**EPISTEMIC VICES AND FEMINIST PHILOSOPHIES OF SCIENCE**

***Routledge Handbook to Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science***

*Ian James Kidd*

**Introduction**

This chapter surveys some points of contact – conceptual, topical, and methodological – between contemporary vice epistemology and feminist epistemology and philosophy of science. There are three fundamental shared features: first, the *motivating conviction* that our epistemic practices and systems are typically suboptimal, defined relative to the goals and values of enquiry; second, the *methodological conviction* that investigation of these suboptimalities must attend to epistemic agents, construed as subjects situated in social systems and practices of enquiry; third, the *ameliorative conviction* that rectification of the suboptimalities of our projects and communities of enquiry is a main task of philosophy.

Such motivational, methodological, and ameliorative convictions are not exclusive to vice epistemologies and feminist epistemologies. One also finds them, too, in pragmatist science studies (see Clough 2003). It’s also clear that these convictions can be articulated in many ways, depending on the specific agenda, concerns, and objectives of different projects in vice and feminist epistemologies. Once those convictions start to play out within specific disciplinary and intellectual contexts, they variegate and, often, diverge. Moreover, epistemology looks very different depending on the sorts of epistemic practices and institutions being studied: for instance, much feminist epistemological work has been on science, whereas most current vice epistemology focuses on educational and political systems. So, let’s think through feminist vice epistemologies of science.

**1. Character epistemology.**

The systematic study of epistemic vices and failings has a long history (Kidd 2019a). Some thirty years ago, virtue epistemology emerged, initially as a response to frustrations about the limitations of abstract, individualist analyses of epistemic agency – the main bugbears being coherentism, foundationalism, and Gettier problems: some date the decisive break to Ernest Sosa’s 1980 paper, ‘The Raft and the Pyramid’, which suggested a role for epistemic virtues in the resolution of puzzles about justified true belief.

A more decisive thickening of conceptions of epistemology was Lorraine Code’s 1987 book, *Epistemic Responsibility*, which argued for a ‘responsibilist epistemology’ – one that has at its heart the concept of responsibility as the core attribute of an epistemic agent, ‘from which [all] other virtues radiate’ (1987: 44). For a responsibilist, enquirers are embodied subjects, working with (and sometimes against) other agents, with whom they exist in complex, often conflicting interdependencies as a result of their sharing (or failing to share) in social practices and institutions of enquiry. Although Code’s work was not explicitly feminist, nor able to deliver a worked-out account of epistemic responsibility, its ideas came to inform work in feminist epistemologies (Grasswick 2003). But as Code also subsequently noted, another merit was that ‘thinking about epistemic responsibility moves close to the realm of virtue epistemology’ (2014:19).

**1A. The emergence of virtue epistemology.**

The discipline of virtue epistemology gradually evolved during the 1990s, finding its own distinctive voice with Linda Zagzebski’s *Virtues of the Mind* (1996). Situated within a broadly Aristotelean framework, she argued that virtue theory could help revitalise epistemology, as it had done for ethics. ‘Given that almost everyone thinks the virtues are important in our moral life’, Zagzebski presciently remarked, ‘I see no reason why they would deny that they are important in our cognitive life’ (1996: 74). Subsequently, a new project of studying the virtues of the mind emerged, even if much of it challenged or rejected several of her theses – her claim, for instance, that an epistemic virtue must have a success component, a strong claim given the phenomenon of epistemic luck (Lackey 2007).

By the late 1990s, one could distinguish two main ways of thinking about virtue epistemology in relation to earlier projects in analytical epistemology (cf. Baehr 2011:12). A *conservative* conception sees the concept of epistemic virtue as useful for addressing one or more traditional problems in epistemology (such as justified true belief, externalism, and the like). An *autonomous* conception sees epistemic virtue as interesting in their own right, independently of any contributions to those ‘classic’ problems. By the early 2000s, virtue epistemologists started to focus on analysis of specific epistemic virtues or of clusters of virtues, such as the ‘maps’ of certain virtues offered by Roberts and Wood (2007: Part II; see, further, the essays in Battaly 2019: Part II).

Three claims should be made about the development of virtue epistemology that set up my discussion of vice epistemology in relation to feminist epistemology of science. First, none of those foundational studies were explicitly feminist in their inspirations, methods, or aims: the books by Baehr, Roberts and Wood, and Zagzebski do not refer to work in feminist epistemology, even if they dutifully cite Code’s on epistemic responsibility. Roberts and Wood’s brief history of 20th century epistemology mentions post-Kantianism, postpositivist philosophies of science, and Gettier problems, but not feminist or social epistemology (2007: ch.1). More generally, those three monographs have little to no engagement with issues of intersectional social identity, systems of social power, patriarchy, and other core concepts of feminist analysis.

