An Epistemology of Solidarity: Coalition in the Face of Ignorance

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Dedication

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Abstract

Privileged ignorance about the structures of domination consists not merely in the absence of knowledge, but in the positive production of false information, of encouragement to look away and to *actively* not-know. I argue that for a person subject to privileged ignorance, attempting to remedy this ignorance by seeking more knowledge brings its own challenges: We have good reason to think that the cognitive distortions that produce privileged ignorance continue to affect a person's knowledge production even when she becomes aware that they exist. Instead, the epistemically and morally responsible behavior for people privileged with respect to a system of oppression is to interrogate the purpose and provenance of their ignorance and to practice critical trust in the experts (i.e., those who are oppressed under that system). Learning to trust wisely is good for liberatory politics because it demands that we cultivate relationships of trustworthiness. It is also better for knowledge production than pursuing epistemic autonomy, which either vastly constricts what we can know or causes us to overestimate our epistemic abilities in ways that reinforce the cognitive distortions of privilege. Evaluating what we think we know in terms of narrative significance—Whose story does this advance? Which characters are undeveloped? What future narratives does this enable, and which does it foreclose?— in addition to truth-value can offer a solution to paralyzing skepticism and can spur coalitional political action in the face of uncertainty.

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Introduction

On the last day of summer before the second year of my PhD program, I went for a bike ride on several of the many beautiful trails in the Twin Cities. I biked from my apartment south, then east along Minnehaha creek, around lake Nokomis, and south to the ponds and lakes near Fort Snelling. When the paved trail petered out into dirt and roots, I walked my 1960's Raleigh three-speed as I took in the bright green duckweed and scattered wildflowers of Minnesota summer.

I had been contemplating the various political and personal stakes of accepting a fully funded trip to Israel—part of a program funded by Sheldon Adelson and the Israeli government to bring Jewish youth from the diaspora into a more intimate relationship with "the homeland." I had found my philosophical interests coalescing around the cognitive and emotional states of nominally unwilling oppressors, and here, while walking in the picturesque surroundings of what I dimly knew was a site of conflict between Native people and either the state or federal government, I thought that perhaps the trip to Israel could yield some insight into the psyche and beliefs of conflicted oppressors in the form of the everyday Israelis and carefully-chosen young soldiers on vacation from the IDF who would be the tour group's companions.

I remember hearing the breeze rustle through the leaves of the birch and pine when it dawned on me that I didn't have to go anywhere to learn the mind of the uncomfortable oppressor—except, perhaps, to where I was standing at that very moment. It feels like nothing. It feels like regretting, in a vague sort of way, that one is the beneficiary of so much suffering while only being dimly aware of the former concentration camp beneath one's feet. It's building the shameful abuse of Native people in U.S. history into one's own self-concept so that the contested space on which one stands becomes a site of introspection, insight, and shame, while remaining oblivious to the details of historical and continued colonization and resistance.

I am afraid that the anecdote above makes me seem naive, but I think I am not especially so (and certainly I am less naive now than when the story takes place). But what I continue to be is a white woman from a family of professionals who grew up in a society that made it easy not to know much about people whose lives were substantially different than mine or about the structures that produce that difference. I know that my experience of coexisting progressive values and problematic ignorance is not unique. The relationship between social location and truth, between ignorance and political action is becoming increasingly evident as many of us live more closely connected to people whose lives are dramatically different from our own. I think it is common these days for people who are privileged to want to fight oppression but to have very little clue where to start. Some of these challenges are practical—What kind of action should I take?—and

some are epistemological—How should I know what to do? What do I need to learn that the insularity of my privilege has prevented me from learning?

I set out to write this dissertation with the hope of giving myself some guidance about my role in movements for justice— particularly those movements that target systems that do not directly cause me harm, or that threaten to undermine my privileges. But while in some ways I intended to be the main audience for my dissertation, I also hope it is more broadly relevant. When I have told acquaintances about this research, they have often responded with enthusiasm about the timeliness of the work, the connection to contemporary social and political conflicts. I usually demur and remark on my own conflicts about the disconnection between academic writing and public discourse, but it is true that I have always intended to do philosophy that is relevant and responsive to a real need. In more private moments, though, I wonder if the sort of work I present here does contribute to contemporary political movements; while public discourse is often maligned for being polarized and superficial, I have witnessed highly sophisticated dialogue on the themes of ignorance, allyship, coalition, appropriation, identity, and more. With these conversations progressing quickly on social media and informed by the perspectives of diverse thinkers and activists, what, in particular, can I add?

I see this dissertation as making two primary contributions. The first is the combination of work in epistemology of ignorance and postpositivist realism to explore more deeply the relationship between who we are and what we can know— in particular

to identify the slippage in this relationship that provides room for us to grow. The second, and perhaps more original task of this dissertation is to root our epistemic practices in the material world. This goes beyond the relationship between knowledge and identity to explore the ways time, land, movement, capital, illness, fear, and trust shape and are shaped by our experiences of learning.

Epistemology of ignorance involves turning our epistemological attention from characterizing knowledge to understanding the ways that ignorance is produced and sustained in connection with systems of privilege and domination. As Charles Mills argues in "White Ignorance," the idea that social privilege comes with certain epistemic disadvantages is a straightforward corollary of claims that people on the margins may have advantaged perspectives on the systems responsible for their marginalization (2007). Oppressed groups have made this latter claim repeatedly and persuasively for generations (for a selection, consider Marx's proletarian class-consciousness, Gramsci's organic intellectuals, W.E.B. DuBois' double consciousness, Patricia Hill Collins' Black feminist thought, Hartsock's standpoint theory and their subsequent development). However, neither insight nor ignorance is an automatic or incidental consequence of social location —the insight of the oppressed originates from a need to understand and survive the structures of one's marginalization and the ignorance of the privileged is produced for diffuse and specific political goals. Privileged ignorance about the structures and consequences of domination consists not merely in the absence of knowledge, but in the

production of false information, of subtle (or not so subtle) encouragement to look away and to *actively* not-know.

The postpositivist realist perspective[1] helps to clarify how these epistemic tendencies attach to social and political identity. This understanding of ontology acknowledges the importance of discourse in shaping our world while retaining a realist belief in the existence of that world, independent of our understanding of it. This realism gives traction that is necessary for political change and offers resources to judge our interpretations of the world in terms of how well they make sense of diverse experiences of it. On this view, our perceptions and understanding of the world are always mediated by theory developed in part through experiences shaped by social identity. Thus there is a causal but not a deterministic relationship between our social identities and how we see the world. Because of the realist commitment that the world is *shared*, we can improve our knowledge beyond our own perspective by engaging with other people's experiences and perspectives and attempting to understand how they interact with our own, and what each says about our shared world.

Together, these philosophical discussions can add nuance to some of the conversations about identity and knowledge at play in activist circles by acknowledging that our social location has something to do with what we perceive and what we're equipped to say about the world, but that the relationship is not strict and therefore allows

[1] In this dissertation I focus on Satya P. Mohanty and Paula M. L. Moya's work, but there is much more—especially useful collections are Hames-García and Moya 2000 and Alcoff, Hames-García, Mohanty, and Moya 2006.

for change. Keeping this in mind can discourage problematic practices of using features of social or political identity as a proxy for what a person has standing to speak about—practices that put marginalized people in the uncomfortable position of spokesperson and that encourage the privileged to defer to the beliefs expressed by the marginalized without engaging them. By attending to the subtleties of the relationship between identity and knowledge, in this dissertation I move beyond discussion of what privileged people can or cannot know, toward how the privileged can go about learning and, when they cannot know, how to act responsibly even in the face of ignorance.

One thing this dissertation does not do is offer a definition of solidarity. Though I am interested in how we can act in solidarity and how we can build coalitions, I worry that puzzling over a particular characterization of these concepts calls for a different kind of response than the one I hope for. In early drafts of some of this work, I attempted to give necessary and sufficient conditions for some of the concepts discussed. But the response from most readers to this presentation of the material was to judge how they stacked up against these definitions— it became more about judgment and moral perfectionism than about forward-looking political action. Moreover, I expect that the actions and attitudes that might represent solidarity vary according to the particular political activity and I have trouble seeing the value in my describing them independently.

The chapters of this dissertation are meant to stand alone, but they fit together into a larger narrative addressing epistemic challenges in building political coalitions across boundaries of privilege and oppression. Together they discuss moral and epistemic challenges facing the relatively privileged who recognize their ignorance with respect to colonialism, racism, sexism, and other systems of oppression.

One way of limiting what we can know is by restricting what we think knowledge can be. Colonialist norms within Western universities create institutional barriers to liberatory politics by conceiving of knowledge as a commodity. Chapter 1 examines how treating knowledge as a commodity undermines attempts to repair the relationship between the University of Minnesota and the Anishinaabe people indigenous to the Great Lakes region. This relationship is broken in part due to the University's research and development of wild rice as a crop; this chapter focuses on the epistemic norms that support this focus on capitalist development and create a barrier to political change.

In Chapter 2 I argue that for a person subject to privileged ignorance, expanding what counts as knowledge and attempting to acquire it brings epistemic and moral challenges. We have good reason to think that the cognitive distortions that produce privileged ignorance continue to affect a person's knowledge production even when she becomes aware that they exist, and attempts to learn by consuming the knowledge and experiences of the oppressed often reinforce oppressive structures and produce unreliable knowledge. Anti-oppressive intentions do not ensure that attempts to learn about oppression will be epistemically useful nor morally benign.

Instead, I argue in Chapter 3, the epistemically and morally responsible behavior for people privileged with respect to a system of oppression is to (a) interrogate the purpose and provenance of their ignorance and (b) practice dynamic or critical trust in the experts, i.e., those who are oppressed under that system. Learning to trust wisely is good for liberatory politics because it demands that we collaborate to cultivate relationships of trust and trustworthiness. It is also better for knowledge production than pursuing epistemic autonomy, which either vastly constricts what we can know or causes us to overestimate our epistemic abilities in ways that reinforce the cognitive distortions of privilege.

Over-valuing epistemic autonomy results in a socially supported yet unjustified expectation of certainty and epistemic autonomy among the privileged. Chapter 4 discusses the fragile response to uncertainty when people with this expectation are confronted with their systematic cognitive distortions; even those who value justice often find themselves paralyzed in the face of their own ignorance. I argue that learning from people who have lived lives punctuated with reminders of epistemic dependence and uncertainty can help provide guidance in these cases. In particular, evaluating what we think we know in terms of narrative significance—Whose story does this advance? Which characters are undeveloped? What future narratives does this enable, and which does it foreclose?— in addition to truth-value can offer a solution to paralyzing skepticism and can spur coalitional political action even in the face of uncertainty.

Chapter 1

Institutions and Solidarity: Wild Rice Research, Relationships, and the Commodification of Knowledge[2]

1.1 Introduction: Food Justice and Knowledge-Producing Institutions

Around the world, universities are paying attention to global demands for food security by offering new classes, majors, and graduate programs, and dedicating millions of dollars to food security and food justice research. At the University of Minnesota, "Feeding the World Sustainably" is one of five priority areas of research, and at least three of the other areas are closely related (they address water, health, and justice, respectively) (Regents 2016). This research crosses disciplines of agriculture, ecology, economics, and policy, and sometimes also includes input from other social sciences and humanities. Yet the faith that funders place in technocratic and agroecological solutions to food insecurity avoids acknowledgment that the role occupied by these approaches within systems of power and knowledge production creates problems for food *justice*.

In this chapter I will express pessimism about the ability of universities and other knowledge-producing institutions to be in genuine solidarity with food justice and food-

[2] This chapter appeared in Werkheiser, Ian and Piso, Zachary, eds. 2017. *Food Justice in US and Global Contexts.* Springer.

sovereignty movements, given the way these institutions treat knowledge as a commodity. I will examine a particular case in which, after causing harm, the University of Minnesota has tried to be in solidarity but at best struggles to really help. Then I'll suggest some theoretical tools that can help us understand this case as representative of some harmful norms for thinking about knowledge that exist within the university.[3]

1.2 Wild Rice Research and Relationships in Minnesota

Let us begin with a particular case concerning differing attitudes toward knowledge about wild rice. These attitudes have contributed to the history of harm, miscommunication, and the growth of the paddy-grown rice industry, but this section focuses on their role in the struggle to *repair* the relationship between University of Minnesota researchers and the Anishinaabe people, in light of this history. I want to be clear that the situation I describe here is not intended as an exemplar of the theoretical proposals discussed later; rather, my engagement with this situation as a member of the

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[3] I will not provide a substantive definition of solidarity in this paper since I think such an account is a bigger project than can be addressed here. I mean the term to describe the relationship of trying to stand with or advocate with people who are fighting for their own rights, respect, or liberation when one is not a member of that group. This includes people oppressed in different ways by similar structures (e.g., Latinx and Black coalitions against racism) who wish to work in coalition, as well as a subset of people who benefit from the structures against which the group is struggling, but who nonetheless are interested (at least superficially, if not when it really comes down to it) in dismantling those structures. I am inclined to think that "solidarity" describes a relationship rather than a state, and that it includes reflexivity and growth. For one characterization of various kinds of solidarity, see Scholz 2008.

Food justice refers to "a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities" (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, ix). *Food sovereignty* is the concept popularized by La Via Campesina, which defines it as "The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations" (2007, 1). For a discussion of the uses and meaning of "food justice" and "-sovereignty", see Cadieux and Slocum 2015.

university, a non-Native resident of stolen land in Minnesota,[4] and a person interested in fighting against domination and exploitation compel me to understand the epistemic dimensions of the misunderstandings that persist in this relationship.

Since its beginning, research on wild rice (manoomin, *Zizania palustris*) at the University of Minnesota has been intimately linked with the development of industry and the production of wild rice as a marketable crop (as, literally, a commodity). This research began in earnest in the late 1960s, when early paddy-growers persuaded state government funders that wild rice could be commercialized, after half a century of less-successful attempts to do the same (Doerfler 2003; Kahler 2015). Research focused on traditional breeding through phenotypic selection, hybridization, and later, genetic mapping in the interest of making wild rice more profitable to cultivate in paddies.

Since long before that time, the Indigenous people of the Great Lakes region have had a special relationship with sacred wild rice, which plays a central role in Anishinaabe culture. Manoomin has tremendous social, spiritual, and medicinal significance for Anishinaabeg. The tribe expressly reserved rights to wild rice in ceded territories in the treaties of 1837, 1854, and 1855, and has, since settler interest in wild rice began, resisted the commodification of the sacred manoomin. As Jill Doerfler (White Earth Nation) has articulated, "commercial exploitation of Manoomin by non-Indians is generally viewed

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[4] The University of Minnesota was funded by the 1862 Morrill Act which created land-grant universities by giving federal land to states, which were then to sell the land to settlers to create endowments for the universities. In Minnesota, this land was acquired by the federal government through a series of treaties with the Dakota, often procured under duress. The nominal payment to the Dakota was dramatically delayed, and the resulting privation led to the U.S.---Dakota War in 1862, after which 38 Dakota were executed in the largest mass-execution in U.S. history, and the Dakota were forced out of Minnesota.

by the Anishinaabe as a desecration." Though at the same time, "It is customarily considered acceptable for Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples to sell some extra manoomin after they have secured an adequate supply for their families" (2003). The Minnesota Cultivated Wild Rice Council now claims that 4-10 million pounds of cultivated wild rice is produced annually in Minnesota (with even more produced by California growers—the unintended beneficiaries of much of the breeding research in Minnesota). The successful commercialization of paddy-grown wild rice has flooded that market, and the excess wild rice that Anishinaabeg had used to supplement meager family incomes can rarely serve this purpose now.

In response to vocal resistance to wild rice breeding and gene-mapping research, as well as a leadership change at the university, in 2006 an ad-hoc committee consisting of members of the university and Native communities was formed—the Nibi and Manoomin Bridging Worldviews Committee—with the goal of protecting natural stands of wild rice and improving the relationship between the University of Minnesota and the Anishinaabe of Minnesota and the Upper Midwest (Kokotovich 2014). As part of their work, the committee has organized four biennial symposia, with a fifth being planned. In spite of these efforts, a gulf of understanding between scientists and Native people[5] persists, and the manoomin continues to be at risk from environmental damage and

[5] Of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the participation of people who straddle this boundary has been important and fruitful as they have knowledge from within both worlds. I will nonetheless continue talking about "scientists" and "Anishinaabeg" as synecdoche for a worldview characteristic of each.

biological contamination[6].

At two of these symposia, I have observed a gulf between the ways many scientists and Anishinaabeg talk about the identity of wild rice. Anishinaabe participants in this conversation argue that the identity of wild rice is at risk of contamination by hybridized varieties of cultivated rice (Gunderson and Julin 2002). One premise for this claim is that cultivated wild rice is no longer genuinely wild and has lost its identity (Wild rice white paper 2011). Yet I have heard scientists dismiss this claim as scientifically naive, since, according to scientists, it fails to take account of the genetic variety within natural wild rice stands (protected by centuries of Anishinaabe stewardship), and ignores the similarities between cultivated and natural wild rice. It appears to me that scientists are thinking of identity in this context as genetic identity, and for this reason insist that cultivated and truly wild rice are the same, since they are the same species and have substantially similar genetic code.[7] This is in spite of the fact that there are quite significant phenotypic differences, including a desired trait in hybridized rice in which the amount of seed shed by wind and rain back into its growing water is minimized in order to maximize crop production. (This trait-- referred to as seed shattering-- is how manoomin re-seeds for the next season in the wild, and thus

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6 The risk of biological contamination is related in a different way to the gap in understanding at issue here: wild rice is at risk from sulfate runoff from mining operations, and many scientists are interested in doing research that can help "save" wild rice from this pollution. This has been one contested area of possible (depending who you ask) collaboration between scientists and Anishinaabeg.

7 It is worth noting here, that the meaning and use of *species* is not uncontentious. There has been much discussion among philosophers and scientists about the concept (for one compendium of this discussion, see Wheeler and Meier 2008), so appeals to species membership are far from conclusive.

represents not a loss of goods, but an essential part of the life cycle of the plant in natural stands.) This insistence on genetic identity suggests a view of wild rice and of knowledge about wild rice that is starkly in contrast with Anishinaabe worldviews; it makes difficult effective communication with people who talk about identity in a more holistic and ecological sense that includes humans using traditional ricing practices and distinguishes between histories of phenotypic differences.

Because manoomin stands as the fulfillment of prophecy that foretold that the Anishinaabeg should migrate west until they found the place where food grows on water, it has spiritual and medicinal value (Wild rice white paper 2011, 2). The centrality of wild rice is reflected in the Anishinaabe legal system, and Anishinaabeg have always seen themselves as caretakers of the rice.[8] As one Native participant in the 2013 symposium commented, “Even though manoomin varies in size and color, it is always perfect” (NMBWC 2013, 2). These ideas refuse a conception of wild rice that reduces it to its genetic identity, nutritional, or commodity value. Manoomin is food, medicine, a gift from the Creator, variable, yet perfect, all at once. An Anishinaabe wildlife biologist shared the importance of imagining the role of wild rice as an organism, embedded in its ecology: "who are my allies, how do I serve of the earth for the purpose that I'm here for?" (8). Thus, the importance of connections and relationship are the starting point for

[8] Here is a focus on governance that illustrates another important difference between commodified Western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge. As Kyle Powys Whyte explains in an effort to resist the instrumentalization of Indigenous knowledges by interested non-Native academics and policy-makers, one central feature of Indigenous knowledges is their role in Indigenous governance (Whyte 2015).

learning about manoomin, rather than the interior patterns of its genetic identity.

