Orienting Social Epistemology [1]
Francis Remedios, Independent Researcher, SERRC

Because Fuller's and Goldman's social epistemologies differ from each other in many respects, it is difficult to compare the two.[2] The points of difference concern the goals, the conceptions of knowledge, and the scope of study for each of them. The goal of Fuller's social epistemology is to democratize cognitive authority in terms of science policy and install a constitution of science:

> How should the pursuit of knowledge be organized, given that under normal circumstances knowledge is pursued by many human beings, each working on a more or less well-defined body of knowledge and each equipped with roughly the same imperfect cognitive capacities, albeit with varying degrees of access to one another's activities (Fuller 1988, 3)?

The goal of Goldman's social epistemology is to evaluate social practices in terms of whether they promote or impede epistemically valuable states, such as knowledge. Fuller's conception of knowledge is in terms of products of normatively appropriate institutions of inquiry, while Goldman's conception of knowledge is based on the acquisition of true belief, which is what he calls W-knowledge, or knowledge in a weak sense. S-knowledge, or knowledge in the strong sense, consists of true belief, plus some additional element or elements (Goldman 1999, 23). The scope of study of Fuller's social epistemology is science, while the scope of study of Goldman's social epistemology is all forms of social interaction that produce knowledge.

Analytic social epistemology (ASE) is the "conceptual and normative study of the relevance of social relations, roles, interests, and institutions to knowledge" (Schmitt, 1994, 1). ASE can be divided into three branches: the role of social factors in the justification of individual knowledge; the organization of the cognitive labor of individuals and groups of individuals; and the nature of collective knowledge. *Goldman's Knowledge in a Social World* (1999) (*KSW*) is a general theory of social knowledge that involves all three branches of ASE. *KSW* is a companion to Goldman's earlier pioneering study, *Epistemology and Cognition* (1986), which concerns individual primary epistemology (Remedios 2000). Goldman's project concerning social knowledge is

---

[1] The following revised excerpt comes from pages 106-110 of Francis Remedios' *Legitimizing Scientific Knowledge: An Introduction to Steve Fuller`s Social Epistemology.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003.
[2] In the new introduction to the second edition of *Social Epistemology* (2002), Fuller characterizes dialectical and geometrical social epistemologies. For dialectical social epistemology, which Fuller ascribes to his own social epistemology, social epistemology's concepts and principles "are developed and justified in the actual contexts of knowledge production that concern the social epistemologist" (Fuller 2002, xv). For geometrical social epistemology, which Fuller ascribes to Goldman's social epistemology, social epistemology's concepts and principles "are developed and justified in a 'pure' philosophical setting, that is, by a combination of intuition, logic, and some stylized examples that acquire rhetorical force from their basis in empirical settings, but which function philosophically as paradigm cases for a very broad class of phenomena" (Fuller 2002b, xv).

veritistic social epistemology (Goldman 1999, 100). Veritistic social epistemology is "a discipline that evaluates intellectual practices by their causal contributions to knowledge or error" (Goldman 1999, 69). For him, there are two main categories of human knowledge: individual and social (group). The objects of epistemic evaluation for individual primary epistemology are cognitive processes, structures, and mechanisms, which bear on the acquisition of true belief. Goldman's social epistemology is concerned with the evaluation of social institutional practices in terms of their acquisition of truth — how they affect the level of true and false beliefs and ignorance within a group.[3] Social institutional practices include speech and communicational activities, plus organizational rules and practices that influence the transmission and exchange of information. Goldman's naturalism is described terms of reliabilism and its goal is true belief, which is normative. [4]

The domain over which Goldman's social epistemology ranges is the social knowledge of multiple agents. Goldman writes concerning the notion of the "social":

> More traditional approaches retain individuals as the agents or subjects of belief and knowledge, while emphasizing the massive effect of an individual's relations to other agents in the acquisition of knowledge. As we have seen, this is the core of Kitcher's approach in *The Advancement of Science,* and also my approach in *Knowledge in a Social World* (Goldman 2002a, 195).

Fuller notes that Goldman assumes a presociological sense of the "social," in which the social is an aggregation of individuals. Social life is then the observable interaction among individuals. "Individuals are deemed to have clearly identifiable psychological and biological properties before they interact with others," Fuller notes (Fuller 2000, 575). Goldman admits to methodological individualism in which "all activities of groups, institutions, or social systems arise from the actions of individuals" (Goldman 2002b, 222). Goldman does not preclude the existence of group properties in the causal or explanatory story of doxastic states. Goldman holds that social "epistemology can be built on social relations among individuals without committing itself to collective or socialized agents that bear epistemic properties" (Goldman 2002a, 195).[5]

---

[3] Goldman does not define an individual, though he clearly separates individual epistemics from social epistemics. See Goldman's "Foundations of Social Epistemics" (1987). See also Goldman's "Social Epistemics and Social Psychology" (1991, 122). Kitcher admits to a methodological individualism in the Advancement of Science (1993b), 303, n. 1.