Second, virtue epistemologists engage with the history and philosophy of science as sources of case studies of epistemically virtuous practice and to support their calls for attention to the character of enquirers (see, e.g., Roberts and Wood 2007: ch.7). But those case studies are usually presented and discussed without due sensitivity to historical and social contexts of scientific practice. Moreover, use of the relevant philosophies of science typically was decoupled from critical discussions internal to the philosophy of science, such as well-known work by such influential feminist philosophers of science, such as Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), Helen Longino (1990), Carolyn Merchant (1980), and the essays in Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall’s influential 1989 collection, *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*. Indeed, when virtue epistemologists do engage philosophy of science, they tend to focus almost exclusively on mid-20th-century Anglo-American male philosophers of science, such as Kuhn, engaged primarily in epistemological debates about rationality, theory change, or the semantics of scientific language.

A third feature of virtue epistemology is that it has tended, until quite recently, to neglect epistemic vices. The focus is almost entirely on virtues, flourishing, and other positive concepts, broadly mirroring the focus of much virtue ethics, which also focuses on the sunnier side of character. Unsurprisingly, some of the most lucid critiques of the frontloading of virtue and flourishing and the occlusion of vice and corruption in ethical and epistemological theorising came from feminist critics, like Claudia Card (1996), Robin Dillon (2012), and Lisa Tessman (2005). The emergence of vice epistemology has therefore been a welcome, timely corrective to the one-sidedness of what we should really call *character epistemology*, whose constituent sub-disciplines are virtue epistemology and vice epistemology.

**1B. Vice epistemology: a primer.**

The current interest in vice epistemology was really initiated by the work of Heather Battaly (2010a, 2010b, 2014) and, as a discipline, was formally named by Quassim Cassam, who characterises it as ‘the philosophical study of the nature, identity, and epistemological significance of intellectual vices’ (2016:159). Most contemporary work in vice epistemology falls into one or more of three kinds:

1. *Foundational*: analyses of the concept(s) of epistemic vice, their relation to the concept(s) of epistemic virtue; their relation to ethical virtues and vices; normative issues about the badness of vices; ontological issues about the nature of epistemic vice(s); the classification of epistemic vices; the significance of epistemic vices to other philosophical topics (eg Battaly 2014 2016; Cassam 2016, 2019; Kidd 2016).
2. *Studies of specific vices*: the analysis and articulation of specific epistemic vices, such as the *familiar epistemic vices* – arrogance (Tanesini 2016), closed-mindedness and dogmatism (Battaly 2018) – and the *esoteric epistemic vices* – epistemic hubris (Kidd 2019a), epistemic insouciance (Cassam 2019: ch.4), epistemic self-indulgence (Battaly 2010), and epistemic timidity (Tanesini 2018).
3. *Applied vice epistemology*: the application of vice-epistemic resources to the analysis and amelioration of epistemological problems arising in specific social and practical domains, such as education, healthcare, political deliberation, and scientific enquiry, as well as normative and methodological questions about effective and appropriate uses of vice-epistemic resources in applied contexts (eg Battaly 2013, Biddle, Kidd, and Leuschner 2017, Cassam 2019: chs.2-4, Kidd 2019b).

There are much stronger feminist themes flowing through vice epistemology, much of it due to the influence of Miranda Fricker’s 2007 book, *Epistemic Injustice*. A striking feature of this book is that the theoretical framework is a feminist-inspired virtue epistemology, despite its primary critical target being a vice – *testimonial injustice*. Commentators tend to neglect the vice-epistemic framing of epistemic injustice, which is fine, if that suits their purposes: nothing *requires* that epistemic injustices be analysed in terms of character epistemology. Still, it’s worth our being reminded *testimonial injustice* itself is an epistemic vice and most fully understood in those terms (Battaly 2017).

An overtly feminist exercise in applied vice epistemology, informed by Fricker’s work among much else, is José Medina’s 2012 book *The Epistemology of Resistance*. It presents a complex analysis of gendered and racial oppressions through the lens of systematic social-structural intersectional epistemic injustices. Starting from the insight of liberatory theorists that ‘oppression involves corrupted and distorted forms of social relationality’, Medina defines an epistemic vice as ‘a set of corrupted attitudes and dispositions that get in the way of knowledge’ (2012: 41, 30). This is a feminist analysis in at least two key senses: there is, first, a built-in sensitivity to intersectional social identities and situatedness relative to systems of power, and, second, an explicit liberatory aspiration to find effective strategies to help mitigate the vices that motivate, enact, and sustain patterns of social oppression (2012: ch.4). Similar feminist themes and sensibilities flow through the work of Alessandra Tanesini on the vices accompanying the virtue of humility: she has analysed such vices of the privileged as arrogance and *superbia* and the oppressive vices of timidity and servility, construed as contributions to a study of the psychology of oppression (e.g., Tanesini 2016, 2018).

Granted, these feminist themes and influences are not universal among all work in contemporary vice epistemology. Not all work on epistemic vices will obviously require any distinctively feminist approach, of course, and feminist theorists could take a lot from vice epistemological work even if it wasn’t developed with feminist concerns in mind.