From this perspective, the actions and intentions of the university can seem incomprehensible and downright sinister. Descriptions of attempts by the university to understand wild rice are frequently met by rancor and suspicion. At the same symposium described above, a Native participant remarked that “the university sees itself in the business of stealing life and patenting it to fund itself” (8). The university's appetite for information makes it inattentive to the particular state of the relationships we learn within. With manoomin, the state of our relationship changes what we can know; as another participant commented, "knowledge can be compared to picking berries; not all are ripe for the picking" (18). Here is a clear difference from the assumption that knowledge is contained within genetic identity, ready to be harvested by anyone; instead we have an expression that knowledge belongs to manoomin and has sense within our (healthy) relationship with manoomin-- it cannot be claimed by just anyone and removed from its context.

1.3 Knowledge as a Commodity

An epistemologist's look at the dynamics of this relationship reveals that one persistent conflict centers on differing attitudes toward knowledge. In addition to the important non-epistemic reasons scientists and the university fail to understand and respond in ways that are satisfying to Anishinaabeg (e.g., funding ties to paddy-growers, legislative support for continued research, and a sense of entitlement supported by deep histories of colonialism and exploitation) underlying assumptions about what knowledge

is play a role in this recalcitrant lack of understanding. I argue that in this case, scientists' tendency to view knowledge as a commodity contributes to their inability to understand or adequately respond to the concerns articulated to them by Native communities.

One way to begin thinking about the complex role commodities play in our lives is to consider what we mean when we talk about belonging. When I purchase a sweater, it is appropriate to say that the sweater belongs to me, and the same is true for a house, or a book, or a computer. In this way, belonging can refer to ownership of private property or commodities. Contrast this with a kind of belonging that designates membership in a group or a sense of place within community. Philosophy has at times offered me a sense of belonging that I had not experienced in other disciplines; I felt like I had found people who thought like I did, and I identified with the methods and interests of (some!) philosophers. Neither the commodity-sense or the identity-sense of belonging obviously applies to knowledge, but attention to the ways we actually treat knowledge in each of these senses can illuminate some of the difficulty plaguing researchers' attempts to be in solidarity with the communities they study, or with communities that have a stake in what they study.

We have some *prima facie* reasons to think that knowledge is not at all like a commodity. The most obvious one is that knowledge is not a material thing. I cannot purchase or exchange a bit of knowledge the way I can a sweater, in part because knowledge can be multiply instanced: I can acquire knowledge for myself without taking it away from anyone else. Likewise, I can share knowledge with someone else without

losing it for myself. Another consequence of knowledge being multiply instanced is that it is not finite in the sense necessary for a commodity to be subject to supply and demand.

Nevertheless, we often do treat knowledge as though it were a commodity. For one thing, we appear to buy and sell it. Academics (especially those of us in the humanities, who rarely have anything material to show for our research besides articles and presentations) are, under a capitalist regime, paid and promoted on the basis of our production and attempted transmission of knowledge. The subscription fees to academic journals that open-access advocates challenge may also be enough to persuade us that what's being sold goes far beyond paper, ink, and binding. Patents, copyright, and other issues of intellectual property also point to an assumption that knowledge is the sort of thing that can be owned as a commodity.

The tensions between the *prima facie* reasons for thinking knowledge is not a commodity and the fact that we treat it as one create a difficulty: some work must be done to get knowledge into a state where it can be treated and traded as a commodity. In this way, knowledge functions as what the social theorist and economic historian Karl Polanyi described as a fictitious commodity. Polanyi counts land, labor, and money as fictitious commodities because they are not made for the purpose of being traded on the market and require regulation to prevent running out of natural resources, exhausting the labor force, and making money valueless (Polanyi 1944). Likewise, knowledge requires intervention in order to render it fungible. Data is excavated from its context and recontextualized using the theories of a particular discipline, within the background of the

inherited histories of European imperialism and colonialism that found academia (Smith 2012), to make it legible within the academic context. Depending on the object of research, knowledge may need more or less intervention to render it a commodity. When research reaches across very different contexts, this processing can have dramatic effects, as when "the history and culture of the [global] South are discovered and translated in the journals of the North, only to come back, reconceptualized and repackaged, as development interventions" (Escobar 2012, 181; see also Smith 2012).

Obscuring the effects of this work on our relationships with each other and with knowledge itself creates serious barriers to working in solidarity with people who either do not see knowledge in general as a commodity, do not see the particular knowledge at play as a commodity, or who do not stand to benefit from the commodification of knowledge while others do (namely, researchers and various powerful institutions that rely on their work). It is unlikely that many academics explicitly think of knowledge as a commodity, but without an acknowledgement of this assumption, the possibility of solidarity is undercut by a refusal to see the ways others might think of knowledge differently. Treating knowledge as a commodity while maintaining otherwise creates a culture of denial that people with whom academics may want to be in solidarity can sense and that can create suspicion and distrust. This kind of ignorance can be a special barrier for researchers who take themselves to be doing work that benefits everyone, or is on behalf of a particular community, since faith in their own pure intentions creates no incentive to be critical of the harm they and their work may still cause (Smith 2012).

Consider the many projects which, though they engage the participation of community members in research within those communities, fail to address asymmetries of power and interest in the results produced. One such example of this process is articulated by Lorraine Code in her work on epistemic practices used by NGOs in Tanzania (Code 2008). Code praises the practice of incorporating local knowledge through participatory research on health initiatives for its ability to generate better (i.e., more reliable and accurate) knowledge about the needs of locals. Yet Kristie Dotson has noted that, in the absence of Tanzanian voices assessing the research programs, the possibility remains that the participatory research practices were epistemically effective, but not just (Dotson 2008). The mere fact of including some knowledge of community members within research is no guarantee that the research is genuinely in solidarity with the interests of those community members, and this is even more clear if we are alert to the ways that knowledge may be expropriated from the community and commodified in a way that benefits the researchers, even if their intentions are good. That as university researchers we are accumulating publications on the basis of such research, and that there are few, if any, norms for crediting the participation of community members, creates an imbalance that frequently goes unrecognized by researchers who take themselves to be doing the best work they can to involve communities and create knowledge on behalf of all of us.

1.4 Knowledge About Wild Rice

I now turn to a discussion of how the distinction between different senses of

"belonging" may help explain the difficult relationship in the wild rice case: though scientists and Anishinaabeg are both talking about knowledge, scientists in general are working with a conception of knowledge (and wild rice itself) belonging as a commodity, and Anishinaabeg in general talk of knowledge (and wild rice itself) belonging-- that is, having meaning-- only within relationship.

There are several reasons I'm inclined to say that scientists are treating knowledge as a commodity. What follows is not so much an argument, but a list of these reasons, some of which appeal to the particulars of this case, and some of which are instances of the larger Western knowledge-producing paradigm described above. First, the structures of the university as a knowledge-producing institution strongly favor treating knowledge as a commodity and provide scant means to think of knowledge otherwise. Because academics are not typically aware of these assumptions, or of alternative ways of thinking about knowledge, they are not able to develop the skills to correct for them. Given the especially great value placed on objectivity within science and a persistent tendency to see knowledge as value-free (in spite of the substantial challenges to this idea within philosophy of science), there are even more reasons to think that scientists are especially susceptible to commodity-thinking, and especially unlikely to identify it as such.

Returning to the specific issue of genetic identity, I suggest that one reason this focus persists is that genetic identity is a tool to sort discrete items so that they can be treated as commodities. As knowledge in general must be extracted from its original context, and reprocessed to be traded on the market, those interested in commodifying

knowledge of hybridized wild rice (i.e., the particular varietal) must create an object to be the commodity. Genetic essentialism is the vehicle for this process; collapsing the identity of the varietal itself with its genome allows scientists to point to a particular thing which they have created for the market and which is able to be their (or the university's or the state's) property.[9] It is thus ironic to refer to genetic similarity to dismiss Anishinaabeg concerns that hybridized wild rice has been changed, given that changing wild rice was the goal of hybridizing research.

It also must be noted that a turn from family lineage and history to genetic identity has played a different and historically relevant role in the relationship between Anishinaabeg and the European settlers of this land. The transition to blood quantum-based Tribal identification was used as a way for settlers to purchase land from "mixed-blood" Native people, which would have otherwise been illegal. As sociologist Eva Garroutte states, "The original, stated intention of blood quantum distinctions was to determine that point at which the various responsibilities of the dominant society to Indian people ended. The ultimate federal intention was to use the blood quantum standard as a means to liquidate tribal lands and to eliminate government trust responsibility to tribes, along with entitlement programs, treaty rights, and reservations" (Quoted in Doerfler 2015). This context is relevant to how contemporary

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9 In point of fact the University of Minnesota does not to my knowledge hold patents on the 6 varieties of wild rice developed as a result of its research. The harms to wild rice that concern Anishinaabeg are distinct from the sort of concerns characteristic of small farmers resisting the influence of patent-hoarding corporations like Monsanto. Nonetheless the habits of treating knowledge as property plays an important role in this harm.

emphases on genetic essentialism are perceived by Native people.

1.5 “Knowledge Belongs to Everyone"

Some scientists have a tendency to talk about data existing “out there” in the world, and as if it ought to be accessible to anyone. This perspective is reflected in governance institutions as well: In the unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision declaring that naturally occurring DNA sequences cannot be patented (though closely related synthetic sequences can), Justice Clarence Thomas cites precedent that “manifestations … of nature [are] free to all men” while arguing that the claim is about the *information* contained in the sequence, rather than the mere chemical structure (2012). These two claims together provide a compelling example of the belief that information exists in nature, for everyone, though they elide issues of who has the power, institutional support, money, resources, and authority to actually access that information and claim knowledge created from it.

This view of knowledge pervades even well-intentioned efforts to promote justice in knowledge production. Consider efforts to make knowledge and information more accessible, as we can see in the struggles for open-access publishing. For good reasons, many within and outside the academy are pushing against proprietary research and even publication in expensive, hard-to-access journals. At the University of Minnesota, and at other universities throughout the United States, research funded by private sources is strictly regulated to ensure that transparency and accessibility of the research meets standards for publicly-funded research, and are not distorted by the proprietary demands

of funders (Regents 2010). Proprietary and otherwise inaccessible research has been criticized for restricting innovation and public deliberation, limiting who can create and consume research, and for keeping knowledge in the hands of the few, as it is often produced on the backs of people who are not able to supervise its production or access its results (e.g., Deibel 2014; Evans and Selgelid 2015; Parker 2013; Wellen 2004). As a general rule, it seems fair to say that knowledge should not be accessible only to a few privileged people; this creates serious concerns for democracy, and we have good reasons to challenge the practice.

Yet the response to problems of proprietary or inaccessible research is articulated within a paradigm that is itself problematic for many of the same reasons as proprietary research. A common solution to concerns about proprietary research is to offer open-source research and open-access publishing as necessary tonics that will make knowledge production and dissemination more democratic (e.g., Deibel 2014; Parker 2013). Many of these arguments are infused with rhetoric about knowledge belonging to everyone (e.g., Ernst 2012; Hansson *et. al.* 2011). This response isn't merely theoretical: many universities are now encouraging and even requiring faculty to contribute their publications to open-access repositories (see Regents 2010 for one example). National initiatives with international cooperation, like the National Center for Biotechnology Information's GenBank maintain open access databases of millions of genetic sequences compiled from submissions from laboratories across the country, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and genome-sequencing organizations (Benson *et. al.* 2013). This

information is public, purportedly accessible by anyone, thus apparently solving problems of unjustified possession of knowledge by only the privileged.

This response solves the problem of ownership of and access to knowledge by the rarefied few by claiming *collective* ownership. But the emphasis on collective ownership does nothing to challenge the assumption that knowledge is the sort of thing that can be owned. This is an important mistake, since the ways in which we treat knowledge as though it were a commodity, and the ways it in fact operates as one transform relationships and create barriers to solidarity. To put a more historical point on it, claiming that land in the first instance belonged to everyone has been an important step in European colonization of land inhabited by Indigenous people (Whitt 1998), and this practice continues as a tool for cultural appropriation (Wylie 2015; hooks 1992). In a parallel fashion, the belief that knowledge belongs to everyone and exists out there in the world waiting to be harvested has served and continues to serve as a means to commodify that knowledge.

1.6 Knowledge as Relational

I've now painted a fairly bleak portrait of attitudes toward knowledge within the academy. Indeed, this view is somewhat totalizing; there are alternatives to thinking of knowledge as a commodity, and many of them do exist (though they often struggle for recognition) within the academy. Returning to 'belonging' allows us to see knowledge as something that exists within relationship, something that belongs within the worldview of a particular community, something that changes when it is appropriated into another

worldview. Without endorsing any particular view, I suggest several variations of treating knowledge as other than a commodity. Since, as I claim, the tendency to treat knowledge as a commodity is deeply embedded in the customs of western knowledge production, one place to look for alternative views is within indigenous methodologies and epistemologies.

While taking into account the enormous diversity of Indigenous peoples around the world, Cree scholar Shawn Wilson argues that a common feature of Indigenous worldviews is an emphasis on relationship and the centrality of interconnection (2008). Wilson argues that this perspective on metaphysics equally influences Indigenous epistemologies, since, by denying a clear distinction between observer and observed, an Indigenous researcher must engage in a reciprocal exchange with those from whom she hopes to learn. Wilson contrasts a Western worldview that treats knowledge as individual and able to be owned with "the Indigenous paradigm, where knowledge is seen as belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge" (38). Another way to see this is that in the reciprocal process of research and learning, the researcher belongs as much to the world she studies as it does to her.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botanist, poet, and enrolled member of Citizen Potawatomi Nation, articulates this reciprocal exchange in terms of gift-giving, though it is important to distinguish her claim from descriptions of gift-giving common to 20th century anthropology, in which gifts are exchanged as commodities to accrue debt to the

recipient (2013). Kimmerer's conception of knowledge as a gift is meant to evoke the kind of relationship in which, though they inspire an obligation in the sense of strengthening the relationship, gifts require no particular exchange of goods as a response. Rather, this sense of gift-giving calls for attention and care as the prototypically human response, especially in light of the incommensurability of the wisdom we receive from our relations in the world, and what we are able to give in return.[10] For Kimmerer, gifts are inextricably identified with responsibility and relationship. She describes the clash of worldviews that stunned her family as they were forced to migrate away from their ancestral homeland: “In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold” (17). When we see the way knowledge is integrated into the material and spiritual relationships with land, nature, and human and nonhuman relations, commodifying any one of these appears incoherent.

Even from (somewhat) more central positions within the Western academy there is precedent for thinking of knowledge as other than a commodity. Feminist

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[10] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang use incommensurability as a powerful tool to describe moves to settler-innocence that try to incorporate Indigenous worldviews into existing colonial epistemologies in their paper, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" (2012). Incommensurability may be another productive way of thinking about the gulf between University of Minnesota researcher’s and Anishinaabe attitudes toward knowledge.

epistemologists and philosophers of science have argued that thinking about knowledge and research in a way that emphasizes the primacy of the relationships we learn within is a way not only to produce more just knowledge, but also to produce better knowledge. Alison Wylie has articulated this position in relation to archeological research in the midst of larger anxiety about pluralism and academic freedom. In response to negative reactions (articulated in terms of knowledge belonging to everyone) to the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), Wylie claims that in many cases, deciding not to undertake a study in the interest of preserving relationships with descendants of people studied can have positive effects on the knowledge we create (Nicholas and Wylie 2009; Wylie 2015).

One possible consequence if researchers genuinely engage with diverse communities' demands is that researchers may develop relationships that ensure more people from subordinated worldviews have access to and a hand in creating knowledge in the future. Naomi Scheman argues for this as a goal for academics and universities and thinks of it as a "sustainable epistemology" (Scheman 2012). This sustainable epistemology resists treating knowledge like a commodity because it acknowledges the importance of the context within which knowledge is produced: the people who produce it, their position within systems of power and domination, and their vulnerability to the consequences of that knowledge. Still, within the context of the Western university, this perspective is at risk of treating knowledge as a commodity in the long run, since, as Scheman notes, "Western science and the modern university are notoriously omnivorous,

as adaptively capable of fattening on increasingly diverse epistemic diets as neoliberal regimes of multiculturalism are of commoditizing diverse cultures" (486). Given the weight of the historical political role knowledge-producing institutions play, even if put to use within the university these perspectives are no guarantee against commodifying knowledge, though for our purposes they do offer an alternative set of perspectives.

These alternative ways of thinking of knowledge within the university create some hope that collaborations between scientists and communities need not necessarily face the kinds of problems I've described in this paper. Many scholars are doing important and creative work within the space of these relationships, creating and revising methods of community-based participatory research, examining what it means to be an activist-scholar, and creating new ways to address issues of translation and collective authorship (DeLeeuw *et. al.* 2012; Derickson 2015; Nagar 2014). These efforts face an uphill battle against the institutional inertia and incentives to treat knowledge as a commodity.

1.7 Conclusion

I have suggested that the difficulties plaguing attempts to improve the relationship between the University of Minnesota and the Anishinaabe people are symptomatic of larger structural issues within the academic system. Internal university structures entrench the commodification of knowledge. Disciplinary boundaries discourage collaboration and encourage ideas of purity within disciplines, and even interdisciplinary work in the sciences often focuses on the overlapping areas of sub-disciplines, as opposed to

traversing larger differences between, for example, scientific disciplines and philosophy of science. Here, then, is one explanation for the ignorance by scientists in the wild rice case of prominent interventions in philosophy of science that challenge widely-accepted beliefs in the value-neutrality of science, as well as for the dearth of examples of scientists interested in working with Native communities seeking out the wealth of social science and humanities literature on these topics. This insularity protects disciplinary interests and fractures responsibility to the extent that no individual researcher feels empowered to take responsibility for research practices that appear increasingly outside his or her purview (Smith 2012, 71).

These structures are not limited to academia, but are a reflection of the great inheritance of Western universities: imperialism and universalism about the knowledge produced within universities (as well as other privileged sites). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith articulates, this history and its continuing impact on the world reinforce and facilitate the enclosure and commodification of knowledge. She says, "The globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of 'civilized' knowledge. This form of global knowledge is generally referred to as 'universal' knowledge, available to all and not really 'owned' by anyone, that is, until non-Western scholars make claims to it" (Smith 2012, 66). Within this context, we can see that the lasting impacts of imperialism and colonialism, and the governance structures supporting these forms of domination play an important role in the production of

knowledge within universities and in other privileged contexts.

Finally, though universities are some of our most conspicuous knowledge-producing institutions, they are far from the only ones. Certainly, they are not our only institutions that treat knowledge as a commodity, as this is repeatedly affirmed within legislative and judicial bodies, and policy-setting agencies. These institutions, too, are in the business of producing knowledge, and in many cases are much more likely to translate that knowledge into practical results. The effects of these institutions treating knowledge as a commodity have ramifications beyond the (ir)responsible research relationships I have discussed as a primary target within academia. Attention to the extended effects of commodifying knowledge in these contexts ought to be a priority if we are interested in producing knowledge that supports, rather than harms movements for liberation, sovereignty, and justice.

These are some of the entrenched differences in attitude toward knowledge that contribute to my pessimism about the ability for even those scientists and university representatives (including myself) who desire to repair the relationship between the university and the Anishinaabe to be in genuine solidarity. For reasons outside the scope of this paper I do think that solidarity cannot require perfect understanding on the part of those wishing to be in solidarity (I'll call them allies), but an awareness of and sensitivity on the part of allies that they do not fully understand does seem like an important attribute of a relationship of solidarity. Thus, I suspect that unless academic attitudes toward knowledge are exposed, essential misunderstandings on the part of the scientists

will persist and the effort to heal will be stymied. At the same time, addressing these assumptions will not be sufficient for relationship repair; there are a multitude of other historical and material harms that will need to be repaired before trust is restored. Yet even if we restrict our attention to the somewhat more surmountable epistemic issues addressed here, change from the university seems unlikely, given the structural and historical entrenchment of treating knowledge like a commodity. I hope that observing some of the social-epistemic barriers to doing responsible research can help us do more of it by bringing to light values to which we may have thought our research immune. Keeping these limitations in mind can help those of us interested in promoting genuinely collaborative and supportive work within the university to envision the space we must create to facilitate creative, critical, responsible research.

