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Introduction to The Challenge of Epistemic Responsibility: Essays in Honour of Lorraine Code

Anna Mudde
Campion College at University of Regina, anna.mudde@uregina.ca

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Many readers versed in feminist philosophy will know the central importance of Lorraine Code's feminist epistemological work, particularly through the often-taught "Is the Sex of the Knower Epistemologically Significant?" (1991)[1] and "Taking Subjectivity into Account" (1993). In this symposium of papers, invited by *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, the authors return to Code's first book, *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987), to re-read it, respond to it, and rethink Code's articulation of epistemic responsibility anew, considering it in light of her other work and drawing it into contact with their own.

This symposium is the outcome of a conference panel that I co-organized with Susan Dieleman,[2] held October 25, 2015, at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy (CSWIP) at my institution, the University of Regina, in Saskatchewan, on the Canadian prairies. Susan and I conceived of this panel even before we realized that it could serve as a lead up to the 30th anniversary of the publication of *Epistemic Responsibility* in 2017. Lorraine[3] is a central figure in the establishment, and continued nurturing, of CSWIP, and since she has a family connection to Saskatchewan, we thought it might be an especially nice place to celebrate her work. The timing was a happy coincidence.

The publication of *Epistemic Responsibility* marked a groundbreaking shift in epistemological theory and practice. Despite not having written the book as an explicitly feminist text, Code later acknowledges, in the preface to her collection of essays *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations,* that, upon finishing it, she came to "a recognition that it was specifically a woman's and a feminist's book" (1995, 11). By raising the indispensable epistemological and ethical questions "*Who*

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[1] This is chapter one of Code's *What Can She Know?* A paper with the same title was published in *Metaphilosophy* in 1981. See Code's footnote 1 in the 1991 chapter for her discussion of the shift in approach between the earlier paper and later chapter.
[2] I would like to thank Susan Dieleman (whose paper is included in this Symposium). She graciously allowed me the pleasure of chairing the panel, and was instrumental in my having the opportunity to introduce this symposium. Thanks also go to the editors of *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, and Kathryn Norlock in particular, for their interest in publishing the panel.
[3] Throughout, I use first names when recounting events, and the tradition of using last names when discussing the author's work.

knows?" and "Who *can* know?," *Epistemic Responsibility* opened crucial spaces for explicitly feminist work in epistemology and the areas of thought that draw upon it, including feminist ethics, metaphysics, and philosophy of science, as well as feminist work in other humanistic and social scientific disciplines. In calling for knowing practices that emphasize the inherent sociality of knowers, the concept of epistemic responsibility remains a decisive development in challenging traditional assumptions about the subjects and objects of knowledge, and in undoing orthodox epistemic ontologies of knowers, knowns, and knowing relationships.

The panel was an opportunity for collective reflection on and celebration of Code's work, and highlights the concept of epistemic responsibility as a pivotal contribution to early critiques of epistemological orthodoxies (e.g., epistemologies of "*S-knows-that-p*"). The papers in this Symposium cast Code's concept of epistemic responsibility as a uniquely feminist contribution to thinking about subjectivity, agency, and power, and as an early and persistent antidote to debates that continue in social epistemology. But there was also a second, more forward-looking goal of the panel: to explore some of the novel directions in which the theory and practices of epistemic responsibility can move, including thinking about creativity and social imaginaries, epistemic communities and advocacy work, and the application of the concept to social movements and activist practices.

One of the results of preparing for this panel was that all of the contributors took the opportunity to re-read (or read) *Epistemic Responsibility*. What I relish in each paper is the way that each author finds in the book something distinctive that is resonant with her own work. The papers in this symposium are indicative of the richness of Code's thought and the breadth of her philosophical influence. They are also a testament to her sustained and deep mentorship work, which includes but exceeds her relationships with many members of this panel. This collection is, moreover, squarely a product of the larger Canadian community of feminist philosophers, a community with which Code's contributions are intimately entwined.

Another of the salient features of the papers here is that they point, vividly, to the challenge posed by Code's demands for epistemic responsibility, and how it serves as a way past the "but is this *philosophy*?" question, so prevalent in the discipline. Code's work pushes readers to be skeptical about the gatekeeping of the discipline. Yet to cite Lorraine Code is to cite rigorous, unfailingly sharp, responsible *philosophy*; her philosophical ideas provide openings in, and demand engagements beyond, the purported boundaries of the discipline.

Among the key themes of the essays that follow are discussions of the ways that Code's thinking develops over the course of her (still prolific) career; Code's "remodeling" of responsibility, subjectivity, objectivity, and autonomy for situated human knowers; the idea that responsible knowing requires at once an appeal to

who knows or is claiming knowledge, and attention to the adequacy of a knower's ability to be, non-naïvely, "open to how things are;" the imperatives of advocacy work, as a form of epistemic responsibility, and as a way of insisting upon and living responsibly with and for others; and a sense of selfhood that exceeds the boundaries of skin and of individual consciousness, so that thinking about and living the constellations of privilege, oppression, and responsibility as individual, interchangeable knowers becomes both inadequate and inaccurate.

