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“Analytic Social Epistemology” and the Epistemic Significance of Other Minds Sanford C. Goldberg, Northwestern University

In this paper I develop a rationale for pursuing a distinctly “social” epistemology, according to which social epistemology is the systematic study of the *epistemic significance of other minds*. After articulating what I have in mind with this expression, I argue that the resulting rationale informs work presently being done in the emerging tradition of “Analytic Social Epistemology” (ASE). I go on to diagnose Steve Fuller’s (2012) dismissal of ASE (as “retrograde”) as reflecting a rather deep — and, to date, deeply uncharitable — misunderstanding of the aims and rationale of this emerging tradition. Far from being retrograde, the best of the work in the emerging ASE tradition provides a nice compliment to the best of the social epistemology work in the social science tradition. The key to seeing this point is twofold: we need to recognize the normative orientation of (much of) the work in ASE; and, perhaps more importantly, we need to appreciate the difference between how Fuller (2012) understands the normativity of social epistemology, and how this is understood by theorists within the ASE tradition. I conclude with what I hope will be some constructive suggestions on this score.

Section 1: Communities, Dependency Relations, Norms and Assessment

In the last thirty years or so, philosophers, social scientists, and others have begun to speak of and pursue inquiry within a distinctly “social” epistemological framework. That there should be a subfield of epistemology in “social epistemology,” and that this subfield should have begun to attract a good deal of attention, are matters that require some explanation. (After all, there is no corresponding phenomenon with “baseball epistemology,” or “financial epistemology,” or “dinner epistemology,” or)

In one sense, the explanation is obvious. As standardly conceived, epistemology is the theory of knowledge. As standardly practiced, the theory of knowledge is interested in (among other things) the various *sources* of knowledge. We might think to explain the existence of a distinctly “social” epistemology, then, in terms of the existence of distinctly social sources of knowledge. According to this explanation, it is because we get a good deal of what we know from other people, that we ought to devote time to studying the nature of this source, and the nature of the knowledge that it produces.

There is much to this explanation. For one thing, the explanation foregrounds a claim — the claim that *there are* distinctly social sources of knowledge — whose plausibility has been at the center of a good deal of recent discussion. Given the highly individualistic orientation of much of traditional epistemology, many thinkers (at least since the British empiricists) wonder whether so-called “social” sources of knowledge might be reduced to other (individualistic) sources of knowledge: perception, inference, memory, etc.¹ For another thing, the present explanation makes clear that one rationale for pursuing social

¹ The original source for such a view is often taken to be Hume (see e.g. Hume 1742/1846 and 1748/2000). For a recent defense of this view, see E. Fricker (1987, 1994, 1995). A “mixed” account (reductionistic about justification but not knowledge) is found in Audi 1997. I will take up this issue later in the text.

epistemology rests on the failure of such a reduction. In recent years, a good deal of ink has been spilled in examining the case for and against this reductive project.

Still, I think that it will not do to explain the existence of social epistemology entirely in terms of the fact that much of our knowledge comes from social sources. For one thing, it seems wrong to restrict epistemology’s potential interest in “the social” to that of a source of knowledge. On the contrary, those who are sympathetic to the pursuit of “social epistemology” often hold that one’s community is implicated in one’s body of knowledge in ways that go far beyond that of being a source of information. Nor is this the only drawback of the proposed explanation. Such an explanation fails to make clear precisely why many theorists think that social epistemology presents a challenge to certain aspects of the epistemological tradition. And by “many theorists” I have in mind not only the usual suspects (people like Steve Fuller and other sociologists of knowledge, those working in the history and philosophy of science, and theorists from Science and Technology Studies programs). I also have in mind some epistemologists whose training was within the epistemological tradition, and whose work continues to engage that tradition — including many of the very people Fuller dismisses as “analytic social epistemologists.” An adequate explanation for the emergence of social epistemology ought to explain the challenge such a development presents to epistemology as traditionally practiced.

In order to appreciate the nature of this challenge, and so to deepen our explanation for the existence (and rationale) of a distinctly social epistemology, we would do well to begin with the reasons for thinking that there are distinctly social sources of knowledge. These reasons, I want to suggest, point to a central deficiency in traditional epistemology, as it seeks to represent the contributions others make in one’s attempts at knowledge. Once we recognize this, we will be in a position to appreciate the variety of different ways in which knowledge acquisition is (often, and perhaps even typically) a social activity.

Epistemic Communities

Traditional epistemology is individualistic in its orientation: it focuses on the states, skills, and background information of individual epistemic subjects. As such it recognizes only two general ways for an individual to acquire knowledge of her environment: ² through perception, or through inference (relying on one’s own background information). Once this framework is accepted, we are limited in the role(s) that other people can be recognized as playing in one’s pursuit of knowledge. Put in the starkest terms possible, others’ antics and appearances — their doings and sayings, their dress and manner of presentation etc. — are no different in principle from the antics and appearances of *any* of the objects in one’s environment. That is to say, on this framework other people’s antics and appearances have the status of *evidence* from which one can come to know things through inference. Thus, when I come to know e.g. that the Dean is upset through your

² Here I disregard the possibility of *a priori* routes to knowledge of the environment, as not relevant to my topic here.

telling me that she is, my route to knowledge here is no different in kind than the route by which I come to know that it's cold outside by seeing my brother reach for his parka, or the route by which I come to know that we have a mouse problem by observing the mouse droppings under the sink, or the route by which I come to know that it is currently raining by hearing the characteristic patter-patter-patter on my roof. In each case perception makes available to me a piece of evidence — an utterance of yours; a piece of nonverbal behavior of my brother's; mouse droppings; sounds coming from the roof — from which I go on to make inferences. In making these inferences, I am relying on my background information, both for interpreting the evidence in the first place (those things are *mouse droppings*; that's the sound of *rain*), and for knowing which inferences to draw from my evidence (*the presence of mouse droppings is highly correlated with the nearby presence of mice; my brother reaches for his parka only when it's cold outside; you assert things only when what you assert is true*).

I want to suggest that this approach to the role others play in one's pursuit of knowledge fundamentally mischaracterizes that role. To be sure, we often do draw inferences from others' antics, speech, and appearances; and when we do, their antics, speech, and appearances serve as evidence. But there are also cases in which we rely on others *as epistemic subjects in their own right*. When we do, we regard them not merely as providing potential evidence, but also, and more centrally, as manifesting *the very results of their own epistemic sensibility*. And when one comes to acquire knowledge through relying on results others have made manifest to one in this way, (i) one's own knowledge depends on more than the evidence in one's own possession; (ii) one's reasons outstrip what one oneself can offer in defense of one's beliefs; (iii) one's access to the facts go beyond what is accessible merely to one's own eyes (or ears or ...). In these cases the epistemic task has been *socially distributed*; and with only a little overstatement we might say that the distinct epistemic subjects involved constitute (part of) an *epistemic community*.

