This is a draft of a paper I will give at a conference on *The European Face of Political Epistemology*. Comments, criticisms, etc. very welcome but please do not cite.

Parochialism in Political Epistemology

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"Political epistemology" has recently emerged as an area of analytic epistemology. In the past few years both a handbook (Hannon and Ridder 2021) and an edited volume (Edenberg and Hannon 2021) have been published. Countless articles and book chapters have appeared on topics including conspiracy theories (see e.g. the essays in Dentith 2018), echo chambers (see e.g. Nguyen 2020), fake news (see e.g. the essays in Bernecker, Flowerree, and Grundmann 2021), the epistemology of democracy (see e.g. Cohen 1986; Estlund 2008; Landemore 2012), the epistemology of propaganda (see e.g. Brown 2018), expertise and trust in experts (see e.g. Boyd 2022; Croce 2019; Origgi 2015), political disagreement and polarisation (see e.g. (Broncano-Berrocal and Carter 2021; Kelly 2008; Worsnip, n.d.), and (ir)rationality in politics (see e.g. Achen and Bartels 2016). Epistemologists have written about recent political events, such as the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK see e.g. (Watson 2018), the 2016 election of Donald Trump in the US (see e.g. Rini 2017), and the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic (see e.g. Meyer, Alfano, and Bruin 2021).

This is clearly a trend, and it is perhaps natural to view trends with a degree of suspicion. Part of the reason for the emergence of political epistemology is a preoccupation with recent political events, and the role that conspiracy theories, echo chambers, fake news, and polarisation have supposedly played in them, in the UK, US, and a few other predominantly English-speaking countries in the Global North. One reason to be worried with these preoccupations is that they reflect, whether knowingly or not, a particular understanding of these problems, perhaps an understanding informed by a tacit political ideology (cf. Habgood-Coote 2019). Another reason is that they reflect a problematically narrow focus on the present political situation in a small number of countries, in particular the US and the UK.

My aim in this paper is to develop the second worry. Put slightly differently, the worry is that political epistemology, as it is currently practiced, is *parochial*. It is parochial not just in the sense in which one might think that analytic philosophy is always parochial. It is parochial in the further sense that it is overly concerned with contemporary political events in a small handful of countries (in particular, the US and UK). The flipside of focusing on certain countries and political events within those countries is typically that other countries, or political events within one's own country that don't fit with one's preferred narrative, end up being ignored. This has consequences *inter alia* for the sort of work that is published in political epistemology. It may be easier to publish a discussion of misinformation and its role in the contemporary right-wing US political ecosystem than a discussion of, say, misinformation in Hungarian politics. You are certainly more likely to find the former in a leading analytic philosophy journal than you are to find the latter.

That said, I am going to argue that there need not be nothing wrong with parochialism in political epistemology, at least in and of itself. There is nothing wrong with being interested in misinformation in contemporary US politics. The problem is when problems that are specific to a particular country or geographical region are treated as if they were universal problems, or when problems that are common to a wide range of countries are viewed through a lens particular to one country. Moreover, I am going to argue that something approaching parochialism is positively valuable insofar as political epistemologists *should* be interested in political problems in particular countries, as well as the local flavour that more universal problems have in particular countries. To this end, I will suggest that we can view political epistemology as concerned with certain general problems and tensions, which political epistemologists may then seek to identify and address within the political context in which they are working.

Before continuing let me clarify that the critical parts of this paper are in the service of the more constructive parts. My aim is to sketch a productive method for doing political epistemology. I also want to be completely clear that it is not my intention to criticise individuals working within political epistemology. When you look at the major resources in the field (e.g. Hannon and Ridder 2021) you find a lot of valuable work, some of it with a historical focus, some of it with a focus on more fundamental issues, and some of it about contemporary political events. Insofar as there is a problem with political epistemology, it is a problem with the field as a whole, not the individuals working within it.

Here is the plan for the rest of the paper. I will start by saying a little more about political epistemology—what it is, and what distinguishes it from related movements such as social epistemology (§1). I then discuss parochialism itself, both in general and within political epistemology (§2). In the final two sections, I sketch a methodology for political epistemology that combines a focus on the local and political problems specific to particular countries with an interest in more general problems and tensions (§3) and make some suggestions about what putting this methodology into practice might involve (§4).

