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TO BE EPISTEMICALLY RESPONSIBLE = TO BE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE

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Abstract. Epistemic responsibility (ER) integrates epistemic and ethical elements, aiming to produce true beliefs and uphold virtues addressing epistemic issues. Lorraine Code, a feminist epistemologist, employs ER to highlight the role of the knower and their context in shaping knowledge. ER intersects with self, society, space, sex, sphere, and social justice, paralleling social responsibility. ER regarding self-examines subjective understanding, while in society, it concerns knowledge transmission within communities. Spatially, ER investigates social structures influencing epistemic deliberations. In terms of sex, ER contends that women and minorities must be acknowledged as knowers. For sphere, it addresses ecological contexts and cohabitation principles. ER in social justice emphasizes care and the inclusion of vulnerable lives in knowledge politics. ER's evolving nature endorses practices for knowing and living well: realism aligns with rational truths, testimony seeks hearer acknowledgment, imaginativeness challenges assump-

tions with empathy, and objectivity recognizes the knower's context. Critiquing social imaginary questions societal structures to provoke change, while advocacy supports justice-oriented interventions. These practices affirm the alignment between epistemic and social responsibilities, addressing societal concerns through philosophy. This essay, using analytic methodology, explores ER's conceptual framework and its six components, establishing the equivalence between epistemic and social responsibility.

Keywords: Epistemic Responsibility, Social Responsibility, Lorraine Code, Feminist Epistemology, Applied Ethics.

Introduction

Philosophical concepts have long guided individuals toward social responsibility. In ancient Greece, Plato's notion of *dikaisyne*, or justice, played a crucial role in promoting personal integrity and virtue. This concept encouraged individuals to maintain consistency in their actions and strive for goodness. On a societal level, *dikaisyne* fostered a collective sense of social responsibility, promoting internal harmony within communities. In Indian philosophy, the *Purusharthas* are fundamental values that guide individuals towards a meaningful existence in society. Embracing these values helps individuals align their lives with principles of virtue and purpose, fostering a fulfilling life and providing resilience and stability amid life's challenges. Similarly, the contemporary concept of epistemic responsibility, as proposed by Lorraine Code, emphasizes the societal obligations inherent in philosophical inquiry. It reminds philosophers that their intellectual pursuits must extend beyond personal interests to benefit society as a whole. By embracing epistemic responsibility, philosophers acknowledge their duty to engage with knowledge in ways that promote collective welfare. This concept underscores philosophy's role as a tool for advancing social responsibility and the common good.

Epistemic responsibility (ER) has attracted considerable scholarly attention across various fields, including epistemology, philosophy of science, and education. Scholars have explored ER from multiple theoretical and practical angles, resulting in diverse interpretations and applications. Early discussions on epistemic responsibility can be traced to the works of Ernest Sosa [16], Roderick Chisholm [2], Laurence Bonjour [1] and Hilary Kornblith [14], addressing both the epistemic and ethical dimensions of responsibility for justification. Lamy [15] highlights the epistemic aspect of responsibility, emphasizing its role in promoting practices that aim to produce true beliefs. According to Lamy, ER involves recognizing and addressing one's epistemic faults, thereby advancing the pursuit of knowledge and truth [15, p.2]. This view under-

scores the importance of virtues that help rectify epistemic shortcomings in various knowledge-seeking endeavours. Fleisher and Šešelja [12] expand on ER within the context of epistemic practices, suggesting that a responsibility is epistemic when it supports achieving epistemic aims within specific evaluative frameworks. This perspective stresses the contextual nature of ER, highlighting its relevance within particular epistemic activities and communities. Building on her foundational work on Epistemic Responsibility [5], Code focuses on the acquisition and application of knowledge within ER frameworks. She argues that ER includes not only possessing adequate knowledge but also the ethical obligation to "know well," thereby introducing a moral dimension to epistemic practices. Code's approach highlights the ethical implications of knowledge acquisition and dissemination, stressing individuals' responsibility to engage in epistemically virtuous behavior. Her later works demonstrate a progressive development of ER, equating its importance with social responsibility. This evolution of ER can be articulated through six interconnected concepts, each beginning with the letter 'S': Self, Society, Space, Sex, Sphere, and Social Justice. Using an analytical and philosophical approach, this discussion delves into the core of epistemic responsibility and its implications for social responsibility.