I cannot pretend that this picture is anything but controversial among those who grew up in the more traditional, individualistic orientation that characterizes orthodox epistemology.³ But I won't defend this picture further here.⁴ Instead, I would like to suggest how social epistemology looks from the vantage point of those who take this picture seriously. Those who do take this picture seriously recognize that we stand in a fundamentally different relation to other epistemic subjects than we do to the rest of the items in our environment. And once one recognizes this, one sees the need to characterize what I will proceed to call the *epistemic significance of other minds*.

To understand what this involves, let me describe in more detail how (from the epistemic point of view) our relations to other epistemic subjects differ from our relations to the rest of the items in our environment. Here I highlight three dimensions of difference.

³ I suspect it will be more familiar to those who already have theoretical axes to grind against that tradition.

⁴ I have attempted to do so elsewhere. See Goldberg 2010, 2011.

Epistemic Dependency Relations

First, there are various *epistemic dependency relations* that structure our interactions with others. Depending on a thermometer for knowledge of the current temperature differs from depending on another’s telling you the temperature: in the latter case but not the former, you are depending on your source to make available to you a piece of knowledge that is the result of *her own epistemic sensibility*. This isn’t to say that she herself arrived at her judgment relying only on her own on-board cognitive competences. Perhaps she herself came to know the current temperature by glimpsing the read-out of a nearby thermometer, or by reading the weather section of her newspaper. But even if she did, you remain epistemically dependent on her: you are relying on the epistemic goodness of the processes through which she came in possession of and subsequently reported the information in question. That is, you are epistemically dependent on her in her selection of a good source, in her competent “reading” of that source, and in her competent reporting of what she read.

When you depend on her in this way, *your* knowledge of the temperature depends on the epistemic goodness of the results of *her* epistemic sensibility on this occasion. To be sure, when you know the temperature through reading a thermometer, you are relying on it to be working properly. However, when it comes to the epistemic tasks involved in coming to know the temperature, it makes no sense to say that you have distributed some of that task to the thermometer. A thermometer exhibits no epistemic sensibility on which to rely; insofar as you are relying on the thermometer’s output, your reliance is only as epistemically good as *your own grounds* for so relying (observed track record; reasons for trusting the company that manufactured it; and so forth). I describe this difference by saying that whereas reliance on another epistemic subject can make you *epistemically dependent* on that subject, reliance on a mere instrument (or other item in your environment) does not do so. Of course, relying on another person’s say-so is *one* kind of epistemic dependence; but it is not the only kind, and it is a task of social epistemology to enumerate and describe the variety of kinds of epistemic dependence exhibited in our interactions with others.⁵

Epistemic Norms

Second, there are a variety of *epistemic norms* that enable us to calibrate our expectations of one another as we pursue our inquiries (whether individually or jointly). You might well expect the shadows creeping across your lawn to proceed at a calculable rate, and to correspond in some regular way to the time of day. But insofar as you have such expectations, these expectations require some epistemic support — e.g. by appeal to your past observations of the rate of the shadow’s creep, the correlations you have made between this creep and the observed time, and so forth. In contrast, there are a variety of expectations we have of *others* — in particular, with respect to the roles that they play in

⁵ I make some initial taxonomic distinctions in Goldberg 2011.

our attempts of knowledge — where it is not obvious that these expectations are evidentially grounded in this way. For example, consider the expectations we have of others’ assertions: we expect others to be knowledgeable or reliable in what they tell us, and we hold them responsible when they are not. But it is far from clear that this practice depends on everyone’s having sufficient evidence that assertions generally are highly knowledgeable or reliable. Rather, these expectations appear to reflect *epistemic norms* governing the practice of assertion, where the norms themselves are at least implicitly mutually acknowledged by all members of the speech community, and where it is the (internalization of the) norms themselves that underwrite our expectations of knowledgeable or reliability in others’ assertions.⁶

Given that we live in complicated communities exhibiting a high degree of the division of intellectual labor, we would expect there to be *other* coordination problems whose solutions rely on other epistemic norms; the epistemic norms involved in assertion need not be the only instance. I regard it as a task for social epistemology to enumerate and describe these norms, and to articulate their epistemic bearing on the expectations they underwrite.

Epistemic Assessment of Other Minds

Third, as a result of the first two points, the epistemic assessment of beliefs formed through one of the “social routes” to knowledge⁷ would appear to be decidedly different from the epistemic assessment of beliefs not so formed. In particular, the former would appear to require the assessment of a variety of social factors that have no relevance in assessments of the latter sort. The point can be put vividly, if somewhat misleadingly, by saying that if a route to knowledge is social, there is no way that we ought to assess the resulting belief in the sort of terms Descartes described in *Meditations on a First Philosophy*.⁸

Descartes thought that he was in a position from the armchair to certify all that he knew and justifiedly believed, merely by reflecting on the reasons and evidence that were available to him then and there, as well as the relations holding between these reasons and the beliefs he formed on their basis. But it is wrong to think that an armchair assessment of this sort, or indeed any assessment restricted to features of the individual in isolation, will be adequate to cases involving a “social route” to knowledge. On the contrary, insofar as epistemic tasks really are socially distributed, our assessment itself

⁶ This idea is prevalent in the literature on the so-called “norm of assertion.” See e.g. Williamson (2000), Lackey (2007), and the various papers in Brown and Cappelen, eds. (2011). Arguably, this idea can be traced back to a “deontic scorekeeping” view of assertion developed by Robert Brandom (1983, 2004). However, Brandom’s approach to assertion is explicitly distinguished from the approach favored by the “norm of assertion” crowd in MacFarlane (2011).

⁷ The language of a “social route” to knowledge is taken from Goldman 1992. I do not claim that he endorses the picture I am presenting here.