**1C. Vice ontology.**

Before we can engage with those sorts of issues, though, there is one last abstract issue to address – *vice ontology* (Cassam 2020). I focus on two ontological questions: *what kind of thing is an epistemic vice* (the Kind Question) and *what are the bearers of epistemic vice* (the Bearer Question). Concerning the Kind Question, Cassam distinguishes two positions: *vice-monism* is the view that epistemic vices are one kind of thing (character traits, say, as with Aristotle) while *vice-pluralism* is the view that epistemic vices can be many kinds of things (Cassam is a pluralist, since, for him, epistemic vices can be *character traits*, *attitudes*, and *ways of thinking*, such as wishful thinking). I think vice-pluralism is more useful for feminist purposes, since it’s natural to speak of *sexist epistemic attitudes* or *sexist ways of thinking* - bell hooks, for one, refers to ‘sexist thinking’ as ‘ways of knowing’ that tend systematically to create ‘distortions’, ‘misinformation, and ‘false assumptions’ (2013, ch.16).

The Bearer Question asks to what sorts of things can we attribute epistemic vices, in the sense of talk of their being epistemically vicious being descriptive of their properties or qualities, rather than being figurative, as when one talks of ‘the cruel sea’. The traditional answer within Western philosophical character theory has been *bearer-monism*: the sole bearers of epistemic vices (and epistemic virtues) are individual epistemic subjects, and everyone who does character epistemology agrees that there are epistemically vicious individuals. More recently, however, some epistemologists have argued for a more pluralist picture. Consider two options, each with interesting feminist precedents:

1. *Epistemically vicious collectives*: a collective can have one or more specific epistemic vices, V, whether or not some or all of its constituent members also possess V. We can therefore talk about arrogant committees, dogmatic research teams, and so on, without this simply meaning that the entirety or majority of their members are arrogant or dogmatic: the position called *non-summativism* (Lahroodi 2019, Fricker 2010).
2. *Epistemically vicious abstracta*: abstract objects – such as doctrines, policies, or conceptions or ideologies – are epistemically vicious if they tend to (a) *promote* epistemically vicious attitudes, actions, motives, or desires in the subjects and environments structured by them or (b) if their enactment tends to require the *exercise* of one or more epistemic vices when enacted or (c) if they could only be regarded as *attractive* to agents with at least a latent disposition to epistemic vice (Battaly 2013, Kidd 2018).

An interesting source for epistemically vicious abstracta are the criticisms of androcentric science as they have contingently developed historically—histories, of course, more deeply influenced by women than was once supposed, thanks to a generation of historical research on occluded women scientists, technicians, craftspersons, and others, which shows that the ‘masculine profile of the sciences, as they have developed in Euro-American contexts in the last 300 years, was by no means monolithic or inevitable’ (see Crasnow, Wylie, Bauchspies, and Potter 2018, §2).

Sandra Harding offers several candidates of epistemically vicious abstracta in her 1986 book, *The Science Question in Feminism*. She specifically targets positivist conceptions of science, especially those modelled on the physical sciences, arguing they’re epistemically dogmatic in the sense that they incorporate conceptual and methodological presuppositions which structurally militate against critical self-appraisal:

Their non-social subject matter and the paradigmatic status of their methods appear to preclude critical reflection on social influences on their conceptual systems; indeed, prevalent dogma holds that it is the virtue of modern science to make such reflection unnecessary (1986: 34)

A philosophical conception of science (or some specific science) whose constitutive values and assumptions precludes critical self-evaluation is one at strong risk of promoting such vices as dogmatism and closed-mindedness – two vices described by Battaly (2018), which I show how to attribute to *epistemic* *stances* in Kidd (2018).

Another vice-based critique of abstracta is María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman’s famous attack on androcentric ‘empirical, philosophical, and moral theories’, according to which ‘theories appear to be the kinds of things that are true or false; but they also are the kinds of things that can be, e.g., useless, arrogant, disrespectful’ (1983: 578). Arrogance and disrespectfulness are vices, so there is precedent for attribution of epistemic vices to sexist and androcentric theories. Whether this could be cashed out in ways useful to feminist aims is a task for future work.

 A feminist epistemologist can be ontologically pluralistic about epistemic vices: they can be many *kinds of thing* (character traits, attitudes, ways of thinking) and have many *bearers* (individual agents, collective agents, abstracta). Such pluralism can accommodate the range of targets of feminist critiques of sciences – the arrogantly sexist professor of physics, the closedmindedness of a research team closed to the possibility of gendered politics in their laboratory, or dogmatic conceptions of science as an epistemically impeccable enterprise performed by genderless ‘objective’ enquirers.

**2. Conceptions of epistemic vice.**

There are two main normative conceptions of what makes vices bad – one appeals either to their *effects* or their *motives* – and this section sketches them and assesses their pertinence to feminist epistemology and philosophy of science against its main thematic concerns (see Anderson 2019: paragraph 1):

1. The exclusion of women from practices and communities of scientific enquiry.
2. The denial of epistemic authority (and other epistemic goods and attainments) to women.
3. The denigration of putatively ‘feminist’ cognitive styles and epistemic traits.
4. The generation of theories of women that are derogatory or subordinatory.
5. The occlusion of women’s experiences from epistemic projects and practices.
6. The production of knowledge that is irrelevant or injurious to the interests of women.

Clearly enough, these themes need some clarification, at least when stated in this schematic way—for instance, to guard against the tendency to avoid inadvertently essentialising talk of women as a putatively homogeneous category, or, even worse, as a gloss that disguises a background focus on the concerns and experiences of relatively privilege white women in the developed world (the classic statement of this criticism is Lugones and Spelman 1983). It also seems clear that each of these epistemological themes refers to assumptions, attitudes, and actions that are epistemically vicious, at least intuitively.

