonal sense, are generally three-place relations. Trust, existing between two agents in relation to a specific domain of interaction is simplified as ‘A trusts B to do X.’\(^76\) This trust is generally seen to require that A be vulnerable to B, in that B may not merely disappoint A, but that A would feel betrayed were B not to do X; that A be optimistic that B is competent to do X; and, according to some accounts, that A believe that B is indeed trustworthy to do X.\(^77\) Victoria McGeer offers the parent-teenager relationship as one that may involve trust-without-belief.\(^78\) Parents often extend trust to their teenage children, despite believing that the teenager may let them down. Trust-without-belief in these cases rests on hope and a desire to increase the trustworthiness of the other agent.\(^79\) As deficits in the recognition of autistic trustworthiness include a failure to believe that the autistic are indeed trustworthy, I will focus on trust-with-belief.

A trustworthy agent is one that is both competent and committed to doing X for another agent in a specific domain. In other words: ‘B is trustworthy with respect

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\(^{77}\) Ibid.


to A, to do X’ if and only if B is competent and committed to doing X for A. To be competent, B must be able to do X. As such, B is potentially trustworthy in the specific domain so long as B continues to be capable of doing X. B must also be committed to doing X to count as trustworthy in the given domain. Commitment entails the full intention to do X. In this, our capacity to be motivated by the needs of other’s become central.

Following from Karen Jones, to recognise and be motivated to respond to legitimate signals of dependency or trustworthiness, we need to be able to place ourselves within the mindset of the other agent. To trust and to be trusted we require a Theory of Mind (ToM). ToM is a cognitive capacity that arises out of the broader capacity we have for empathy. This marks trust and trustworthiness as discernible stages in our social and psychological development.

When using the term empathy, I refer to our broader empathising capacities. These capacities are both cognitive and affective in nature. The cognitive component; referred to as ToM and invoked in Jones’ account of recognition, allows us to understand and predict how another agent may think, feel or behave through the ability to connect external behaviour to inner mental states. This capacity is generally seen to rely on the ‘human mirror neuron system.’ When we watch another agent perform an action, mirror neurons activate the same parts of the brain that would be engaged were we to perform the action ourselves. This automatic link we experience between seeing and acting allows us to understand the mental life of others by understanding how we may think or behave in similar circumstances.

On the affective processing side, in watching or learning of another agent’s emotional state one naturally responds with an appropriate emotion. Feeling sad in response to another agent’s pain is an example of this capacity. As a subset of affective processing, sympathy arises out of this emotional responsiveness, initiating a drive to help the other agent. In relation to trustworthiness, cognitive-empathising capacities enable agents to recognise the dependency of others. Subsequently, our emotional responsiveness enables the recognition of another’s vulnerability or

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80 Jones, "Trustworthiness."
81 Ibid., 63-64.
82 Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, "The Empathy Quotient," 164.
83 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, "The Empathy Quotient," 164.
87 Ibid., 170.
88 Ibid.
dependency. This then functions as a motivational force to act as counted on. Put simply, empathy enables recognition and motivation to be trustworthy.

These empathising capacities enable not only our commitment to be trustworthy but also our ability to recognise the trustworthiness of others. In this, cognitive processing allows us to understand and predict the behaviour of others; reading the social signals that others give off and interpreting them as signifying potential trust or trustworthiness. Working alongside affective processing, our emotional responsiveness to others may block or enhance our trust in the other agent. Where the emotions of the other evoke positive emotions, one is more likely to trust the other. In contrast, where the other elicits negative emotions, these emotions can serve as blinkers, blocking our ability to judge objectively how they are likely to behave. Similar to this, when we are in a bad mood, whether this is in response to another agent or not, we are less inclined to trust or recognise where others may be counting on us.

Our ability to empathise is highly susceptible to the influence of our social and situational context. In this, we are blocked from achieving full empathy with those from whom we see ourselves as radically different. Fear and stigmatisation of difference may see our ToM highly unreflective of the actual mental states of the other. Due to this, an agent may fail to recognise the social signals of trustworthiness given out by the stigmatised other. Where trust is blocked by such negative identity prejudices, a trust injustice is committed against the wrongfully mistrusted agent. Credibility judgements rely on these assessments of trustworthiness. As such, trust injustices give rise to a wealth of subsequent injustices, impairing an individual’s credibility, wellbeing, social mobility, and so on.