⁸ This is “misleading” since it creates the impression that I endorse Cartesian-style assessments for beliefs that do not involve any social dimension. (I don’t; see the Preface to Goldberg (2010).) My point in making this contrast here is to say that Cartesian-style assessments don’t so much as get off the ground in cases in which beliefs are formed through one or another “social route” to knowledge.

must be a social one. It must take into account not only the other individual(s) on whom the belief epistemically depends, but also the social practices and epistemic norms that structure the relations between the individuals. In such cases, we will need to rethink the nature of epistemic assessment so that it proceeds along social lines, in a way that reflects the various epistemic dependencies and epistemic norms that are implicated in the production and sustainment of belief. I regard it as a task for social epistemology to reconceive the nature of epistemic assessment, and, where needed, to reconceive the categories employed in the assessment.⁹

In short, the epistemic significance of other minds can be seen in (i) the various forms taken by our epistemic dependence on others, (ii) the variety of norms that underwrite our expectations of one another as we make our way in the common epistemic environment, and (iii) the distinctive epistemic assessment(s) implicated whenever a doxastic state is the result of a "social route" to knowledge. It is these, (i)-(iii), that capture the ways in which our relations to other epistemic subjects differs from our relations to the rest of the items in our environment. And it is this, I propose, that provides the rationale for a distinctly social epistemology: social epistemology ought to be the systematic investigation into the epistemic significance of other minds, where this is understood to involve the epistemic tasks I have described in connection with each of (i)-(iii).

Below I will be suggesting that this rationale informs the emerging tradition in social epistemology that is sometimes known as "Analytic Social Epistemology." But before I develop that idea, I want to draw out several lessons from the foregoing rationale.

The Extent to Which Epistemology is Social

First, if the foregoing rationale is to be our guide, it is an open question to what extent epistemology is social. To be sure, it is social at least in part because we depend on others as sources of knowledge. But this does not exhaust the roles others play in our pursuit of knowledge. Consider the roles others play as experts, as well as in the certification of expertise; in policing standards of assertoric speech and writing; in peer review; in the collective research projects involving teams of researcher, where no single person is in a position to have all of the relevant expertise or to possess all of the relevant evidence; in devising technologies aimed at enabling us to discern more of nature's secrets, and in training others how to use that technology; and in the process by which we educate our young to become thoughtful, critical, productive members of our own knowledge community. In all of these and perhaps many other ways, we depend on each other epistemically. As I see matters, it is the task of social epistemology to enumerate and describe these ways, to characterize the epistemic norms that underwrite our expectations of one another in these efforts, and to describe the epistemic standards we bring to bear when we assess the results. None of us should be confident of the precise contours of social epistemology (or its place in epistemology more generally) in advance of an extended investigation into these matters.

⁹ Goldberg 2010 attempted to do just this.

Second, it is an open question how best to understand the role of technology in inquiry. Here I mean to include not only tools of communication and information technology but also the distinctive technology and instrumentation employed in mathematics and the social, natural, and human sciences. It is an open question how to understand technology’s role here since it is far from clear how we ought to think of that role, given the rationale I have suggested for the pursuit of social epistemology. On one hand, technology falls within that part of the world whose antics provide us merely with evidence. On the other, technology itself is typically the result of a good deal of epistemic effort: other epistemic subjects bring their epistemic sensibility to bear on the construction, validation, employment, and teaching of technology. What is more, at least some of our technology — here I have in mind scientific instruments — are themselves specifically designed for the purpose of providing results which enable us to discern aspects of the world’s features that would go undetected by unaided perception. Thus our reliance on technology does appear, in both indirect and direct ways, to involve reliance on other epistemic subjects. It would thus seem that social epistemology would do well to explore the epistemological dimension of our reliance on technology.

Third, it is an open question whether the individual epistemic subject is the proper unit of analysis at which to conduct epistemic assessment. So far I have been speaking as if the unit of analysis is the individual subject. This way of speaking is compatible with a view in epistemology and in the philosophy of the social sciences known as “methodological individualism,” according to which all statements regarding communities or collectives can be understood, without remainder, in terms of statements regarding individual actors and their relations to one another. At the same time, many social epistemologists take issue with methodological individualism, and it might seem curious that I have been speaking in ways that appear to emerge from such a doctrine. But the matter is complicated. On the one hand, my sense is that most of the early criticisms of methodological individualism are not compelling. On the other, the increasing complexity and interconnectedness of the world in which we pursue inquiry, as manifested in the prevalence of “big data”¹⁰ (in which our epistemic dependence on others is more profound than any one of us can appreciate), enhance the need to assess the case for a more collective epistemology. The development and evaluation of this case ought to be on the agenda of social epistemology.

All three of these points suggest that we do a great disservice to the potential of social epistemology research if the only rationale we recognize for pursuing this research is that there are social sources of knowledge. Such a conception is far too limited. In studying the variety of epistemic dependency relations, the set of epistemic norms that enable epistemic tasks to be socially distributed, and the nature of the epistemic standards used to assess the resulting beliefs, we can see clearly why social epistemology is not merely one category among others on the list of sources of knowledge. We can also see the sort of challenge that social epistemology presents to orthodoxy. In a nutshell, our epistemic dependence on others cannot be understood in the orthodox (individualistic) terms of

¹⁰ “Big data” is a term used to denote data sets that are so massive that they pose challenges to traditional techniques for the storage, manipulation, and analysis of information.

traditional epistemology, nor can the questions about the nature and scope of this dependence find their place among the standard questions of individualistic epistemology. It would thus be a significant mistake to think that acknowledging the relevance of social epistemology is merely adding one other item to the list of knowledge sources.

In short, I submit that the pursuit of social epistemology is the attempt to come to terms with the epistemic significance of other minds. To do so we can begin by acknowledging other people, not merely as sources of knowledge, but as *resources* of knowledge — where others bring their own epistemic sensibility to bear in all sorts of ways as we shape and operate within a common epistemic environment.

Section 2: A Rationale for Social Epistemology

I intend for the foregoing to serve as a rationale for pursuing social epistemology. What is more, I believe that this rationale does in fact inform the sort of social epistemology that is prevalent on the contemporary Anglo-American epistemology scene. (Since Fuller describes this scene as “Analytic Social Epistemology,” or “ASE” for short, I will follow his lead on this — despite my dislike of this label.¹¹) In this section I will argue that my proposed rationale informs work within the emerging ASE tradition in three main ways.

First, my proposed rationale makes sense of the origins of ASE within traditional (Anglo-American) epistemology, and explains its early focus on issues of testimony. Second, my proposed rationale makes sense of the variety of topics currently being pursued within the emerging ASE tradition. And third, my proposed rationale provides a plausible construal of the contours of ASE within epistemology more generally — contours that can lead us to predict the shape of future work within this tradition. While the majority of those actively engaged in ASE will not find my comments controversial it is worth clarifying for those who are unfamiliar with this emerging tradition or are laboring under mischaracterizations of it.¹²

The Emerging Tradition of Analytic Social Epistemology

First, the rationale I have proposed for the pursuit of social epistemology makes sense of the origins of the subfield of social epistemology within traditional (Anglo-American) epistemology. On my reconstruction, these origins lie in the attempt to make sense of

¹¹ The sort of social epistemology that is prevalent on the Anglo-American epistemology scene derives in large part from the work of Alvin Goldman. This said, one salient difference between my rationale for social epistemology and the one offered in Goldman (2009) is this: whereas Goldman sees social epistemology as devoted to considering the effects of various social arrangements on the production of true belief (in comparison with that of false belief), I have a more expansive conception of social epistemology — one that includes a place for more traditional epistemological concepts such as evidence, reasons, rationality, and justification. Still, I intend my rationale to be broadly Goldmanian in spirit; I offer my defense of this in my (2010: Chapter 7).

