Cluster: Epistemic Justice, Ignorance, and Procedural Objectivity

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Editor's Introduction
Alison Wylie

The groundwork has long been laid, by feminist and critical race theorists, for recognizing that a robust social epistemology must be centrally concerned with questions of epistemic injustice; it must provide an account of how inequitable social relations inflect what counts as knowledge and who is recognized as a credible knower. The cluster of papers we present here came together serendipitously<1> and represent a striking convergence of interest in exactly these issues. In their different ways, each contributor is concerned both to understand how dominant epistemic norms perpetuate ignorance and injustice and to articulate effective strategies for redressing these inequities.

In the first two papers in this cluster Kristie Dotson and Emily Lee take as their point of departure Gayatri Spivak's account of the epistemic violence done by practices that silence the oppressed, and the debate about whether strategic essentialism is a viable response to this silencing. Dotson focuses on situated modes of unknowing that are culpable, even if unconscious; the "reliable ignorance" of a dominant culture audience is silencing when members of oppressed groups find they must reframe or truncate what they say because of a well grounded expectation that otherwise they will not be heard, or will be heard in prejudicial and harmful ways. Lee takes up the complementary problem: what are the implications of attributing special cultural knowledge to women with hyphenated identities on grounds of their presumed authenticity as representatives of an "other" culture? She challenges the presumption that credible knowledge of a culture requires or automatically arises from insider experience; this not only reinforces a reductive conception of the third world and of subdominant cultures that women of color are presumed to represent, but also restricts the scope of their epistemic authority in areas other than that of

their "authentic" identity. Lee proposes a sophisticated coherentism as an alternative to epistemic essentialism that best captures the co-constitutive relationship between experience of a culture and knowledge of a culture.

Closely related themes are addressed by the following three contributors—Gerald Marsh, Rebecca Mason, and Erinn Gilson—all of whom take Miranda Fricker's recent book, *Epistemic Injustice* (2007), as a resource and a foil for their analyses of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Marsh argues that the harms done by testimonial injustice should be understood as one instance of a broader set of harms: they are forms of "trust injustice" that have wide social and moral as well as epistemic ramifications. Focusing on hermeneutical injustice, Mason draws attention to the rich resources developed by oppressed groups for understanding and communicating their experience, and to the epistemic practices by which ignorance of these resources is perpetuated in the dominant culture. Her insistence that dominant culture knowers must be held accountable resonates powerfully with Dotson's analysis of pernicious ignorance, and defines the challenge to which Erinn Gilson responds. Gilson considers a different kind of ignorance: a willful ignorance of vulnerability rooted in a culture that prizes dominance and control, equating vulnerability with weakness. She argues that this type of ignorance is constitutive of oppression, and urges that we cultivate epistemic vulnerability as a precondition for learning about ourselves, about others, and, crucially, about the ways in which we are complicit in oppressive relations. She outlines a range of strategies for disrupting and counteracting pernicious ignorance as an ethically and epistemically credible response to oppression.

The focus of the final two papers, by Dan Hicks, and by Carole Lee and Christian Schunn, is on the conditions for well functioning epistemic communities set out by Helen Longino. Hicks asks what resources Longino has for responding to a radically illiberal critic—the hypothetical Nazi scientist—who abides by Longino's requirements for participation in epistemic deliberation but whose values are profoundly at odds with the liberal pluralism embodied in her cognitive/social norms for epistemic practice. Must the objections of such a critic not only be taken seriously but cultivated? What principled grounds are there for exclusion? The challenge here is to provide clear articulation of how Longino's egalitarian, pluralistic norms of epistemic authority are to be "tempered" in application. In the final paper in this cluster, Lee and Schunn take up this challenge with respect to Longino's provisions for transformative criticism. There is inevitably room for background beliefs to influence epistemic judgment, so much depends on how community standards of evaluation are implemented. Lee and Schunn consider peer review as one common mechanism by which epistemic credibility is adjudicated, and examine differences in evaluation styles (in the degree of negativity) between philosophy and psychology. This jointly empirical and conceptual analysis provides the basis for identifying a number of potential solutions to the problem of social bias that arises from background beliefs, most of them designed to mobilize the epistemic resources of perspectival diversity. In this Lee and Schunn illustrate the promise of a rigorously naturalized approach to questions about how procedural objectivity and epistemic justice are to be realized.

We are delighted to present this rich cluster of articles. They build on pivotal work by three of the most creative and influential feminist theorists currently working on epistemic issues and in the process open up considerable new territory for feminist analysis of epistemic justice and credibility.

NOTES

1. The contents of this "found cluster" were all received as open submissions and were accepted on the basis of our standard review process.