### Autism Spectrum Condition

Whether autism counts as a disability or as a difference depends on the severity of the condition, its impact on individual wellbeing, and how responsive one’s society is to the needs of autistic individuals. Disability refers broadly to a stable physical or psychological condition, which leads to a lack or deficiency in some

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89 Ibid., 170.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
motor, sensory, or cognitive ability that most people possess. In the case of ASC, this ‘lack’ or ‘deficiency’ is neurodevelopmental in nature, involving some level of brain dysfunction at both cortical and sub-cortical levels. This typically impacts the individual’s social and communicative behaviours and is accompanied by resistance to change, strong systematic thought processes and repetitive or ritualistic behaviours. While much remains debated regarding the aetiology of autism, it is widely agreed that autism is an empathising disorder. This is evidenced in the impacts autism has on socio-emotional processing and ToM capacities.

It is argued that the autistic have no concept of, or feeling for, other minds. Further, depending on the level of autism, this conceptual lack may even extend to one’s own mind. Put simply, the autistic have no ToM. Research regarding impairment within the mirror neuron functioning of the autistic, again implicates issues in this cognitive-empathising capacity. Some autistic individuals can be seen to disprove this theory by being able to pass ToM tests. However, an individual’s ability to pass such tests does not conclusively indicate whether the natural ToM processing is functioning well. Rather, compensatory capacities may enable some individuals to pass these tests using alternate methods.

The lack of joint attention often experienced by autistic infants supports the claim that autistic individuals have impaired ToM capacities. Joint attention is where two individuals deliberately and simultaneously attend to the same object. Usually shown within the first year of life, infants are able to draw the attention of other agents to interesting or desired objects through look or gesture. Equally others may draw infants’ attention to objects, enabling the infant and the other agent to enjoy shared interest. This joint attention strengthens the development of infants’ sense of

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95 Firth, Autism: 20.
98 Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, "The Empathy Quotient," 164.
99 Ibid., 170.
100 Firth, Autism: 14.
other minds.\textsuperscript{101} Lack of joint attention, on the other hand, signifies an inability within the infant to recognise that other agents have a mental life of their own.\textsuperscript{102}

In addition, studies have suggested that the social defects found in autism are a result of an impaired ability to process emotional information. This is witnessed in the difficulties autistic individuals experience in recognising the emotional significance of incoming stimuli or automatically attaching motivational value to other agents’ emotional expressions.\textsuperscript{103} Impairments in empathising can be seen to have significant consequences for the trustworthiness of the autistic.\textsuperscript{104} If autistic individuals are unable to recognise the signals of dependency given out by others, the autistic may be blocked from recognising the need to be trustworthy. This would leave the question of whether they can be competent and committed in specific domains superfluous. Further, if autistic individuals are impaired in their ability to recognise the social signals of trustworthiness given out by others, trust, if it is extended, will be extended inappropriately. Thus, autistic individuals experience a greater risk of being let down when trusting others.

As this section makes clear, conceptions of trust and trustworthiness can be seen to exclude the autistic from trusting and being trustworthy. Recognition of the fact that another agent is counting on us to act as trustworthy requires a ToM in order to properly identify the signals of trust they give out. Further, motivation to act as counted on requires affective processing, enabling appropriate emotional responsiveness and sympathy. ASC, however, results in impaired empathising capacities. Where trustworthiness can be seen to rely on empathising capacities, the autistic may be incapable of being trustworthy. If this were the case, trust and credibility deficits directed towards the autistic would be justified.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 30.
The testimony of Temple Grandin, Jim Sinclair, and the bloggers referenced in part I show that the autistic can be committed to acting as trustworthy. Motivation, therefore, does not seem to be at issue. Whether an autistic individual is motivated differently to the neurotypical remains open to question. This question can be answered by the far more fraught question surrounding the recognition of trust and trustworthiness. As we have seen both from autistic testimony and research surrounding the impact autism has on the brain, the ability to recognise the signals of trust and trustworthiness is impaired in the autistic. The ability to recognise the intentions of others, to recognise that they have internal thoughts and feelings which may be different from one’s own, seems necessary to establish trust reliably and to recognise the fact that another agent is depending on you to be trustworthy. Thus, even if the autistic are motivated to be trustworthy, without appropriate recognition of the fact that they are being counted on, they will not be able to be trustworthy.