Consider closed-mindedness, characterised by Battaly (2018) as an inability or unwillingness to engage with relevant epistemic options. We see this vice in the attitudes and actions of those who try repeatedly to exclude women from collaborative enquiry and try to deny them epistemic authority. Such persons are closed to such options as *including women in enquiry*, *affirming the epistemic authority of women*, *revising inherited assumptions about gendered-coded cognitive styles*, and so on.

Contemporary vice epistemology offers two main answers to the question of what it is that makes epistemic vices *bad* or *negative* in a way that can justify their classification as vices. *Consequentialism* regards the vices as tending to systematically cause epistemically bad effects, such as overlooking evidence, ignoring explanatory possibilities, or blocking the pursuit of truth and other epistemic goods. This is the opposite of *virtue-reliabilism*, the idea that epistemic virtues are traits that tend to make one a more reliable agent, in the sense of one who tends successfully to come up with the epistemic goods.

*Motivationalism* is the view that epistemic vices are traits that express or manifest epistemically bad motives or desires, which their possessor may endorse and be aware of, or not. Typical examples might include a desire to interfere with the epistemic agency of other subjects, or a lack of concern for the evidential basis of one’s beliefs, or a failure to appropriately value or desire epistemic goods. Motivationalism is the position opposed to *virtue-responsibilism*, the position introduced by Code (1987), on which the epistemic virtues are those traits that make on a responsible epistemic agent. An epistemically vicious agents lacks the motivations constitutive of an epistemically responsible subject, including what Zagzebski regards as the fundamental motivation for all the epistemic virtues, a desire for ‘cognitive contact with reality’ (1996:167).

Actually, there is a third option, too, which Battaly (2014, 2015,) dubs *pluralism*: a vice is a trait that (a) tends to cause a preponderance of epistemically bad effects *or* (b) expresses epistemically bad motives/desires *or* (c) both. Sometimes, the focus on either consequences or on motives is enough for an account of why some epistemic trait is vicious, whereas in other cases one might think that a vice is only satisfyingly described attends to both its bad effects and motives. In the latter case, consider *epistemic malevolence*, which Jason Baehr (2010) argues has two forms: *impersonal epistemic malevolence* is (roughly) opposition to knowledge as such, while *personal epistemic malevolence* is (roughly) opposition to the epistemic well-being or development of one or more other persons (2010: 204). This vice surely has special pertinence to feminist epistemologists, since:, intuitively, it is epistemically malevolent to have or endorse a desire to exclude women *qua* women from systems of enquiry by denying them epistemic authority – these being forms of *epistemic violence* (see Dotson 2011, Spivak 1988).

 We therefore have three options – *consequentialism*, *motivationalism*, and *pluralism* – and in the following sections I present fuller accounts of them and ask how they might be profitably appropriated by feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science.

**2A. Consequentialist conceptions of epistemic vice.**

A consequentialist conception of epistemic vice focuses on the *epistemically bad effects* of traits, attitudes, and ways of thinking—what Heather Battaly dubs *effects-vices*. An epistemic vice is an epistemic failing because it tends to have, as Cassam puts it, ‘a negative impact on our intellectual conduct’ (2019:2). The fullest statement of a consequentialist conception of this sort is *obstructivism*, which Cassam develops in his book, *Vices of the Mind*. Its guiding claim is that:

An epistemic vice is a blameworthy or otherwise reprehensible character trait, attitude, or way of thinking that systematically obstructs the gaining, keeping, or sharing of knowledge (2019: 23).

Note three features of this definition. First, vices must be ‘reprehensible’, in the sense that they are objects of *criticism*, of which *blame* is only one type. Cassam emphasises that we’re not always justified in *blaming* people for their vices, many of which are acquired as a result of our environments. Our evaluative responses to vices therefore are, and ought to be, broad, and blame is only one sort (see Cassam 2019:22f).

Second, obstructivism is ontologically pluralistic, since vices can be, at the least, character traits, attitudes, or ways of thinking; later in the book, Cassam introduces the terms *character-vice*, *attitude-vice*, and *thinking-vice* (2019: 79, 38, 56). Third, epistemic vices are bad due to their epistemically obstructive tendencies, which Cassam qualifies in his remark that epistemic vices must ‘*systematically* obstruct the gaining, keeping, or sharing of knowledge *in the actual world*’ (2019:12, my emphasis). I flag this point because feminist epistemologists, alert to the huge variations in the epistemic circumstances of differently socially situated subjects, will rightly point out that our unjust socio-epistemic environments are *already* typically epistemically obstructive, in all sorts of ways. Moreover, the tendency for epistemic character traits to be epistemically *obstructive* varies depending on the social identities of their possessors – a point to which I’ll return.