[4] Goldman describes his naturalism as both substantive epistemic naturalism and methodological naturalism. An exemplar of substantive epistemic naturalism is a reliabilist account of knowledge or justification. Methodological naturalism holds that epistemology should be either empirical science (Quine) or should be informed by the results of scientific disciplines (Goldman). For Goldman, science "should (help) determine the goals, values, or general criteria associated with epistemic norms" (Goldman 1994, 30).

[5] Kusch (2001) argues that Goldman's *Knowledge in a Social World* (1999) does not provide a systematic defense of "epistemological dualism," the claim that epistemology can be divided into individual and social epistemology.

The goal of Goldman's social epistemology is true belief. Goldman notes that his approach is not descriptive but normative:

> In contrast to the descriptive approach, normative veritism would not confine itself to social practices *actually* used by the community, but would equally concern itself with practices that could be adopted. (Goldman 2002a 199)

Fuller's criticism of Goldman's goal of social epistemology is that Goldman emphasizes the efficient production of reliable knowledge at the expense of those who actually participate in the process and the community that sustains the epistemic practice. In effect, Fuller argues that Goldman holds to an epistemic paternalism that justifies censorship and deception if the dissemination of the truth is likely to lead to social unrest. Fuller notes that Goldman's epistemic paternalism allows a few elite inquirers to manipulate those who find the truth hard to accept (Fuller 2000, 575). Is Goldman an epistemic paternalist? The answer is yes. Goldman writes:

> In any event, I shall construe epistemic paternalism in a broad sense. I shall think of communication controllers as exercising epistemic paternalism whenever they interpose their judgment rather than allow the audience to exercise theirs (all with an eye to the audience's epistemic prospects) (Goldman 1991, 119).

Goldman's rationale for his epistemic paternalism is that it is justified so that it allows people to avoid error and get to truth. In *KSW,* Goldman examines several social practices that use epistemic paternalism. These practices are: (1) based on rules of evidence, the courts refuse to admit certain types of evidence for trial, hence juries are denied from hearing that evidence, for example, hearsay evidence; (2) the U.S. Federal Trade Commission has rules that keep advertisers from false advertisements; (3) school systems that have a curriculum that do not teach some viewpoints, for example, creationism; (4) scientific journals that have editors and referees who select some papers and not others and hence deny publication to some people's submissions.

In chapter 7 of *KSW,* Goldman tries to find a veritistic justification to accepting Mill's notion of a free market of ideas, but Goldman is unsuccessful. Hence, there should be regulation of free speech in order to acquire knowledge. On the issue of epistemic paternalism, Goldman notes:

> It could be argued that successful pursuit of epistemic ends depends not only on "deregulation" at the highest level, but on wise regulation at the lowest levels (Goldman 1991, 131).

Hence, Goldman's epistemic paternalism is officially in the service of truth. Fuller opposes Goldman's epistemic paternalism, which Fuller considers to be the manipulation of most of the population by the few elite inquirers, because Fuller's social epistemology's overarching goal is the democratization of the distribution of knowledge.

Whether Fuller and Goldman have a genuine disagreement here depends on whether the democratization of knowledge has anything to do with true belief. Where Fuller and Goldman meet on this issue is that Fuller addresses the issue of manipulation with the notion of a constitution of science, and while Goldman does not address the issue of manipulation by a few elite inquirers in *KSW,* Goldman notes that his veritistic epistemology is not an "all things considered" evaluation. Goldman would not endorse a practice in which a few elite inquirers would manipulate others though it would be veritistically good. Moral and political considerations can trump the V-goodness of a social practice. Goldman notes that there is no need to prioritize plural values:

> As long as multiple things are valued, a sensible division of labor will ordain special fields of study, each dedicated to variables that augment or diminish the incidence of a selected type of good or bad. Veritistic epistemology is such a special field, where the selected good is knowledge and the selected bads are error and ignorance (Goldman 1999, 6).

I suggest that Goldman needs an account of how extra-epistemic considerations can trump epistemic considerations and not introduce censorship and manipulation because some people may prioritize authoritarianism more highly than democracy and hence deny access to true belief. Here is where Fuller's use of a constitution of science addresses the issue of how extraepistemic considerations can trump epistemic considerations better than Goldman in terms of manipulation. Fuller's solution to the charge of paternalism is to introduce the notion of a civic republican constitution of science, where criticism is the order of the day.