Christine Koggel's paper is an invitation to read or return to *Epistemic Responsibility*, disclosing the contemporary value of the moral theory found in that book for discussions in feminist ethics and epistemologies. Koggel considers Code's early reading of Kant and her appeal to virtue ethics in *Epistemic Responsibility* as grounding the concept of responsibility that Code seeks for epistemology. Making an indispensable connection between (a) the virtuous knower and knowing well, and (b) questions of realism and relativism, Koggel draws attention to the realist features of *Epistemic Responsibility.* She shows how this position emerges amid Code's thinking about the challenges of relativism, challenges that arise when one takes seriously questions about *who* the knower is, so central to Code's work. Koggel argues that post-*Epistemic Responsibility*, Code will come to distance herself from realism-relativism debates. Not only are accounts of these concepts too tied up in philosophers' fears and misunderstandings, but more importantly, Koggel argues, relativism is a non-starter for gaining insight into epistemology or moral and political theory.

Attending to Code's articulations of responsibilism and her early commitment to normative realism, Susan Dieleman diagnoses a current debate in mainstream social epistemology as relying on an artificial epistemological-normative distinction, one which was already, she argues, being addressed in *Epistemic Responsibility*. Drawing on Code's theorization of the role of community in individual epistemic agency, Dieleman highlights the ways that Code's early assumption of (relatively) equivalent epistemological access among knowers was, already in 1987, nuanced by, and deeply inflected with, considerations of power-knowledge. As Dieleman reveals, despite Code's more recent self-critique about the (relative) absence of power-discourse in *Epistemic Responsibility*, she is, early on, interested in the ways communities at once enable and constrain the potential for knowledge and responsibility.

Beginning with this same self-critique, Cathy Maloney draws our attention to Code's more recent theorization of advocacy as a practice of epistemic responsibility and a development of her earlier conception of subjectivity. Turning to Code's thinking about the ways the credibility of a knower's testimony is shaped by social imaginaries, and the ensuing challenge of and need for dialogical advocacy work (that is, the work of thinking across differences and articulating knowledge not yet

part of the/a social imaginary), Maloney draws out the connections between testimony, advocacy, and autonomy in Code's *Ecological Thinking* (2006). This "autonomy" holds even under conditions when a knower might not, as Maloney puts it, following Miranda Fricker, "understand her own experience." Considering the role of advocates in such circumstances, Maloney draws Code's conception of epistemic responsibility into conversation with Fricker, Mikhail Bakhtin, and her own work developing intercultural learning programming for university students.

Alexis Shotwell, too, draws Code's thinking about advocacy and epistemic responsibility toward her own recent work on the development of AIDS activism in Canada. In particular, Shotwell considers the "life-giving epistemic-ethical practice" of the advocacy work that characterized (and characterizes) activists' role in shaping the social imaginary of the virus and epidemic in Canada. In charting a history of the funding of AIDS medications in Ontario, Shotwell pushes readers to notice the ways that ferocity, crankiness, and love are central features of successful AIDS (and other) advocacy and activism work. Even without a grounding in intersectional analyses of oppression or commitments to epistemic responsibility, advocacy practices can manifest "multilayered anti-oppressive effects" by attending to concrete realities, to "how things are." Shotwell focuses and extends the insistence in Code's work that knowing well or badly is inescapably collective, but also, often, an intimately personal, concrete matter of life and death.

The papers, which the authors have expanded and revised, were presented in the order that they occur here, with—as here—Lorraine providing a response at the end. As Christine Koggel, who spoke first, finished her paper and began to take questions, we realized that it was strange to speak about Lorraine's work as though she wasn't in the room. The usual panel format shifted, so that the person speaking might answer questions, and Lorraine, seated in the middle of the "audience," might also engage more freely in the discussion. As each presenter finished speaking, the question and answer period became more conversational; we laughed and smiled a lot, and were also serious. Lorraine sometimes added contextual anecdotes (many of which I would have loved to replicate here), as well as insights about her own thinking and the conditions under which it occurred. I suspect I am not alone in taking away a new understanding of her philosophical contributions, but also a sense of collective, affective knowing about how to inhabit one's work—and collective work—with sharpness, authority, and vulnerability.

References

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ANNA MUDDE is Assistant Professor of philosophy at Campion College at the University of Regina, Canada. She works in feminist epistemologies and metaphysics, and on responsible knowing and being. Her published work attends to embodiment, critical race and queer theory, critical subjectivity, self-knowledge, privilege, and Simone de Beauvoir. She has interests in science, technologies, and practices, and in theorizing objectivity and responsibility.