Our inquiry examines the foundational principles of epistemic responsibility and explores its interconnectedness with social responsibility, highlighting how the former informs and enriches the latter within philosophical discourse. Within our research framework, we ask: a) what constitutes the philosophical concept of epistemic responsibility? and b) how does it intersect with and bolster social responsibility? This analytical approach investigates the fundamental nature of epistemic responsibility and its role in shaping and enhancing broader societal obligations. Our analysis begins by elucidating the concept of epistemic responsibility, and then delves into six progressive manifestations of this responsibility along with their corresponding practices. This comprehensive exploration emphasizes the crucial role of philosophy and philosophical practices in fostering social responsibility, underscoring their intrinsic interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement.

Idea of Epistemic Responsibility

Epistemic responsibility asserts that everyone has a duty to seek knowledge, improve their understanding, and make well-founded knowledge claims through careful investigation and practice. It emphasizes the need to engage with subjectivities, which are relevant to the locations and identities of the knowing subject. This concept involves understanding, assessing, and addressing issues related to place and subjectivities in knowledge production. Epistemic responsibility is both an epistemic and ethical concept from which other virtues emerge [5]. As an intellectual virtue, it shapes one's orientation toward the world, oneself as a seeker of knowledge, and others, promoting intellectual flourishing and critical thinking. Epistemic responsibility integrates both epistemic and ethical components, reaffirming that ethical thinking is essential for ethical action, with "ethical responsibility founded on epistemic responsibility" [5, p.95]. Code expands on this idea in her later works, associating it with various notions. We identify six key aspects to illustrate the role of epistemic responsibility as a philosophical concept in social responsibility. These aspects are linked to self, society, space, sex, sphere, and social justice. We begin by exploring epistemic responsibility in relation to the self.

Epistemic Responsibility and Self

The philosophical concept of the "self" pertains to an individual's unique identity and existence. Over centuries, philosophers have extensively analyzed and debated on the nature of the self, resulting in diverse theories and perspectives on this fundamental concept. Human beings have the freedom to structure knowledge as they wish, irrespective of objective reality. There are numerous subjective ways to make sense of the world [3, p.537]. Discussions involving knowledge and belief inherently prioritize both the knower and the known, thus attributing epistemological significance to both. Epistemologists must consider the condition, structure, or content of the body of knowledge possessed by an individual. When discussing knowledge or belief, we are addressing what is held by a specific subject at a particular time. This perspective aims to articulate the previously implicit significance of the knower or potential knower, along with their epistemic "situatedness" within

a specific time, place, or relevant conditions [4, p.30]. Focusing solely on the known, while neglecting the knower, may lead to an incomplete explanation of knowledge's nature and prerequisites. Evaluating a knowledge claim often depends on whether the individual making the claim has the necessary capacity for knowledge. This evaluation is partly based on their intellectual integrity, similar to how moral integrity influences trust in moral matters. The character of the agent significantly impacts epistemic responsibility [5, p.30]. The importance attributed to the individual as a knower is determined by the extent to which conditions can be specified for the rationality, within particular circumstances, of acknowledging their knowledge claims. Just as an individual's behaviour can be evaluated based on their moral dependability, cognitive endeavours and their outcomes can be assessed based on the epistemic dependability of the prospective knower. This involves considering the degree to which the circumstances surrounding the pursuit and evaluation of knowledge claims prompt inquiries into whom one trusts and why. Within such an ethical framework, fundamental validation is grounded in moral virtues, reflecting enduring tendencies to engage in specific behaviours.

Code [6, p.40] advocates for realism as a practice, asserting that feminists must develop the most accurate and effective explanations of social realities to intervene meaningfully in structures and institutions. While feminist theory rejects the notion of a universal knower, this does not preclude a commitment to realism. It is vital to ground knowledge in "reality," even when that reality is shaped by social constructs such as racism, tolerance, oppression, or equality of opportunity. A reconstructed epistemology must retain an empirical-realist foundation capable of navigating both the fixed and fluid dimensions of the physical-social world, without succumbing to the objectivism characteristic of positivist traditions [6, p.21]. Realism, as both a philosophical and political framework, presents a complex challenge for advancing gender equality in discourse and practice. Realist perspectives often prioritize power dynamics among states, marginalizing the roles of individuals, particularly women. Central to epistemic responsibility is the concept of the self, which emphasizes the individual's active engagement in shaping their beliefs. This approach requires that beliefs be formed through reliable methods and grounded in evidence, underscoring the ethical and personal accountability inher-

ent in the pursuit of knowledge. For example, humans are prone to developing supernatural beliefs due to cognitive biases like patternicity and agentivity. For our ancestors, interpreting rustling in the grass as a potential predator rather than mere wind was a survival strategy. Detecting patterns and attributing them to intentional agents often meant the difference between life and death. However, when such thinking becomes unchecked, it can lead to dogmatic adherence to beliefs, fostering intolerance and conflict. Realism, through its ER, offers a safeguard for the self in such situations, promoting well-founded beliefs grounded in evidence and critical reasoning.