Goldman includes Fuller in his charges of veriphobia. Goldman claims that Fuller and other veriphobes bracket truth and falsity in their discussions of knowledge and end up talking about belief or institutional belief, a practice that Goldman classifies as social doxology (Goldman 1999, 7). Fuller's response to Goldman is that Fuller does not hold to the importance of the truth condition in helping to explain the acceptance of an epistemic practice. Fuller also notes that truth plays no role in terms of his advice about improving an epistemic practice, since the advice would be about either the practice itself or the practice's environment (Fuller 2002, ix-xxiv). Though Goldman does not provide advice on how to improve an epistemic practice, he disagrees with Fuller on the role of truth, for Goldman holds that true belief operates normatively (Goldman 2001, 2002a). Goldman's aim is the evaluation of social practices in terms of whether they promote or impede epistemically valuable states such as true belief. Fuller's reply to Goldman is that Fuller's goal of social epistemology aims to provide policy advice on how to improve epistemic practices and not to evaluate whether social practices promote epistemically valuable states. Fuller writes:

> I generally regard knowledge as a means to other human ends (which themselves may be epistemic), but one's participation in the knowledge process is usually confined to meta-level inquiry, that is, the design and evaluation of knowledge production regimes that others carry out (Fuller 2002, xvi).

Here is the nub of disagreement between Fuller and Goldman and also Miller, Brown and Goldberg. For Fuller, social epistemology operates on the meta-level to design and evaluate knowledge production regimes. These regimes have other human ends, which are non-epistemic such as to improve humanity. For Goldman, social epistemology operates at the base level to evaluate whether social practices promote true belief. [6]

Contact details: francisxr28@gmail.com

References

Fuller, Steve 1988. *Social Epistemology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Fuller, Steve 2000. "Social Epistemology: A Philosophy for Sociology or a Sociology of Philosophy?" *Sociology* 34 (3): 573-78.

Fuller, Steve 2002. *Social Epistemology* 2nd edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Goldman, Alvin. 1991. "Epistemic Paternalism: Communication Control in Law and Society." *Journal of Philosophy* 88:113-131.

Goldman, Alvin. 1994. "Naturalistic Epistemology and Reliabilism." In *Midwest Studies in Philosophy. Vol. 19 of Philosophical Naturalism,* edited by Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling and Howard K. Wettstein, 301-320. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Goldman, Alvin 1999. *Knowledge in a Social World.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Goldman, Alvin. 2001. "Social Epistemology." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-social

Goldman, Alvin 2002a. "What Is Social Epistemology? A Smorgasbord of Projects." In *Pathways to Knowledge,* edited by Alvin Goldman, 182-204. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Goldman, Alvin.2002b. "Reply to Commentators." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64 (1): 215-27.

Kusch, Martin. 2001. "'A General Theory of Societal Knowledge'? Aspirations and Shortcomings of Alvin Goldman's Social Epistemology." *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science.* 32 (1):183-92.

Remedios, Francis 2000. "Preview to special issue on Alvin Goldman's *Knowledge in a Social World."* Social Epistemology 14 (4): 235-38.

---

[6] This paper shows that Thomas Uebel in his 2005 review of my 2003 book fails to understand Fuller's social epistemology and my book. Uebel's criticism is that Fuller's social epistemology is an epistemology in name only because it is not concerned with truth. My point is that epistemology does not have to concern itself only with truth. Epistemology can have extra epistemic considerations such as humanity. If the starting point of social epistemology such as Goldman's is to evaluate whether social practices promote true belief, then that social epistemology's only concern is truth. If the starting point of a social epistemology such as Fuller's is to evaluate actual social epistemic practices and to provide policy advice on how to increase knowledge production, then that social epistemology's concern is not only truth. Miller, Brown, Khalifa have pointed out that ASE works with a thin concept of the social and do not care about socially situated cases of knowledge. Goldberg seems to have conceded that point.

Remedios, Francis 2003. *Legitimizing Scientific Knowledge: An Introduction to Steve Fuller`s Social Epistemology.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Schmitt, Frederick F. 1994. "Socializing Epistemology: An Introduction through Two Samples Issues." In *Socializing Epistemology,* edited by Frederick F. Schmitt, 1-28. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Uebel, Thomas. 2005. "Review of Legitimizing Scientific Knowledge: An Introduction to Steve Fuller's Social Epistemology." In *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews.* http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24412-legitimizing-scientific-knowledge-an-introduction-to-steve-fuller-s-social-epistemology/