A DEFENSE OF IGNORANCE

ITS VALUE FOR KNOWERS AND ROLES IN FEMINIST AND SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGIES

CYNTHIA TOWNLEY

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Preface

The ideas for this book originated as my PhD dissertation, completed in 2000 at the University of Tasmania, and sparked by the idea that ignorance had a more important role in epistemology than had been recognized. Ignorance seemed to show up only as the specter of skepticism or as some kind of failure to achieve knowledge, but I set out to explore whether ignorance could have more interesting and possibly more valuable roles. The field of epistemology has expanded since then, and connections to other discussions of ignorance, social epistemology, epistemic virtue, and epistemic justice have become evident. I hope that this book will now be useful to others working in the neighborhood of these ideas.

I am grateful to many people for supporting this project in its various stages. I especially thank my thesis supervisors Marguerite La Caze and Jay Garfield without whom I could not have turned my initial ideas into the work that started this project. My graduate student colleagues in the philosophy department at the University of Tasmania where I completed the PhD provided extensive moral and intellectual support, and an exemplary philosophical community during that first phase.

My thinking has benefited from generous comments by the external examiners of the dissertation, and more recently from constructive reports from anonymous reviewers. Jay Garfield and Mitch Parsell have commented extensively on various versions and provided invaluable encouragement along the way. I am deeply indebted to those critical friends. Macquarie University supported sabbatical time in 2006 and 2010, members of the Philosophy Department at Smith College were gracious and generous hosts in 2006, and my colleagues in the Philosophy Dept at Macquarie University provide an exceptional intellectual environment in which to think and work. Mary

Walker's assistance with preparing the final manuscript was invaluable, and I am privileged that my friend Brett Salter created the image for the cover.

If this work has any strengths, they are due to what I have learned in and from my philosophical communities. Without them I could not have done this work. Its flaws are all my own.

Introduction: Ignorance Matters

Ignorance matters because as epistemic agents interact with one another and we share information, as theorists and as people concerned with knowledge, we are in fact dealing with ignorance as much as with knowledge. Yet until recently, philosophers interested in knowledge have paid little attention to ignorance.[1] Epistemologists have tended to ignore ignorance, in contrast to the attention paid by ethicists to various forms of evil. Most epistemologists have assumed that acquiring knowledge, supplemented with sharing knowledge in accounts of testimony and in social epistemology, is the central epistemic goal.[2] When epistemic dependence is considered, the ideal and virtuous knower is maximally informed and maximally informative, so the elimination of ignorance remains an uncontroversial good. I will show that ignorance, far from being an epistemic flaw always in need of remedy, is demanded by some of the epistemic virtues that a responsible epistemic agent (understood as a social agent) needs to possess. Epistemic value comprises more than knowledge and what leads to knowledge.[3] It is simply false that, from an epistemological point of view, it is always desirable to reduce ignorance. Ignorance has a variety of forms and functions, and not all are negative.

We cannot understand a wide range of epistemic practices solely as practices devoted to increasing knowledge. Trust, empathy, discretion, and discrimination all demand forbearing to seek or to share information, and maintaining one's own or another's ignorance in some way. Since these practices are not always subordinate to a goal of increasing (acquiring or sharing) knowledge, to understand these activities as valuable, we need epistemic standards that account for, even accommodate ignorance, not ideals that require it to be reduced or eliminated. Ideals that entail the elimination of ignorance don't set the standards for agents such as ourselves to be doing

well with knowledge. They set up a distorted picture of epistemic virtue that presents certain activities in an excessively positive light, and others in an excessively negative one. Thus, there are practical and theoretical imperatives to revise epistemology so that it attends to ignorance.

This book defends three interrelated claims: 1. That understanding relationships is integral to understanding epistemic practices; 2. That epistemic values are not reducible to the value of increasing knowledge; and 3. That ignorance is not merely inescapable for epistemic agents, but is valuable. Much traditional epistemological discussion (perhaps most discussion in analytic epistemology) takes for granted not only that increasing knowledge is the definitive epistemic goal, but also that independent means of acquiring knowledge are superior to those involving dependence. Since my project challenges these assumptions, it is an exercise in revisionary epistemology, although it is also part of the expanding fields of social epistemology and feminist epistemology.[4] An adequate epistemology must pay attention to epistemic interactions, both for theoretical completeness, and in order to be useful, since most dealings with knowledge are dealings with other knowers.[5] Epistemology must address epistemic dependence, and I demonstrate that it must therefore attend to ignorance. While it may seem surprising that any form of ignorance can be an epistemic good, ignorance is practically indispensable for a community of knowers and an account of ignorance is theoretically necessary for an adequate epistemology.