Chapter 2

Privileged Ignorance, 'World'-Traveling, and Epistemic Tourism

White America remains unable to believe that Black America's grievances are real; they are unable to believe this because they cannot face what this says about themselves and their country.
James Baldwin, 1985

There are also those who suffer from what I have called loving, knowing ignorance; those who seem to have understood the need for a better way of perceiving but whose wanting leads them to continue to perceive arrogantly, to distort their objects of perception, all while thinking that they are loving perceivers.
Mariana Ortega, 2006

2.1 Introduction

Pernicious ignorance on the part of the privileged plays an important role in sustaining systems of oppression.[11] Thus, it makes sense that privileged people who wish to subvert oppression would first try to target their own ignorance. For white people interested in

[11] In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills argues that "the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made" (1997 p. 18). See also *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, eds. for a collection of responses to and developments of Mills' work on white ignorance, power, and domination (2007).

undermining systems of white supremacy, the obvious response to the recognition that ignorance is crucial to facilitating racism is to try to learn the things that white-privilege typically prevents white subjects from learning. There are some ways in which this is the right approach, but many ways in which it can fail. In this chapter I will argue that attempting to remediate ignorance of systems of oppression by acquiring knowledge about what it is like to be oppressed is often both a moral and an epistemic failure.

When confronted with their own ignorance about race and racism, white people who hold anti-racist values face a conundrum: how should we learn what we have been insulated from knowing without inflicting further harm on people of color? When this risk of creating further harm is unacknowledged or only a very distant consideration compared to the sensed need to educate oneself, the privileged can find themselves wading blithely into unfamiliar worlds in attempts to correct for the ignorance that both facilitates and is facilitated by their privilege. The impulse to learn what one has been ignorant of— whether that means acquiring mere facts, or a sense of empathy—is good; many failures to live in community or to work productively in coalition toward liberation arise in part from vast gaps in understanding among groups differentially affected by systems of white-supremacy, colonialism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and more.

However, it is also apparent that the persistence of these systems is not merely due to the ignorance by those who benefit from them of their costs. It is important for people in dominant positions to learn what they have been insulated from and to develop empathy for the people they dominate as one step toward no longer dominating; bringing

visibility to the experiences of the oppressed is important in changing power relations. But focusing exclusively or primarily on awareness as a tool to undermine oppression reflects a naive claim that if only privileged groups better understood the experiences of the oppressed, they would join up with fights against oppression. Consider the response from Ricardo Rosselló, governor of Puerto Rico, in response to a recent video of a man near Chicago berating a woman for wearing a shirt depicting the Puerto Rican flag: "It's an issue of education. It's an issue of civil rights, and it's an issue of basic human dignity" (Rosselló 2018). Rosselló's emphasis on education during the interview implied that if the man had known that Puerto Rico is in fact part of the U.S. and that people born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens, he would not have been such a bigot. I see little reason to think that is true. While we are right to recognize that privileged ignorance is a symptom of and contributor to systems of oppression, treating ignorance as the central cause of oppression erases the vast material and social benefits for the privileged that continue to provide an incentive to subjugate other people.

Nonetheless, there are people privileged by these systems who do want to dismantle them, and who recognize in themselves an ignorance that they sense ought to be corrected. This ignorance is often interpreted, both by 'allies' and by activists within groups resisting oppression as ignorance of what life is like for those harmed by systems of oppression, so efforts to learn/teach more about these experiences are often important in movements against oppression. Consider Martin Luther King, Jr.'s tactic of trying to awaken the moderate white majority to the violence and pain of segregation, which

Meena Krishnamurthy has argued was an attempt to demonstrate not only the facts of such a system, but also the experience of living under such oppression (Krishnamurthy 2017).

These tactics can have tremendously positive effects, but the principle behind them can also beget problematic responses. When aspiring allies try to educate themselves about 'what it's like' to experience oppression, they frequently go about this in objectionable ways. For example: there is a worldwide phenomenon of relatively wealthy people taking tours of slums, favelas, barrios, and shantytowns. These tours are often marketed as important, eye-opening rites of passage for privileged progressives wishing to become conscientious global citizens (Odede 2010). Then there is slum tourism's cousin, 'voluntourism,' in which people take a vacation to build a church in rural Mexico, or distribute shoes in Uganda, or a similar service-oriented adventure (Illich 1968). One need not necessarily travel to engage in a well-intentioned but nonetheless annoying, offensive, and harmful information-gathering mission: many aspiring allies interrogate Black or transgender acquaintances about intensely personal aspects of their experiences, or extrapolate ridiculously from sensational media (consider the lamentations from white liberals about 'the Black experience' when the movie *Precious* was released; prior to that particular outbreak, the writer Percival Everett lampooned the behavior in his novel *Erasure*).

These behaviors are morally problematic because they involve the objectification of the people with whom the aspiring ally hopes to be in solidarity, they push the burden

of educating oneself about oppression onto people already burdened by that oppression, and they often seem to absolve responsibility for acting to undermine systems of oppression by replacing it with guilt or 'awareness' as an end-point for allyship. Knowledge of what it's like to be oppressed is not the only kind of knowledge about oppression about which people in positions of domination are systematically ignorant, but it is frequently the one that people try to address when they first begin to grasp their own ignorance, and focusing intently on learning what it's like can preclude more productive kinds of learning.

These practices are epistemically problematic because they often involve interpreting a small number of experiences as representative and because they are insufficiently attentive to the cognitive distortions that created and sustained the ignorance in the first place and continue to influence conclusions drawn from such experiences. If you realize that growing up as a white person under conditions of white supremacy has led you to develop certain cognitive distortions about race and racism, why would you think that those distortions disappear just because you recognize they exist, or because you decide to fight against racism? This latter epistemic failure in particular is a structural problem that makes it difficult to fix privileged ignorance of oppression by seeking to understand *what it's like* for the oppressed. Thus, the examples above aren't just poor executions of an essentially useful or productive strategy (though they are particularly bad cases); to the extent that these practices are intended to solve the epistemic problem that people in positions of privilege develop cognitive distortions that

limit their understanding of that privilege, these knowledge-seeking practices fail because they continue to be influenced by the social and political structures that created the distortions in the first place.

In this paper I am concerned with how relatively privileged people who wish to act in anti-oppressive ways respond to an awareness of the limits of their own understanding of oppression in ways that fall short of what is necessary for building coalitions against oppression. I begin by considering 'world'-travel and epistemic friction-seeking as strategies for combating privileged ignorance, and assess how well they fare when put into practice by those suffering from this kind of ignorance. I then draw on the resources of tourism studies to guide our attention toward the social, political, and material circumstances in which we suffer ignorance and produce knowledge. Recognizing that the political structures of our world shape the way we produce knowledge suggests that the ignorant privileged should not rely on filling in their lacunae with facts about the experience of being oppressed in order to counteract their ignorance, since the epistemic vices and cognitive distortions that created the ignorance in the first place continue to influence knowledge-creation even after they are acknowledged. Instead, the privileged progressive should undertake to learn about the provenance and purpose of her ignorance and the structures of oppression that facilitate and are facilitated by that ignorance. This chapter is one attempt to pursue that latter project— by trying to understand how the structures of domination influence epistemic

processes, I aim to demarcate domains of learning that may be more politically and epistemically productive.

2.2 'World'-traveling and epistemic friction

To demonstrate the claim that it is problematic to attempt to fix privileged ignorance by learning about what being oppressed is like, I want to discuss some philosophical responses to the problem of privileged ignorance: 'world'-traveling as introduced by María Lugones in 1987, and its more narrowly epistemic relative, epistemic friction, discussed by José Medina twenty-five years later. Both of these concepts describe important features of cross-cultural communication and experience, both pay close attention to the role of power in shaping our relationships, and both face serious problems when deployed by people occupying dominant social positions, even when those people intend to undermine their own dominance.

Lugones' description of 'world'-traveling primarily describes the compulsory travel between world-views that people of marginalized cultures experience (for example, the ability of and need for a Latina woman in the U.S. to read and navigate both her Latina world and the white/Anglo world that dominates) and discusses the value of this skill for self-preservation, communication, coalition-building, and resistance to domination. Lugones suggests that willfully engaging in 'world'-travel may also be helpful for people who have been taught to ignore, exclude, and separate dominated others but who no longer want to do this to see what they have been insensitive to:

> By traveling to other people's 'worlds,' we discover that there are 'worlds' in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable. (2003, 97)

This 'world'-traveling must be animated by a "playful attitude [which] involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the 'worlds' we inhabit playfully, and thus openness to risk the ground that constructs us as oppressors or as oppressed or as collaborating or colluding with oppression" (96). Lugones contrasts her conception of playfulness with an agonistic one that focuses on competition and on winning a game for which the rules are known and the uncertainty is about who will win. Attempts at 'world'-travel animated by this agonistic playfulness are bound to fail because they are not characterized by openness to surprise, to new conceptions of self and other, or to the possibility of different rules from those with which the participants are familiar, or a lack of rules altogether; "Their traveling is always a trying that is tied to conquest, domination, reduction of what they meet to their own sense of order, and erasure of the other 'world'" (95).

Medina's prescription for the ignorant-privileged to seek epistemic friction parallels the epistemic elements of Lugones' recommendation. In *The Epistemology of Resistance* Medina discusses the epistemic imbalances that accompany, facilitate, and resist oppression. These include a special propensity among the materially privileged to

develop certain epistemic vices like arrogance (which Medina describes as "enjoying too much cognitive esteem"), laziness and closed-mindedness (2013, 32).

> Epistemic vices (such as epistemic arrogance) are flaws that are not incidental and transitory, but *structural and systematic*: they involve attitudes deeply rooted in one's personality and cognitive functioning. Epistemic vices are composed of attitudinal structures that permeate one's entire cognitive life: they involve attitudes toward oneself and others in testimonial exchanges, attitudes toward the evidence available and one's assessment of it, and so on. These vices affect one's capacity to learn from others and from the facts; they inhibit the capacity of self-correction and of being open to corrections from others (which requires some amount of epistemic humility and open-mindedness). (31)

Letting our epistemic vices go unchecked has disastrous implications. "Continual epistemic neglect creates blinders that one allows to grow around one's epistemic perspective, constraining and slanting one's vantage point" (33). As these blinders take hold, an epistemically vicious person can develop and reinforce *meta-insensitivity*, which Medina also calls "meta-blindness," marking its relationship to the familiar pronouncements of "color-blindness" or "gender-blindness" (in myopic attempts at equal-opportunity hiring, for example)[12]: willful, even lauded, refusals to see; "…the hermeneutically privileged have a pronounced *insensitivity to insensitivity*, a sort of *meta-blindness* (or meta-insensitivity), a special difficulty in realizing and appreciating the limitations of their horizon of understanding." (75)

Considering remedies for epistemic vices such as an arrogant overestimation of one's epistemic abilities, Medina champions experiences of epistemic friction, or

[12] Like Medina, I do not intend the use of 'blindness' here to associate moral or epistemic ineptitude with vision impairment. Medina retains the term in order to invoke problematic but common metaphorical uses like 'color-blindness'; I use the term when he does, but prefer 'insensitivity' otherwise.

circumstances that challenge an individual's world-view enough to cause a realization that there are other ways of experiencing and knowing the world than those to which the person in question has access. "As an antidote to this meta-blindness, we need to appeal to the *principles of epistemic friction*, actively searching for more alternatives than those noticed, acknowledging them (or their possibility), attempting to engage with them whenever possible, and seeking equilibrium among them" (78).

It is here worth noting a concern about epistemic friction as a remedy for meta-insensitivity, which has to do with a general conundrum about needing to employ particular virtues to fix related vices. This concern is not new; accusations of circularity[13] against Aristotelian accounts of virtue abound, though Aristotle's own view may be able to escape them (Peterson 1992). Likewise, the prescription to seek epistemic friction isn't strictly circular, but it is full of difficulties that result from a kind of circularity. The problem with suggesting epistemic friction as an antidote to meta-insensitivity is that a person must be sensitive enough to see alternative viewpoints when they are present, which is one of the skills the profoundly meta-insensitive person lacks. If a person does manage to get started on the project of correcting her meta-insensitivity (perhaps she becomes friends with someone who has a different viewpoint, and after a while,

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[13] Here I have in mind accounts that question how a person who has been habituated into vice, for example, may learn to develop virtue, given that the only account we get of the development of virtue and vice is one of habituation from a young age. (See, for example, David Hurka, "Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, wrong, and wrong" in *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Julia Peters, Routledge: New York, 2012. Sandra Peterson, "Apparent Circularity in Aristotle's Account of Right Action in Nicomachean Ethics" in *Apeiron*, 1992, includes a detailed catalogue of accusations of circularity.)

something about the friend's perspective 'clicks'), the tension between epistemic bad-habits and concerted efforts to mediate them manifests as a slow, frustrating dynamic of striving and failing. As with many attempts to teach ourselves new skills, the process is characterized by trial and error. This dynamic is compatible with improvement, but we should note that in this context each error runs the risk of reinforcing epistemic vices and harming other people. These risks should not dissuade us from trying since doing nothing is another way of perpetuating existing harms, but they give us another reason to make ourselves accountable to others so that we may learn when we have made harmful errors and seek help in correcting them; they emphasize the importance of outside perspectives and relationships that allow us to hear them.

Though Lugones' 'world'-travel and Medina's epistemic friction do not map onto each other perfectly, there are many ways in which they speak of the same activity. This activity—opening oneself to a world that is not one's own—is essential to creating good epistemic agents in general, and more specific to my concerns here: allies in liberatory movements. I suspect that, implicitly, many people attempting to 'world'-travel from positions of dominance are doing so with the intention of cultivating epistemic friction. One part of learning to see the subjugated other as a lively, resisting person—which is at least one of the goals of 'world'-travel from relatively dominant positions—is learning to appreciate their view of the world, and to allow that view to challenge and influence one's own. That is, one of the goals of 'world'-traveling is to encounter epistemic friction. Yet both are subject to concerns about whether successful 'world'-travel or

epistemic friction-seeking in this context is possible, and about the larger consequences of people in positions of social domination pursuing these aims.

Shannon Sullivan has argued that 'world'-traveling can actually contribute to white-privilege because of a tendency for white people to develop what she calls "ontological expansiveness," or a sense of belonging and comfort in a variety of worlds —linguistic, geographical, cultural, etc.—even when those worlds are not "for" them (2006). Lugones has two reasons to object to characterizing the activity Sullivan describes as 'world'-travel: ontological expansiveness is a version of the colonialist travel Lugones explicitly rejects, and one of the distinctive experiences that allows one to identify different 'worlds' is feeling differentially "at ease within" them. If many white people are already at ease within the vast majority of spaces, even when these spaces were not designed for them to feel at ease within, their presence within those 'worlds' does not seem to count as travel at all; one must must be sufficiently open and affected by the space to sense that it is not one's own 'world' in order to travel to it. Setting aside whether such an ontologically expansive person actually 'world'-travels, the critique brings up some risks of attempting to 'world'-travel from a dominant position: ontological expansiveness can turn the attempt to travel into an expansion of privilege by claiming more space that belongs, in some sense, to others. This kind of ontological expansiveness means that 'world'-traveling can end up with white people laying claim to 'worlds' that were previously zones of comfort, escape from, resistance to white dominance in other spheres.

The epistemic analog to this ontological expansiveness involves unconsciously employing the epistemic vices one wishes to thwart in a way that assimilates new information into one's existing worldview. When a privileged person recognizes that he is subject to cognitive distortions that produce ignorance, those distortions do not simply go away, leaving the gaps in knowledge to be filled unproblematically. The epistemic vices that accompany privilege can prevent one from even recognizing experiences as occasions of epistemic conflict. This tendency may assert itself in interpreting new, difficult information in ways that fail to acknowledge the serious challenge to one's worldview.

An example: an acquaintance from my fiction book club and I were having an argument about the relative values of sameness and difference in building just communities. He is a very kind, peace-and-love sort of person, and was arguing that fundamentally we all want and need the same things, and that this should be the basis of our coming together to create a world where we could all get along. I was arguing that people of different backgrounds and identities often have very different, sometimes conflicting needs, and that the project of building just communities needs to take the differences of social identity seriously and provide means for sustaining identities that are historically, socially, and personally meaningful, rather than trying to root out this difference in the interest of harmony. Infuriatingly, my friend's single-minded focus on sameness and agreement extended to the point that he refused to admit even that we disagreed at all, and I left the conversation feeling like I had been talking to a wall.

Likewise, if I cannot recognize testimony, narrative, or experiences as conveying new information that challenges what I already know, I fail to experience or be changed by epistemic friction, though I may think I have done what is necessary to court it.

Mariana Ortega has described a version of this phenomenon prevalent among white feminist academics as "loving, knowing ignorance," a kind of "arrogant perception that involves self-deception and the quest for more knowledge about the object of perception—the perceiver believes himself or herself to be perceiving lovingly even though this is not the case, and the perceiver wishes to make knowledge claims about the object of perception, even though such claims are not checked or questioned" (2006, 63). The knowingly, lovingly ignorant fail to make substantive use of remedies to the instrumentalization and erasure of women of color offered by Audre Lorde, Elizabeth Spelman, and María Lugones, and instead settle for superficial attempts at learning about (for this is rarely conceived of as learning *from*) the people whose struggle they want to support.

There is also the risk that 'world'-traveling will turn into a kind of political tourism, which Ortega describes as "fleeting moments of experimenting with being political while not really being committed to effecting change" (2016, 141). This kind of dalliance into politics can take on a self-aggrandizing aesthetic, characterized by the desire to earn credibility from having 'world'-traveled, incorporating a sense of worldliness (hipness, 'wokeness') into one's image without a sustained commitment to effecting change. The concern with projecting a politically engaged image can range from

social media photos of smiling white teenagers surrounded by poor Third-World children, to "Water is Sacred" tee-shirts, and often involves some amount of turning the Other into an object of aesthetic contemplation or adornment. I am not sure whether a sustained commitment to struggle takes the sting out of the aestheticization of that struggle; the kind of social credit accumulated by performances of radicalism or commitment to social justice can have stultifying effects even within communities that are deeply dedicated to their cause. It is easier to say that at least *mere* aesthetic engagement with a political movement does not achieve the goals Lugones and Medina have in mind, and certainly not without the attending complications of commodifying social and political movements. Yet we need to balance these concerns with recognition that symbols, representation, and visibility are very important for justice movements.

A confusion about 'world'-traveling persists in interpretations of Lugones' theory and in actual attempts to 'world'-travel: a failure to distinguish "identifying with" from "identifying as." While Lugones first articulates 'world'-travel in the context of her own need to identify with her mother (instead of perceiving her arrogantly), this shouldn't be mistaken for Lugones' need to identify *as* her mother (2003, 86). As Sonia Kruks points out, attempting to 'world'-travel on the basis of identifying *as* the people to whose 'world' one travels demands an untenable metaphysics (2001). But this is not merely an interpretive misunderstanding; the conflation persists in practical attempts at solidarity as well, from trivial statements of identification ("Je suis Paris"), to emphases on sameness as a basis for political action ("gay people are just the same as straight people; we just

want to have the same rights to be married"), to the somewhat absurd, but not uncommon adoption/appropriation of a culture one visits (I have in mind a phenomenon especially common with privileged young liberals, who, to take a recent example, dressed themselves up in the rituals and norms of Indigenous Dakota Access Pipeline resisters after a stay at the Standing Rock Reservation resistance camp). Identification *as* the people whose 'world' one visits is deeply problematic since it erases the real, significant differences that characterize the relationship of domination/privilege that create the need for 'world'-travel in the first place. When we erase these differences, we fail to understand the material conditions of our relationships and we lose access to "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (Lorde 1984, 111). This kind of identification also often includes cultural and epistemic appropriation, with their attendant material and immaterial effects.