 An obstructivist conception of epistemic vice therefore relies on a form of epistemic consequentialism, specifically their tendencies to systematically obstruct three generic sorts of epistemic activity – the *gaining*, *keeping*, or *sharing* of knowledge, which includes self-knowledge about one’s own possession of the self-concealing vices Cassam dubs *stealthy vices* (2019: ch.7). We should also add other sorts of epistemic good, such as true belief, insight, or understanding, and also epistemic attainments, such as epistemic virtues (2019: ch. 8). Within those three generic activities, one can make further distinctions: an *insensible* subject fails to *perceive* certain things as epistemically good, owing to a false or deficient conception of the epistemic good: think of a radical instrumentalist, maybe a Secretary of State for Education, who CAN only perceives things as epistemically valuable if they are also economically valuable (Battaly 2013: §2).

Cassam argues that epistemic vices can obstruct knowledge in at least three ways:

1. By reducing the likelihood that that the vicious individual’s beliefs will be true;
2. By getting in the way of belief;
3. By undermining one’s right to be confident in one’s beliefs (2019:11)

Consider closed-mindedness: a person with this vice may be epistemically closed off to true beliefs, and unlikely to form beliefs about topics or issues to which they are closed, and the confidence they have in their beliefs is likely to be insecure, since they are unlikely to have openly explored certain aspects of those beliefs or salient critical perspectives on them (Cassam 2019: ch.2).

Obstructivism may appeal to feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science for several reasons. First, the focus on the gaining, keeping, and sharing of knowledge and other epistemic goods is obviously consistent with the broad epistemic aims of scientific enquiry. Cassam (2019:7, 86) actually frames obstructivism in the context of what Christopher Hookway called *enquiry epistemology*, a pragmatist-inspired conception of epistemic life as consisting of individual and collective efforts ‘to find things out, to extend our knowledge by carrying out investigations directed at answering questions, and to refine our knowledge by considering questions about things we currently hold true’ (1994: 211).

Second, obstructivism shares with feminist epistemology and philosophy of science an upfront sensitivity to the manifest suboptimalities of our epistemic activities and systems. Although Cassam focuses on the epistemic defects of the media and the political systems in the developed world, one can plausibly find epistemic vices across individuals, institutions, and cultures, including the sciences. Third, obstructivism is *ameliorative* in the sense that its analyses are intended to guide corrective measures, if and where possible. For Cassam, ‘epistemic vices of various kinds have been at least partly responsible for a series of political and other disasters’, and that our ‘only hope of avoiding such disasters in the future is to improve our thinking, our attitudes, and our habits of thought and inquiry’, with the alternative ‘too ghastly to contemplate’ (2019:187).

A final feature of obstructivism with appeal to feminist theorists is an insistence that ‘vice-explanations’ of epistemic failures – ones invoking the epistemic vices of agents – are only apposite in certain cases and only then to a certain degree. Depending on the particular case, we may also need *structural explanations*, *ideological explanations*, *political-rational explanations*, *situational explanations*,and *sub-personal explanations*, like appeals to cognitive bias. Sometimes, a fuller story needs to be told about the causes of epistemic failures and vices may play only a marginal, secondary role in some of them. Obstructivism is thus committed only to the conviction that ‘there are cases where [other] explanations don’t do the job and where it is difficult to understand a person’s intellectual conduct other than by reference to their epistemic vices’. Sometimes, says Cassam, ‘the explanation *is* personal’ (2019:27).

 Still, certain feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science may demur on at least three other features of obstructivism, each of which requires changes to its normative or methodological components. To start with, obstructivism, at least as it is presented in *Vices of the Mind*, has no built-in sensitivity to gender or social identity. There is recognition of the role of degrees of social power, as when Cassam argues that occupying ‘positions of power and privilege can easily result in intellectual overconfidence or a cognitive superiority complex’ (2019: 97). In such cases, vice-explanations and structural-explanations reveal the phenomenon of *epistemic corruption*, a form of characterological damage that occurs when a subject interacts with individuals, groups, structures, or processes that tend to facilitate the development and exercise of epistemic vices. Such epistemically corrupting conditions also underscore the need for *aetiological sensitivity* to the contingencies and complexities of the development of an agent’s vices and character (see Kidd 2016, 2020).

A second concern with obstructivism concerns the *perception* of epistemic character traits, attitudes, and ways of thinking as epistemic vices can be distorted by sexist and racial biases, spoiling our capability to detect epistemically vicious agents. What may be needed to offset this concern is what Robin Dillon calls a critical sensitivity to ‘the politics of character assessment’ (2012:100). Otherwise, charges of epistemic vice risk doing what they have been used for historically – the denigration, marginalisation, and oppression of women and other subordinated groups (Superson 2004). Think of the systematic tendencies within the sciences to exclude women by attributing to them – individually or collectively – such ‘feminine’ vices as foolishness, stupidity, or distorting sentimentality, obstructive relative to the demands of objective, rational enquiry (some classic statements are Anderson 1995, Lloyd 1984, and Longino 1987).

A final feature of obstructivism that requires amendment relative to the aims and sensibilities of feminist analyses of science concerns its *axiological monism*: the reliance on epistemic values in the normative appraisal of vices, which assigns either a secondary role or no role at all to non-epistemic values – ethical, social, political. Cassam typically notes the bad practical, social, and political effects of epistemically vicious conduct, using case studies like the US invasion of Iraq, the Yom Kippur attack on Israel, and Brexit. But epistemic values are the normative core of obstructivism, and a feminist can response in two ways.