Epistemic Responsibility and Society

The second notion of epistemic responsibility concerns its relationship with society. Society is essential for the emergence and continuation of human life, making the dynamics between the individual and society one of the most profound issues in social philosophy. The epistemic community is created, expanded, and maintained through acts of transmitting and receiving knowledge [5, p.28]. Humans accumulate knowledge not only through their independent investigations but also significantly through knowledge imparted by others. This process is not limited to childhood but continues throughout one's cognitive existence [3, p.541]. From early learning about one's immediate environment to acquiring specialized knowledge in professional fields, learning from others is fundamental. Furthermore, for something to qualify as knowledge, it must fit within a communicative framework that is shared or shareable with others — a framework that originates and evolves through collective engagement. The human knower evolves through reciprocal interactions with the world and fellow knowers, and the epistemic community thrives on the on-going exchange and reception of knowledge. Traditional adherents to epistemological orthodoxy, who were initially sceptical of the role of testimony, argue that emphasizing testimony in epistemic inquiry introduces unresolved ambiguities due to its subject-specific uncertainties. In contrast, feminist and other social-political epistemologists welcome this paradigm shift, as it grounds epistemology in the tangible realities of the world, with all its variations, instabilities, and diversity. This shift allows for the inclusion of sub-

jectivity and inquiries regarding credibility, responsibility, and trust within the realm of epistemic discourse.

Code advocates for the use of testimonial practices to build community. Testimony inherently reflects its speaker and can vary qualitatively and quantitatively based on adherence to principles of responsible epistemic inquiry, which go beyond mere truth-telling and accuracy to ensure the conveyed knowledge is of commendable quality. Cultivating practices centered on epistemic responsibility and trust involves moving from a passive observer role in epistemology to active engagement, where speakers and hearers participate in deliberative processes, embracing, challenging, or contesting knowledge acquisition in diverse contexts. She addresses the interactive and intersubjective nature of testimonial knowledge, emphasizing that the knower cannot be isolated for testimony. For her, testimonial communication involves critical and constructive engagements that foster epistemic interactions and negotiations [Code, 2010]. Therefore, testimonial communications require responsibility from both the hearer and the speaker during communicative actions. Responsible testimonial communications expose subjugated and silenced forms of knowledge and promote epistemic justice for those who are ignored. This approach can help the hearer become an advocate for the speaker and 'enfranchise epistemically marginalized others,' thereby overcoming systems of silencing in human society.

Epistemic Responsibility and Space

The third aspect of epistemic responsibility intertwines with the concept of space, which provides the framework for understanding the movement of objects from one location to another. It focuses on the "spaces where knowledge and subjectivity are reciprocally constitutive" [8, p.1]. Code conceptualizes rhetorical space as the spatial framework within which communicative events unfold, encompassing both cultural and material dimensions. She suggests that rhetorical spaces are not merely incidental but can be intentionally or inadvertently shaped by social and material arrangements. In "Rhetorical Spaces," Code conducts detailed analyses of interpersonal knowledge dynamics in environments marked by social and political inequali-

ties, aiming to illuminate how asymmetrical distributions of epistemic power and privilege impact the process of knowing others.

Code characterizes rhetorical spaces as dynamic arenas with implicit territorial boundaries shaping discourse permitted within them. These spaces are imbued with texture and significance, where the identity and positionality of speakers profoundly influence the reception and validation of their utterances. She emphasizes the pivotal role of rhetorical spaces in mediating knowledge claims, moral judgments, and representations of reality, probing into the sites where knowledge is produced to recognize whose knowledge is privileged or marginalized within them. Additionally, Code highlights power dynamics at play, identifying how authority can be asserted, contested, or suppressed within rhetorical spaces. She stresses the ethical responsibility of editors and classification schemes to exercise empathy and respect towards named subjects, ensuring all voices are recognized and legitimized within the rhetorical landscape.