Ignorance has at least the following forms, which are not mutually exclusive. First, ignorance can be a lack of knowledge or information that could be acquired relatively simply, by, for example, observing or asking. I call this simple ignorance. Second, there can be entrenched, interested and invested ignorance exemplified in Charles Mills' work on epistemologies of ignorance in *The Racial Contract*.[6] Here, ignorance is systematically produced and sustained, to misrepresent reality in ways that not coincidentally sustain patterns of racial privilege. Invested ignorance includes ignorance of one's own privilege, and can both support and be reinforced by a misguided sense of merit or superiority. Miranda Fricker's hermeneutic epistemic injustice can involve a similar form of ignorance. She describes cases in which a "hermeneutical lacuna" prevents an understanding of a distinct social experience, such as sexual harassment, before the label and description were developed.[7] Arguably those who gain some kind of satisfaction from indulging in sexually harassing behaviors have invested ignorance in the conditions that permit this indulgence. Invested ignorance can also be seen in the tendency of medical practitioners to succumb to cultivation by medical device and pharmaceutical companies. Practitioners may sincerely believe they are unaffected by these relationships, but evidence suggests otherwise.[8] The widespread tendencies to ignore the evidence of the effects of both generous and

small gifts on prescribing practices and to deny that I (unlike others) could be influenced by such gifts are manifestations of invested ignorance.

A third kind of ignorance (a counterpart to some varieties of invested ignorance, such as the ignorance of racial privilege), is a view of members of some group as characteristically ignorant, not merely lacking some information, but fixed in some inferior condition, such as lacking a capacity for a rational or objective view, a sophisticated understanding, or a civilized perspective.[9] Related, but distinct, is the recognition by one group that another group is systematically ignorant. This can describe the way that members of a subordinate group respond to the ignorance of the privileged group, by exploiting the opportunities this offers for subversion. Pharmaceutical marketers might also trade on the invested ignorance of medical prescribers—the marketers know what kinds of interventions increase their sales, but the prescribers might not be aware of the extent and type of changes to their choice to recommend certain medications. These are forms of ascribed and applied ignorance. A further category includes the ignorance that accompanies selectivity—inevitably, pursuing one kind of inquiry can leave another in the background. Such neglect can become problematically embedded in some disciplines, as Sandra Harding explains in relation to philosophy.[10]

My discussion is mainly concerned to explore the first and simplest kind of ignorance, and to point out where it can be valuable. I begin with simple ignorance in order to develop an epistemology that takes it seriously, and which is both sensitive to relationships with other forms of ignorance, and can engage with the work that explores them. Less attention has been paid to simple ignorance than to invested, applied and ascribed ignorance. This is mainly because explorations of ignorance have emerged not from mainstream epistemology, but from identifying how ignorance can function in patterns of social organization along class, race, and gender lines, and its presence in patterns of discovery and authentication in science.

Current attention to ignorance comes from a range of historic, sociological, and political disciplines, often prompted by concerns about social privilege, and to uncover practices of "systemic unknowing."[11] Feminists, race theorists, and post colonial theorists have been actively exploring the importance of ignorance in shaping the social world, recognizing that ignorance itself is complex, and, for example, operates both as a mechanism of oppression and of strategic resistance.[12] To some extent, considering ignorance "from an epistemological point of view" is artificial, as no human being is a pure epistemic agent; all our knowledge practices are socially situated, motivated by, and grounded in our complex and concrete lives. However, it is important to engage with philosophy of knowledge on its own terms, and doing so involves a degree of abstraction and generalization. The result of this engagement is not only a revision of some longstanding assumptions

within epistemology, but also an analysis of some dimensions of epistemic interdependence that will be useful in more practical contexts.