On the other hand, identification *with* a community seems less problematic. Recognizing the liveliness, humanity, creativity, vulnerability, capacity to trick and deceive, that are common to all of us is an important part of building solidarity and challenging the systems that would have us believe otherwise. Erroneously identifying *as* a particular social or political group actually creates barriers to the more productive attitude of identifying *with*.

Lugones is emphatic that play is an important part of 'world'-travel. By this she means that the kind of attitude that leaves one flexible and open to change in the rules or one's understanding of the rules, a willingness to explore, to give ground, etc. is central to

‘world’-travel. But Sue Campbell and Mariana Ortega both point out the problems that arise when this element of play is at work in ‘world’-travel on the part of the dominant. For one thing, the sense of having expectations unsettled, and of giving ground will rarely *feel* like play to the privileged. Instead it is likely to be unsettling at the most benign, and more often quite frightening (Campbell 1999). Ortega points out that play can suggest that there is little at stake (2016). From the dominant, encouragement to have a playful attitude while ‘world’-traveling can morph into a familiar kind of colonialist diversion in an exotic locale, or ‘dressing up’ in another culture, as with many misguided attempts to identify as the community one visits. In spite of Lugones' own description of playfulness, which draws a distinction between this kind of colonialist diversion and the openness she’s calling for, playfulness might be a misleading attitude to encourage in aspiring ‘world’-travelers from dominant positions. The attributes of playfulness that Lugones values are important for ‘world'-travel that hopes to avoid becoming dominating itself, but they are a tall order when the feelings that usually attend risking one’s position, even if this is what one values, are defensiveness, fear, and anxiety. With care and effort, we can slowly cultivate more comfort with these feelings, but it is not a simple choice not to feel them; a strong voluntarism about these attitudes seems unreasonable.

2.3 Epistemic tourism

Many of the critiques of ‘world’-traveling parallel concerns about travel and tourism in the ordinary sense; it may be useful to think of them as worries that ‘world’-travel, when performed from a position of dominance, can turn into a kind of *epistemic*

tourism. This connection is useful because the work done in tourism studies can draw our attention to the political, economic, and symbolic power structures that shape tourism as an activity. These attributes of tourism would be likely to put most people off recommending ordinary tourism as an unproblematic remedy for insularity— though *travel* frequently is recommended, and there is a common perception that people from the U.S. don't typically value international travel; a claim often lamented and offered as one explanation for U.S. exceptionalism, ignorance and arrogance about the rest of the world.

Lugones has argued that arrogant perception (leading to agonistic travel) is one distinguishing feature between 'world'-travel and what I call epistemic tourism. Are there material and social structures that facilitate arrogant or agonistic attitudes when relatively privileged people attempt to 'world'-travel? Taking a closer look at the structures that distinguish ordinary tourism from ordinary travel can help us identify structures that influence the epistemic forms of these activities and create a tendency for attempts at 'world'-travel from the privileged to take on the arrogant and dominating character of epistemic tourism.

At a basic level, tourism is a type of travel, one special aspect of which is that it is voluntary, whereas travel as a broad category can encompass movement of varying levels of compulsion. For a sense of the breadth, consider the wanderings of refugees, emigration from hostile environments, immigration to promising ones, travel for work, vacations, research, family, escape. One chooses to be a tourist, and a tourist typically chooses where she visits and for how long; a tourist can return home.

Tourism is characteristically about consuming an environment, experience, or culture. As sociologists Elisabeth Cunin and Christian Rinaudo observe, "tourism functions well on a rationale that allows the passing visitor to consume the objects of an exotic yet domesticated world" (2008, 282). Though tourists (and those advertising to tourists) often describe tourism as a tool for self-actualization and the development of autonomy, the pretense that this activity is accessible to everyone and operates outside of the realm of consumption "ignores the basic determinants of social differentiation and material inequalities that determine peoples' [*sic*] ability to consume," and glosses over the way "the 'freedom' to consume [tourist products, destinations, etc.] often comes at the expense of someone else's welfare, whether through the appropriation/privatization of public lands for tourism development, the displacement of peasant populations, resource degradation, and the intensified commodification of labour power and/or exploitative working practices" (Bianchi 2009, 495).

Tourism is not just for the politically unaware, either; enlightenment is not what differentiates tourism from travel, and the narcissistic aetheticization of political awareness is highly visible in contemporary tourism. Raoul Bianchi, drawing on the anthropologist John Hutnyk, describes this as "revolutionary tourism," that is, "the seeking out of places and souvenirs associated with political struggle as part of one's travel experiences—in which the inherent irony of seeking hope in foreign struggles whilst failing to advance a revolutionary politics at home, is all too apparent" (496).

Tourism is characteristically practiced by people in privileged social and economic positions, whether they are politically conscious or not. And even when practiced by the politically aware, tourism requires and partakes of structures of capitalism and colonialism that allow visitors who can afford it to purchase experiences and souvenirs of exotic(ized) worlds, often sanitized or curated to fulfill the expectations of the tourist. Tourism, even when self-consciously practiced to increase one's exposure to the world outside one's experience, requires a location that is able to accommodate visitors, infrastructure for reasonably comfortable travel, at least nominally hospitable hosts. That is, the immaterial experiences of tourism—at best: awe, expanded understanding of the world, a new perspective on one's own norms—require a material world that allows for these experiences. They also often, but not always, include fetishizing the locals—objectifying them, or imbuing them with a kind of mystical naive wisdom, and generally failing to engage them the way one would an equal.

Because of the parallel I have drawn between tourism and epistemic tourism on the one hand and travel and 'world'-travel on the other, it would seem that I think a distinguishing feature of tourism in contrast to travel is that tourism involves some particular kind of moral failure, but I do not think this is true. Tourism does not always commit harm over and above that which attends the colonialist and capitalist social relations that support tourism. While objectification of the people, culture, and place toured is a frequent attribute of tourism, it is not a necessary feature. In my own experience, these features more frequently accompany tourism when there is a very large

gap between the power of the tourist and that of the toured (contrast the stereotypical attitudes of an American tourist in Paris and an American tourist in Nairobi). What I wish to draw attention to is the way in which tourism not only relies on but tends to function in harmony with structures of colonialism and capitalism, whereas travel may transgress them.

Both travel and tourism are embedded in social, political, and material relations that influence who practices them and how they are practiced. Drawing a connection between ordinary travel/tourism and the epistemic versions of these activities should urge us to consider capitalist and colonialist social relations as important features that shape and distinguish 'world'-travel and epistemic tourism.[14] Just as those engaged in the agonistic play with which Lugones contrasts her own open, creative playfulness are linked to conquest and domination, epistemic tourism operates within a system where the tourist has power over the toured, consumes knowledge and culture, interprets information within her existing system of understanding and takes herself to have contributed to her own personal and larger social development. Processes of epistemic tourism reinscribe the systems of colonialism and capitalism that, at least superficially, the tourist aims to subvert through her tourism. Epistemic tourism is suffused with the capitalist, colonialist, and otherwise dominating norms of ordinary tourism, and so we

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[14] Though I continue to think the connection is useful, I will point out one way in which the analogy fails: while I have described ordinary tourism as one kind of travel, epistemic tourism does not qualify as a kind of 'world'-travel on Lugones' view. It may qualify as an attempt to seek epistemic friction, since Medina's concept does not have success built into the definition.

should not assume that what is learned as a result is free from the distortions that accompany these modes of domination just because the intention on the part of the epistemic tourist is to correct the ignorance that has resulted from those distortions in the past.

Other elements of the analogy also help illuminate what transforms 'world'-travel practiced from dominant positions into epistemic tourism. The voluntariness of attempts at 'world'-travel from dominant positions parallels tourism more than it does the compulsory travel demanded of oppressed subjects. Because this has been frequently misunderstood, it bears repeating: the travel to dominant 'worlds' that marginalized subjects experience is very often compulsory. Contrary to Sandra Bartky's lament that marginalized women ought to learn to see things from her point of view, there need be no recommendation that marginalized women seek out these experiences because they often cannot help but have them (1997).[15] This is part of what it means for there to be a dominant 'world' or 'worlds;' they demand participation by claiming and dominating social and physical space. This is the enormous privilege that distinguishes even successful 'world'-traveling *from* dominant positions from 'world'-traveling *to* dominating worlds; for the dominant person, traveling to another 'world' is a choice.

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15 As I attempt to read charitably the essay in which Bartky says this, and to place it in the context of the rest of her work, I acknowledge that Bartky is describing the strategic value of understanding the psychological state of the privileged and that she is asking difficult questions about the challenges of building coalition against oppression. While I think it is true that some level of mutual empathy and identification is important for successful and healthy relationships, changing the material circumstances and asymmetries of power within these relationships is probably a precondition for getting to that point.

Raoul Bianchi has critiqued the 'critical turn' in tourism studies for focusing too single-mindedly on the symbolic exchanges and interactions in tourism while ignoring the material power relations that simultaneously shape tourism. It is worth keeping this critique in mind when we translate to 'world'-traveling and epistemic tourism in order to acknowledge that our ways of acquiring knowledge are tied up with acquiring status, spending money, and a number of other less-obviously epistemic activities. Adhering to the notion that knowledge acquisition is importantly distinct from these other activities (though perhaps concurrent with them) conceals the ways in which activities of knowledge acquisition can cause material harm. It also obscures the way knowledge acquisition works differently for people depending on their situation within differentially distributed social, political, and material power— a central theme of feminist epistemology, but which can sometimes be forgotten especially in analysis that centers white women.

2.4 Alternatives to Epistemic Tourism

So knowledge acquisition is not exempt from the power structures that shape our social, political, and material world. But the inclination on the part of aspiring allies to learn what they can to ameliorate suffering, to educate themselves to help or be in solidarity with others' struggles is understandable and even laudable, even if in both principle and practice it is neither as epistemically effective nor as politically helpful as needed. Recommendations to 'world'-travel or to seek epistemic friction, when deployed from positions of domination, are distorted by the very systems they are intended to

diminish and transform into attempts to understand the experiences of subject of domination through epistemic tourism. What can be recommended that will avoid this distortion?

Aspiring allies might be better off trying to learn about the provenance of their own ignorance of oppression than trying to understand what it's like to live subject to that oppression. We ought to resist the claim that mere ignorance is the cause of oppression (so if only people knew better, oppression would not exist), but recognize the role manufactured ignorance plays as a symptom and tool of oppression. Privileged people wishing to be helpful allies must interrogate whether we are as ignorant of systems of oppression as we claim to be, since false claims of ignorance allow us to disavow responsibility for oppression, all the while idly wishing it would stop. Lenape and Potawotomi education scholar Susan Dion describes this behavior as casting oneself as "the perfect stranger" in the context of non-native people's frequent claims that they know nothing about Indigenous peoples. This tactic is an often reflexive way of refusing to acknowledge any existing relationship between oneself and Indigenous people; if you don't know anything about the history of settler colonialism then you can't be blamed for having done nothing to fix it (2009, 2016).

Eve Tuck (Unangax) and Wayne Yang's description of "settler moves to innocence" recounts a similar process of claiming ignorance as a sort of defensive stance to avoid taking responsibility for colonialist harms (2012). Tuck and Yang describe four moves toward innocence: settler nativism (referred to by Vine Deloria, Jr. as the "Indian-

grandmother complex"), adoption fantasies and appropriating Indigenous cultures, equivocating on colonialism by characterizing all struggles against imperialism as anti- or decolonial without addressing specific context, and focusing on "decolonizing consciousness" to the exclusion of material decolonization. "Settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positioning that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware." (2012, 10)

The critiques from Dion, Tuck, and Yang emphasize the importance of recognizing that one central role that ignorance plays in systems of oppression is that of excusing the oppressor. These critiques encourage us to move beyond the mere fact of our ignorance and toward understanding its purpose. So one positive recommendation for a person at the point of recognizing genuine ignorance or declaring ignorance (and these may feel much the same to the person doing the recognizing), is to learn about the ignorance itself rather than attempting to fill in that ignorance with facts obtained through epistemic tourism. We can ask ourselves: Why was I ignorant for so long? What purpose does/did this ignorance serve? What narratives does it allow to persist? What forces allowed or encouraged or enforced its perpetuation?

Shannon Sullivan's paper "White Ignorance and Colonial Oppression: Or, Why I Know So Little about Puerto Rico" is a an example of responding to ignorance by asking these sort of questions (2007). Sullivan notes that she is "less interested here in ignorance

as a simple lack of knowledge than [she is] in ignorance as an active production of particular kinds of knowledges for various social and political purposes" (154). The distinction can be subtle, since Sullivan's approach to understanding her ignorance does involve learning a large number of facts about the colonial history of the U.S. in Puerto Rico, but crucially, it also involves recognizing the relationship between knowledge, ignorance, and power, as well as learning about the 'knowledge'[16] produced and distributed among white people from the U.S. in order to justify continuing colonial projects in Puerto Rico.

In addition to (or as part of the process of) understanding the contextualized role of ignorance, aspiring allies should focus on learning about the structures that ignorance supports: the relations of power that facilitate well-being for some groups at the cost of the suffering (exploitation, dehumanization, poverty, shame, cultural and material dispossession, and so on) of others. This is in contrast to learning "what it's like" for those who suffer the costs of these structures, though they are easy to confuse, since we have good reason to think that it is easiest to see the structures of privilege and oppression from the perspective of the oppressed.

The complex relationship between the visibility of these structures and their power over one's life can easily lead to the belief that in order for a privileged person to understand the structures underlying their privilege they need to learn what it's like to be

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16 "Knowledge" is in quotation marks here so I can avoid committing to whether what Sullivan (along with most of us in the U.S.) was taught ought to be described as knowledge. Certainly many of the things we are taught about Puerto Rico are not *true*, but they are treated as knowledge.

oppressed. One concern about the practice of epistemic tourism that sticks with me is that it is evidence of a refusal to accept the testimony of oppressed people about their own experiences; instead an aspiring ally tries to go out and experience oppression himself with his own eyes. In addition to being epistemically unjust, this urge reflects a misunderstanding of how privileged ignorance works; why should I trust my own interpretation given what I know to be my cognitive limitations in these particular areas? If I grasp the way my ignorance of systems of oppression works to support that oppression, at the very least I do not have any reason to think my interpretation or experience of what it might be like to suffer under systems of domination is more reliable or valuable than those of people whose perspectives have not been blinkered by a lifetime of ignorance.

Luckily, the relationship between experiences of oppression and insight into oppressive structures is not so tight that one must have those experiences in order to understand at all. Mills, Medina, Linda Martín Alcoff, Paula Moya, Satya Mohanty, and more have all emphasized this looseness while discussing the sort of insight into oppressive structures that experiences of being oppressed can facilitate. All hold that suffering oppression is neither necessary nor sufficient for developing these kinds of insights, but that nonetheless there is an important connection between identity, experience, and knowledge.[17] As Medina puts it, the vices and virtues that tend to accompany privilege and oppression are not exclusive to those groups, are not universal

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17 This connection will be taken up in greater detail in the following chapter.

within those groups, and are not automatic features of membership in those groups (2013, 43). Rather, as Moya interprets the conflict expressed by Cherríe Moraga of feeling strongly that her experiences of the world shape what she sees and how she sees it, without wanting to be reduced to her social and political identities: "The 'physical realities of our lives' will profoundly *inform* the contours and the context of both our theories and our knowledge" (2002, 37).

Finding ways to understand the structures of oppression without needing to have the experiences of being oppressed will be an important part of educating the privileged while minimizing harm to the oppressed. In the meantime, and as we continue developing these skills of learning to work in coalition, it is important to keep in mind the ways in which seeking knowledge is embedded in a material and social world, and that our knowledge-seeking is not morally or politically neutral. We ought to recognize that we often know more than we think we know, and that we are taught ignorance in order to serve particular political purposes. And when we recognize that the reproduction of this ignorance is built into the structure of various forms of domination, let us also recognize that pursing knowledge within those same structures is unlikely to rectify either the ignorance or the domination.

Chapter 3

Experts, Trust, and the Responsibility of Engagement

3.1 Introduction: Identity and epistemic dependence

A few months ago, the radio program *This American Life* aired an introductory segment in which the radio producer expressed dismay at the realization of how many beliefs she had for which she had no direct evidence. This realization was provoked by a motivational speaker who pointed out how few audience members had direct evidence that the earth rotates around the sun rather than the other way around. The producer's worry was not skeptical in nature; it was framed instead around epistemic responsibility in the context of the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and its aftermath. The epistemic worries ascendent in this period are often centered around the proliferation of "fake news"—of people asserting false claims as true, and accusing claims they disagree with of being false. Less often, the conversation attends to related concerns about an increasingly divided society and a disturbing inability to communicate across different frames of reference.

While I think that epistemic responsibility *is* seriously lacking and that we all ought to be more diligent in employing our best epistemic skills, we must balance this

take on the crisis with one that addresses the irreducible role of testimony and trust in building knowledge and in sustaining political communities. In the radio story, the producer responds to the recognition of her naivety by vowing to be more diligent about learning for herself, rather than taking on faith the assertions of conventional wisdom. While this response is admirable in some ways, if the producer insists on finding direct evidence for every one of her beliefs, she will seriously limit what beliefs she can have, due to limitations of time and access. A different response may not carry such a high price: the producer could try to understand when and whether she is justified in believing information given by others, to cultivate the skill of *trusting wisely* (Jones 1999).

When a person is accustomed to thinking of herself as autonomous—as the final decision maker on how her life goes, as responsible for her own success or failure—it can be disconcerting to acknowledge the extent of her dependence on others. Pointing out the extent of our dependence (on the care of the people who raise us, on teachers, on health-care workers, on roads, on farmers and laborers, on the historical and continuing exploitation of land and people treated as natural resources) undermines the modern myth of the independent, self-made man. We are all dependent, to greater and lesser degrees, with respect to knowledge as much as our physical and psychological development, mobility, employment, and so on. We cannot have direct evidence for much of what we know; a huge amount of our knowledge depends on the testimony of others (Coady 1992). And while we may be able to establish some independent justification for why we ought to believe something we learn through testimony, sometimes we cannot. For some

of our knowledge we are irreducibly dependent on other people (Hardwig 1985). And yet, this need not frighten us. We, like the radio producer, may instead direct our attention to understanding what kinds of relationship put us in a good position to learn well from others, and how to cultivate the skill or disposition of trusting wisely.

Epistemic dependence is especially noticeable in situations where we find ourselves novices with respect to an area of knowledge in which others have expertise. Most of us are fairly comfortable (though less so, recently) outsourcing knowledge about medical treatments or gravitational waves or heliocentrism to doctors and scientists. There are some domains of knowledge which we do not expect ourselves to have mastered, and which we entrust to others (as though it were in our control to do otherwise!). Yet there are other areas of knowledge that evoke more discomfort when we suggest that there are experts and novices at all. For example, we may be tempted to think that we each possess equal capacities for moral reasoning, and thus may be suspicious of claims of moral expertise from others. Yet as Karen Jones has argued, in spite of the good reasons for wanting to retain a kind of autonomy about moral reasoning, in many cases it is epistemically and morally responsible to defer to moral experts.