¹² In the following section I will be making an appeal to this rationale in order to argue that Fuller is mistaken in his main criticisms of the emerging ASE tradition. Lest it seem that the tradition I defend there is not the one Fuller criticizes under the label “ASE,” I spend some time here making the connection explicit.

what I have been calling the epistemic significance of other minds. In particular, the move to a more social epistemology begins in a re-examination of the role others play in our individual attempts to acquire knowledge. From this vantage point, it is natural that testimony (as a source of knowledge) should loom so large at the outset of the emerging tradition of ASE. This focus on testimony is natural in only because testimony offers the clearest case in which the individualism of orthodox epistemology is inadequate, in the ways described in section 1. Thus, it is precisely in thinking about the nature of testimonial knowledge that we bring maximum pressure to bear on the prevalent individualism of traditional epistemology. Or so I argued in my last book (Goldberg 2010), and so it was argued in the introduction to the very first anthology in Goldmanian (Anglo-American) social epistemology, Schmitt (1994).¹³ And indeed, this is precisely what we find: in its earliest moments, ASE focused the role others play in enabling the acquisition of knowledge through testimony. As we will see shortly, this is a point that Fuller himself acknowledges (Fuller 2012, 275).

Nor is this the only area in which the proposed rationale informs the recent Goldmanian tradition in social epistemology. The proposed rationale can also make sense of the issues that have more recently been pursued on the contemporary ASE scene. Beyond the work on testimony, there has been a good deal of work on such phenomena as disagreement,¹⁴ collective epistemology,¹⁵ the epistemology of inclusiveness,¹⁶ and the epistemology of instrument-based belief.¹⁷ In each case we can make sense of the inclusion of the topic (on the list of things currently being pursued within the ASE tradition) in terms of their being facets of *the epistemic significance of other minds* — that is, in the very terms suggested by the proposed rationale. It is perhaps worth making this explicit.

Consider the literature on the epistemology of disagreement. This literature addresses the epistemic significance of (peer) disagreement. Here the question is centrally whether the fact of (peer) disagreement itself constitutes a basis for revising one’s confidence on the disputed matter. Why should it even occur to us that the fact of disagreement itself — as opposed to the arguments and evidence cited within the disagreement — might have any epistemic significance at all? That it does occur to us reflects uncertainty regarding the epistemic significance to be ascribed to the output of another epistemic subject’s own cognitive system.

¹³ In the introduction to that book, as well as in more recent work (Schmitt 2006), Schmitt makes clear that testimony presents a test case for various assumptions we might put under the label “epistemic individualism.” See also Lackey (2006, 2008), where she emphasizes testimony’s challenge to individualistic epistemology.

¹⁴ See for example two recent volumes published by OUP: Feldman and Warfield (2010), and Christensen and Lackey (2013).

¹⁵ In addition to various recent articles (see e.g. Tollefson (2006, 2011), Miranda Fricker (forthcoming), and Jennifer Lackey (2012)) and the recent high-visibility book by Pettit and List (2011), OUP has two forthcoming volumes on collective epistemology, one edited by Jennifer Lackey, the other edited by Michael Brady and Miranda Fricker.

¹⁶ See *Episteme* 3: 1-2 (2006) and *Synthese* 190 (2013), both of which are devoted to this topic.

¹⁷ Two journal volumes (one just published, one forthcoming) deal with this from the perspective of the “extended cognition” hypothesis in the philosophy of mind. See *Philosophical Explorations* 15: 2, 2012, and a forthcoming one in *Philosophical Issues*.

Consider next the recent interest in collective epistemology. Work on this topic addresses whether there is any place in our ontology for groups or collective subjects, or whether the relevant “social” phenomena are ultimately reducible to an ontology that recognizes only collections of discrete individuals. Once again, we can understand this as asking after the epistemic significance of collaboration and cooperation with others in inquiry: does the effect of such collaboration underwrite an epistemic subject over and above the individuals who are collaborating? This is another facet of the epistemic significance of other minds.

Next, consider the recent attention to inclusiveness. While there is one aspect of this topic that can be understood in the fully individualistic terms of orthodox epistemology — How does being inclusive in one’s deliberations affect one’s own epistemic perspective?¹⁸ — there are many other aspects that can only be understood as exploring the epistemic significance of other minds. For example, how does inclusiveness in group deliberation affect the quality of *the group’s* decisions?¹⁹ This question concerns what we might describe as the epistemic significance of deliberation with other minds. For another example, what epistemic norms are proper for group deliberation if such deliberation aims to acknowledge the reality of multiple (and diverse) epistemic subjects, each of whom has her or his own take on matters?²⁰ This is a question about the norms that are proper when one is dealing with other epistemic subjects.

I have just been suggesting that my proposed rationale can make sense of the variety of topics currently being pursued within the emerging ASE tradition. I turn, finally, to a third way in which the proposed rationale informs contemporary work in the emerging ASE tradition. By seeing this tradition as organized around and motivated by the epistemic significance of other minds, we arrive at a plausible construal of the contours of social epistemology within Anglo-American epistemology more generally. Others are not merely sources of knowledge; they permeate our attempts to acquire and maintain knowledge. Insofar as these interactions between subjects are shaped by cognitive labor of each of the subjects, there is an opportunity to pursue the epistemic significance of the interaction — in other words, an opportunity to do social epistemology, ASE-style. This would lead us to predict that future topics of research will develop around the ways in which other minds bear on our epistemic projects, not merely by providing us with information, but also as cooperative subjects in joint modes of inquiry, and as fellows in a shared tradition, with shared practices and institutions that shape both our expectations of one another and the forms of our interaction.

In this section I have been belaboring the point that the work being done within the emerging tradition of ASE can be understood as part of a comprehensive attempt to characterize the epistemic significance of other minds. I now want to go on to argue that, when it is understood in this way, ASE is not guilty of the more serious of the charges

¹⁸ I myself pursued this very question in Goldberg (2013).

¹⁹ This is the topic of Cariani (forthcoming).

²⁰ Such can be seen as the animating idea behind Miranda Fricker’s seminal work on epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007).

Fuller levels against it. (While it is guilty of some of the lesser charges, the explanation for this does not attest to the “retrograde” status of ASE, as Fuller contends.)