While I reject the global imperative to eliminate ignorance, I do not deny that there are cases when ignorance should be remedied. False claims to knowledge, and denial of ignorance in the face of reasons to acknowledge it, are problems both on my account and on traditional accounts, and likewise for the mis-ascription of ignorance, or denial of knowledge to others (often as part of other mechanisms of unjust dismissal or subordination). I touch on some of these issues briefly in what follows, but the main concern of the book is to uncover and defend the presence of ignorance, in oneself or in another, where there is no epistemic imperative to remedy it, and good epistemic reasons not to do so. That is to say, I defend an epistemology in which ignorance can be viewed positively, neutrally, or negatively, in contrast to standard views in which a positive attitude to ignorance is not an option. Because the standard attitude to ignorance is negative, my discussion aims to show where this should be revised. Revealing ways in which ignorance can be valuable challenges the received view that increasing knowledge is the central epistemic value, to be cultivated to the exclusion of any other.

This excessive love of knowledge has been named epistemophilia.[13] The claim is not that love of knowledge is always bad, but that taken to excess, it can and has limited the understanding of epistemic practices and values, because increasing knowledge is not always good, and not the only epistemic good. Epistemophilia perhaps forms the opposite pole to what Alvin Goldman calls "veriphobia" a "deep skepticism or utter repudiation of truth as a viable criterion for studying epistemic phemomena."[14] This excessive enthusiasm for knowledge can lead to claims that knowledge should be maximized, or more plausibly optimized, by responsible epistemic agents, that veritism is the sole standard for epistemic practice, or that knowledge or knowledge conduciveness is the exclusive standard for epistemic good. These claims cannot be sustained.

Epistemophilia shows up in diverse ways. It can take a benign form. Like sinophilia, an enthusiasm for things Chinese, epistemophilia can be an appreciation of and attraction to knowledge that doesn't distort the understanding of its object. But because the study of knowledge is an evaluative and selective enterprise, an excessive and exclusive valuation of knowledge tends to obscure other considerations, so that values other than increasing knowledge are treated as externalities that do not feature in the accounting. Social, political, or ethical concerns are beyond the scope of a self-contained epistemology, and are resisted as alien, and potentially distortive. Epistemophilia yields few resources to analyze epistemic injustice, instead aligning with a view of knowledge as facts observable by anyone, propositions available for anyone's collection, with authority and credit properly accruing to those who acquire knowledge. With such a conception of knowledge, it is easy to see

how "patterns of incredulity" are omitted from the field of epistemic concern.[15]

Epistemophilia tends to take all ignorance to be remediable, and best remedied, so the proper response to ignorance is to replace it with knowledge. This attitude conflates all ignorance with simple ignorance, and hence overlooks the ways that the incentives and interests of invested ignorance support a resistance to know or notice certain things. An epistemophilic outlook will also tend to take knowing to be a benign activity, so those adhering to that view will tend not to see the downsides of knowledge increase, such as the appropriation of others' understandings (say in cases of bioprospecting) or the arrogance of an assumed right to take up others' perspectives. Epistemophilia limits the scope of legitimate epistemic interactions to those that in one way or another add to knowledge, and the achievement of knowledge increase is epistemically self justifying. Lorraine Code's descriptive phrase "epistemologies of mastery" captures much of the character of epistemophilic epistemology. An epistemology which takes ignorance seriously is a useful remedy to the problems of epistemophilia.

I adopt the framework of virtue epistemology for my discussion of epistemic agents and their communal practices. Epistemologists in general define and distinguish relevant concepts, identify and defend standards, and explain what we are (and should be) doing, individually and collectively insofar as we are epistemic agents. Epistemology most broadly explains what knowers do and what we need to do in order to qualify as successful knowers. Virtue epistemologies base their analyses on the qualities and dispositions of knowers and tend to offer a less general, less abstracted approach to epistemology, emphasizing applications to persons who know, and persons who engage with others on knowledge-related matters. Thus, for example, epistemology might tell us directly, or indirectly, what experts and discoverers do when they acquire knowledge on behalf of a community.

The position defended here is stronger than the claim that truth-conduciveness is not sufficient for epistemic virtue. Some reliabilist and responsibilist accounts are compatible with that claim, and seek to show what more is needed for an agent to be properly virtuous.[16] It seems counterintuitive to many that conduciveness to truth or knowledge is not *necessary* for epistemic virtue, but I defend this position. The claim is not that an epistemic agent should in general be motivated to seek falsehood, nor that there would be no problems if practicing certain epistemic virtues led to error vastly more often than not. But getting more truth is not the only issue. I will argue that standards for doing well as an epistemic agent are not reducible to the goals of truth and avoidance of error and that we can't tell if a trait is an epistemic virtue by asking whether or not it is maximally or optimally truth-conducive.