Areas of knowledge that have to do with public life are, in general, hard for many of us to accept as domains in which the epistemically responsible thing to do is to defer to other people's expertise. In this paper I will briefly argue that this is the responsible thing to do, then I will focus on some of the difficulties of doing it responsibly. Drawing on the

literature in epistemology of ignorance, which argues that material privilege comes with and reinforces the production of ignorance about the circumstances of domination that produce that privilege, I will discuss the challenges for the privileged person who recognizes herself as a novice on these topics to determine how to learn and whom to learn from.

A frequent response to recognizing that one is ignorant is to seek out for oneself the knowledge one can identify is lacking. Yet, as the growing literature in epistemology of ignorance points out, privileged ignorance about the structures and consequences of domination (racism, sexism, colonialism at the like) consists not merely in the absence of knowledge, but in the positive production of false information, of subtle (or not so subtle) encouragement to look away, to *actively* not-know. Over time, these habits create durable (though hopefully not incorrigible) epistemic vices or cognitive distortions. José Medina provides a detailed account of how social circumstances in which a person is granted too much cognitive esteem can result in the development of epistemic arrogance, how the privilege of not needing to know (e.g., the intricacies and burdens of the U.S. immigration system[18]) can result in a lack of curiosity or epistemic laziness, and how the

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[18] I have in mind common misunderstandings of how immigration to the U.S. works. I frequently hear calls for immigrants to "just get in line" and wait their turn, or suggestions that giving DACA recipients permanent legal status would amount to letting them "cut in line". Setting aside whether order of arrival is a just way to address these matters, this is just not how immigration works in the U.S.. There are a few incredibly restrictive paths to apply for legal residency, many of which are constrained by quotas, and a prospective immigrant's experience of which varies dramatically depending on finances, access to lawyers, access to influential government representatives, and other features the government does not make transparent. These bear little resemblance to a line, and they do not apply to all types of immigrants, many of whom have no line whatsoever that they qualify to "get into."

distinct need not to know (e.g., the incredible violence of the day-to-day operations of oppression) can produce a kind of closed-mindedness to alternative perspectives as an unconscious defense mechanism.

These epistemic vices may harden into what Medina calls "meta-blindness": when agents whose sense of epistemic autonomy has been reinforced by social circumstances (i.e., they have rarely bumped up against the limits of their understanding) develop a profound inability to identify their own inability to see alternative points of view. "This meta-blindness protects the first-order forms of blindness, which become particularly recalcitrant and resistant to change and improvement: cognitive deficits that are not even recognized are especially difficult to correct, and their correction will require transformations that the meta-blind subjects are ill-prepared to carry out by themselves" (2013, 76). Even in cases where a person is not affected by a total meta-insensitivity—it seems to me that meta-insensitivity may be partial, or narrow with respect to particular domains of knowledge—correcting the first-order vices will be a serious challenge and will require help.

In the circumstances I am considering here, the novice does recognize that she is a novice with respect to some area of knowledge. Yet we have good reason to think that epistemic vices and cognitive distortions continue to affect a person's knowledge production even when she becomes aware that they exist. So seeking to correct for this ignorance by employing one's own epistemic resources is not likely to be successful on its own. Additionally, it involves a failure to trust marginalized people's analyses of their

own marginalization, or at least an arrogant belief that one's own skills of perception and analysis, distorted though they may be, are more trustworthy than the testimony of people whose social position and identity makes them much less likely to be subject to the same distortions. As John Hardwig argues, "a belief based partly on second-hand evidence, will be epistemically superior to any belief based completely on direct empirical evidence whenever the relevant evidence becomes too extensive or too complex for any one person to gather it all" (1991, 698). This is even more obviously true when we have reason to think that the direct empirical evidence may be distorted by the epistemic habits shaped by systems of domination.

Yet the alternative ought not be mindless deference either. Medina's suggestion for correcting epistemic vices, including the second-order vice of meta-insensitivity, is to cultivate what he calls epistemic friction. For a subject who has developed epistemic vices from living a life with insufficient epistemic resistance, experiences of epistemic friction can help by "forcing one to be self-critical, to compare and contrast one's beliefs, to meet justificatory demands, to recognize cognitive gaps" (50). Thoughtless deference in the face of new information is not a way to cultivate friction so much as another extreme of avoiding resistance. The solution can't just be, for example, a mandate that white people trust anything and everything people of color tell them, even everything people of color tell them narrowly with respect to racism. In addition to evading epistemic friction, this kind of credulity faces the problem that people's views often conflict. We cannot believe every claim of a particular community without being

inconsistent, since there is always variation and conflict within communities, no matter how unified they may seem to outsiders. This kind of credulity also fails to recognize that people have complex reasons to deceive or conceal, and it concedes too much epistemic responsibility to people who already bear the weight of too many unjustly distributed social burdens. Finally, this kind of politically motivated gullibility is not really a way of engaging or building healthy relationships with people who are different from us. If the goal of learning more is to work toward healthy political communities, we should keep this value in mind to guide how we try to learn; epistemic practices that strengthen relationships of domination would not help achieve this goal, even if they were otherwise epistemically responsible.

The epistemically and morally responsible behavior for people privileged with respect to a system of oppression is to practice dynamic or critical trust in the experts—most often, those who are oppressed under that system. This kind of practice requires time, and the experience of trusting and learning changes throughout that time, which is why I describe it as dynamic. I will elaborate on that point later, but for now I will start at the beginning of this process, where I think the default disposition ought to be deferential, but defeasible trust. At this stage, identifying who counts as an expert represents the major challenge for those with distorted perception about the domain of knowledge.

So whom should the novice trust? Clearly not all people who experience oppression have good (i.e., accurate, or useful) analyses of that oppression. And not only

people who experience oppression can understand analyses of it.[19] José Medina and Charles Mills both discuss epistemic dispositions that generally inhere in social groups, while cautioning that social identity is neither necessary nor sufficient for either ignorance or expertise (Mills 1997; Medina 2013). Nonetheless, talking generally of these trends can be useful. Satya Mohanty and Paula Moya argue that neither expertise nor identity are wholly determined by social location, but they are not incidental either; a person's development of a particular identity is a theory-mediated response to her social location (Mohanty 1997; Moya 2002). In spite of this looseness, there is a real, causal relationship between social location and identity on the one hand, and identity and expertise on the other. For Medina, the epistemic vices that beset the privileged due to their experiences contrast with the complementary epistemic virtues of humility, curiosity/diligence, and open-mindedness, and the meta-virtue of lucidity (2013, 42). This list of virtues is not meant to elide the material and epistemic costs of oppression, but to articulate certain epistemic habits that can develop as the result of confronting epistemic resistance throughout one's life, and needing to find ways of understanding and resisting experiences of oppression.

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[19] I talk of analysis here in order to avoid the topic of whether people's *experiences* of oppression can be understood by the oppressors (or even by anyone other than the experiencer herself). I am inclined to say that there is something like a continuum of understanding on which we can grasp someone's experience to a greater or lesser degree, but cannot understand their experience as fully as if it were our own. I do not think that this kind of understanding of experiences is a necessary component of coalition-building. I do think, however, that getting to a more accurate understanding of the way power and domination functions in our world is important for building healthy political communities, and that attending to how relative experts analyze these areas is an important way to improve this understanding.

So then, if identity and social location are not infallible indications of expertise, how should someone who does not even putatively have this kind of expertise, or who has reason to think that they do not, distinguish which potential experts to trust? That is, if we have reasons to think that white people suffer certain cognitive distortions that prevent or limit our insight into the way racism functions, we may justifiably wonder if these distortions make it difficult to identify trustworthy experts on whom we can rely for that information. Should we trust someone whose view is easiest to assimilate to what we already know? If we are aware that we have been systematically deceived in some respects, might that give us reason to give extra weight to views that are *hard* for us to swallow? What is an epistemically responsible way to approach or receive information in an area in which we know ourselves to be novices?

3.2 The Novice/Experts Problem

As the large portion of our knowledge that depends on testimony has been increasingly acknowledged within epistemology, questions of whose testimony to trust have captured attention as well. Concerns about epistemic injustice, particularly testimonial injustice, have been prominent within feminist epistemology (e.g., Fricker 2007), and social epistemology more generally has also taken up the issue of how to form reliable knowledge through testimony (e.g., Coady 1992). Much of this work focuses on the production of knowledge in science, since scientific practice is seen as a paradigmatic case of rational knowledge production, but it need not be so narrowly focused. Part of the

goal of this paper is to explore the usefulness of the conclusions drawn in consideration of trust in experts in the context of science and legal testimony when we apply them to the somewhat messier domains of social and political knowledge.

One clear explanation of this question and possible solutions to it comes from Alvin Goldman. He formulates the problem this way:

> In what I am calling the novice/expert problem (more specifically, the novice/2-expert problem), the novice is not in a position to evaluate the target experts by using his own opinion; at least he does not think he is in such a position. The novice either has no opinions in the target domain, or does not have enough confidence in his opinions in this domain to use them in adjudicating or evaluating the disagreement between the rival experts. He thinks of the domain as properly requiring a certain expertise, and he does not view himself as possessing this expertise. (2001, 90)

Goldman considers a situation—such as being a member of a jury—in which one has to adjudicate between purported eyewitness testimonies as one possible species of the novice/experts problem, but he is most interested in what he calls "cognitive expertise." Goldman contrasts cognitive expertise with expertise at a certain skill or because one was in the right place at the right time, though he acknowledges that the distinction may be one of degree. For Goldman, a cognitive expert is one who possesses significantly more knowledge in a particular area than do the vast majority of people and can deploy that knowledge to answer new questions within the area of expertise. Finally, Goldman's formulation of the problem is particularly concerned with justification: "The novice/2-experts problem is whether a layperson can *justifiably* choose one putative expert as more

credible or trustworthy than the other with respect to the question at hand, and what might be the epistemic basis for such a choice?" (92, emphasis in original).

Goldman considers five sources of evidence the novice might use to justify her choice of one expert over another. It is not guaranteed that the novice has access to any of these sources of evidence, but it is at least possible for the novice to use one or more of the following to assist in her decision of whom to give credibility: (1) Arguments from the putative experts supporting their own views and critiquing the rival views, (2) agreement from additional putative experts on one side or other, (3) appraisals by "meta-experts" of the experts' expertise, including those reflected in the experts' credentials, (4) evidence of the experts' interests and biases regarding the question at issue, and (5) evidence of the experts' past "track records". Of these, Goldman finds the fifth resource the most useful, though still imperfect. It is the most reliable kind of evidence for the credibility of the experts that will be accessible and intelligible to the novice without the novice having to become an expert herself. Though none of these resources will provide full justification, and they are not all always readily available to the novice, that they are sometimes available and provide partial justification for credibility judgments satisfies Goldman's skeptical concerns.

Goldman's formulation of the novice/experts question draws for the most part on our normal ideas of who an expert is—we imagine situations in which a layperson must judge the conflicting theories of a pair of scientists, or perhaps conflicting expert testimonies about the psychological state of a defendant on trial. It also presumes a

somewhat ordinary sense of naivety: simple ignorance with respect to an area of knowledge. Both of these notions shift when we import the novice/experts problem into the realm of more politically-identified social epistemology. Let us rephrase the novice/ experts problem in a more specific context: if a white person recognizes herself as subject to the cognitive distortions that accompany white supremacy (that is, if she sees herself as a novice relative to the operations of racism and white supremacy), and she is confronted with conflicting testimonies or analyses of white supremacy from people of color, how can she be justified in choosing one of those testimonies as more credible than the other?

In this context, expertise may come from extensive education and research of the kind usually acknowledged as conferring expertise, but it might not. We have already addressed that it may come instead from having experiences tied to one's social location which then spur one to create interpretations of the world that make sense of these experiences. Charles Mills notes that "Often for their very survival, blacks have been forced to become lay anthropologists, studying the strange culture, customs, and mind-set of the 'white tribe' that has such frightening power over them" (2007, 18). Patricia Hill Collins' groundbreaking attention to the development and contributions of Black feminist thought shows how the kind of learning that comes from experiences of (resisting) oppression can develop into refined domains of expertise:

> the legacy of struggle among U.S. Black women suggests that a collectively shared, Black women's oppositional knowledge has long existed. This collective wisdom in turn has spurred U.S. Black women to generate a more specialized knowledge, namely Black feminist thought as critical social theory. Just as fighting injustice lay at the heart of U.S. Black women's experiences, so did

> analyzing and creating imaginative responses to injustice characterize the core of Black feminist thought. (2009, 15)

Though it comes from social positions to which one is assigned by contingent factors (i.e., not due to moral character) this kind of expertise is closer to cognitive expertise than the expertise that comes from the mere luck of being eyewitness to a crime.

Likewise, naivety in this context is not merely about a lack of knowledge. White ignorance is positively produced and involves active looking-away as well as the calcification of epistemic bad habits into serious cognitive distortions. Citing Herman Melville's novella *Benito Cereno*, Mills describes the absurd consequences inherited ideas about racialized capacities and roles can have on white people's ability to interpret the information around them:

> Boarding a slave ship—the *San Dominick*, a reference to the Haitian Revolution —which, unknown to the protagonist, Amasa Delano, has been taken over by its human cargo, with the white crew being held hostage, Delano has all around him the evidence for black insurrection, from the terror in the eyes of the nominal white captain, the eponymous Benito Cereno, as his black barber Babo puts the razor to his throat, to the Africans clashing their hatchets ominously in the background. But so unthinkable is the idea that the inferior blacks could have accomplished such a thing that Delano searches for every possible alternative explanation for the seemingly strange behavior of the imprisoned whites, no matter how far-fetched. (2007, 19)

I love this example in part because I had the exquisitely ironic experience of studying the novella as an undergraduate and finding myself subject to the same mystification as the story's protagonist. (I admit that with no small amount of shame, though I know I am not the only one with this experience; it is part of the genius of the book. I wonder at the patience of the Black woman professor of the class whom I do not recall exploding at all

the white ignorance we manifested.) Centrally, the naivety that accompanies and facilitates privilege is structural: structures of oppression shape not only what we learn, but the concepts through which we perceive the world around us.

The five resources Goldman considers also change when we attend to the context of power and hierarchy that doesn't have a causal relationship to expertise. For example, the questions of who the meta-experts are or whether the novice would be able to identify them are more complex because social standing and institutional regard are not good proxies for expertise in domains of knowledge about oppression since they are deeply shaped by the structures of oppression. Neither would the winner of the imaginary (and deeply problematic) oppression olympics necessarily deserve the most credence, since the relationship between social location, identity, and expertise is not one-to-one.

In spite of these complications, the novice may have tools for evaluating the arguments and conclusions of experts (and meta-experts) that might surprise us, given their naivety. Because the place where these theories are put to work is the world we all share (at least in some ways, and as much as some of us may try to resist this fact), we may have some windows into evaluating how well a theory works in or makes sense of our shared world, including the social conflicts of our shared world. Additionally, for novices who recognize themselves as novices, there is reason to think they share some of the relevant values of the putative experts, since, for example, a minimal understanding and negative evaluation of white supremacy may be necessary for a white person to recognize themselves as subject to white ignorance. Karen Jones points out that cases of

shared values may be somewhat simpler in terms of finding grounds to determine whether one ought to trust or defer to another's expertise (1999).

Considering the novice/experts problem in a moral and political context calls for attending to the messy particulars of an example. I will return to evaluating Goldman's account following the example.

3.3 Minority Neoconservatives and Identity Politics

People of color who deny the relevance (and sometimes the existence) of race in our social world present a challenge for the the naive white person who feels a need to defer to the expertise of people of color on issue of race. When this perspective takes on a more fully-fledged public face, it is often in the form of neoconservative minorities: people who may acknowledge that racism was once a serious problem but has been mostly corrected (we have achieved equality under the law, and this is sufficient), who tend to believe that identity politics and culturally-specific education is damaging to minorities and holds them back from enjoying the benefits of full humanity which assimilation can confer. This phenomenon is not restricted to issues of race; there are reactionaries to every identity-based movement: women who think feminism represents a kind of coddling, gay people whose main political goal is to gain entrance to the privileges of heterosexual marriage, untransformed, unqueered, and so on.

In *Learning from Experience*, Paula Moya argues that the perspective of neoconservative minorities, while mistaken in many ways, can reveal interesting and

important contradictions in the world we share. Moya takes up this argument as one demonstration of the power of what she, Satya Mohanty, and others have called postpositivist realism—a middle ground between positivist and postmodernist theories, which acknowledges that experience and identity are theory-mediated, yet also maintains that "experience *in its mediated form* contains an epistemic component through which we can gain access to knowledge of the world" (39, emphasis in original). Moya takes up the narrative expressed by essayist Richard Rodriguez in his first book, *The Hunger of Memory* to demonstrate the "key postpositivist realist insight …that the epistemic status of different identities can be evaluated by seeing how well they work as explanations or descriptions of the social and natural world from which they emerge" (87).

This example serves a somewhat complex purpose in the current essay. On one level, I intend to present Rodriguez and Moya as two putative experts with conflicting testimony. Yet there is another layer of complexity given by the fact that Moya is not only testifying about her experience and analysis of Latino/a identity in the United States, but also expressing a theory about how to evaluate such testimonies. While Moya explicitly critiques Rodriguez' views in the context of her own theory, Rodriguez does not explicitly craft his own analysis around explaining away Moya's view. Nonetheless, I think Rodriguez offers a robust enough characterization of Latino and other minority identities (in *The Hunger of Memory* and in interviews) that we can extrapolate the implicit critique of Moya.

Rodriguez expresses a deeply ambivalent relationship to his Mexican *mestizo* ancestry and Spanish language. He at once loves and respects his family and many of the values of Mexican cultural identity, and sees assimilation as necessary for participation in the public life of the U.S. He expresses pain at the loss of comfortable, private culture, but thinks that moving beyond that comfort is a necessary and rewarding feature of growing into a cosmopolitan who can understand the world beyond his own milieu. Rodriguez is well known for speaking out against bilingual education, arguing that it does a disservice to Spanish-speaking communities by not preparing them for middle class life in the U.S. Reflecting on his own life, he characterizes Spanish as a private language, one used to keep the rest of the world (presumed to be English-speaking) at bay (1982; 1997). Rodriguez suggests that education and assimilation were his tickets out of minority status, and his fraught experience as the "comic victim of two cultures" was a worthwhile price for the ability to see himself as part of the raceless ranks of full humanity (1997).

When it comes down to it, it seems that Rodriguez' experience of himself as idiosyncratic (that is, his impression that the cultural labels currently in use inadequately capture his particular experience and perspective) leads him to eschew all categorization. His experience as the intended beneficiary of informal affirmative action—through which he understood that only the most privileged of minorities would benefit from such efforts, rather than the people whom he felt really needed the support— led him to abandon a planned career in academia and to develop a negative disposition toward affirmative action (1997). In general, when asked how he fits within a particular social category,

Rodriguez balks—one of many examples is that he has quipped repeatedly over 15 years that he does not identify as gay because he is too morose, (1997, 2014a).

We can contrast Rodriguez' experience of coming to himself only after rejecting identities linked to his social location with Moya's narrative of reaching a better understanding of her experience once she developed an identity that acknowledged her social location. For Moya, recognizing herself first as Mexican-American and later as Chicana helped make sense of certain experiences of exclusion throughout her life. For example, as long as she thought of herself as of Spanish (i.e. European) heritage, as she was taught by her family, the mistreatment she experienced by the other women in her dorm at Yale was mysterious to her. When conversations with wise friends and personal research into her ethnic origins transformed her sense of racial/ethnic identity, she was much better equipped to explain these experiences (2001, 40-42).