In her works, feminist philosopher Lorraine Code [8; 11] explores the geography of argumentation, emphasizing how communication context profoundly influences truth assessment and understanding. She posits that the capacity for an utterance to be deemed 'true-or-false' or for a discussion to yield meaningful understanding depends on the speaker's situatedness. Epistemic responsibility involves investigating subjectivity's role in shaping knowledge creation, challenging traditional objectivity notions by acknowledging that knowledge creation is influenced by individual perspectives and contexts. It underscores the importance of understanding how knower positions and identities impact knowledge formation and dissemination, highlighting the need for reflexivity and critical awareness in knowledge production. Ultimately, epistemic responsibility prompts a re-evaluation of traditional epistemological frameworks, emphasizing the ethical imperative of acknowledging and engaging with subjective dimensions of knowledge.

Code suggests practices of imaginativeness in the realm of epistemic responsibility. Responsible imagination, according to Code [11, p.206], is crucial for knowledge construction. It involves bracketing assumptions by being sensitive to differences. Embracing the possibility of radical difference prompts

the bracketing of assumptions of sameness. Responsible imagination necessitates thorough research and engagement with the situations of marginalized individuals, consulting, negotiating, and interpreting with the community to understand their truths. It emphasizes the importance of not attempting to understand the lives of the marginalized singlehandedly, but rather seeking input and perspective from the community. Additionally, an interpretive community helps prevent misinterpretations and challenges "same assumptions" while sensitively imagining the lives of the marginalized, ultimately making a difference in their lives. Imaginative-interpretive attentiveness [11, p.211] to specificities and commonalities of locations and human lives is crucial for responsible action and understanding. Situations marked by imbalanced power distributions and experiences that perpetuate patriarchy and racism require imaginative-interpretative attentiveness from ecological citizens. This attentiveness improves relational dynamics by destabilizing and challenging prevailing assumptions and presenting reality more accurately. Moral imagination emphasizes empathy as a proper practice for knowing citizens. It is a self-reflective skill that enables individuals to gauge when their habitual empathetic practices may be inappropriate, excessive, or inadequate [8, p.126]. It involves a commitment to understanding others' feelings in meaningful social interactions and formal associations. Engaging in empathetic conversations fosters better understanding and feelings among participants by resisting the imposition of standards onto others, thus contributing to harmonious coexistence within habitats.

Epistemic Responsibility and Sex

Feminism's impact on epistemology emphasizes the critical question, "Whose knowledge are we talking about?" [7, p.13]. Lorraine Code asserts that being male or female significantly influences one's way of knowing, suggesting that gender can strongly affect cognitive processes [6, p.267]. Historically, gender biases and discrimination have sometimes restricted women's access to certain areas of learning. This restriction implies that biological differences can limit cognitive capacity, affecting the type and accessibility of knowledge for women. Gender thus plays a crucial role in knowledge acquisition, often leading to imbalances.

The Western concept of reason is not gender-neutral but assumes a masculine perspective. Feminist philosophers advocate for new knowledge models that include women as knowing subjects, highlighting the importance of considering the sex of the knower. Code argues that as long as women are viewed as incapable of meeting the highest standards of knowledge, they are not just marginalized but excluded from centrality altogether. Therefore, the sex of the knower is epistemologically significant. Women face epistemic injustices due to biases that unjustly limit their ability to acquire and assert knowledge. These biases do not stem from women's incapacity for certain beliefs or knowledge but from the unjust barriers placed upon them. Such constraints hinder the development of a comprehensive understanding of knowledge. Limiting the sex of the knower leads to broader knowledge constraints, resulting in 'epistemic obscurity' and biased knowledge situations. Denying women the opportunity to make epistemic claims effectively depersonalizes them.

To address the limitations imposed by traditional epistemology, Lorraine Code advocates for practices of objectivity that also affirm subjectivity. Classical epistemology often ignores the subjective aspect of knowledge, resulting in incomplete and biased accounts. The devaluation of the subjective component, particularly the female knower, stems from an overemphasis on objectivity. Knowledge is shaped by various factors, including individual creativity, social conditions, the knower's location, and emotional aspects. These factors also influence social roles and how men and women engage in different tasks, which in turn affects what can be known.