My arguments lead to epistemic pluralism in at least two ways: first, I recognize a plurality of values in epistemology. These values are irreducibly

plural and do not form a hierarchy—the values of discretion, respect, and credence are not trumped by nor instrumentally justified by reference to veritism or knowledge conduciveness. In many instances knowledge is the important value, but this is not necessarily the case. The second kind of pluralism is pluralism in relation to what is known. The contents of many knowledge systems may converge and overlap significantly, but incommensurate or incompatible pieces can remain. Here, pluralism means a lack of confidence that these ultimately will form a single unified whole, that they can be matched up and so long as they don't match up, at least one party is in error. This is a moderate relativism,[17] which arises because rejecting the view of epistemic agents as knowledge collectors leads to increased emphasis on situational factors.

In contrast to this latter pluralism, consider Peirce's pragmatist theory of truth: "the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by truth, and the object represented is the real."[18] The practices in which such truth can be approximated or attained require dialogue and social cooperation. Hence, such truth requires attention to the community in which the aspiration for agreement is undertaken. I agree with Peirce that the epistemic community is of fundamental importance. He says further that "We individually cannot reasonably hope to attain the ultimate philosophy which we pursue; we can only seek it, therefore, for the *community* of philosophers."[19] But such consensus and unity is problematic for communities, and even for an individual. María Lugones, for example, describes her experience (as Hispanic and lesbian living in the USA) that "some intentions can only be formed and acted on in one, but not in both, cultures, and some intentions can be formed in both but cannot fully inform our actions in both communities. . . . So, my actions may have different understandings in each community."[20] Where this is the case, an aspiration to an understanding that all can share seems problematic—it would mean some significant loss, rather than a gain of coherence. Lugones argues that such risks are real even within one individual: "Because the selves can connect, each can critique the other and avoid the de-moralization of self-betrayal (for example by becoming assimilated to heterosexualism or becoming ignorant of slowly becoming culturally obsolete.)"[21] So the prospect of convergence on exactly one opinion shared by all who investigate is perhaps less likely and more costly than Peirce believed, in some areas at least.

Peirce's work is valuable (as are the ways it has been developed), especially through in its insistence on keeping the path of inquiry open and on the collective nature of the enterprise of inquiry. While I don't engage directly with much of this work, Peirce is a philosophical ancestor I acknowledge, because of his influence on many philosophers I discuss. Arguably Peirce's pragmatic approach entails a capacity to reflect on social conditions and participation as part of responsible epistemic agency. Various contemporary

thinkers have included such a capacity as part of intellectual virtue, or epistemic responsibility, emphasizing the need for individuals, groups, and institutions to cultivate such constructive critique. I look, for example, at Jane Braaten's feminist intellectual virtues, Kristina Rolin's requirement for norms of civility in science, and Kathryn Addelson's analysis of professional responsibility.

As these three thinkers make clear, a variety of real world activities mirror some of the implicit or explicit claims about the goals of epistemic agents, and about what counts as knowledge or responsible pursuit of knowledge, made within epistemology. For example, the idea that increasing human knowledge is a good thing occurs in both scientific enterprises (and their funding arrangements) and in various discussions of epistemological theory. An epistemology with room for ignorance, and which recognizes the dangers of epistemophilia, can help us to understand what can go wrong with certain kinds of real world epistemic practice, such as bio-prospecting, appropriation, and exclusion. Criticisms directed at these and other colonialist projects have been generated by (and sometimes at) feminists, and by subaltern theorists. My investigation of such practices derives from epistemic considerations, rather than from a prior political commitment. This approach provides an alternative route to certain conclusions about the requirements of social justice, thus reinforcing the claims feminists and others have made. More precisely, my argument inverts the more common argument that social injustices can have detrimental epistemic consequences. Here, an epistemological error can have detrimental ethical and political consequences.