Section 3: Addressing Fuller’s Critique

In this section I want to argue that, while some of the concerns Fuller raises against the emerging tradition of ASE are apt, the significance he attaches to these criticisms is faulty, and as a result his wholesale critique of ASE fails to hit the mark. To make good on this claim I will be assuming that ASE can be understood as part of a comprehensive attempt to characterize the epistemic significance of other minds.

I want to begin with what I take to be Fuller’s central criticism of ASE. This criticism is implicit in the question that serves as the heading of the section of his paper in which he discusses ASE: “Why is ASE *so retrograde*?” (273; italics added) Simply put, Fuller faults ASE with having failed to make any significant advances, and he purports to explain this alleged failure as the result of ASE’s supposedly “‘minimalist’ aspirations” (274). He writes that ASE’s “‘minimalist’ aspirations” are seen in (and I quote)

(1) A tendency to operate with a minimal understanding of actual knowledge practices, including their histories and aspirations, a strategy that is often defended in the name of maximum abstraction and generality.

(2) A tendency to minimize the impact that the philosopher could have on ongoing forms of inquiry, such that the Lockean self-description of having been an ‘underlabourer’ for Newton is presented as ambitious.²¹

(3) A tendency to focus on extant epistemic practices — ‘trust,’ ‘testimony,’ and ‘expertise’ — that appear designed so as to minimally upset the status quo, such that those who would significantly alter our default epistemic behaviors are always put on the back foot in terms of burden of proof (Fuller 2012, 274-75).

On the basis of this criticism, Fuller describes ASE as playing a role analogous to that of the sixteenth-Century astronomer Tycho Brahe. It was Brahe who “proposed a compromise solution to the discrepancies between the Ptolemaic and Copernican worldview” by suggesting that we continue to endorse “the ancient view that the earth is the centre of the universe” while simultaneously holding “the modern view that all the other celestial bodies orbit the sun.” (273) The suggestion appears to be that ASE, like Brahe, is “retrograde” insofar as it pursues inquiry within an old and inadequate intellectual framework. In fact, Fuller goes so far as to say that, under the influence of

²¹ [SG’s footnote: the reference is to the “Epistle to the Reader” in John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he contrasts the “monumental” work of the scientists of his day (he mentions Boyle, Sydenham, Huygenius, and Newton) with his work, whose “ambition” is that of an “under-labourer” whose aim is to “[clear] the ground a little, and [remove] some of the rubbish that lies in the way of knowledge.” (Locke 1690/1964: 58).]

people like Alvin Goldman, ASE “has marched steadily backwards” to the point where “we might currently speak of a *Ptolemaic* turn in social epistemology.” (274)

I find Fuller’s rhetoric, and in particular his astronomical analogy, rather seriously misguided.²² While his description of ASE in (1)-(3) above does capture some aspects of the contemporary literature, his analysis of the contemporary scene in “Analytic Social Epistemology” substantially distorts that scene’s features.

Fuller’s First Criticism

Suppose that I am right to think that so-called “Analytic Social Epistemology” can be understood as part of a systematic attempt to come to terms with the epistemic significance of other minds. Suppose further that I am right to think that this attempt will involve the three tasks I mentioned above: (i) identifying and describing the varieties of types of epistemic dependence; (ii) characterizing the norms that entitle us to the expectations which inform our informational dealings with one another (and with our instruments and technologies); and (iii) giving an account of the epistemic assessment of the doxastic states that result from this interaction. This is enough to see that Fuller is quite right to think that proponents of ASE need to know about our actual knowledge practices. (These include such things as our deference to experts and the accepted methods of expertise validation; the practices through which we rely on technologies in the pursuit of inquiry; the distributed nature of work on epistemic teams; and so forth.) After all, it is these “knowledge practices” that provide a good deal of the evidence for what it is that social epistemology ought to be identifying and describing in the first place.

Nor is this the only thing Fuller is right about. I think it is only slightly exaggerated to say that, as things now stand, many of the theorists within the emerging ASE tradition “operate with a minimal understanding of actual knowledge practices.” Putting these two points together, I can endorse a qualified version of the first half of Fuller’s criticism in (1): proponents of ASE ought to know more than we standardly do about “knowledge practices”.

This is a fair criticism, but one that is not particularly damning. After all, if one thinks that a group of theorists within a given theoretical tradition ought to know more about a certain topic, then the proper reaction would be to regard them as needing to learn more about the topic. It would not be to dismiss the entire theoretical tradition from they come. Perhaps this more limited reaction is all that Fuller means to be expressing with his criticism in (1). But it appears that his critique is more than this. After all, he goes on to offer an explanation for the current state of ignorance.

Fuller describes this “minimal understanding of actual knowledge practices” as “*a strategy*” among theorists in the ASE tradition which is “often *defended* in the name of maximum abstraction and generality” (italics added). This rhetoric makes it seem as though Fuller regards the offending ignorance as reflecting something to which theorists

²² I also find this sort of name-calling to be patronizing, but I will not pursue this criticism here.

in the ASE tradition are *ideologically committed*. Perhaps there are some theorists within the ASE tradition who are so committed, and who would defend this commitment in the way Fuller describes. But even so it would be a far cry to condemning *ASE itself* as ideologically committed to such ignorance.

If this is what Fuller has in mind, he is substantially distorting the emerging ASE tradition. I argued above that ASE can be understood to be part of a systematic attempt to discern the epistemic significance of other minds. If so, theorists within this tradition have clear grounds for addressing such ignorance. Indeed, this was precisely what I acknowledged above. In light of this, we might more charitably explain the continued existence of such a state of minimal understanding, not (as Fuller does) as something to which ASE is ideologically committed, but rather as a temporary state, perhaps to be expected in the early years in which ASE is being developed, but one which we would expect will diminish as time goes on. If I had to guess, I would identify three main factors as those that contribute to the present state of relative ignorance.

First, theorists in the ASE tradition have shown a marked interest in the normative over the descriptive, and this has led us to focus less attention on our actual knowledge practices. Second, the tradition Fuller describes as ASE is still less than two decades old, and while two decades might seem like a long time, philosophy is a discipline in which change comes slowly — for better and for worse. Third, a very common phenomenon in academic research, the division of intellectual labor, reinforces the already-existing tendencies among theorists in this tradition to stick to the normative questions. I would predict that we will begin to see these divisions break down in the next generation or two of social epistemologists in the ASE tradition. But as I say, these are guesses. And whether or not my more charitable explanation is correct, I can say this: this state of minimal understanding is one that, by the lights of the very rationale I have described for ASE, *ought* to be eliminated. And this is enough to show that it would not be correct to think that such a minimal understanding is a *core commitment* of ASE (owing perhaps to its commitment to “maximum abstraction and generality”).