As this section will discuss, the autistic do employ alternative methods to enable recognition of the trust and trustworthiness of others. These alternative methods are not typically used to interpret human behaviour. As such, one is drawn to the conclusion that autistic trust and trustworthiness may be unreliable in a significant way. How reliable trust and trustworthiness are required to be in order to count as appropriately extended can be questioned. Further to this, if the reliability of autistic recognition can be strengthened, the stigma of untrustworthiness surrounding the autistic becomes less justifiable.

Motivation and Recognition

If fully functioning empathising capacities are necessary for recognising and being motivated to trust and be trustworthy, then the autistic may be incapable of achieving trust and trustworthiness. Simon Baron-Cohen and Sally Wheelwright’s investigation of the empathising capacities of autistic individuals shows that empathising capacities are impaired. In self-report questionnaires designed to determine one’s Empathy Quotient, autistic subjects scored significantly lower than controls with 81.1 per cent of the autistic subjects scoring less than 30 out of a total of
80 possible points. This is in comparison to only 12.2 per cent of the control group scoring in this same range.\textsuperscript{105} The investigation supports the conclusion that autism is an empathising disorder. However the results widely indicated that, while the autistic individuals had difficulty recognising and predicting the emotional state of the other, they had little to no difficulty in being motivated to help once the other’s emotional state was known.\textsuperscript{106} From this, one may conclude that while cognitive empathy processing is impaired by ASC, affective processing is not.

R. James Blair’s report on the moral responsiveness of autistic individuals supports this conclusion.\textsuperscript{107} Testing the ability to differentiate between moral and conventional transgressions, the autistic showed no serious difference in judgement compared to neurotypical individuals.\textsuperscript{108} Further to this, the autistic subjects showed significant responsiveness to the distress of others. This responsiveness indicates strong moral concern for others.\textsuperscript{109} Where the needs of others are recognised, there seems to be no impairment in autistic individuals’ responsiveness to others. Thus, autistic impairments in empathising are more seriously located in cognitive processing than affective. Subsequently, the ability to be motivated to act as trustworthy is not necessarily impaired by autism. The ability to reliably recognise where trust and trustworthy behaviour is appropriate, however, is impaired.

**Empathising or Systemising**

The cognitive impairments of ASC result in an impaired ability to recognise where trust is appropriate or trustworthiness is required. Despite this, the ability to receive and respond to social signals of trust and trustworthiness is not permanently lost.\textsuperscript{110} The social signals others give out in order to be perceived as trustworthy can be learnt. ‘With exception, autistic individuals do have the mental capacities that can help them learn about these signals.’\textsuperscript{111} The autistic will, however, learn about these social signals in a very different way to the natural processing developed in

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\textsuperscript{105} Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, "The Empathy Quotient," 169.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 577.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} I would argue that this, with exception, is even the case in some of the most severe ASC cases although obviously the levels to which social signals can be learnt will vary dramatically.
\textsuperscript{111} Firth, *Autism*: 3.
neurotypicals. Autistic knowledge will remain distinct from the ordinary ‘tuned in’ knowledge that neurotypicals take for granted.\textsuperscript{112}

Drawing again from Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, one can conclude that compensatory processes rely on the strong systemising capacities typical in ASC.\textsuperscript{113} Yirmiya et. al., who demonstrated that high-functioning autistic individuals perform better on empathy tests as their IQ increases, furthers this position. The results of Yirmiya and her colleagues’ study suggest that the autistic use a more cognitively based model for socio-emotional processing than neurotypicals.\textsuperscript{114}

Systemising processes drive us to ‘analyse a system in terms of its underlying lawful regularities and to construct systems using such lawful regularities.’\textsuperscript{115} These systems are less able to predict human behaviour, as individuals rarely conduct themselves in lawful regularity with codes of behaviour. Systemising processing could, however, allow an individual to build the ‘dense libraries of experiences’ to which Temple Grandin referred. Systemising processes, further, would allow the autistic to analyse how individuals behave in a wealth of different situations. From this, the autistic could connect external behaviour to typically corresponding mental states.\textsuperscript{116} Through systemised processes as agent could recognise the fact that another individual is counting on them. Following from recognition, affective processing can be engaged towards the other agent. Systemised processing may not be as reliable as cognitive-empathising but it can be seen to enable the recognition and motivation required for trust and trustworthiness.\textsuperscript{117}

\textbf{RICH TRUSTWORTHINESS}

Autistic individuals’ compensatory use of systemised processing can be seen as contributing to the difficulties in establishing trust between neurotypicals and the autistic. These systemised processes are not naturally attuned to predicting and

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, "The Empathy Quotient," 170.
\textsuperscript{116} Sacks, \textit{An Anthropologist on Mars}: 248; Golan and Baron-Cohen, "Teaching Adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions to Recognise Emotions."
\textsuperscript{117} Baron-Cohen et al., "The Systemizing Quotient: An Investigation of Adults with Asperger Syndrome or High-Functioning Autism, and Normal Sex Differences," 362.
interpreting human behaviour. If the autistic are, thereby unreliable in their trustworthiness neurotypicals may indeed be justified in failing to extend trust to the autistic. As such, my position remains open to criticism regarding the reliability of autistic trustworthiness.