While Rodriguez rejects paying much mind to anyone's particular class, ethnicity, language, etc., in favor of focusing on developing commonalities (e.g., trading other languages for English), Moya argues that, "when we pay the right kind of attention to our own and others' particularity, we position ourselves to develop a more productive understanding of our universal humanity" (104). Moya shares Rodriguez' recognition that we need human connection, but thinks that the way toward this connection is through multidirectional recognition of difference, rather than unidirectional assimilation. And, because she sees social location as causally related to but *not* fully determining of

identity, she embraces community labels that may not perfectly describe her idiosyncrasies.

Finally, Moya's view that all knowledge production is linked to (though not determined by) social identity allows her to give an account of Rodriguez' view. She says, "seeing neoconservative minorities as practitioners of identity politics has helped me to appreciate their arguments for assimilation—which I recognize as having been developed through self-reflection about the meanings of their own racialized identities—as suggestions for the best way to end or minimize race-based discrimination and inequality in our society" (134). While Moya disagrees with Rodriguez' conclusions, she sees that the attention he gives to the pressures of assimilation and the inadequacy of social labels responds to real conflicts of power and racial and cultural identity.

So, what resources does the novice have to compare and evaluate the claims of Richard Rodriguez and Paula Moya about the forces of racism, anti-Latinx bias, and the relevance of racial identity for successful navigation of the world? To put the question in Goldman's terms, how can the novice justifiably choose either Rodriguez or Moya as a more credible expert on these matters? I will consider each of the five resources Goldman offers, assessing what they offer in this particular case, and then what additional tools might be available.

(1) Arguments from the putative expert in question. As in the context Goldman considers, it is not clear whether the novice in this case has the tools to evaluate argument

from the experts while remaining a novice. This may be especially true in this context because what makes the novice naive is not just lack of knowledge on the subject, but serious cognitive distortion— a positive "education" to be unable to see the structure and effects of oppression. Thus, the novice's tools for evaluating arguments on this subject are also likely to be seriously distorted. More carefully (and less representative of most people's actual cognitive experience), though the novice may certainly be able to evaluate the formal structure of arguments, she is very unlikely to be able to corroborate or dismiss premises in a way that is unaffected by her own distortions.

(1b) Goldman considers what he calls indirect justification for judging expertise, which he describes as "demonstration of dialectical superiority" of one putative expert over another (2001, 95). This indirect evidence is meant to be more accessible to the novice, but also less reliable, since mere performance may convince the novice that one expert is more qualified than the other. It seems to me that there is a related kind of justification, common to theory selection, that might fall into the category of dialectical superiority, but be more reliable than mere performance: the extent to which one putative expert can account for the existence, successes, and failures of the views of other putative experts. In the example above, Moya sees her ability to make sense of Rodriguez' views at the same time as she critiques them as a virtue of her theory (2001). Rodriguez does not explicitly address Moya's view, but his glib statements about the inevitability of assimilation ("I am no more in favor of assimilation than I am in favor of the Pacific Ocean. Assimilation is not something to oppose or favor—it just happens" (1997).)

suggest that he thinks people with alternate views are being duped. It seems to me that even a novice can judge that explaining away alternative views by suggesting that they are confused is weaker than engaging with the argument and showing where it goes wrong.

(2) Arguments from other putative experts. This resource, too, may be less helpful in the present context. The same concerns about evaluating arguments from the primary putative experts applies to arguments from additional putative experts. If we consider more external means of assessing support for the putative experts, for example the number of supporters each one has, we should be cautious (as Goldman is) about the non-causal link between numbers and rightness. Neoconservative minorities are typically vastly outnumbered, but I am hesitant to make too much of this. On the one hand, it's hard to know who else counts as a putative expert on theorizing one individual's experience; on the other hand, to the extent that theorization makes broader claims about the structure of our society, there are plenty of other putative experts who could weigh in. The novice should be cautious about getting caught up in a mob or a trend, though she should also be sensitive to why a putative expert might fall outside a norm, if they do. While I think the novice should take this kind of evidence into account, it must be defeasible.

(3) Appraisals by "meta-experts." It is hard to see who might count as a meta-expert in this version of the novice/experts question. The roles that are somewhat less problematic in the cases of science or expert witness in a trial, for example university

degrees, are seriously entangled in the structures of oppression being analyzed. Just as the idea that moral matters are in some sense accessible to all of us might make us suspicious that there can be any experts in that domain (though Karen Jones has argued persuasively that there are indeed experts on moral matters), the fact that political relationships of power and domination implicate us all (though in different ways) makes it especially difficult to imagine a second-order of expertise that is not reducible to the first, resulting in the addition of more first-order experts whose credibility needs to be determined.

(4) Evidence of bias. If we take the generous view that Paula Moya does of Richard Rodriguez's theorizing—that they are both working toward developing understandings of the world that make sense of their experiences—there is likely bias on both sides. It may differ according to their individual psychologies: perhaps it is an implicit desideratum for Rodriguez that his theory justify the enormous costs of alienation from his home; perhaps for Moya it is important to establish some de-personalized explanation for the rejection from her peers. But neither bias is nefarious, and neither seems to provide good reason for discounting the theory it biases, though it might inform our understanding of what purpose the theory is best tailored to. And it is important to note that one of Moya's main points is that the phenomena both Rodriguez and she are trying to describe, are *not* merely personal; they are "indexed to" the world they share. We should therefore look to see how well the theories account for the phenomenon of racism in what Rodriguez would call public life in order to evaluate them.

There are occasions when evidence of bias or interest might provide a bit more information to the novice. Goldman notes that a clear imbalance in interest may give us more reason against the interested putative expert, but I want to suggest that it may sometimes give us more reason to extend credibility to the interested party. If an individual stands to gain fame and money by becoming a spokesperson for their community, we may justifiably suspect that they will tailor their account to allow for more attention-getting claims. On the other hand, a person may come to be a spokesman for their community with the intention of gaining much needed resources and attention to the needs of the community. This is a kind of interest that could result in stretching certain claims for rhetorical power, or if there is accountability with the community, it may simply represent an insider's perspective— often the best perspective on what a community actually needs. Setting aside the consideration of *two* putative experts for a moment, consider the EZLN (the Zapatista National Liberation Front). The Zapatistas have explicit interest in advancing the political standing of Indigenous Mexicans, yet it is not at all clear that this bias makes them *less* credible on issues facing Indigenous Mexicans; there is in fact good reason to think that because they spend a huge amount of energy investigating, discussing, and theorizing these issues, that their interest in their own rights makes them *more* credible than an uninvested observer.

If evidence of bias or interest is to be of any help to the novice, she must have nuanced tools for analyzing the role the bias plays. Evidence of the mere existence of bias is not likely to be informative since there is reason for each expert to be biased. It may

sometimes be the case that the bias is of a kind about which the novice is not so naive (it seems to me that bias does not necessarily exist in the same domain as the claims it affects), but typically we have little reason to think that the novice has more resources for interrogating the bias than she does the original issue. Furthermore, because in the context of knowledge about political domination the novice herself is implicated in the domain about which she is trying to judge, she, too, is influenced by bias, whereas she may have no investment whatsoever in certain abstruse mathematical or scientific debates.

(5) Track record. In areas of politics as well as the simpler versions of the novice/ expert question, the putative experts' track records may be the resource the novice is in the best position to use. In fact, novices may be in an even better position to judge in this context than in the case of certain scientific developments because we do not need proxies to evaluate the past track record. The consequences of each expert's theorizing are played out in the political world we all share and have access to (even if it is unequal access; e.g., it may be quite difficult or impossible for a novice to see what consequences Rodriguez or Moya's identity development has within their communities of origin). When Moya points out that despite his protests, Rodriguez continues to be categorized as a Latino author and spokesman (or as he puts it, "shelved between a gangbanger's book of poetry and the biography of a Colombian drug lord" (2014b)), she is pointing out that the political world we share doesn't bear out his theory; she is marking one point of failure in his track record (2001, 121).

Specificity about the particular domain of knowledge and the social and political forces shaping that domain allows us to refine our understanding of the novice's potential resources for evaluating the claims of putative experts. One of the characteristics of Moya's presentation of postpositivist realism is that it posits and examines a substantive, bilateral relationship between the world and our theorizing about it. Acknowledging that our perceptions and understanding are theory-mediated yet connected to the real, shared world can give us a more finely-grained understanding of the novice's resources for evaluating the conflicting claims of experts. For example, engaging this relationship can help the novice move beyond identifying the mere existence of biases to engaging with their content and consequences, both theoretical and material. In the context of knowledge about political domination that implicates us all, this orientation may also direct our attention to how the relationship between the novice and experts shapes the novice's ability to evaluate and learn.

3.4 Justification, Epistemic Dependence, and Trust

Until now, I have done my best to avoid language about *trust*. Much as social epistemologists now acknowledge the large amount of our knowledge that comes from others, it is still seen as desirable that we uncover independent justification for believing information we learn through testimony. Trust is often viewed as a kind of last resort: knowledge based on "mere" trust may be okay, but knowledge that we can verify would be better. But when we do not have direct evidence for a proposition, when we have

reason to doubt that we could get or understand evidence (as we might if we acknowledge cognitive distortions that attend privilege), *and* we have good reason to think that other people do have direct evidence, or other good justification, trust just is the most rational stance to take toward that proposition (Hardwig 1984).

Goldman takes a mournful tone when he considers Hardwig's argument for the irreducibility of epistemic dependence and therefore trust. Goldman's frustration is directed particularly at the term "blind trust," and I think this is no accident, since Goldman's account of a child's first experiences gaining knowledge relies heavily on the child making use of vision. But of course visually impaired children also learn and know. If we avoid associating blindness with ignorance and irrationality, "blind trust" may not seem like such a disturbing proposition. Even if reliance on trust means we are without some tools of knowledge production (namely, direct evidence), there are other resources or senses that can get us where we need to go, and there are better and worse ways that we can make use of them.

One useful feature of bringing trust into the conversation is that trust is relational, perhaps even collaborative. Talking about the relational nature of trust draws our attention to both participants in the relationship, as well as the circumstances that allow for a trusting relationship to occur. Minimally, time is necessary for trust to develop. Power distribution, past behavior, and institutional context are among other attributes that influence trust in a relationship. Examining relationships with an eye toward increasing trust and trustworthiness is one important feature in pursuing what Naomi Scheman has

called a "sustainable epistemology"— one that focuses not only on what we can know now, but also on which practices will increase the chances of learning in the future (2012).

Crucially, cultivating trusting relationships is not just about trusting the testifier, but also about being a trustworthy recipient of testimony. We can see this in the way people adjust the stories they tell about their health, or families, or communities of origin depending on the perceived trustworthiness of the listener. For example, my wife, who is from Mexico, paints a very flattering picture of the country to *gringos* she doesn't know well, is much more ambivalent and forthright about violence, racism, corruption, and political discord when talking with *gringos* she trusts, and gripes miserably, though lovingly, about a hopelessly broken country when talking with other Mexicans. In this case, my wife is calibrating her honesty to what she expects are the existing biases and openness to learning of her listener. This is a common phenomenon—consider how the stories you might tell about your family vary based on whether your listener has an existing relationship with the whole family, whether you expect them to encounter your family in the future, how conscientious or judgmental you expect them to be with sensitive information.

Recognizing the importance of being a trustworthy recipient of knowledge gives the novice another tool for improving the information she gets from experts; aiming to become a trustworthy listener will put the novice in a better position to learn from experts, since she is more likely to elicit their best, most nuanced arguments and

positions. The negative formulation of this might be safer: if the novice has reason to think that one or more of the experts does not trust her, she may also have reason to doubt her assessment of the experts' claims.

Thinking in terms of trust rather than justification may also allow us to supplement some of the resources Goldman offers the novice. While many of the resources Goldman considers do not give the novice new evidence for the claims of one putative expert over another, they may indeed give indications of trustworthiness. On the bias point (4) in particular: evidence of bias does not really give us any new evidence for or against a putative expert's claim, but when we evaluate their track record (5), we might consider whether bias has led them to cut corners or make moral judgments we disagree with. We might also consider whether the domain in which they're operating has incentives or punishments for bad behavior. Hardwig suggests that a context of knowledge-production (namely, science) that insists that it is free from bias or moral issues might justifiably make us *more* suspicious if we agree that issues of trust and trustworthiness are irreducible (1991). This may be one distinguishing feature between, say the trustworthiness of the EZLN (their model of knowledge production exhibits substantial concern with accountability and trust) in spite of their bias, and the untrustworthiness of certain pipeline corporations whose operations are opaque, but who assure us that their research says their plans are safe and foolproof.

Attending to the larger circumstances of the relationships we learn within gives us two additional tools for evaluating putative experts and their claims: political and social

values, and situation within political communities of resistance. Political and social values can give the novice extra tools for evaluating the arguments of the putative experts, even (or especially) when the novice is equally convinced that the experts' theories explain the phenomena they intend to. Drawing on the problem of underdetermination of scientific theories, Helen Longino has argued that we ought to treat:

> Agents/subjects of knowledge as located in particular and complex interrelationships and [acknowledge] that purely logical constraints cannot compel them to accept a particular theory. That network of relationships—with other individuals, social systems, natural objects, and natural processes—is not an obstacle to knowledge but a rich pool of resources—constraints and incentives—to help close the gap left by logic. (2004, 133)

So while the novice may not have enough information to evaluate the credibility or arguments of experts purely on the basis of logic, the network of relationships and values should be seen as a legitimate way to make up the difference. And, following Longino, this is not an inferior tool for theory choice useful to the novice only because she lacks the information experts have; experts, too are guided by values (1995, 2004). In the kinds of cases that I am concerned with here, the novice has license to use, e.g., the value of anti-racism to evaluate the arguments of experts whose claims otherwise meet norms of empirical adequacy. In fact, to the extent that the novice is interested in learning more about the way racism functions with the intention of ending or ameliorating racism, a theory that does not account for and advance anti-racist values would seem not to be even empirically adequate.

But values play a complicated role here, and the novice does risk biasing her choice of experts toward whoever agrees with her values. At its extreme, this cannot be good epistemic practice. For my own intentions in this paper, I want to give a novice whose own values may not be particularly progressive (though she must acknowledge the existence of white-supremacy—or whatever system of domination—enough to recognize herself as subject to the ignorance it systematically creates and enforces) tools to evaluate the arguments of people of color who disagree. It may be that values like "equality" and "freedom" that the extreme novice might have could be sufficient to weigh in favor of one expert or another, but they may not be. Nonetheless, if one expert's argument or perspective clearly flies in the face of one of these values, the novice has good reason against accepting it. If both theories do this, she has good reason to go looking for an alternative theory; this parallels Longino's argument for a "multiplicationist" strategy of theory development (2004, 137).

Focusing on relationships of trust and learning suggests that a putative expert's membership in a political community of resistance may give the novice additional resources for evaluating her credibility. This is distinct from the second and third sources of knowledge Goldman considers (numbers of agreeing experts and the evaluations of meta-experts). When we can see that a person is engaged with political struggle within a community, we may have reason to think they have subjected their views to community critique. What is significant about the condemnation of Richard Rodriguez' views by a larger Latinx and Chicanx political community is not that numbers are not on his side, but

that a relatively cohesive political community is signaling their distrust. Of course, this too must be defeasible (individuals can be ostracized from groups for reasons unrelated to their views), but this kind of belonging within a community can be a useful resource.

As is the case with evidentiary justification, the role of trust is not conclusive for determining how to evaluate testimony. There are complicated conditions of justification for trust, and it is important that we attend to them in order to trust wisely. Karen Jones argues that "there are no useful generalizations to be made concerning whether trust, distrust, or neutrality is the appropriate default stance [because] the appropriate default stance is sensitive to climate, to domain, and, linked to domain, to consequences" (1999, 71). In the case of moral knowledge, Jones argues that our default position should be one of (defeasible) distrust, since moral knowledge is hard to come by; because moral expertise is quite rare, we have reason to bring a certain amount of skepticism to claims of moral expertise. This stance can be overcome given enough knowledge about the testifier and an accurate self-assessment by the listener. Accurate self-assessment is important so that an agent may correct for a tendency to be excessively trusting or skeptical. It is especially important to grasp these tendencies when they are systematically applied differently to different types of testifiers, resulting in what Miranda Fricker calls credibility deficits (2007). Jones says that "racist tendencies to distrust young African-American men" should lead agents who find themselves in the position of differentially distrusting young African-American men "to be more willing to abandon [their default stances] than those who can trust their trust and distrust" (72).

In cases that I am considering, the background conditions of white-supremacy and white ignorance already give enough information to override the reasons for a default stance of distrust. One reason that Jones gives for the default posture of distrust is that the consequences of trusting someone who is wrong about certain serious moral matters can be severe. However, the consequences of *distrusting* testifiers on matters of racial violence whom we have good reason to trust (even if they end up deceiving us) are also severe. To my mind, the appropriate default attitude for the novice is one of engaged or critical trust. This differs from credulity by retaining awareness that the trust is defeasible; that testifiers may deceive or be deceived, that circumstances change. But it acknowledges that the listener is not well-placed to rely on her own evaluation of the arguments of the testifier, and that she may become better-placed over time, through listening, learning, and trying to understand the reasons the putative expert gives— that is, through engaging. It also recognizes that in the types of cases I am considering, the novice and the putative expert have at least some shared values.

Insofar as the novice might have reasons to think that her own default stance of trust or distrust have been distorted by systems of domination, she may have reason to distrust her default stance. Naomi Scheman has argued that, particularly when one is in a position of power, distrusting one's own inclination to distrust can be the appropriate attitude to adopt, even if it sometimes leads one to be deceived (Scheman forthcoming). Describing a situation in which—despite a gut reaction of distrust— she advocated on behalf of a student who falsely claimed she was being stalked, Scheman argues that the

consequences of her not believing future students in similar situations would be far worse than being duped once in a while.

While I am deeply sensitive to the observation that our gut reactions are shaped by social structures and should thus be interpreted critically, a personal experience has led me to conclude that engagement, rather than distrust is the appropriate meta-stance to take toward one's own excessively distrusting gut. When I was beginning my second year of grad school, my next door neighbor and I struck up a tentative friendship. He was a tall, broad Black man in his mid-fifties, and I am a white woman, fairly small, in my early twenties at the time. We would chat about our shared love for jazz or his time playing basketball in Oklahoma, in the alley behind our small apartment buildings; he was on disability from knee problems and was frequently around when I would return from campus.

There were several moments when his tales didn't seem quite right— more accurately, when they seemed too closely to mirror what I had revealed to be my interests. When his presence when I would arrive in the alley on my bicycle became too consistent, I felt pangs of distrust about his intentions. These I silenced, out of an abundant awareness of the history of white women's fear around Black men, a desire to learn from him and to be open-minded, and out of an eagerness to make a friend outside of my social location. I do not recall when we had exchanged phone numbers, but after several weeks of friendly chatting, he began to call me, many times a day; to wait in the alley when I arrived by bike; to gingerly descend the front stoop when I would arrive by

car— curtains swinging in the window from which he had been watching moments before.

My roommate, a law student, helped me research our neighbor in legal databases, using bits of information I parsed from his stories. I was unable to confirm much of what he had told me about himself; I did learn that he had a legal history of violating restraining orders and that he was on parole after serving some years in prison for raping his 17 year old niece. To avoid drawing police attention to our block and hesitant to disrupt his parole, I stopped by the local police substation to ask what my options were, without giving any real information about either of us. Basically, I was brushed off. When I asked my landlord to change and strengthen the flimsy locks on our building, he refused and advised me to buy a gun. Instead, I changed my route home, had a friend accompany me if it was late, made sure I was prepared to get out of the car with my groceries as soon as I arrived home and before my neighbor had time to go outside, and a number of other behaviors women commonly do to avoid harassment and stalking without aggravating their aggressor. Eventually, I found a new apartment and changed my phone number.