I conclude, then, that while Fuller is correct in part of what he says in (1) — there is a relative ignorance of current knowledge practices among many of us working in the ASE tradition — he is wrong if he thinks that this is a particularly damning criticism. It is rather a constructive criticism that can and should be addressed in future work.

Fuller’s Second Criticism

What should be said of Fuller’s second criticism, to the effect that ASE exhibits “a tendency to minimize the impact that the philosopher could have on ongoing forms of inquiry”? I confess that I am unclear why this should be thought a criticism, even if it is true. Perhaps Fuller is giving expression to the view that ASE is objectionable unless it is

committed to some sort of pragmatism in the philosophy of science, and to some sort of activist agenda in the real world.²³ But it is hard to see why this should be.

In particular, it is hard to see why ASE should be objectionable unless it endorses some sort of pragmatism in the philosophy of science. If this really is Fuller’s view, then in effect he is tying his approach to social epistemology to a particular philosophical position — and a rather contentious one at that. Wouldn’t it be better to delimit the scope of the sort of inquiry one proposes to do within social epistemology, and then let the ideological chips fall where they may?

What is more, if Fuller really is tying his conception of social epistemology to pragmatist views in epistemology and philosophy of science, he is endorsing views that are often subject to the very criticisms he is at pains to avoid. In particular, pragmatist views are susceptible to the sort of criticism Goldman makes when he criticizes the “veriphobic” traditions in epistemology and philosophy of science (Goldman 2009). The criticism Goldman has in mind is one that bears against any view whose standards of assessment do not include or make any reference to truth. But this is a worry that can arise regarding pragmatist standards, at least insofar as their focus replaces truth with what “works,” what “makes a difference” (to the course of our experience; to our ability to build new technologies; etc.).

Fuller sometimes speaks in ways that invite others to think that he endorses this sort of truth-less pragmatism – as when he endorses the thought that “epistemic standards” are a “social construction” (Fuller 2012, 276) aimed at helping us realize our community’s goals (more on this below). Thus it is unclear whether Fuller’s charge in (2) can be made without committing him to a version of pragmatism that invites Goldman’s “veriphobia” criticism. In fairness to Fuller, he has written several books in which he claims to do just this. In light of this, I might reframe the present point as follows: insofar as Fuller aims to be offering a criticism that *proponents of ASE themselves* can see as scoring points against ASE, he is not advancing his case at all with the point that ASE exhibits “a tendency to minimize the impact that the philosopher could have on ongoing forms of inquiry.” On the contrary, this sort of criticism plays into the hands of his would-be critics. I conclude that Fuller’s charge in (2) is deeply contentious, unnecessarily limits our conception of social epistemology, and is arguably inconsistent with his avowed aim of avoiding “veriphobia.”

Fuller’s Third Criticism

This brings me to Fuller’s third criticism, that proponents of ASE exhibit “a tendency to focus on extant epistemic practices — ‘trust,’ ‘testimony,’ and ‘expertise’ — that appear

²³ This reading is reinforced by the following, which I quote at length: “... analytic social epistemologists ... suppose one says enough by pointing out that some knowledge-relevant procedure, situation or practice would be better were it to go (or have gone) this or that way, regardless of how the advice is likely to be received. The analytic social epistemologist thus appears primarily concerned with assuaging her own conscience (i.e., ‘I said the right thing’) rather than with making a positive material difference to the practices of those whom she would instruct” (Fuller 2012, 272-73).

designed so as to minimally upset the status quo.” Here Fuller is making two distinct claims: first, that there is “a tendency to focus on extant epistemic practices – ‘trust,’ ‘testimony,’ and ‘expertise’”; and second, that this tendency is “designed so as to minimally upset the status quo.”²⁴ While I agree with him (at least in broad outlines) on the first point, I think his second point (which is the damning one) is baseless.

Fuller is clearly correct that there is a good deal of work that has been done within the ASE tradition on the topics he mentions (testimony, trust, and expertise). Indeed, I myself noted this point above. I also think that the prevalence of this work within the emerging ASE tradition is easy to explain — but that the explanation gives the lie to Fuller’s more damning criticism. Fuller appears to think that the reason for this focus is an intentional effort on the part of theorists in this tradition to avoid “upset[ting] the status quo.” But this is *precisely contrary* to what is the case. As I noted above, the focus on such things as testimony, trust, and expertise *brings maximum pressure to bear against the prevalent individualism of traditional epistemology*. These phenomena — the phenomena of trust, testimony, and expertise — are the best (least contentious) case for thinking that the epistemic “status quo,” with its individualistic orientation, is inadequate to the tasks before us.²⁵ Thus, far from being a rearguard move to preserve the tradition, the focus on testimony, trust, and expertise is an attempt to break with tradition and open the way for a more fully social epistemology.

To be sure, a social epistemology that limits itself entirely to discussions of testimony, trust, and expertise is a stunted social epistemology. While Fuller nowhere claims that ASE is stunted in this fashion, it is worth underscoring that *were* such an allegation to be made it would be false. Indeed, if I am right that ASE can be seen as part of the systematic attempt to appreciate the epistemic significance of other minds, then we should expect that a great deal more than testimony will be studied within this emerging tradition. And above I noted the recent interest in disagreement, collective epistemology, the epistemology of beliefs formed through reliance on technology, and the epistemology of inclusiveness. To this we can add questions regarding the epistemology of privacy and secrecy.²⁶ That such topics are now as popular within the emerging tradition of ASE as is work on testimony and expertise undermines Fuller’s proposed explanation for the focus on testimony, trust, and expertise.

Section 4: Epistemic Intuitions

I have just rebutted Fuller’s charge against ASE of being retrograde (for having “minimalist aspirations”). But this is not the only charge Fuller levels against ASE. In the very same section of his paper from which I took the quote above, Fuller writes that

²⁴ To be sure, Fuller says that this tendency “appears” to be designed to avoid upsetting the status quo, not that it is so designed. But if he restricts his claim to the appearances without making any claim to reality, it is hard to read this as a criticism. So I am interpreting him so as to bring out the criticism he is making.

²⁵ See again Schmitt’s introduction to Schmitt (1994), and see also Goldberg (2010).

²⁶ See *Episteme* 10: 2 (2013), which is devoted to this.

naturalized epistemology remained fixated on the philosopher’s ‘pre-analytic’ epistemic intuitions. ... [S]ome in this camp [of naturalized epistemology] — perhaps Stephen Stich most notably — have gone native in their naturalism, embracing evolutionary psychology. Those who remain epistemologists, such as Goldman himself, have marched steadily backwards. ... In fact, we might currently speak of a *Ptolemaic* turn in social epistemology. Following this turn, the empirical disciplines have been effectively abandoned in favor of computer models and other hypothetical scenarios, redolent of social contract theory, suggestive of transcendental arguments but ultimately pre-emptive of critical data checks (273-4).