This question of reliability is connected to the capacities of the autistic to reliably signal their trustworthiness to others, and to reliably recognise the signals of dependency that may be directed towards them. This is not a question of whether the autistic are trustworthy, rather it is a question regarding their ability to signal that trustworthiness to others. In answering this question, I turn to Karen Jones’ concept of rich trustworthiness.118

For Jones, rich trustworthiness is typically a two-part relation, in that B will count as richly trustworthy in respect to A where:

(i) B is willing and able reliably to signal to A those domains in which B is competent and will take the fact that A is counting on her, were A to do so, to be a compelling reason for acting as counted on and (ii) there are at least some domains in which B will be responsive to the fact of A’s dependency in the manner specified in (i).119

To correctly signal our trustworthiness to others, we need to understand what will count as a signal.120 It is here that autistic capacities for achieving rich trustworthiness are questionable. In addition, the ability of neurotypicals to be richly trustworthy for the autistic is similarly unclear. For Jones, ‘signalling rests on a highly complex socially mediated background understanding. These provide a framework in which …we are always already signalling what we can and cannot be counted on for.’121 ASC impairs one’s capacities to recognise social signals. Because of this, the autistic may miss what a neurotypical would expect to be salient signals of trust. Typical signals of trust conveyed subtly through facial expression, bodily gesture, or the eyes, for example, are often missed by the autistic.122 As such, knowing where, when, and how one is expected to be trustworthy is limited by ASC.

Further, as typical signals of dependency are not salient to the autistic, these signals are unlikely to be given out when attempting to indicate their own dependency to others. Due to this, neurotypicals may not recognise the fact that they are being counted on by an autistic individual. Additionally, without knowing what the autistic

118 Jones, "Trustworthiness,” 74.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., 76.
121 Ibid.
122 Mathersul, McDonald, and Rushby, "Psychophysiological correlates of social judgement in high-functioning adults with autism spectrum disorder."
will recognise as a signal of trustworthiness, neurotypicals are limited in their ability to be richly trustworthy for the autistic. One can, however, question whether the difficulties faced by the autistic and neurotypicals in being richly trustworthy for each other are purely due to autistic impairments.

Hermeneutical injustice renders autistic signals of trustworthiness unintelligible. This can be seen as contributing to the limitations the autistic face in being richly trustworthy. As a hermeneutical injustice, the failure of communication is not the fault of the speaker or potential trustee. Rather, the miscommunication is a result of the hearer’s or potential truster’s lack of interpretive resources. The autistic are capable of being trustworthy and of signalling this trustworthiness, although they may not do so in ways currently recognised by neurotypicals. Identity prejudice, combined with insufficient knowledge regarding the nature of autistic trust and trustworthiness, limit the ability of neurotypical’s to recognise where the autistic are counting on them and where the autistic can be counted on.

With additional resources and with a deeper understanding and awareness of the other, the problem of recognition may be overcome. This will enable a more reliable uptake of trust between the autistic and neurotypical. Further, as Jim Sinclair notes, ‘other people's failure to question their assumptions creates at least as many barriers to understanding’ as does his failure to share their assumptions.\(^{123}\) Thus, simple awareness of the fact that ASC can render certain social signals unintelligible will ensure one is more attentive to the fact that trust or trustworthiness may be extended through alternate signals. From this, the autistic and neurotypicals ought not to be seen as untrustworthy due simply to a failure to recognise the signals of trust given off by the other. Rather, each group can be seen as trustworthy and needing only a deeper understanding of the other in order to decrease the failed or unreliable uptake of trust.