One advantage of this inversion can be seen in an argument that emerges for greater diversity in knowledge making enterprises, such as scientific research. On a standard argument, epistemic reasons for greater diversity would focus on potential increases in information from diverse sources of critique. But this argument hinges on there being sufficient information gains to off-set any loss of productivity that might result from recalcitrant opposition to diversity and the ways this could inhibit both the new contributions and the divergence of efforts from cooperation (with the old familiar team) to hostility (to new "different" members). My guess is that there could be at least some cases, for some, perhaps lengthy, periods of time, in which the gains do not outweigh the costs. Nevertheless, diversity and inclusion can be defended on epistemic grounds: an epistemic community in which systemic patterns of exclusion of members of some groups from certain roles are minimized is a better epistemic community than one in which such patterns are intractable, in ways that are not reducible to knowledge productivity. The capacity and opportunity to participate in a wide range of epistemic roles is good in itself, good for epistemic agents, independent of how much it contributes to knowledge, and good for epistemic reasons as I will argue later in more detail. Conceivably, the same proportion of truths, even the same

truths, could be obtained by collectives with the same memberships, but different arrangements of contributions, roles, and members. Collectives that permit members to cultivate a wide range of epistemic and cognitive skills and virtues are better than those that encourage exclusive narrow specializations or restrict cognitive contributions. Collectives where the opportunities to practice various epistemic roles and cultivate various epistemic virtues are not restricted to narrow and exclusive social groups can hence manifest more epistemic virtue than those with more rigid divisions of labor, and this is so even if there is some loss of productivity or efficiency in the total of true justified beliefs.[22] In other words, the virtue of an epistemic collective or community involves more than its knowledge productivity or efficiency.

Epistemologists have tended to devalue ignorance, but have mostly just neglected it. Unlike evil in ethics (also viewed negatively, to be reduced or avoided) ignorance in epistemology is hardly mentioned. One of the main reasons for the neglect of ignorance is that epistemologists have developed models and accounts of knowledge that *obscure* the role of ignorance. If knowledge is presumed to be a single and unitary kind of thing, the highest and best level of cognitive achievement, then it is the task of epistemologists to offer a characterization of this refined or exalted epistemic state. If ignorance is simply the lack or absence of knowledge, and the epistemological project is to give a proper account of knowledge (its necessary and sufficient conditions), then whatever fails to conform to this account (ignorance) is not salient. If knowledge is a unity, and everyone can know the same things, as stated explicitly in Peirce's description of convergence, and I think presumed elsewhere, then knowers *qua* knowers are interchangeable, and only shallowly interdependent, since in principle anyone can reach the same conclusion. Taking ignorance seriously complicates this picture, but does not eliminate local sharing and convergence of knowledge.

There is perhaps a sense in which ignorance is indirectly valued in science, as it can be seen as an advantage of a theory that it opens up new avenues of research. For example, quantum theory pointed to a great deal of new territory that previously was not known to be unknown. But in such cases, the prospect of knowledge and the opportunity to eliminate ignorance is valued, so it is not really a case where ignorance ought not to be eliminated. John Rawls' famous conception of a "veil of ignorance"[23] may also appear to imply a positive attitude to ignorance, at least as a methodological device. But since this is a pretended ignorance, a positive valuation of genuine ignorance cannot be located here.

In spite of the familiar saying "ignorance is bliss," there is an overwhelming presumption throughout philosophy that ignorance is at best a necessary evil. In ethics, for example, it is usually supposed that ignorance impedes the good judgment necessary for responsible moral agency. Ignorance is often described as lack of knowledge, but it is not a neutral word, and it carries

negative connotations, characterizing the one so described as inferior in some way. "Ignorant" describes behavior that is impolite or inappropriate as well as cases when knowledge is lacking or absent. A person exhibiting bad manners is called "ignorant," but the simple implication that she *does not* know better does not always follow, rather it may be implied that she *should* know better, or knows and should behave better. (This is part of the third form of ignorance outlined above, where ignorance refers to a condition of a person or group.) This use of "ignorance" as a term of criticism mirrors a tendency to assume that knowledge is always positive, that all things being equal, more information is better, and, for example, that experts who know better are thereby better judges of what should be done. But when we consider how ignorance and knowledge operate together, it turns out that knowledge and ignorance are not always respectively good and bad.

These negative connotations mean that describing ignorance as valuable will sound odd. But the oddness helps to recall that knowledge has been over-valued, and highlights the need to overcome entrenched assumptions. I retain the term ignorance in spite of its negative connotations in part to emphasize the revisionary nature of the account I offer. In addition, it is quite clear that if ignorance in its own right has valuable epistemic roles, these will not be reducible to instrumental contributions to knowledge increases.