Insofar as I understand the charge(s) Fuller is leveling here, they appear to be two: theorists within the ASE tradition rely on their own epistemic intuitions as their primary data; and the result is that the (computational and other) models they produce have little if any empirical validity. Neither of Fuller’s charges does what he wants them to do, namely, condemn ASE to a “retrograde” tradition that we must abandon if we are to make progress in social epistemology. While his first charge may be true, I want to suggest that this is not objectionable in the way Fuller thinks; and his second charge, if true, is a reason to criticize particular models, not grounds for abandoning the ASE tradition as a whole.

Consider the charge that practitioners of ASE rely on their own epistemic intuitions as their primary data. Is this charge, by itself, one that the proponent of ASE should fear? I don’t think so. I suspect that Fuller regards this charge as objectionable on the grounds that to rely on one’s own epistemic intuitions as one’s primary data, while simultaneously “operat[ing] with a minimal understanding of actual knowledge practices” (274), results in an empirically invalid theory. But if so, this is grounds for criticizing particular models, not for abandoning ASE.

Fuller might respond that his point is not (or not merely) that the models are empirically invalid, but rather that there is something wrong with consulting “pre-analytic epistemic intuitions” in the first place. But if this is Fuller’s criticism, then he has failed to appreciate the importance of the essentially normative aims of ASE. Let me explain.

The Normative Aims of Analytic Social Epistemology

Emerging out of traditional epistemology, ASE takes from epistemology two key things: a focus on the normative dimension of knowledge and inquiry; and the conceptual and theoretical tools with which to characterize this dimension.²⁷ The concepts of *knowledge* and *evidence*, of *reasons* and *rationality* are normative concepts: their application reflects the satisfaction of certain evaluative standards. To some extent, these standards can be discerned in what Fuller describes as “actual knowledge practices” — that is, in what

²⁷ Goldman is explicit about the use of knowledge in his epistemology; see Goldman (1999, 2002, 2009). And while Goldman has not ventured much into discussions of epistemic justification in social epistemology, others have (see Schmitt (1994) and Goldberg (2010).)

passes for good reasons or evidence, in what is *taken* as rational and reasonable, and in the practices through which knowledge claims *are accepted without further ado*. After all, it is in these evaluative practices that the prevailing standards are made manifest. On this score the work of social theorists such as Fuller has been extremely illuminating, revealing our practices to be much less clean, and much more fraught with social and political considerations, than most would have supposed.

Still, a full account of the relevant epistemological standards requires more than a description of those practices alone can provide. For one thing, the evaluative practices themselves, being messy, are sometimes in conflict — there are debates over whether such-and-such is known, or is good evidence, or is reasonable. When this happens we need some way to adjudicate the conflict, and no appeal to the practices themselves will provide what is needed. (I will return to this issue below.) For another, there must be room to call our evaluative practices themselves into question — if not all at once (a recipe for self-defeat), at least on those occasions when there are well-motivated doubts regarding a particular practice. It is on such occasions that proponents of ASE do well to advert to the sort of normative standards epistemology is in the business of trying to articulate. No doubt, a good deal of the force of these standards rests on something Fuller might deride as “‘pre-analytic’ epistemic intuitions.”²⁸ But I repeat: if the task is to assess the practices themselves, or to adjudicate between conflicts that arise within our practices, we need some critical perspective from outside the local practice(s). To be sure, this perspective itself is not beyond scrutiny.

We can and should explore whether the standards epistemologists present as our standards are in fact the right standards to have. Indeed, this is to do traditional epistemology. But Fuller’s criticism was meant precisely to be a criticism of the traditionalism of ASE. I can’t see how to make good on this criticism without at the same time abandoning epistemology’s traditional role as casting a critical eye on our existing “knowledge practices”. In saying this I do not intend to be offering an invitation to proponents of ASE to remain ignorant of such practices; I intend rather to be construing the emerging tradition of ASE as a complement to those who would describe these practices in detail.

Indeed, this is precisely why I think that the best way to motivate the project of social epistemology is as an exploration of the epistemic significance of other minds. The point here is simply this: given the epistemic role others play in our attempts to acquire knowledge, part of the challenge is to articulate the very normative standards that underwrite our expectations of one another as we play these roles. To be sure, knowing our “knowledge practices” will help us discern the standards that are implicit in our practices. But — for the reasons given — the social epistemologist cannot rest with knowledge of these practices alone. Insofar as we hope to be able to address disputes that arise within a set of practices, and to be able as well to call some practices into question, we would do well to equip ourselves with the normative vocabulary of traditional

²⁸ But not all; see section 5 below.

epistemology, as well as a sense of how this vocabulary might be applied to the cases involving multiple epistemic subjects.

Section 5: The Contributions of Analytic Social Epistemology

I come, finally, to what may be the crux of the contribution ASE can make to a seriously interdisciplinary social epistemology — as well as to the basis of what I regard as Fuller’s misunderstanding of ASE itself. It has to do with the essentially normative dimension of the work in ASE, as well as how theorists within the emerging ASE tradition understand epistemic normativity itself.

It will be helpful to begin by noting that Fuller himself regards his own work in social epistemology in normative terms. I quote him at some length:

I start with the existence of knowledge as a social phenomenon — defined primarily in textual terms — as something already given in the world. I then proceed to determine how it is possible that diversely and imperfectly informed individuals could have organized themselves to produce such an authoritative body of work that exerts normative force in precincts far beyond the sites of knowledge production itself. In short, my focus has been on the *social construction of epistemic standards*, assuming that they arise from and are largely maintained by processes that are relatively indirect to the desires and capacities of the relevant knowers (Fuller 2012, 276; italics added).

In fact, Fuller himself goes on to contrast his understanding of the normative dimension of knowledge with that of the theorist in the ASE tradition. The quote continues:

This focus stands in contrast to ASE’s more ‘classical’ approach of starting from the individual knower who is ultimately concerned with whether her beliefs correspond to *an epistemic standard that is presumed to exist independently of her own individual or collective activity* — be that standard cast in supernatural (e.g. the Cartesian deity) or naturalistic (e.g. the Quinean physical environment) terms (276; italics added).

Fuller’s own view, then, appears to be this. Knowledge itself is a “social phenomenon” from the start, and this is manifest in the normative dimension of knowledge: epistemic standards themselves are a “social construction.” The main aim of the social epistemologist, then, should be to describe this construction, as well as to characterize how “such an authoritative body of work ... exerts normative force in precincts far beyond the sites of knowledge production itself.”