This is not to suggest that all autistic individuals are capable of rich trustworthiness. Severe autism is likely to fully impede an individuals capacity for rich trustworthiness, especially when language has not developed or when ASC is accompanied by intellectual disability. Further, the impact this level of autism has on one’s communicative abilities, social awareness and subjectivity means that trust and trustworthiness are unlikely to develop at all. The wide spectrum of severity complicates the question regarding the genuine trustworthiness of the autistic.

\(^{123}\) Sinclair, " Bridging the Gaps: an Inside-Out View of Autism (or, Do you Know What I Don’t Know?)," 296.
Equally, however, it also highlights the injustice that arises when one generalises the untrustworthiness of all autistic individuals. The impact ASC will have on trustworthiness varies greatly between individuals. As such, while this thesis has focused on high-functioning and Asperger Syndrome individuals, the capacities for trust that individuals located on the autistic spectrum between severe and high-function ought to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

As this section argues, the unreliability of autistic trustworthiness is a result of hermeneutical injustice. As such, while rich trustworthiness may currently be closed off from autistic achievement, the autistic are capable of being richly trustworthy. Much of the external influence on reliability can be overcome through increased resources to strengthen autistic knowledge of neurotypical signals of trust and trustworthiness and, equally, increased resources to strengthen neurotypical knowledge of autistic signals of trust and trustworthiness. Thus, while ASC impairs the ability to communicate trustworthiness reliably, this difficulty in communication can be alleviated.

The following section will argue that the miscommunication of trust and trustworthiness between autistic and neurotypical individuals is not merely the result of non-culpable ignorance. Rather, these deficits are best explained as resulting from epistemic and trust injustice. Further, this section will consider how the methods used by the autistic in extending their trust wisely can be appropriated by neurotypicals wishing to be wise trusters.
SECTION V

LESSONS FROM THE AUTISTIC

JUSTICE THROUGH EMPATHY

Whether a trust injustice is levelled against the autistic is a complex question. On the one hand, the neurotypical failure to recognise or take seriously the signals of trust and trustworthiness given out by the autistic is understandable. Impaired cognitive-empathising within the autistic does see social signals recognised through cognitive capacities that are less attuned to the task of predicting and interpreting human behaviour. The reliability of autistic trustworthiness is, thereby decreased.\textsuperscript{124} This, combined with the neurotypical’s difficult task of understanding the radically different epistemic position occupied by the autistic, renders the neurotypical failure to recognise or take seriously the signals of autistic trust and trustworthiness understandable. On the other hand, while the autistic face difficulties in achieving rich trustworthiness, these difficulties do not result purely from impairment. The impairments and compensatory capacities of ASC need not impact rich trustworthiness to the level they do currently. The neurotypical’s failure to recognise or understand autistic signals of trust and trustworthiness can be alleviated. As such, while current trust deficits may be understandable, they are by no means necessary.

The miscommunication of autistic trustworthiness cannot be seen as merely the result of non-culpable ignorance on the part of the neurotypical. Miscommunication is primarily the result of limitations in interpretive resources and a continued failure to take seriously and correct for the hermeneutical marginalisation faced by the autistic. Like any form of hermeneutical injustice, fault here lies on the part of the hearer or mistrusting agent. Neurotypicals, occupying a privileged epistemic position, fail to ensure that their prejudices are open to counter-evidence. The autistic, being both marginalised and subject to stereotypes of untrustworthiness, will not be extended trust. As such, the autistic are not given the opportunity to disprove stereotypes of untrustworthiness. Being closed to counter-evidence, neurotypicals who unquestioningly take up and reinforce this stigma are epistemically culpable.

\textsuperscript{124} Baron-Cohen et al., "The Systemizing Quotient: An Investigation of Adults with Asperger Syndrome or High-Functioning Autism, and Normal Sex Differences," 362.
Interactions with, and knowledge of, the autistic remains limited due to the marginalisation and discrediting of autistic perspectives. This marginalisation and discrediting limits the ability of neurotypicals to understand the intentions, and recognise the trustworthiness of the autistic. To respond to the signals of others we need to be able to accurately recognise and interpret the signals others give out. To do this we engage imaginatively with others, watching their actions, internalising their perspective and judging their actions and intentions as trustworthy or untrustworthy in the relevant domain. Stigma, marginalisation and limited knowledge all impact the ability of neurotypicals to understand the autistic epistemic perspective. This, in turn, decreases trust through the limitations of neurotypical cognitive-empathising towards the autistic. Perceived deficits in autistic trustworthiness are, therefore, much more a result of ableism and lacks in hermeneutical resources than they are central to autistic impairment.