First, there is a weaker claim that normative accounts of at least *some* epistemic vices must necessarily appeal to both epistemic and non-epistemic values, insofar as any satisfying analysis of the badness of, say, the vice of testimonial injustice must attend to its ethical and political effects, too. Analyses of gendered epistemic injustices in science, for instance, must of necessity attend to the ethical and political consequences of the unjust silencing of the members of socially marginalised groups—otherwise, the ethically and politically charged aspects of occurrences of epistemically vicious conduct within science come to seem secondary, incidental features of what is primarily an epistemically problematic state of affairs (Grasswick 2018, which also contains a valuable survey of relevant work in feminist histories and philosophies of science and healthcare).

A second, stronger response is to reject axiological monism by denying the putative distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic domains of value. Nancy Daukas, for instance, urges us to reject any separation of epistemic and socioethical domains of value. Given the inseparability of knowledge, power, and agency, it’s better to appreciate that the goals of feminist analysis are ‘inseparably socio-ethical and epistemic goals’ (2019: 379). But as a consequence, talk of *epistemic vices* goes out of the window. An authentically liberatory character epistemology sensitive to the *socially situated* natureof epistemic agency as structured by unjust inequities in power and privilege cannot endorse an axiological monism that construes the epistemic as separable from the socioethical—the epistemic *is* political and this demands an axiology undistorted by the misleading idea that a separate epistemic domains could be neatly cut free of its socioethical and political aspects. Indeed, if Kristie Dotson (2012) is right, that axiological assumption may itself help perpetuate systems of oppression.

Whether or not one can make obstructivism more axiologically pluralistic is unclear. Much depends upon the extent to which it is defined by its epistemic consequentialism. I think obstructivism could be made more alert to social positionality and the politics of character assessment and that doing so would complicate and deepen our understanding of the epistemically obstructive effects of the vices of the mind. If that’s possible, then one can also develop obstructivism into a liberatory vice epistemology, which construes the vices of the mind as both socially oppressive and epistemically obstructive.

**2B. Motivationalist conceptions of epistemic vice.**

The second main normative conception of epistemic vices involves their *motivations*. This is the position endorsed by Zagzebski: a virtue or vice has ‘a component of motivation, which is a disposition or tendency to have a certain motive’, the latter being ‘an action-initiating and directing emotion’, directed toward some end (1996: 134). There can be a fundamental motivation common to all epistemic virtues and vices and specific motivations that serve to individuate specific virtues and vices from one another.

Within vice epistemology, there are three main sorts of motivational account (see Crerar 2018: §§2 and 3).

1. *Presence accounts*: epistemic vice requires the presence of *bad epistemic motivations*, such as the motivations not to believe certain things, to be and remain ignorant about a certain topic, for beliefs that are comfortable or convenient rather than well-justified, etc. (cf. Battaly 2016: 105). Such epistemically bad motivation can be rooted in deeper, non-epistemic motivations, such as maintaining one’s privilege (cf. Crerar 2018: 757). Vices get ‘some (or all) of their dis-value from the dis-valuable motivations they require’ (Battaly 2016: 106).
2. *Absence accounts*:epistemic vice involves an absence of *good epistemic motivations*, such as the motivation to form justified true beliefs, to acquire and retain knowledge about salient topics, to establish and maintain cognitive contact with reality, etc. (cf. Zagzebski 1996:167). Consider vices like epistemic laziness, incuriosity, or negligence (cf. Crerar 2018: 757). An epistemically vicious person may manifest either an *absent* or an *insufficient* motivation for epistemic goods relative to other goods (cf. Baehr 2010: 209).
3. *Compatibility accounts*: certain epistemic subjects can exemplify epistemic vices even though they are actually and ultimately motivated by a love of and desire for epistemic goods. A conspiracy theorist may be viciously closed-minded and gullible, while still being motivated by a genuine desire for the truth about certain events (cf. Cassam 2016: 162-163). Epistemic viciousness is thus compatible with the presence of epistemically good motives in at least certain cases (cf. Crerar 2018: 759-761).

The fullest development of a motivational analysis of epistemic vice if the presence type is Alessandra Tanesini’s work on the vices opposed to humility, whose excess-forms include arrogance and *superbia* and whose deficiency-forms include timidity and servility (Tanesini 2016, 2018). She argues that epistemic vices have *behavioural*, *emotional*, and *motivational* components, and the latter two are causally efficacious in bad epistemic conduct. Arrogance includes behaviours LIKE *bragging*, motivated fundamentally by a desire for ego-inflationary *self-enhancement*, and characterised by dispositions to frequently, situationally experience *anger*. Such specific motivations individuate epistemic vices, although all of them also share a more fundamental motivation to ‘turn away from epistemic goods’, the opposite to the desire for cognitive contact with reality arguably characteristic of epistemic virtues.