An epistemologist must continually position and reposition themselves within the structures they study, analyzing the values within these structures and evaluating their implications. Feminist epistemologists need to develop critical, analytical methods to challenge the traditional, unworkable conception of objectivity and to articulate empowering epistemic strategies [6, p.70]. Code critiques the conventional view of objectivity, addressing concerns that women and other minorities might be excluded from full participation as knowers when labeled as non-objective. By deconstructing the rigid dichotomy between sex and objectivity, she argues that being deemed non-objective should

not hinder genuine knowledge acquisition. While Code's work primarily explores the significance of the knower's sex, her critique is rooted in the oppressive nature of the conventional understanding of objectivity. This traditional view can silence minorities, undermine solidarity, foster intolerance, and enable the dominance of one group over others. Those who control access to knowledge hold power over those who do not. Additionally, Code emphasizes that the traditional concept of objectivity isolates the majority from political responsibility and criticism, further marginalizing and disempowering minority voices within the socio-political sphere.

Epistemic Responsibility and Sphere

"Sphere" refers to the domain or realm, particularly the environment or natural surroundings. Environmental philosophy examines the intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world, scrutinizing our role as individuals within the broader context of nature. According to Lorraine Code, the goal of ecological thinking is to "produce habitats where people can live well together and respectfully with and within the physical/natural world" [11, p.19]. Cohabitability, or living well together, is central to this idea. Code states that "ecological thinking is about imagining, crafting, articulating, and endeavoring to enact principles of ideal cohabitation" [11, p.24]. The social objective of cohabitability promotes living together by respecting the residences of others and recognizing our interrelationship through responsive epistemic practices. Contemporary discussions on ecological citizenship emphasize the need for ethical and epistemic practices to achieve ecological sustainability. Terms such as habitat and cohabitation are significant in this context as they provide the space for these practices. Habitat, the natural site of knowledge-making inhabited by humans, allows for critical epistemic engagements with material and political situations. Relations, capacities between different things, sociabilities, and communities within the habitat lead to various types of intra-activities. Each entity exists in multiple forms, intertwined and interdependent with other objects in the habitat. The forces of the habitat play a crucial role in the physical and environmental formation of human beings. To understand humans, one must understand the habitat that shapes them. These

forces generate numerous possibilities inherent in humans and necessitate "multiple connections and reciprocal effects" [11, p.5].

Cohabitability, defined as "living well together" [13, p.157], is the normative ideal for ecological thinking. It supports the social aspect of life within the habitat, encouraging living well together by acknowledging the presence of others and our interdependence. Epistemic responsibility requires citizens to carefully analyze all aspects of specificities. Cohabitability underscores the interconnectedness of human beings, and the epistemic responsibility of citizens is to discover and describe these interconnections. Citizens as knowers are not isolated individuals but members of epistemological communities. Cohabitability emphasizes relationality and "relational subjectivities," reaffirming interdependence and intra-dependence with other beings. It treats relations as constitutive of objects and considers them the basic unit of observation. If relations are the fundamental constitutive element of objects, we come to know them only through the relationships we have with them.

Human beings need strategies like critiquing the social imaginary to engage with knowledge in a revised manner [11, p.189]. This involves "a cluster of subversive and productive practices, metaphors, images — capable, with persistent effort, of shaking epistemology free from the monological imaginary that has kept standard theories of knowledge isolated from the very knowledge they have sought to explicate" [11, p.33]. The social imaginary comprises the images, stories, and legends adopted by the general public to conceptualize their social surroundings, providing shared legitimacy to common practices. These imaginaries can offer diverse insights and reflections. Social worlds can be problematized, and social imaginaries critiqued, to reveal the privileges granted to certain groups and ideas. Employing meaningful social practices is essential to elucidate social changes and uncover these privileges. Critiquing the social imaginary, as a critical imaginative practice, involves presenting counter-possibilities that encourage ecological citizens to destabilize the dominant, established narratives. This reflection on underlying power relations allows for the democratic negotiation of knowledge claims, promoting a more inclusive and equitable understanding of knowledge.