That ignorance has no positive value is not the only assumption taken for granted, rather than explicitly defended by most epistemologists, including virtue epistemologists. Linda Zagzebski's remarks below illustrate the way it appears obvious that increasing knowledge, or truth-conduciveness, is the central epistemic good. Zagzebski sees truth as the goal for epistemic agents, and explicitly commits herself to the truth-conduciveness of intellectual virtues when she writes: "So if it turned out that we were wrong about the truth-conduciveness of one of these traits, that trait would cease to be considered an intellectual virtue. What we would not do is continue to treat it as an intellectual virtue and then go on to declare that intellectual virtues are not necessarily truth-conducive."[24]

Truth-conduciveness, then, is the good, to which epistemic virtues aim, and what enhances truth-conduciveness is instrumentally good. Knowledge and what leads to knowledge together exhaust the domain of epistemic value—only these things are epistemically good. Conversely, ignorance is always bad, to be overcome, reduced, or eliminated. But taking the epistemic community seriously leads to a different picture of epistemic values, a picture in which ignorance has a positive role. Consider the characteristics that are desirable for an epistemic player to possess. Standard virtue-based accounts focus on the acquisition of information through empirical evidence: scrupulousness, rigor, and objectivity are commonly identified as epistemic virtues. Zagzebski's account of such virtues includes "intellectual carefulness, perseverance, humility, vigor, flexibility, courage, and thoroughness, as

well as open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, insightfulness, and the virtues opposed to wishful thinking, obtuseness and conformity."[25] A properly community-based epistemology must attend to relationships between knowers characterized by trust, respect, and credibility. Hence the traditional list is incomplete, and must be supplemented with virtues conducive to empathy, cooperation, deference, discrimination, and discretion. I will show that these features of epistemic interactions at times require the tolerance and even promotion of ignorance. For example, when persons must be selective about what to reveal and share, in exercising the virtue of discretion, they are concerned with ignorance as much as with knowledge. A number of epistemologies are flawed by a failure to recognize virtues such as discretion, but understanding the role of ignorance is essential for understanding many epistemic interactions. This means that an epistemic agent's ignorance ought not to be presumed to be vice or failure, and an agent's knowledge need not be taken as equivalent to success. Epistemological accounts that overlook or deny the importance of ignorance will not account for the virtues involved in interactions between knowers. Part of being a knower in community is understanding the norms of nondisclosure and noninvestigation, and these, I argue, value forms of ignorance. An epistemic agent should not always seek to remedy her own states of ignorance, nor should she set out to communicate all she knows to others. Negative and positive epistemic value do not map on to the ignorance and knowledge that knowers need to navigate in practice.

Ignorance is indispensable, at a theoretical level, most obviously for an account of epistemic interdependence. Reliance on others for knowledge is an ineliminable part of epistemic life, which is one of the most important reasons for taking a nonindividualistic approach to the theory of knowledge. The division of epistemic labor involves ignorance, as others know what I do not, so understanding ignorance sheds further light on socially instituted roles for experts and other epistemic authorities. A simple conception of the value of knowledge yields a misleadingly simple justification of epistemic authority. Those who are experts are closer to, or have a more extended view of, an information domain that would look the same to anyone with the opportunity to make the same observations. On such a view, epistemic authority is unproblematic, because anyone, in principle, could have it. When I encounter others who know what I do not, they are entitled (if not obliged) to share information with me, and I am entitled to acquire knowledge on their say so (there is more to say about conditions for testimonial transmission, but here, I am more concerned with the structure than details). Those who are experts happen to know more than others do, and the knowledge that counts is that which is authorized by the proper institutions. Institutions and practices that successfully produce knowledge are thereby justified; firstly, because knowledge is considered to be a good thing in its own right, so produc-

ing it is good, and secondly, because since knowledge is actually produced, it seems that there cannot be too much wrong with the practices that generate it. These practices must be sufficiently neutral and nondistortive to produce knowledge. Additionally, knowledge is thought to be a good for everyone, as the phrase "for the human community" suggests. In practice, knowledge benefits are far from universal. For example, medical research is said to be for the good of humanity. But in fact the benefits tend to go to research corporations, and to patients from the wealthier sections of wealthier communities, whereas participants in medical trials often come from vastly different communities and social groups, generally those who are much less advantaged. The benefits and costs are not evenly distributed, and references to "human community" tend to obscure these patterns.