For my part, I might describe Fuller’s vision as a *fully descriptive* characterization of the normativity of knowledge. This characterization is informed by what I would call Fuller’s Central Assumption. Putting the point in my own words, the assumption is this:

Once we describe the social practices through which it comes to pass that things are *taken* as knowledge, *count* as good evidence, *pass* for being a justified theory, are *certified* as authoritative, are regarded as a legitimate criticism, and so forth, we will thereby have said what needs to be said about the relevant standards themselves.

From the perspective of such an assumption, attempts to attain an independent perspective on these very practices will be naïve at best, impossible at worst. Hence Fuller’s view of how the emerging tradition of ASE understands epistemic normativity: we continue to hold out for “an epistemic standard that is presumed to exist independently of [any subject’s] own individual or collective activity.” I assume that Fuller’s use of “presumed to exist” here is not otiose, but instead registers his view that the claimed independence is a philosopher’s fiction.

In response, I submit that Fuller’s Central Assumption is both superfluous and deeply contentious. It is superfluous: while one might think that the Central Assumption is needed to underwrite the interest social epistemologists should have in extant knowledge practices, I have argued that there are other grounds that underwrite this interest. In particular, we should be interested in knowledge practices since they serve as “evidence” for what our standards are. (These practices are not the end of the story, but they are important evidence nonetheless.)

But Fuller’s Central Assumption is also deeply contentious, and I suspect a good many — perhaps even all — of those working in the ASE tradition would challenge it. This is not to say that epistemic standards can float free from the practices which Fuller would have us study. On the contrary, I repeat that a careful study of those practices should inform our understanding of the standards themselves. This is precisely why I think social epistemology itself does well to heed Fuller’s advice to characterize the practices. But as I noted above, this is not enough.

The practices can conflict; and it can come to pass that, in certain local contexts, we find that we want to criticize the practices. We need some way to have a perspective from which to do so. To this it might be said that we should study how *the communities themselves* resolve matters when their knowledge practices reach opposing verdicts, or how *they themselves* criticize their own practices and respond to such criticisms, etc. This would be in keeping with a fully descriptive characterization of the normativity of knowledge. But this strikes me as an inadequate response. While we would do well to study such things, we would also do well to aim to occupy a critical perspective even when addressing a community’s responses to its own internally-generated criticisms and difficulties. To do otherwise is to accept without criticism the community’s own standards (or at least their standards for criticizing their standards). In addition to being groundless, such an acceptance risks degenerating into a thoroughgoing form of subjectivism.

It will be asked how we can attain such a critical perspective on knowledge practices. This is a fair question. In response we do well to attend to the traditional epistemological

orientation from which ASE derives. For while the work in ASE arises in the first instance by calling into question the adequacy of the individualistic orientation of traditional epistemology, most of the work in this tradition does not call into question the very categories that traditional epistemology gave us — the categories of *evidence*, *reasons*, *rationality*, *justification*, *warrant*, and *knowledge* (among others). And while some rethinking of these categories is called for, a wholesale repudiation of the categories themselves is not. Such a wholesale repudiation would not be in keeping with the proposed rationale for ASE, namely, the attempt to come to terms with the epistemic significance of other minds. If we want to address this, we do well to embrace the categories we have inherited from epistemology, and to consider the questions epistemologists raise as we seek to understand these categories and apply them in social contexts. In so doing we are articulating a perspective that can be used to criticize existing knowledge practices.

Let me illustrate this in more concrete terms.

A recent set of questions in contemporary epistemology focus on the value of knowledge: why is knowledge valuable, and in particular why is it more valuable than merely true belief? This question was originally raised (by Plato (1961), and more recently by Jon Kvanvig (2003)) independent of any interest in social epistemology. But we can take our answers to this question and use them to inform our assessment of existing knowledge practices. Do these practices succeed in preserving what we take to be valuable about knowledge? If the answer is negative, this can be the basis for criticizing such practices.

Or consider the epistemologist’s obsession with epistemic justification — with the sort of epistemic support which puts one in a position to know something. How, if at all, do existing knowledge practices preserve this support as information is disseminated across wide populations? As work is distributed across a great collection of individuals working as a research team? Or as we train the next generation to rely on the technologies and instrumentation we have invented in an attempt to learn more of nature’s secrets? If existing knowledge practices do not succeed in preserving this support in these (and other) contexts, this can be the basis for criticizing such practices.

Of course, it is always possible to decide that it is our epistemological theory, rather than our knowledge practices, that deserve criticism when there is a conflict. Perhaps existing knowledge practices suggest that knowledge is valuable for reasons *beyond* those already acknowledged by our favorite account of the value of knowledge — in which case we need to revise our theory, not our practices. Or maybe existing knowledge practices indicate that we need to rethink our theory of epistemic justification. (Indeed, I argued as much in my (2010).) But even granting all of this, there remains the possibility that epistemic doctrine can be used to criticize extant practice. Indeed, this is precisely one of the core motivations for Alvin Goldman’s veritistic approach to social epistemology:²⁹ using certain aspects of his reliabilist approach to epistemology, he aims to study the veritistic effects — the effects on the production of truth and falsity — of a variety of

²⁹ See Goldman (1999, 2002, 2009).

different practices in the law, in the polis, in the classroom, and in group deliberation. (One can imagine other applications as well.) Goldman’s efforts on this score offer other illustrations of how we might attain a critical perspective on existing knowledge practices. To be sure, when we apply epistemological doctrine to current knowledge practices we will need to employ our best judgment.

We will need to determine whether the negative assessments yielded by our application of existing doctrine should be accepted, so that the practice in question should be revised, or instead whether this tells against that doctrine itself. But in this respect our challenge is no different from any theorist’s challenge: we need to find a proper balance between the various theoretical *desiderata* we aim to satisfy. One thing we do *not* want to do is throw away the tools that enable us to raise these questions and to attain a potentially critical perspective on existing practice. Insofar as this is what Fuller is suggesting, his suggestion is not merely groundless; it is likely to be detrimental to our efforts to understand the social dimensions of knowledge.

Section 6: Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to suggest that ASE is motivated by the acknowledged need to characterize the epistemic significance of other minds, and I have suggested that, so motivated, ASE has a good deal to contribute to social epistemology more generally understood. It is my fervent hope that this message can be accepted in the spirit in which it is offered: as a way for moving beyond any turf battles, so that the sort of contemporary social epistemology deriving from the work of Alvin Goldman can be seen as contributing to, and complementing, the sort of social epistemology deriving from the social sciences.³⁰

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³⁰ With thanks to Patrick Reider, for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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