Epistemic Responsibility and Social Justice

Social justice aims for the fair distribution of resources and opportunities, seeking to correct historical wrongs and support marginalized communities. Advocates of social justice work towards a society marked by fairness and equality. Genuine caring, as an aspect of social justice, involves approaching subjects or inquiries with impartiality and openness, guided by evidence regardless of how desirable the outcomes may be. However, purely objective inquiry can sometimes neglect the specific concerns of marginalized groups, necessitating actions to address the epistemic and ethical injustices arising from the invisibility of these vulnerable populations in mainstream conclusions. The concept of "caring" is often seen as inherently positive but carries a gender-specific bias. Traditionally associated with women's roles in the private sphere, caring is viewed as instinctual and not requiring specialized knowledge or training. This perception allows anyone to claim the ability to care without needing any particular understanding or expertise. This superficial adoption of caring values by instrumental rationality can mask genuine concern, drawing from activities historically considered menial or trivial. When caring is universalized and detached from direct interaction with those being cared for, it can lead to social and political outcomes more oppressive than the historical relegation of women to caregiving roles. At its worst, caring becomes an impersonal, mechanized process within capitalist frameworks, emphasizing efficiency over personalized, compassionate care. This focus on efficiency devalues hands-on, empathetic caregiving practices, replacing them with a generic form of care that lacks individual attention and significance.

Advocacy practices enhance the voices of the marginalized, challenging the dominant narratives about what constitutes knowledge and who is considered a knower. These practices equip people with new epistemic positions, liberating them to participate in the knowledge-making process. By critically rethinking knowledge claims, advocacy subverts the existing normative epistemological framework. It involves activism, including public opinion polling, referendums, and people-centered approaches to influence socio-political structures to be more inclusive of marginalized perspectives. Advocacy can articulate marginalized viewpoints in insightful ways. However, Code cautions

that when vested interests overpower objectivity and integrity in inquiry, advocacy practices can lead to significant epistemological violations.

ER and their connection to Moral Problems, Potential Consequences & Dilemmas

The study of responsibility spans multiple domains of philosophy, focusing on the conditions under which individuals are held accountable for their actions, outcomes, beliefs, and character in relation to moral, legal, epistemic, and prudential norms. However, despite significant progress in philosophical accounts of ER, there is a glaring absence of a unified and systematic framework that explains how responsibility connects across these diverse contexts. Without such a framework, our understanding of the underlying principles that govern accountability in these domains remains fragmented and incomplete. Critics may argue that ER is secondary to moral or legal responsibility, but such a view underestimates its far-reaching implications. Consider the case of individuals who harbor racist beliefs: the harm of these beliefs is not confined to theoretical discussion but manifests in discriminatory actions that perpetuate systemic injustices. Similarly, endorsing irrational or unfounded scientific beliefs can lead to decisions with catastrophic consequences for society and the environment. These examples highlight that failures to adhere to epistemic norms are not merely personal shortcomings; they have profound ethical and social ramifications. Thus, ER is inseparable from moral accountability and demands equal scrutiny.

Detractors might suggest that individuals cannot always be blamed for epistemic failings, given the complexities of information accessibility, cognitive limitations, and systemic biases. While such considerations warrant careful attention, they do not absolve us of the need to delineate where and why blame is justified. For instance, individuals operating in contexts where accurate information is readily available cannot reasonably claim ignorance as an excuse for harmful epistemic choices. Conversely, those subjected to systemic misinformation or oppressive structures may justifiably escape blame. This variability calls for a nuanced and principled approach to modelling ER in relation to accountability.

A failure to rigorously address these issues leaves critical questions unanswered: When is an individual epistemically responsible for their beliefs and the consequences of those beliefs? How should responsibility be apportioned when epistemic failings intersect with systemic barriers? Ignoring these questions risks conflating cases of culpable negligence with those of genuine exculpability, undermining efforts to hold individuals and institutions accountable where it matters most. To address these challenges, a comprehensive framework must be developed to integrate ER with moral, legal, and prudential norms. Such a framework should clarify the conditions under which individuals are deemed accountable for their epistemic failings and identify the broader social mechanisms that enable or constrain responsible belief formation. By doing so, we can move beyond fragmented accounts of responsibility and toward a cohesive theory that better equips us to address the ethical and societal harms arising from epistemic failings. The stakes are too high to settle for anything less. ER must be understood not as an isolated philosophical concern but as a cornerstone of accountability in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