But the lack of attention to the exact meaning of "human knowledge" or "humanity's knowledge" also obscures whether information is widely known or highly restricted, specialized but accessible, buried in neglected books or data-bases, part of a small group's "secret business" and so on. In other words, "human knowledge" depends on complex interdependence between people, institutions, and communities, past and present. Thus epistemology requires a social dimension.

The book's main aim is to set up a general argument that works on epistemological terms and that can be applied in various types of cases. My discussions tend to use abstract examples, for two reasons. First, I start from existing discussions in epistemology, so inherit that level of abstraction, and second, abstraction enables arguments to be presented more cleanly and efficiently. However, those benefits are counterweighted by the danger of omitting or eliding "details" that would make an important difference to the arguments. The example in chapter 1 of Dennis and Christopher is an example of how something that looks plausible in the abstract (the claim that epistemic independence is superior to dependence) looks less plausible in a variety of concrete versions. While my own examples tend towards abstraction, I hope they are both rich enough to achieve real-world plausibility, and general enough to suggest their wider applications.

In chapter 1, I develop an account of epistemic community, taking interdependence as fundamental. I show that even when an account starts with an ideal of knowledge collecting, as soon as cooperation is admitted as part of epistemic practice, knowledge maximizing (or optimizing) has to be supplemented with virtues of cooperation. An epistemic theory might also offer ways to evaluate the community as a whole: Is the community sustainable, are its actual practices those its members would thoughtfully endorse? Is the community virtuous? Relying on knowledge as the sole evaluative standard yields unsatisfactory answers to such questions.

In chapter 2, I focus on interdependence in the forms of trust and reliance. Trust is a source of knowledge that cannot be reduced to treating persons and

their claims as evidence and it involves ignorance. Thus, the reevaluation of ignorance emerges from the starting point of epistemic community. In chapter 3 I argue further that the epistemic responsibilities of expert knowers are not limited to the provision or acquisition of accurate information. I show that an approach to knowledge that incorporates ignorance and starts from the ways that virtuous knowers engage with one another is a promising way to analyze practical epistemic concerns.

In chapter 4, I make explicit an argument for epistemic pluralism. I consider the roles of ignorance in knowledge transactions between social groups: especially knowing about other groups and acquiring knowledge from other groups. I show how this revised epistemology differs from and contributes to issues in feminist epistemology. I discuss feminists who recognize that epistemic practices reflect patterns of subordination and oppression between social groups and have shown how exclusionary and hierarchical patterns of interdependence within and between social groups affect trust, credibility, and authority. While I tend to agree with feminist diagnoses of ethical and political dimensions to epistemic practices (and my account is strongly influenced by feminist critiques of epistemic individualism[26]), my arguments start from an account of epistemic dependence within epistemology, and extend toward political considerations, rather than applying feminist concerns to theories and practices concerning knowledge.[27] Hence there are differences as well as convergences between my project and others in feminist epistemology. First, ignorance usually appears in feminist discussions as a problem to be identified and overcome. Problematic forms of ignorance include an ignorance that is complicit in privilege (invested ignorance), and ignorance that keeps members of some group from full participation in epistemic practices (exclusionary ignorance). (These need not be exclusive categories.) My aim is not to deny that ignorance can be involved in oppression, but to show that there are other possibilities: just as knowledge is not always good, ignorance is not always bad. Second, my project is initially motivated not by an understanding of and opposition to gender oppression, but by an explanation and revaluation of ignorance within epistemology. The arguments developed here show that epistemology on its own terms needs to take seriously its common ground with considerations that have been raised by feminists whether or not an explicitly feminist agenda is adopted. Locating my project within feminist epistemology shows how it contributes to social epistemology more broadly, as the relevant parts[28] of feminist epistemology fall broadly into that category.

The project as a whole demonstrates that taking account of ignorance in epistemological theory enhances an adequate analysis of a range of epistemic practices that cannot be reduced to knowledge maximizing. Ignorance is both theoretically indispensable to epistemological analyses and practically invaluable for a community of knowers. According to many accounts of epistemic