In terms of neurotypical perception of the autistic as untrustworthy, or less trustworthy than they may actually be, an understanding of the alternative signals given out and received by the autistic is perhaps not enough to combat the prevalence of ableism in society. However, establishing hermeneutical resources regarding alternative forms of trust and trustworthiness is a necessary step towards establishing trust and epistemic justice for the autistic.

IDENTITY PREJUDICE AS IMPAIRED EMPATHISING

Negative identity prejudice, arising out of stigma and limited knowledge, blocks empathy. Rather than being moved appropriately in response to another’s emotions, one instead responds to negative identity prejudices and the desire to disassociate from the stigmatised individual. As such, one’s affective-empathising is impaired by stigma. The neurotypical’s cognitive-empathising can also be impaired by stigma when making judgments of autistic trustworthiness. Where the autistic are seen as occupying a radically different epistemic position, an ableist fear of difference creates limitations in cognitive-empathy. In this, neurotypicals are limited in their capacities to imagine the mental life of the autistic. Thus, without an increase in understanding on the part of the neurotypical, ableism will continue to block empathy towards the autistic. Without empathy, the uptake and extension of trust between neurotypicals and the autistic will remain limited.
The autistic are able to learn the social signals of neurotypicals. As such, the autistic show that it is possible to learn to recognise the trustworthiness of those who inhabit radically different epistemic positions. As such, we do not appear limited to imagining the world of meaning and intention by the boundaries of our own epistemic position. The autistic use compensatory systemised processes to connect external behaviour to internal mental states. Through this, trust can be extended to trustworthy individuals even if the signals given off are different from signals one is used to receiving. Through increased understanding of difference, blockages in cognitive-empathising may be overcome. This leaves the potential open to deepen the capacity for empathy between such groups if current levels of ableism that divide them can be eradicated through increased epistemic resources.

By combating stigma at its source, we may alleviate the blocks in affective-empathising created by negative identity prejudice. Through this, stereotypes surrounding autism can be reconstituted toward, rather than away from, trustworthiness. This can be achieved by increasing neurotypical knowledge surrounding the impact autism has on trustworthiness. Further, building up an understanding of the alternate social signals the autistic may use to indicate their trust or trustworthiness can enhance the uptake of trust between neurotypicals and the autistic. Subsequently, the autistic individual’s own testimony will be able to combat additional stigmatisations directed towards them through increased credibility.

This section has argued that the failure to trust the autistic is not simply the result of non-culpable ignorance. Rather, it is the result of an epistemic and trust injustice. While the autistic attempt to signal their trust and trustworthiness to others, uptake remains limited. As such, there is little opportunity for the autistic to combat the stigmatisations currently directed toward them. Due to this, the cause and solution of this trust injustice rests in the hands of neurotypicals. How trust injustice can be alleviated can be found in examining the methods through which the autistic come to be wise trusters. Autistic compensatory capacities teach us that trust may be established despite difficulties in imagining the mental life of the other agent. Further, rich trustworthiness may be impeded by stigma and limitations in interpretive resources. Where this is the case, increased hermeneutical resources and understanding of the other agent can increase rich trustworthiness.

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SECTION VI

TRUST JUSTICE

THE VIRTUE OF APT TRUST

This thesis is, in part, designed as a contribution to stigma alleviation and the development of more virtuous and reflective trusters. By increasing understandings of autistic trustworthiness within the neurotypical imagination, the stereotypes surrounding the autistic as being untrustworthy may be overturned. This increases the potential for stronger cognitive-empathising and emotional responsiveness towards the autistic. Through this, neurotypicals are better able to recognise autistic trust and credibility. Recognising where the actual trustworthiness of the autistic is not reflected in the perceived trustworthiness of the autistic, the neurotypical is able to become more reflective and critical of the prejudices that come into play when assessing the autistic as untrustworthy. In this, one learns to trust appropriately.

Apt trust is where the extension of trust reflects the actual trustworthiness of the trustee. Where an individual is not trustworthy but one trusts them, one has failed to extend trust appropriately. Equally, where the other agent is trustworthy and one fails to trust them, apt trust has not been extended. Apt trust does not imply a responsibility to trust or distrust others, but rather requires agents to be aware of prejudices that may impede the appropriate extension of trust. In this awareness, one is able to deepen one’s understanding of stigmatised individuals, and thereby correct for prejudice.