Motivational conceptions of epistemic vice resonate with key themes in feminist epistemologies and philosophies of science, reflecting Tanesini’s earlier work in those very areas(see Tanesini 1999). Three points stand out. To start with, there’s the emphasis on the affective and motivational dimensions of epistemic character and activity and a consequent appreciation of the significance of anger, fear, and other affective states to epistemology. Second, the sensitivity to the ways that social identities shape the motivational psychology of epistemic subjects –

Tanesini focuses on the ways that patterns of oppression and social privilege affect the development of the vices of humility. A final point connecting motivationalist conceptions of epistemic vice and feminist philosophies of science is the emphasis on the *messiness* of the motives informing scientific enquiry. Such laudable epistemic motivations as a ‘love of truth’ or the desire for knowledge do play a role within scientific enquiry, but these motivations are (a) often only partially expressed and are (b) perpetually accompanied by other bad epistemic motivations. A survey of feminist studies of science reveals an enormous variety of invidious motivations evinced by scientists. Elizabeth Potter, for instance, mentions:

* Being motivated to deny the significance of gendered assumptions to scientific practice.
* Being motivated to ignore evidence about the role of sexist assumptions and values in scientific theory and practice.
* Being motivated to resist claims about the social nature of scientific knowledge.
* Being motivated to exclude women and the members of other marginalised groups from scientific training, communities, and systems of advancement.

 (Potter 2006, 19, 111, 119)

These are all epistemically bad motivations, since they involve what Tanesini calls a turning away from epistemic goods—for instance, from the evidence of persistent and systematic gendered inequalities in historical and contemporary scientific communities (a good survey and discussion is Schiebinger 1999: chs. 2-3, which also documents some absurd strategies used by apologists for androcentric science). I think there are good prospects for analyses of these strategies of denial and resistance in terms of motivated epistemic vice (cf. Kidd 2018: § 6.3).

There are two issues about motivationalism when it comes to feminist analyses of science. The first is the *normativity question*: must the bad motivations be *epistemic,* or can they be *ethical, social, or political* – another form of the issue about axiological pluralism. An array of epistemic vices evident in science are plausibly explained fundamentally in terms of misogynistic motivations, especially in medical and healthcare sciences (some recent studies include Criado Perez 2017: Part IV, Dusenbery 2017, and Freeman and Stewart 2019). A vice can still be *epistemic* if it primarily affects epistemic activities, such as enquiring, even if the operative motivations are ethical, social, or political. Second, how do motivational accounts of vice fare relate to the emphasis by many feminist epistemologists and philosophers on the fundamentally collective character of scientific enquiry? We might argue that certain motivations can be shared by a collective (a research team, say), which could mean that we can talk about *collective epistemic vices* grounded in collective motivations. But this needs conversations between vice epistemology, social metaphysics, and feminist philosophies of science.

**Related Topics**

Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 15, 16

**Biographical Note**

Ian James Kidd is an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Nottingham, UK. He works mainly in epistemology, philosophy of illness and healthcare, and philosophy of science, and co-edited (with Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. and José Medina) *The Routledge Handbook to Epistemic Injustice* (2012) and is currently co-editing (with Heather Battaly and Quassim Cassam) *Vice Epistemology* (2020). His website is www.ianjameskidd.weebly.com.

**References**

Anderson, E. (1995) “Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology,” *Philosophical Topics* 23 (2): 27–58.

Anderson, E. (2019) “Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science,”, E.N. Zalta (ed.) The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/feminism-epistemology/>.

Baehr, J. (2010) “Epistemic Malevolence,” *Metaphilosophy* 41(1-2): 189-213.

Baehr, J. (2011) *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Battaly, H. (2010) “Epistemic Self-Indulgence,” *Metaphilosophy* 41 (1-2): 214-234. Reprinted

Battaly, H. (2013) “Detecting Epistemic Vice in Higher Education Policy: Epistemic Insensibility in the Seven Solutions and the REF,” *The Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47(2): 263-280.

Battaly, H. (2014) “Varieties of Epistemic Vice,” in J. Matheson and R. Vitz (eds.) *The Ethics of Belief*(Oxford: Oxford University Press), 51-76.

Battaly, H. (2015) *Virtue* (Cambridge: Polity).

Battaly, H. (2016) “Epistemic Virtue and Vice: Reliabilism, Responsibilism, and Personalism,” C. Mi, M. Slote, and E. Sosa (eds.), *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Chinese and Western Philosophy: The Turn Towards Virtue* (New York: Routledge), 99-120.

Battaly, H. (2017) “Testimonial Injustice, Epistemic Vice, and Vice Epistemology,” in I.J. Kidd, G. Pohlhaus, Jr. and J. Medina (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (New York: Routledge), 223-231.

Battaly, H. (2018) “Closed-mindedness and Dogmatism,” *Episteme* 15 (3): 261-282.

Battaly, H. (ed.) (2019) *The Routledge Handbook to Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Routledge).

Biddle, J., I.J. Kidd, and A. Leuschner (2017) “Epistemic Corruption and Manufactured Doubt: The Case of Climate Science,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 31 (3): 165-187.

Card, C. (1996) *The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).

Cassam, Q. (2016) “Vice Epistemology,” *The Monist* 99 (3): 159–180.