For the purposes of this paper, my takeaway is this: while I was right to be critical of my initial inclination to distrust my neighbor, silencing my distrust altogether would have been quite dangerous for me. While I do not think either Jones or Scheman would advocate my silencing my distrust—after all, Jones is talking about one's default attitude and I was working with much more than that; Scheman's focus on silencing her gut has much to do with how serious or trivial the risk is of getting it wrong—I worry that

dealing with the ways our default reactions can be shaped by social relations of domination by distrusting our distrust is too static, and that it glosses over nuances of vulnerability, power, and intersecting identities.

I would like to suggest instead that we engage with our gut reactions and default states of trust or distrust. What I mean is that we should actively seek to understand what purposes our distrust serves, which narratives it enables and which it forecloses. As Hardwig and Jones point out, an accurate self-assessment is essential for trust. Medina's development of the concept of meta-insensitivity is a diagnosis and explanation of the systematically poor self-assessment skills that people in positions of privilege have. But just as gullibility is not an adequate response to a history of systematically ignoring the expertise of experts, distrust of one's own distrust can be a dangerous blunt instrument. We are better off aiming for a nuanced understanding of our own default tendencies and gut reactions, their track record, the information they draw on, the conclusions they license, and the risk— for ourselves and for others— of getting it wrong.

3.5 Conclusion: Learning through the structures of experience

Perhaps the most important feature shaping my treatment of the novice/experts problem is that I am interested in the problem insofar as it troubles efforts to build successful political coalitions across boundaries of privilege and ignorance. This purpose makes salient some things that are obscure when we focus on the problem in isolation. Because social and political values are explicit from the beginning, it is easier to see the

role they can play in theory choice. Because sustainable movements require sustained relationships, it is easier to see the role that trust plays for both the testifier and the recipient of testimony. Further, because learning—especially learning about our political relationships—is not just about gathering facts, we need to build relationships that facilitate wise trusting.

While it is important for Goldman's formulation of the novice/experts problem that the novice remain a novice, this is not the case in the context of educating naive allies in social movements. While I do not think that novices with respect to understanding racism, sexism, ableism, etc. can become experts in exactly the ways that people who suffer these kinds of domination can, sometimes the right response to naivety is to become as much of an expert as one can. If it is possible for a novice to become less naive in these respects, that is often the right choice; we have no need to preserve the epistemic puzzle. I do think that the puzzle is important because trust is irreducible and for people who wish to fight systems of domination from which they benefit, there will always be experts who need to be listened to. But, when we look from a larger time-scale, each instance of deference, or skepticism, or engaged trust in testimony contributes to the changing position of the learner on a scale of naivety to expertise. If the novice learns to trust wisely and to engage with the arguments and testimonies of experts about systems of domination, more resources for evaluating arguments will become available to her. This is some reason why I am inclined to argue for a default "state" that is not really a

state at all: engaged, critical trusting is a long-term activity that improves the novice's standing as she practices it.

The salience of values, trust, and relationships for learning across axes of power and privilege suggests a larger take on epistemology: we ought to naturalize epistemology not only with respect to science and psychology as Quine suggested, but also with respect to social relations. This is not a revelation; many feminist philosophers and philosophers of race are already doing this, but they should not be the only ones doing so. If more traditional epistemologists, including social epistemologists who focus on science, are trying to come up with something general to say about knowledge, they ought to look at the way their claims play out in the political realms of social epistemology, not just the scientific ones (as though these were fully separable!).

With the goal of political organizing in mind, what can the treatment of the novice/experts problem tell us about how to learn within struggles for liberation, how to struggle together without knowing with certainty, and how to engage with people and views we don't understand? For all the attention given in social and feminist epistemology to an agent's situation within structures of domination, a more mundane structure of experience—time—is sometimes given short shrift. Time is necessary for the development of most healthy relationships; both trust and engagement require time and energy. Determining whether to accept the testimony of a purported expert need not just be about looking into the past at their track record and the listener's own tendencies, but about building a future relationship together that can give reasons for and subtler

indications of trustworthiness (or not). What remains for the novice is to learn how to develop relationships of critical trust within which she can learn.

Chapter 4

The Privilege of Certainty and What We Can Learn from Unreliable Minds

4.1 Introduction

In 2015, George Yancy asked white Americans reading the New York Times "to listen with love, a sort of love that demands that you look at parts of yourself that might cause pain and terror" as he encouraged us to come to terms with our own racism. He wrote with characteristic perspicacity of the need for white people to "open [ourselves] up; to speak to, to admit to, the racist poison that is inside of [us]," and he asked us to interpret his letter as a gift. In return, readers unleashed a broad range of threatening and threatened racism in Yancy's direction (many of the responses are catalogued and discussed in his resulting book, *Backlash,* 2018).

Robin DiAngelo describes the defensiveness of white people in conversations about race and racism as "white fragility" (2011). "White Fragility," she says, "is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-

inducing situation" (2011, 54). DiAngelo's argument begins from the claim that white-supremacy has created an environment in which white people are insulated from challenges to their dominance. This insulation is enacted overtly through wielded political power and covertly through the hegemony of objectivity, individualism, and liberalism that reinforce white racial domination. When these norms are challenged, many white people react to the challenge as though it were a serious existential threat.

Reactions to this sense of threat vary, guided in part by a person's values— people may react with anger, refusal to hear or participate, insistence that they already know, or that the criticism doesn't apply to them but to other white people. Aspiring allies often unknowingly shift discussions to center around them and their feelings, their guilt, and their predicament as (aspiring) progressive members of the oppressive class.

While white fragility is an extremely common phenomenon, defensiveness is not the only origin of the behaviors and feelings that characterize white fragility; bewilderment and fear or failure can provoke them also. The insidious structures of racism are overwhelming to grasp, and the prospect of undermining white-supremacy is intimidating. (Of course, it is already a privilege to feel the intimidation of *undermining* racism—rather than the experience of racism— as the great threat. This paper is aimed at those who do have the privilege of choosing whether to fight.) Caught in a system that is racist through and through, and catching criticism from what feels like all sides, it is easy to feel paralyzed when contemplating how to act to undermine systems of oppression.

Fear of making a mistake, of causing further harm, or of being wrong can tempt us to try to know which is exactly the right next step before we take action. Marilyn Frye argues that this focus on being right—on being a moral and epistemic judge—is one of the characteristic traits of "whiteliness" (i.e., the set of traits and cultural norms related with whiteness the way we might say masculinity is related to maleness) (1992). Even for people seriously committed to undermining racial oppression and other forms of injustice, this orientation around judging rightly and avoiding being wrong can get in the way of productive political action. Sensitivity to the potential harm that can come from speaking and acting on behalf of others is important given the role that (mis)representation plays in oppression. But as Linda Martín Alcoff notes, even earnest intentions to avoid discursive imperialism can be problematically focused on perfectionism rather than political productivity:

> In some cases perhaps the motivation is not so much to avoid criticism as to avoid errors, and the person believes that the only way to avoid errors is to avoid all speaking for others. However, errors are unavoidable in theoretical inquiry as well as political struggle, and moreover they often make contributions. The desire to find an absolute means to avoid making errors comes perhaps not from a desire to advance collective goals but a desire for personal mastery, to establish a privileged discursive position wherein one cannot be undermined or challenged and thus is master of the situation. (1992, 22)

Whether it comes from self-centered moral perfectionism, or from earnest concerns that blunders can create serious harm, an obsession with correctness is problematic when it leads to inaction, and by extension, affirmation of the status quo.

In this paper I want to add to DiAngelo's list of norms that promote white fragility. I will argue that the legacy of Enlightenment epistemology has led those whose lives do not contradict those norms to develop an unjustified expectation of certainty, or of the possibility of being certain. This expectation of certainty, in turn, results in a very low tolerance of uncertainty among the privileged, and contributes to a sense of paralysis and helplessness in the face of ignorance. Rather than trying to solve this problem by seeking certainty or by restricting our speech and actions to domains in which we retain the expectation of certainty, I will suggest that we can learn from people who have had to develop skills for managing—even living well—under conditions of uncertainty. Learning from the habits of people who live under conditions of uncertainty—people whose needs, experiences, and worldviews the political and social world is not constructed to confirm, who have unreliable bodies and minds because of disability or illness—can offer a reminder that we are all dependent, epistemically and materially, at various times, and that this need not prevent us from living well and working for justice. Finally, I will argue that learning to manage uncertainty is not only a necessity for coalitional politics, but can offer some positive rewards—in particular, applying the tools of narrative analysis rather than attempting to evaluate the truth value of certain political claims and actions can allow us to gain a richer understanding of the world, our place in it, and our power within it.

4.2 Skepticism and white fragility

One of the defining features of European modernity is a focus on empowering the individual— politically, morally, and epistemically. But as marxist, feminist, decolonial, and critical race scholars have noted, the characteristics generalized to define the individual were those of the able-bodied, heterosexual, bourgeois white man— other ways of being were ignored or defined as deviations and defects. The (able-bodied, heterosexual, bourgeois, white, male) individual aims for epistemic empowerment by minimizing error and reducing his epistemic dependence; thus Enlightenment epistemology—typified by Descartes' *Meditations*— is centrally concerned with certainty and epistemic autonomy.

While the traditions of rationalism and empiricism are typically depicted as opposite approaches to knowledge production, they differ in terms of how to achieve the shared goals of certainty and epistemic autonomy, not whether those are the appropriate goals toward which knowledge production should be oriented. Both traditions confront the challenge that their goals are in tension: the more epistemic autonomy one claims, the more concern there is to be had about the ways one may be deceived, whether by nefarious or mistaken others or the malfunctioning of our own perception and reasoning. The goal of epistemic autonomy creates a need for certainty, for the assured reliability of one's own epistemic methods so that one needn't be vulnerable to deceit or error.

The solution that took hold of European modernity was to embrace a metaphysics that distances the knower from sources of doubt—from nature, other people, one's own body—and to maintain those sources of doubt under strict control. In a pair of papers

discussing the relationship between doubt and control in Enlightenment epistemology, Naomi Scheman describes the mechanism behind this solution to the skeptical problem and the social organization that facilitates it:

> "[Descartes] withdraws from the world — even, ultimately, from his own body — in order to put his relationship with it on a different footing: he aims to find and maintain himself in a position of epistemic control, knowing himself (i.e., his mind) while agnostic of all else, and admitting knowledge of the world only after it has been subjected to tests and proofs" (1987, 66)

> "The social mechanisms of privilege aid in the achievement of those virtues [noncontradiction and integrity] by facilitating splitting and projection: the unity of the privileged self is maintained by the dumping out of the self—onto the object world or onto the different, the stigmatized Others—everything that would disturb its pristine wholeness" (1992, 97).

In order to establish the reliability of the enlightened mind to produce certain knowledge, sources of error had to be excluded from the self. At the time of Descartes' writing, this move—the conception of the self as unconnected, independent, and autonomous—was revolutionary. But as Enlightenment norms facilitated and were reinforced by the growth of capitalism, colonialism, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the consolidation of global power in the West, the role these methods of splitting, projection, and control played in the creation of the individual receded from view. For those people whose lives are reflected in the political, social, and epistemic norms of European modernity, epistemic autonomy comes to seem natural. Truth appears to be something each person ought to be able to establish through deductive reasoning or judicious evidence-gathering.

Thus aided by social institutions built to reflect Enlightenment values, the background value of epistemic autonomy created an unjustified expectation of certainty

among people whose experiences conform to Enlightenment norms and values. Cheryl Harris' landmark law review paper, "Whiteness as Property," discusses the law's power to reify norms— in particular, how centuries of U.S. legal decisions assigning and affirming privilege to white people helped to construct racial identity and hierarchy. Harris argues that as these decisions accrued privilege to whiteness, they both created and affirmed an expectation of privileged social and legal treatment. Over time, and because of these legal affirmations, the expectation for the privileged treatment of whites became settled, amounting to a kind of property. As Harris describes it, the relationship between racism and property regimes is not incidental, but deeply entangled:

> "The legal legacy of slavery and of the seizure of land from Native American peoples is not merely a regime of property law that is (mis)informed by racist and ethnocentric themes. Rather, the law has established and protected an actual property interest in whiteness itself, which shares the critical characteristics of property and accords with the many and varied theoretical descriptions of property" (1999, 1724).

Similarly, the value of epistemic autonomy has been affirmed through policy, law, and norms of knowledge production, and has transformed into a settled—though often unacknowledged—expectation of knowing or being able to know. And this too is not incidentally related to a society structured by domination; the social norms and institutions that enforce oppression facilitate the sense of epistemic autonomy and the expectation of certainty by creating barriers between people privileged by these structures and experiences of vulnerability, dependence, and uncertainty. That is, social and political

structures take on the splitting and projecting role of Descartes' radical doubt, retaining for the privileged a solipsism that affirms the expectation of certainty.

As with a property interest in whiteness, the expectations of certainty and epistemic autonomy are not evenly distributed. For those people on whom the undesirable parts of the modern self are projected, the norms of the Enlightenment are less likely to masquerade as the natural way of things. Because the oppressed are frequently reminded of their vulnerability to the caprice of those in power and because collective action is often the only effective way to survive or resist it, certainty and epistemic autonomy are untenable expectations for the oppressed; being treated as epistemically deficient (e.g., needing white corroboration for Black testimony to count) is more likely to lead to an excess of self-doubt than to a belief in one's epistemic autonomy. Of course while there is the potential for epistemic advantage from this position, we must be careful not to suggest that this epistemic benefit undermines or outweighs the harms of oppression; this kind of credibility deficit is one of the forms of epistemic injustice discussed by Miranda Fricker (2007).

José Medina argues that the asymmetry of experiences of epistemic resistance results in a set of epistemic vices that frequently plague the privileged and a corresponding set of epistemic virtues that the oppressed are more likely to acquire. On Medina's account, because society is constructed in such a way that the privileged are spared encountering much epistemic or political friction, they can develop the epistemic bad-habits of arrogance, laziness, and closed-mindedness: "there is a complete lack of

resistance from the world and from others that gets in the way of knowledge acquisition, that is in the way of discovering facts without prejudging, of articulating and justifying one's claims properly, of responding to objections responsibly, of being genuinely open to contrary evidence, and so on" (2013, 32).

In addition to the epistemic vices that Medina discusses, living in a world constructed to affirm one's epistemic autonomy and that teaches that anything one might want to know can be learned can create a problematically low tolerance for uncertainty. This is a useful way to understand why it can be such an emotional struggle to recognize one's cognitive distortions and why it is so hard to move forward even after recognizing them. For even if the privileged break through what Medina describes as an "insensitivity to insensitivity;" that is, even if we recognize that we are subject to serious kinds of cognitive distortion related to racism, colonialism, sexism, ableism and other structures of domination, we may retain the settled expectation of epistemic autonomy. If we are taught to perceive our own minds as the best tools for acquiring truth, experiences of uncertainty or of recognizing that we do not know and may be unable to know important things can be deeply destabilizing.

Intolerance for uncertainty is a recognized psychological phenomenon (Carleton 2012). It is linked to greater risk of anxiety and depression, and some research shows that developing strategies for increasing tolerance for uncertainty can help alleviate stress in children with autism spectrum disorders, as well as for their families (Rodgers *et al.* 2016). The psychology research on (in)tolerance of uncertainty views intolerance as a

deviation from the normal psychological function, however I am suggesting that the norms of liberal epistemology passed down from the Enlightenment actively encourage a problematic intolerance of uncertainty, including its affective consequences. The commonness of this troublesome trait is easily elided because centuries of social and political structure also reflect this intolerance; those in privileged social positions do not bump up against threatening uncertainty all that often. But when we do, we sometimes exhibit the defensive reactions characteristic of white fragility.

As DiAngelo describes it, white fragility is linked to the perception of conversations about race and racism as existential threats. While the conversations DiAngelo has in mind are not *existential* threats, they are not non-threatening: they are intended to threaten white-supremacy and the hidden metaphysical apparatus that supports it. They threaten to undermine a way of existing that depends on the subjugation of stigmatized Others. DiAngelo catelogues some of these threats as follows:

- Suggesting that a white person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity);
- People of color talking directly about their racial perspectives (challenge to white racial codes);
- People of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of white people in regards to race (challenge to white racial expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort);
- People of color not being willing to tell their stories or answer questions about their racial experiences (challenge to colonialist relations);
- A fellow white not providing agreement with one's interpretations (challenge to white solidarity);
- Receiving feedback that one's behavior had a racist impact (challenge to white liberalism);
- Suggesting that group membership is significant (challenge to individualism);

- An acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (challenge to meritocracy);
- Being presented with a person of color in a position of leadership (challenge to white authority);
- Being presented with information about other racial groups through, for example, movies in which people of color drive the action but are not in stereotypical roles, or multicultural education (challenge to white centrality). (2011, 57)

To these I add that encountering one's inability to know something because privilege has distorted access to information and cognitive practice is a challenge to the settled expectation of epistemic autonomy.

While white fragility is meant to broadly describe the behavior of everything from avowed white supremacists to those who would describe themselves as anti-racist or allies (DiAngelo 2011), I want to focus on the threat to epistemic autonomy as it affects well-intentioned privileged progressives with regard to racism and to systems of oppression more broadly. For privileged people who hold anti-racist and other progressive values, undermining the sense of epistemic autonomy to which we are accustomed can provoke anxiety. We may recognize that we do not have all the information we feel we need before we act and that we may not have the ability to get it. Our fear of error and worry about causing harm to movements and people we value can leave us hesitant to act at all. It can seem that the safest approach is to retreat into an examination of our own knowledge, as Descartes thought: "In the meantime, I know that no danger or error will result from my plan, and that I cannot possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude. This is because the task now in hand does not involve action but merely the acquisition of knowledge" (AT VII 22).

One of the dangers of recognizing that our ignorance and uncertainty are due to the epistemic vices of privilege is that, for people susceptible to the particular kind of Cartesian doubt characteristic of the desire for epistemic autonomy, inaction is the response that seems called for. "Because the problem is one of an internal mechanism, potential error in judgment cannot be guarded against by attention to circumstances that form the settings of our projects. We must move away from these projects to an examination of the problematic faculty" (Campbell 2001, 159). Rather than encouraging careful action, punctuated and permeable to feedback and correction, the fixation on epistemic autonomy and certainty urges reflection and thought.

Yet, as Alcoff argues, none of us has the privilege of thinking or speaking only for ourselves— our thinking and speaking have life beyond our control, enabling and disabling the thoughts and actions of others: "As my practices are made possible by events spatially far from my body so too my own practices make possible or impossible practices of others. The declaration that I 'speak only for myself' has the sole effect of allowing me to avoid responsibility and accountability for my effects on others; it cannot literally erase those effects" (1992, 20). Refraining from action for fear of being wrong or of causing harm is not a politically neutral decision; it is a decision in favor of the status quo that disclaims responsibility for the consequences of inaction. But figuring out how to act given an irresolvable uncertainty is a serious challenge; it is a struggle to act responsibly when we don't know definitively whether what we are doing is right.

4.3 Unlikely role models

The good news is that all this has been done before. The people whom a society is not constructed to protect, whom the dominant world-view is not constructed to put at ease, have long had to adjust to the capriciousness of the dominant— a sort of fundamental uncertainty that can have life-or-death consequences. Living in an environment where one is exposed to forces outside of one's control creates a sense of humility (which can be problematically excessive), in contrast to the arrogance encouraged by insulation against the vagaries of forces of nature and other people. Where the latter creates an illusion of predictability, the former cultivates the development of strategies to survive, and ideally, to live well, in spite of unpredictability.