Gerald Marsh similarly refers to the concept of apt trust. According to Marsh’s account, the agent is required to be impartial to a significant degree in deciding with whom they ought to enter into trust relations.126 An apt truster avoids identity-prejudicial credibility judgements by viewing ‘race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on as irrelevant to determining whom to trust.’127 Marsh builds on Fricker’s notion of testimonial justice. Fricker holds that an individual in possession of the virtue of testimonial justice will correct for, or neutralise the impact of prejudice on her credibility judgements.128 Again borrowing from Fricker, Marsh calls for the just

127 Ibid.
128 Fricker, Epistemic Injustice: 92.
truster to develop a ‘self-critical apparatus’ in order to ‘monitor and remove judgments that are resistant to evidence in order to trust aptly.’

I would take this position further in arguing that we must focus primarily on deepening our understanding of these prejudices and how they do or do not correspond to the actual trustworthiness of individuals associated with these groups. In building knowledge, one does not simply set aside irrelevant role- or social-identifiers. Rather, through increased knowledge and interpretive resources cognitive- and affective-empathising is engaged towards these groups. This paves the way for stigma alleviation. Where stigma is alleviated, negative identity prejudices will no longer factor into the extension or non-extension of trust.

Much can be learnt about how to trust from the autistic. As shown by the autistic, where empathy is blocked by impairment or by stigma one can learn to empathise. Through this empathy, we are able to better recognise trust and trustworthiness in others. In Temple Grandin’s case, difficulties in recognising social signals arose from impaired cognitive-empathising. While she was excluded from the implicit knowledge of social connections and signals that came naturally to the neurotypical, she was able to overcome these difficulties. Lacking this implicit knowledge she instead had to ‘compute others intentions and states of mind’ and, through this systemised learning, connect external behaviour to internal mental states. This systemised learning enabled her to be both wise in her trusting and to engage her affective-empathising capacities where they were otherwise blocked by impaired cognitive-empathising.

This systemised learning can similarly overcome the difficulties in empathising that arise from identity prejudice. Identity prejudice constructs groups with low identity-power as radically different from those with high identity-power. Further to this, where a group is stigmatised it becomes difficult to imagine the mental lives of individuals within those groups as apart from those stigmas. This sees the accurate recognition and extension of trust and trustworthiness blocked. Through systemised learning, building interpretive resources, and knowledge of others’ intentions and motivations, apt trust can be established.

The apt truster corrects for prejudice, not just in that they will not allow for prejudice to hold sway in trust judgements, but that in cultivating the virtue of apt trust one builds knowledge and empathy towards these groups. Through this, the apt

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truster lets go of prejudice. This leads to trust justice in a stronger sense: seeing trust established through the cultivation of empathy and alleviation of prejudice. Trust justice feeds back into credibility judgments. Where one possesses the virtue of apt trust, negative identity prejudices will not hold sway in assessments of credibility. As such, virtuous trusters will also be virtuous hearers, having cultivated the virtue of testimonial justice along with trust justice.

Cultivating this virtue may be more difficult a task than simple self-reflection and discounting irrelevant identifiers in making trust or credibility judgements. This task, however, ought not to fall purely on the shoulders of the virtuous themselves. As has been evidenced in the case of the autistic, systemised building of interpretative resources for trust and trustworthiness is best fostered by our education system, complimented by self-directed learning and family or community centred support. Ensuring stigma does not factor into our education, that minority perspectives are included alongside the perspectives of those with strong identity powers and that information that cultivates empathy towards others is included within our trust-education is central to alleviating prejudice and strengthening apt trust.

**DISCRIMINATION AND DISABILITY RIGHTS**

The disabled frequently find their opportunities limited because of marginalisation and discrimination. In this context, prevailing societal attitudes towards the disabled do not only determine the social expectations and treatment accorded to the disabled. The disabled individual’s self-image is also shaped by these prevailing attitudes. These attitudes shape the disabled individual’s feelings about who they are, what they can do, and how they should behave. As such, the stereotype of disabled untrustworthiness does not only influence how the disabled will be treated by society, but also how the disabled will view themselves.

The failure to extend apt trust to the disabled ought to concern the non-disabled. The lives of the disabled are impacted by the marginalisation that often accompanies stigma and mistrust. Trusting and being trusted is necessary for education, employment, lasting and meaningful relationships, and generally cooperating and engaging with others. Without trust, one cannot participate fully in

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131 Golan and Baron-Cohen, "Teaching Adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions to Recognise Emotions."
social life or contribute to society. This has serious consequences for disabled wellbeing.