Cassam, Q. (2019) *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political* (Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cassam, Q. (2020) “The Metaphysics of Epistemic Vice”, in I.J. Kidd, H. Battaly, and Q. Cassam (eds.) *Vice Epistemology* (London: Routledge), forthcoming.

Clough, S. (2003) *Beyond Epistemology: A Pragmatist Approach to Feminist Science Studies*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers).

Code, L. (1987) *Epistemic Responsibility* (Andover, NH: University Press of New England).

Code, L. (2014) “Feminist Epistemology and the Politics of Knowledge: Questions of Marginality,” in M. Evans, C. Hemmings, M. Henry, H. Johnstone, S. Madhok, A. Plomien, and S. Wearing(eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory* (London: SAGE), 9-25.

Crasnow, S., A. Wylie, W.K. Bauchspies, and E. Potter (2018) “Feminist Perspectives on Science,” E.N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy(Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/feminist-science/>.

Crerar, C. (2018) “Motivational Approaches to Intellectual Vice,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 96: (4): 753-766.

Criado Perez, C. (2017) *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London: Chatto & Windus).

Daukas, N. (2019) “Feminist Virtue Epistemology,” in H. Battaly (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Routledge), 379-391.

Dillon, R. (2012) “Critical Character Theory: Toward a Feminist Perspective on ‘Vice’ (and ‘Virtue’),” in S.L. Crasnow and A. M. Superson (eds.), *Out from the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 83-114.

Dotson, K. (2011) “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” *Hypatia* 26 (2): 236-257.

Dotson, K. (2012) “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 33 (1): 24–47.

Dusenberg, M. (2017) *Doing Harm: The Truth About How Bad Medicine and Lazy Science Leave Women Dismissed, Misdiagnosed, and Sick* (New York: HarperOne/HarperCollins).

Freeman, L. and H. Stewart (2019) “Microaggressions in Clinical Medicine,” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 28 (4): 411-449.

Fricker, M. (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Fricker, M. (2010). “Can There Be Institutional Virtues?,” in T. S. Gendler and J. Hawthorne; (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 235‐252.

Garry, A. and M. Pearsall (eds.) (1989) *Women, Knowledge, and Reality* (Boston: Unwin Hyman).

Grasswick, H. (2003) “The Impurities of Epistemic Responsibility: Developing a Practice-oriented Epistemology,” in H. Nelson and R. Fiore (eds.) *Recognition, Responsibility and Rights: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), 89-104.

Grasswick, H. (2018) “Understanding Epistemic Trust Injustices and Their Harms,” Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 84: 69-91.

Harding, S. (1986) *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

hooks, bell (2013) *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (London: Routledge).

Hookway, C. (1994) “Cognitive Virtues and Epistemic Evaluations,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2: 211–227.

Keller, E.F. (1985) *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Kidd, I.J. (2016) “Charging Others with Epistemic Vice,” *The Monist* 99 (3): 181-197.

Kidd, I.J. (2018) “Is Scientism Epistemically Vicious?,” in J. de Ridder, R. Peels, and R. van Woudenberg (eds.) *Scientism: Prospects and Problems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 222-249.

Kidd, I.J. (2019a) “Deep Epistemic Vices,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 43: 43-67.

Kidd, I.J. (2019b) “Epistemic Corruption and Education,” *Episteme*16 (2): 220-235.

Kidd, I.J. (2020) “Epistemic Corruption and Social Oppression,” in I.J. Kidd, H. Battaly, and Q. Cassam (eds.) *Vice Epistemology* (London: Routledge), forthcoming.

Lackey, J. (2007) “Why We Don’t Deserve Credit for Everything We Know,” *Synthese* 158: 345-361.

[Lahroodi](https://philpapers.org/s/Reza%20Lahroodi), R. (2019) “Virtue Epistemology and Collective Epistemology,” in H. Battaly (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Routledge), 407-419.

Lloyd, E. (2005) The Case of the Female Orgasm: Bias in the Science of Evolution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Lloyd, G. (1984) *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen).

Longino, H. (1987) “Can There Be a Feminist Science?” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 2: 51–64.

Longino, H. E. (1990) *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Lugones, M., and E. Spelman (1983) “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for ‘the Woman’s Voice’,” Women's Studies International Forum 6: 573–581.

Medina, J. (2013) *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Merchant, C. (1980) *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row).

Potter, E. (2006) *Feminism and Philosophy of Science: An Introduction* (London: Routledge).

Roberts, R.C. and W.J. Wood (2007) *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Schiebinger, L. (1999) *Has Feminism Changed Science?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Sosa, E. (1980) “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1): 3-26.

Spivak, G.C. (1988) “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Macmillan), 271-313.

Superson, A. (2004) “Privilege, Immorality, and Responsibility for Attending to the “Facts about Humanity”,” [*Journal of Social Philosophy*](https://philpapers.org/asearch.pl?pub=594) 35 (1): 34–55.

Tanesini, A. (1999) *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell).

Tanesini, A. (2016) “Calm Down, Dear: Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance,” Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 90 (1): 71-92.

Tanesini, A. (2018) “Intellectual Servility and Timidity,” Journal of Philosophical Research 43*:* 21-41.

Tessman, L. (2005) *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Zagzebski, L. (1996) *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Knowledge and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).