ER is not merely an abstract ethical principle; it is a practical necessity rooted in our obligation to critically evaluate beliefs and ensure they are supported by sufficient evidence and rational justification. Failure to engage in such scrutiny carries significant moral implications, as poorly justified or unexamined beliefs can lead to actions with harmful, far-reaching consequences. A key aspect of ER is the role of testimony, which serves as a cornerstone for acquiring and sharing knowledge. Yet, the ethical dimension of testimony demands more than mere communication — it requires both the informant and the recipient to uphold rigorous standards of integrity and reliability in the exchange of information. Critics might argue that testimony inherently involves trust and that such trust should obviate the need for constant scrutiny. However, this assumption ignores the profound moral risks associated with uncritical acceptance. The spread of false information — whether arising from deliberate deceit or negligence — can mislead individuals, distort public opinion, and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. The proliferation of such misinformation exacerbates societal biases, often deepening existing inequities. Therefore, it is imperative that informants rigorously verify

the accuracy and ethical implications of the information they share, while recipients actively interrogate the validity of the knowledge they consume.

Furthermore, the challenge of ER extends beyond factual testimony to the realm of imagination and societal narratives. The concept of responsible imaginativeness underscores the necessity of critically engaging with ideas, possibilities, and shared societal constructs, often referred to as the social imaginary. Critics might contend that societal narratives evolve naturally and that their critique is unnecessary or disruptive. Yet, this perspective overlooks the dangers of allowing unchecked assumptions and biases to influence beliefs and actions. When dominant narratives embed unexamined prejudices related to race, gender, or class, they perpetuate systemic inequities, reinforcing power imbalances and marginalizing vulnerable groups. Failing to analyse these narratives not only perpetuates injustice but actively obstructs efforts to advance social justice and equity. The status quo often privileges certain groups while marginalizing others, making the critical examination of power dynamics and societal structures an essential component of ER. Dismissing this obligation risks entrenching existing inequalities, thereby undermining progress toward a fairer and more inclusive society. ER is not an optional exercise but an ethical imperative that demands both individual commitment and collective action. It challenges us to rigorously assess the information we share and consume, critically interrogate societal narratives, and confront the power dynamics that shape our understanding of the world. By embracing ER, we not only guard against misinformation and bias but also contribute to the larger project of fostering justice, equity, and ethical knowledge practices in society.

Alternative forms of knowledge diverge from normative and hegemonic frameworks, offering multiple perspectives and explanatory models that accommodate diverse knowledge-generation processes. Normative knowledge adheres to established frameworks rooted in dominant cultural, social, or scientific norms, prioritizing certain perspectives and methodologies. This can limit the range of understandings and explanations, marginalizing or excluding alternative viewpoints and reinforcing existing power structures and inequalities. In contrast, alternative knowledge systems challenge these domi-

nant paradigms by presenting different ways of understanding and interpreting the world. Embracing diverse perspectives and methodologies, these systems provide a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of reality. Unlike normative frameworks, which often assert universal truths, alternative knowledge recognizes the contingency of knowledge on historical, cultural, and social contexts, acknowledging the situatedness and partiality of all knowledge claims. This reflexivity fosters critical engagement with knowledge production processes, encouraging ongoing dialogue rather than fixed certainties. By prioritizing collaboration and co-creation, involving multiple stakeholders in generating and validating knowledge, alternative knowledge systems democratize knowledge production and cultivate a greater appreciation for diverse ways of knowing and being in the world.

Conclusion

Early discussions on ER primarily centered around the concept of justification. However, contemporary interpretations, particularly those informed by Lorraine Code, emphasize its dynamic nature and its connection to social responsibility and collaborative practices. According to Code, knowledge constitutes true belief that arises from epistemically responsible activity. Positioned as a concept that intersects with self, society, space, sex, sphere, and social justice, ER advocates for aligning knowledge with practice, particularly in ways that promote social responsibility. Epistemically responsible activities must remain accessible to the knower. A proficient knower, utilizing realist methodologies, integrates epistemic and moral principles in societal engagement. By adopting interactive and reflexive approaches, such a knower demonstrates sensitivity and empathy towards diverse perspectives, thereby fostering socially responsible behaviour. This approach challenges the presumption of value-neutrality and underscores the importance of inclusivity, critically interrogating societal power dynamics. This reflective practice seeks to advance social justice and strengthen communal relationships. To enact socially responsible practices, virtuous motivation is essential. This entails examining which combinations of virtues synergize effectively and identifying organizational structures, cultures, and support systems that cultivate

collective virtues. These collective virtues, in turn, facilitate the adoption and sustenance of socially responsible epistemic practices.

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