One ought to be concerned by trust injustice, not simply due to the consequences it has for mistrusted individuals (although this is central to the case). Failed trust does not only impact the mistrusted, it also narrows the knowledge and social opportunities available to those who are not just in their trust. This, additionally, narrows the collective knowledge and opportunities available to society at large. Without trusting the disabled, the potentially extraordinary contributions to society that the disabled have to offer are lost.

This is not to suggest that individuals have a right to be trusted. Rather, I intend to emphasise the impact trust injustice has on individuals and society more broadly. In the call for equality and disability rights, trusting the testimony of the disabled is paramount. Developing a culture of apt trust rather than marginalisation surrounding disability will see our society move towards reduced stigmatisation and increased equality between the disabled and non-disabled. By increasing trust and credibility, the disabled and nondisabled can be equally important participants in, and equally important beneficiaries of, the social goods that arise out of trust relations. Without trust and epistemic justice, the disabled will remain marginalised. Positioned on the margins of society, the call for equality between the disabled and nondisabled will be left unanswered.

Trust injustice is not solely directed against the disabled. Many, if not most, marginalised and stigmatised groups are also subject to trust injustices on the basis of their inherent, non-chosen characteristics. Developing a culture of apt trust, thus, is important not only for the disabled, but for the stigmatised more generally. Through trust justice, the marginalisation and stigmatisation faced by many groups within our society may be lessened. This allows the marginalised and non-marginalised to be equal participants in the call for stigma alleviation. Where trust is extended appropriately, rather than withheld due to stigma, the pool of collective knowledge society can draw from is increased. Similarly, where trust is extended appropriately, the potential relationships and activities the marginalised and non-marginalised alike can participate in is increased. Through trust justice, society itself would no longer remain limited by marginalisation.
SECTION VII

CONCLUSIONS

Trust is more readily directed towards those who occupy a privileged social position, being those with strong role- or identity-power. Those subject to negative identity prejudice, on the other hand, are viewed through a lens of stigma. Stigmatisation alters the trust economy; creating large disparities in trust relations between stigmatised and non-stigmatised groups. This deficit in trust and credibility ensures that the stigmatised are less able to enter into trust relations or access the wealth of social goods that accompany trust and credibility. Where an individual is both competent and committed to being trustworthy, but is not seen as such due to stigma, a trust injustice has occurred. In these cases, the perception of untrustworthiness has arisen due to factors external, rather than internal to the mistrusted individual. As such, we ought to view these trust deficits not as a result of the inherent, non-chosen characteristics for which the individual may be stigmatised. Rather, the fault lies on the part of the other agent who, in making trust judgements, fails to recognise the impact stigma has on perceptions of trust and credibility.

Autism Spectrum Condition itself may contribute to the trust deficits faced by the autistic. The autistic do signal their trustworthiness in ways that may not be recognised by neurotypicals. Further, impaired cognitive-empathising may result in difficulties for the autistic in recognising neurotypical signals of trust and trustworthiness. The autistic, however, are able to compensate for their difficulties in recognising social signals through systemised learning processes. Thus, where the autistic continue to be subject to deficits in trust and credibility, an injustice has occurred.

As the autistic have shown, compensatory learning can alleviate difficulties in trusting wisely. Thus, whether deficits in apt trust are the result of internal or external factors, it is still possible to cultivate apt trust. By increasing interpretative resources, interactions with, and knowledge of marginalised and stigmatised groups, negative identity prejudices that impair trust relations may be let go of. This allows for trust to be extended based on an individual’s actual trustworthiness rather than their stereotyped trustworthiness. Through this, trust justice can be achieved not only for the autistic but also for marginalised groups in general.
This thesis has focused on trust injustice as a particular form of discrimination directed towards the disabled, and the autistic more specifically. As per persistent and systematic prejudices such as racism, sexism and homophobia, trust injustice is but one aspect of a much broader issue of discrimination. In narrowing the focus of this thesis to one specific form of discrimination directed towards the autistic, we are able to think more clearly about an injustice that is part of a bigger problem. Additionally, in looking at the ability of the autistic to overcome their own impairments and become wise in their trust, we are shown a method for overcoming our own difficulties in trusting justly. While trust and epistemic injustice may be only a small component of much broader and more complex forms of discrimination, by increasing trust and credibility the marginalised are better positioned to overcome discrimination.
Bibliography