The epistemic and emotional habits that come from this exposure to uncertainty come with a cost; their development is attached to experiences of oppression that we should not valorize, and, at least in my own experience, it seems to be an artifact of human psychology that there is an emotional burden associated with developing a tolerance for uncertainty. Ami Harbin articulates this in her discussions of the moral value of disorientation: experiences of disorientation can cause too much pain to encourage people to seek them out actively. Yet, for the privileged, disorientation can make us aware of our vulnerability, encourage humility, "tenderize" us to other peoples' experiences of vulnerability and marginalization, and create an opportunity to develop skills for acting responsibly in the face of uncertainty (2016).

As Harbin says, “disorientations are not so much good in themselves as they are a reality” (2016, xix). So while we may not want to seek disorientation, we can learn from those experiences when they occur, both when we have them ourselves and by paying close attention to other people’s strategies for coping with disorientation and uncertainty. Those of us who struggle with intolerance of uncertainty can learn from many people—people in environmentally exposed regions of the world, in war zones, prisons, detention and refugee camps, from people oppressed for a variety of reasons— but in this section I want to focus on a cross-cutting and somewhat banal experience of disorientation: the serious doubt that accompanies a life with mental illness.

I do not really know how to comment on other people’s experiences of mental illness, but in my lifelong experience with depression (I can remember serious bouts from as early as six years old) doubt has been an unmovable companion. What is fascinating to me now is that doubt seems to be as unmovably present in periods of recovery and relative health as in darker times—in fact, it is a *necessary* part of recovering from particularly bad periods. In order to recover, I must believe that what appears to me as true—that I am unkind, lazy, undeserving, helpless; that others are cruel, hopeless, unjust—is not true, or not necessarily true, or not wholly true. I must allow myself to be convinced that my perception of myself and the world is distorted, untrustworthy. This sets up a skeptical problem: how am I to judge which of my perceptions and assessments are trustworthy? How can I distinguish, from inside my own perspective, which beliefs are distorted by depression, and which are not?

While in my experience, depression has seemed to arise somewhat organically, out of my own character—making the question of distinguishing myself from my depression ring incoherent—mental illness and psychological suffering have complex and varied origins. Though medical models of mental illness suggest that it is something about me (or at least, my brain) that is responsible for depression, I have trouble distinguishing between "me" origins and "not-me" origins. Our lives are tangled up with the lives of others; deeply personal experiences of depression and doubt can arise from sources outside us. Susan Brison's philosophical reflections on her experience of brutal sexual violence and attempted murder attend to both her own doubt about the world and people around her, and to the doubt experienced by people to whom she would tell her story. Brison understands the tendency of some victims of sexual violence to blame themselves as a way to claim agency and to reduce the extreme unpredictability of the world that becomes apparent if events really were outside of the victim's control. While this move is painful, and complicated by social norms that blame women for their own abuse as tool of domination, claiming some responsibility and therefore control can serve an important epistemic purpose, because, "When the inconceivable happens, one starts to doubt even the most mundane, realistic perceptions" (1993, 10).

When I have tried to talk about about these thoughts—particularly about the relevance of experiences of mental illness to all of us—with people who do not suffer mental illness, I have been met with a particular kind of resistance. There seems to be a sense that experiences of mental illness or sexual violence are different in kind from

normal living, or at least that they are so rare that they can't have much to bear on normal experience. Statistically speaking, neither of these experiences are very rare. While the prevalence of both is notoriously hard to measure, government agencies estimate that about one fifth of people in the US experience some form of mental illness in any given year, and that one third of women and one sixth of men experience sexual violence in their lifetime (SAMHSA 2017; Smith *et al.* 2017). We cannot dismiss these from the range of normal experience without eliminating far too many people from the ranks of the 'normal.'

I suspect that people need a bit more convincing that those who suffer mental illness, particularly severe mental illness, are not different in kind (at least in the relevant way) from people who do not. As Joel and Ian Gold write in *Suspicious Minds: How Culture Shapes Madness*, when we talk of delusion in particular, there tends to be

> …a sense that the mentally ill are not us—are *other*, different from you and me. But any psychiatrist will tell you that is not true. Mental illness is just a frayed, weakened version of mental health. In researching and writing this book, we came to understand just how little separates the mentally ill from the mentally fit. A genetic vulnerability here, a childhood trauma there, one loss too many— and just like that, you've switched places. We all have psychotic and nonpsychotic parts of our mind. The challenge is keeping the craziness at bay, under careful watch of the saner aspects of ourselves. It doesn't take much for anyone, you and me included, to become mad. (2014, 13)

These experiences are similar enough in the relevant ways that the paralyzed privileged can learn from them. Yet there is stigma and shame on both sides of the relationship I am suggesting that makes this suggestion potentially dangerous, so I will address some objections at the outset.

First is the worry that equating things like racism to mental illness inappropriately absolves the racist of responsibility. I think this concern is rooted in a long history of changing attitudes toward mental illness. While for many years in the modern era, mental illness was treated as a kind of moral failing, this attitude has thankfully fallen out of favor. In its place, and aided, I suspect, by the incentive to increase the market for lucrative psychopharmaceuticals, a medical model began to take over; mental illness was seen as disease, a malfunction of neurotransmitters, or a genetic disposition activated by some trauma. Again thankfully, our understanding of mental illness is becoming a bit more nuanced, and many people now take into account the social determinants of mental illness and health, at both the conceptual and phenomenal levels. Still, the medical model seems to have grabbed hold of public discourse; I suspect that, just as this model serves the pharmaceutical industry well, it matches the desires of a public that prefers one-time (or once a day) solutions to longer-term struggle that requires changing larger structures of social life.[20]

The concern that equating (or even relating) racism or the paralysis of the privileged to mental illness inappropriately absolves the racist of responsibility depends on the assumption that people with mental illness are not responsible for their mental

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[20] To be clear, I am *not* arguing against the usefulness of medication in the treatment of mental illness. Psychopharmaceuticals can save lives. There is, however, abundant evidence that treatment with pharmaceuticals works best in conjunction with talk therapy (Mintz 2006; examples concerning dual treatment for depression are Klerman *et al.* 1974, Seligman 1995, and Teasdale *et al.* 2000). Anecdotally, I have found that building community, maintaining accountable relationships, and integrating within my larger social and physical environment have been the most important tools for staying healthy. Paradoxically, this requires energy and interest that is impossible to conjure in the midst of depression.

illness. But this is not how mental illness works. While the mentally ill should not be blamed for their/our illness, managing to live with mental illness is a huge (unasked for) responsibility.[21] It requires enormous vigilance to keep up behavior that keeps one healthy when that is not a natural inclination, when a period of acute suffering is on the horizon, and when one is doing well and thinks it may be safe to take a break from all the effort of staying healthy. What I mean to suggest by relating racism to mental illness is to challenge those of us who have developed within a racist culture and find racism within ourselves to accept the responsibility of battling it, every day, even when we are not certain how to go about it— as those of us who aim to live (well) with mental illness must also do.

A second important possible disanalogy comes from the fact that society is structured to favor oppressive norms, whereas mental illness is marginalized. While the needs of those with mental illness are often in conflict with social pressures and norms, the world is constructed to put the middle class, heterosexual, white man at ease, even if he abhors the oppressive structures that make this the case. This is an important distinction. While there is some research that would challenge it (e.g., that sociopaths are

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[21] Despite the many disanalogies between mental and bodily illnesses, I think this is one place where they can be treated similarly. It is, of course, possible to neglect one's mental health, as it is possible to neglect one's physical health, resulting in serious illness. I do not think blame is the right attitude to take in either case. In addition, there are gray areas— in the current climate, addiction is sometimes treated as mental illness, sometimes treated as physical illness, and sometimes as moral failing (this last one is becoming less common now that white people are perceived to be as vulnerable to addiction as Black people). And wherever one sees the balance of these elements of addiction, whether addiction is blameworthy is an area of public disagreement, as we can see in debates about whether drug addicts ought to qualify for transplant lists.

overrepresented among Fortune 500 CEOs[22]), I think this distinction is analytically true. Mental illness—both mood disorders and personality disorders— is most frequently defined in terms of deviation from a norm. I am more inclined to think that mental illness ought to be defined in terms of deviation from some desired state of mental wellness (average or normal mental functioning aside—a society where depression is the norm would still be unwell). Either way, mental illness is about deviation, whereas what makes oppression oppression rather than mere individual wrong, is that it involves shaping norms to facilitate domination. Therefore the psychological habits that accompany oppression *match* social norms, rather than diverging from them.

In any case, my intention is not to describe racism *as* mental illness, but to say that there are tools that the unwilling racist can learn from those living with mental illness. The first of these was alluded to above: we can learn to accept the challenge and responsibility of struggling against oppression while knowing that our perception and cognition distorts our ability to understand clearly. Of course it is true that people who suffer mental illness do not always accept the responsibility of managing it. The struggle is often overwhelming, and many people succumb—opting out through suicide. But many more simply struggle to build a life under difficult circumstances. I have experienced this undertaking in various ways: sometimes it feels like a concerted effort to manage my health and sometimes it is just feels like inertia. This is where the difference

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[22] This claim periodically receives attention in the media, which is often unscrupulous and glib in reporting on research to this effect. A take with a bit more empathy comes from Jon Ronson, whose book *The Psychopath Test* stirred up excitement; among other claims, he argues that in the dysfunctional context of capitalist society, the traits of psychopathy are rewarded (2011).

between the marginalization of mental illness and the centering of privilege comes into stark contrast: while the privileged person who wishes for a more just world can nonetheless opt out of creating that world, the mentally ill person who wishes to survive has no choice but to undertake the struggle.

What this should tell us is that action is possible, even under conditions of ignorance or uncertainty. What is necessary is to develop tools to act responsibly under these conditions. Building accountable relationships to which a person must be responsive can help with this. Anecdotally, while solitude is often what I desire most in times of despair, and though it can be healing, I have found more sustained health through steadfast relationships with people who care enough about me and share enough of my values to give me tough love and gentle care and reassurance when called for.

I remember one occasion on which I marveled at how seriously a very close friend took the advice of people around her. My friend has struggled with mental illness since adolescence; when we met in college she was suffering greatly, but also receiving consistent mental health care for the first time in her life. Over the years, she has developed an intimate knowledge of her own mind and of its unpredictability. A year or two ago, she was very committed to making a decision that I felt was dangerous and that she would regret, though I appreciated the values that drove her to it. After several discussions spread out over a few weeks, she announced to me that she was not going to do what she had wanted, even though she still thought it was a good decision. She explained that so many people who cared about her expressed their reservations that she

had decided to listen, though she still did not agree. I was astounded at what still seems to me a very unusual occurrence of someone listening to and following the advice of people around her. I do not know if I would do the same thing. I have thought about this event frequently since then, and what I am left with is admiration for the respect my friend showed her own fallibility. I do not know whether she would have had occasion to develop this respect without her years of experience of mental illness. Recognizing the unreliability of our own minds can draw our attention to the importance of seeking other perspectives in order to get a better view of the world.

Obviously, relying on other people in this way puts us at risk of being harmed. But compared to what? Striving for individual autonomy (epistemic or otherwise) has historically led to devastating harm inflicted on others, as we extract energy and labor to support our autonomy but simultaneously make that extraction invisible. We are relational beings, and ours is a relational world. Mental illness, like other forms of vulnerability, has the power to draw attention to the ways that, for better and worse, we make and are made up by our relationships with others. Recognizing the unreliability of our own minds can be a stark reminder of the irresolvability of epistemic dependence.

The paralyzed privileged can learn from the experiences of people living with mental illness to value and put effort into building relationships of trust, even though they will always be subject to doubt and deceit. That we *are,* in fact, vulnerable to the beliefs and actions of those around us is evidenced by the very situation that brings the

privileged progressive to paralysis: that we (including our cognition) have been shaped by a society built on the suffering and exploitation of some of its members. What we can learn from people who struggle through mental illness is to recognize that though we are subject to larger systems that act upon us, we are also the subjects of our own (and our collective) stories.

4.4 Narrative and storytelling

One of the tools characteristic of cognitive behavioral therapy is developing the skill to identify patterns of thinking that are unproductive (i.e., that contribute to unhappiness or bad-functioning), to interrupt them. Eventually, we may learn to replace them with thoughts that are more conducive to living well, though sometimes just identifying problematic thoughts can be sufficient. I have often found myself struck with doubt during this practice as well—what if a habit of thinking (e.g., that I am undisciplined) is harmful to my self esteem, but is nonetheless true? It would seem problematic to try to undermine true beliefs just because they make me unhappy; that is a recipe for delusion. What has been helpful for me in this area is to momentarily set aside the (perceived) truth-value of a thought, and to consider it as though I were writing a narrative: does this advance the story I want to tell? Does this sort of thinking help move the narrative of my life along a path I value?

This orientation can help get the paralyzed privileged progressive unstuck when she knows that the cognitive distortions that result from her privilege limit her ability to

evaluate the truth value of claims she encounters. Asking questions of our own lives, beliefs, and actions that are more akin to narrative analysis than to assessing truth value can give us a new perspective. Evaluating what we think we know in terms of narrative significance—Whose story does this advance? Which characters are undeveloped? What future narratives does this enable, and which does it foreclose?— can offer a solution to skeptical paralysis and can help spur coalitional political action even in the face of uncertainty. Bringing the tools of narrative analysis to evaluate beliefs about personal traits can draw attention to the history (personal or larger) that contributed to the belief, to its consequences for self and others, and to one's responsibility and power to change it, if desired.

There is reason to think that this kind of analysis will have importantly different consequences when applied to beliefs about mutable personal characteristics and rather more fixed social and historical facts (e.g., that the Holocaust happened). In the latter case, it may concern some people to further dislodge from the status of objective truth claims that have already been subjected to problematic doubt. But narrative significance is not intended as an alternative to truth value; rather it provides us with extra tools to evaluate and engage with a claim, whether or not we have access to its truth value. When applied to more objective claims, narrative analysis can draw attention to the fact that facts are not inert— they are *used* to tell particular stories; they make sense within the apparatus of theory. Asking the characteristic questions of narrative analysis about the history and memory of the Holocaust, for example, can give insight into the aims of

deniers (whose claims are otherwise so far beyond the pale as to prohibit engagement), *and* to recognize manipulation of the memory and pain of the Shoah to justify Israeli neo-colonialism. In this way, assessing bits of (putative) knowledge for how they fit into larger narratives can dislodge us from the paralysis that can arise from uncertainty about truth value, and it enables us to engage in ways that certainty often discourages.

Most relevantly for this paper, the tools of narrative analysis can offer a way to learn and act in accordance with one's values in spite of durable cognitive distortions. As people with mental illness and other[23] disabilities must find workarounds for their impairments, paralyzed privileged progressives can find ways to learn and act around and perhaps through their epistemic lacunae. This is not a recommendation to ignore the ignorance and cognitive distortions that accompany privilege or to blithely act in ways that seem, on first glance, to fit progressive values. What it actually requires is a sustained effort to learn about the contours and origins of one's impairment in order to understand what kind of beliefs it is likely to impact. It requires doing the work to cultivate relationships of trust and accountability. And it requires subjecting one's own beliefs as well as the feedback of others to questions about their practical and theoretical provenance, purpose, and consequences.

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[23] Whether and which kinds of mental illnesses are disabilities is not fixed, and people's self-identification varies. I do not mean to impose the category of disability on anyone who does not identify with it. I am ambivalent about my own identification, though I have found mental illness disabling for me at certain times and for certain purposes.

4.5 Conclusion

The structures of white supremacy have functioned to ensure that white people would not come into conflict with people or experiences or notions that challenged the pretension that white superiority was real and natural. The social, political, and legal structures that support white supremacy were and are so strong that they established epistemic distortions so that even when counterexamples to white supremacy make it through, white(ly) people simply cannot comprehend them—instead, we make room for exceptions that prove the rule, or we lean on a robust apparatus of cognitive dissonance. In Medina's terms, the political structures of white supremacy have encouraged so much epistemic arrogance that white(ly) people often fail to perceive epistemic friction even when confronted with it.

But times are changing. The many victories (incomplete though they are) of struggles for justice have made counterexamples to the myth of white supremacy harder to avoid. We encounter people who are different from us; we watch video after video of police brutality committed in our name, we witness people loving freely, practicing ancestral religions, reaching the highest levels of performance in our society in spite of huge pressures against them, mastering the language and reasoning of oppressors and using that language to argue and persuade us that what we thought was universal, what we took for granted as shared reality, is not so reliable after all.

The gift that George Yancy (and Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass, and W. E. B. Du Bois, and James Baldwin, and Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, and so many

others) offered to white people is our story. And, though the story is painful, the power of engaging with it is that it allows us to change.

Conclusion

Engaging questions of privilege, knowledge production, and activism is productive for both practical action and philosophy. Careful consideration of the relationship between our material and political world, our location in it, and what we can come to know can help us develop strategies for responsible action against oppression. Recognizing the ways that colonialism has shaped academic conceptions of knowledge can allow us to see alternatives that may be necessary for repairing relationships with Native communities. Understanding that knowledge production is embedded in relationships of power urges us to learn how domination shapes knowledge production and to be cautious about reproducing domination in our attempts to learn. Recognizing that dependence on others is a durable characteristic of our epistemic lives can direct us to develop skills of learning by trusting wisely. And attending to the narrative significance of claims we do not understand can help us devise ways to act when we are uncertain about how to move forward.

On the other hand, philosophy has much to learn from attending to the real struggles of building political coalitions against oppression. Orienting philosophical attention around the messy details of political life brings up new questions (e.g. what are the consequences of treating knowledge like a commodity?), offers new clues to old

questions (e.g., that trust is an important area of analysis when we talk about learning from experts), and disrupts answers once thought settled (e.g., that seeking epistemic autonomy is epistemically responsible behavior). To my mind, the most important things philosophers have to learn from inquiry rooted in real, political need are a sense of accountability for which questions we pursue, how we go about pursuing them, and which sorts of answers we are satisfied with, and a recognition that we do not produce knowledge in a vacuum— that philosophers are part of political communities that shape and are shaped by us.

When I first had to give a title to what would become the dissertation, I called it, "An Epistemology of Solidarity: Allyship in the face of ignorance." Aside from disliking the word *allyship,* throughout the process of writing the dissertation, my relationship to the political struggles I was writing about changed. One way I have begun to distinguish allyship from coalition-building is that the ally does not see herself as having a stake in the fight—she is merely helping. As my research and writing progressed, I started to recognize the stake I have in all fights for justice. It goes beyond preserving or developing my own integrity or humanity; beyond valuing justice, or wishing that no one would suffer oppression; I *feel* in some important, intimate way, that our ends are tied up together.

In some ways, this has eased some of the puzzles for me about what to learn and how to act. Part of the answers to what can seem vexing questions are quite simple and practical: having conversations, listening well, putting the effort in to learn what came

before you, and so on. Of course there are complications to each of these activities—power dynamics shape conversations in ways that can prevent us from fully meeting our interlocutors; listening is not passive, and we ought to be aware of how our existing beliefs shape what we hear; history is not inert and ought to be challenged—but I think there is a lot of progress that can be made through seriously engaging with our relationships, communities, and stories. Given the intricate network of connections between our political and social locations, our identities and values, and our epistemic habits, a change in any one of these areas is likely to influence the others as well. It has helped me, recently, when the reach of oppression into the structures of our relationships, thoughts, and feelings, (not to mention institutions) is overwhelming, to keep in mind that one consequence of this ubiquity is that everywhere is a potential site of resistance.

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