1. What is Political Epistemology?

Boundaries are usually blurry, whether between disciplines (e.g. philosophy and psychology), sub-disciplines (e.g. epistemology and ethics), or sub-sub-disciplines (e.g. political epistemology and social epistemology). But one can typically cite clear examples on either side of the divide. Work on epistemic conceptions of democracy counts as political epistemology; work on foundational issues in the epistemology of testimony doesn't. Other examples are harder to classify, and some examples seem to blur the boundary in question. For instance, one of the most-discussed topics in contemporary epistemology is epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007; see also Dotson 2014; Medina 2012). Does epistemic injustice belong within political epistemology? It isn't clear.

For my purposes I don't need a precise definition of "political epistemology", and in any case I doubt a precise definition is even possible. One helpful way of viewing political epistemology has been suggested by Michael Hannon and Elise Woodard (n.d.). Political epistemology is concerned with both (a) epistemological dimensions of political issues and (b) political dimensions of epistemological issues. Under (a) we consider topics such as epistemic conceptions of democracy, polarisation, political ignorance, dis- and misinformation, fake news, and the like. Under (b) we consider topics such as expert disagreement, trust and mistrust in experts, political disagreement, and the like. This helps explain why political epistemology is so tricky to characterise: it typically overlaps with political philosophy (under a) or social epistemology (under b).

A distinctive feature of political epistemology is that it is deeply engaged with *other* disciplines, in particular relevant empirical disciplines: political psychology, political science, media and communications, sociology, and so on. (Social epistemology can also be deeply engaged in this way; as above, political and social epistemology often overlap). To take an example from my own work, I have looked at science denial, with a particular focus on climate change denial, and on the cultural, psychological, and sociological drivers of it (see McKenna 2023, chaps. 4, 8 and the references herein). But my work is not in any way distinctive in this regard. Political epistemologists frequently draw on a wide range of different disciplines. They sometimes even carry out their own empirical work (Ahlstrom-Vij et al. 2018; Meyer and Alfano 2022; Sullivan et al., n.d.). This is, in my view, one of the best things about political epistemology. It is *outward-looking*, far more so than more traditional epistemology. It is of interest to non-philosophers, perhaps even the general public.

While political epistemology is outward-looking, it is liable to inherit the problems that are inherent to the other disciplines on which it draws. So, for example, insofar as political epistemologists draw on social psychology, it is liable to inherit worries about the replicability of studies in social psychology, especially when those studies play a crucial role in the work of political epistemologists (for relevant discussion see Buckwalter 2022).

Most importantly for our purposes, the empirical disciplines on which political epistemologists tend to draw are often parochial in the exact same ways in which political epistemology is parochial. Focusing again on my own work on climate change denial, most of the data on which I rely is drawn from the US (see, for example, the papers cited in McKenna 2023, chap. 4). More generally, the political framing within which I discuss climate change denial is specific to the US. This doesn't so much reflect a deliberate choice on my part as the simple fact that a lot of the data on climate change denial is about the US. (It may perhaps reflect an implicit choice—more on this later). But—I hope!—my work is also not in any way distinctive in this regard. Many of the empirical studies discussed by political epistemologists are about the US and concern political issues that are either specific to the US, or take on a particular shape within the US. (I won't cite examples because I don't want to single out individuals, other than myself of course).

Let me pause to clarify that I am, at least at this point in this paper, simply making the descriptive point that political epistemology is likely to inherit a particular geographical and political focus from the empirical disciplines on which it draws. I'm not making a normative assessment of political epistemology, or of these empirical disciplines. I go on to say what I think is and isn't problematic about parochialism in political epistemology. Much of what I say about parochialism in political epistemology would also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to, say, political psychology. There is a general problem here, and my discussion of parochialism in the context of political epistemology only touches on the more general problem.

2. Parochialism

So much for political epistemology. What about parochialism? The OED gives several definitions for "parochial".[1] The most relevant for my purposes is "relating or confined to a narrow area or region, as if within the borders of one's own parish; limited or provincial in outlook or scope". In this sense, parochialism is a matter of one's interests being confined to the local, to where one lives or calls home (this may be a parish, but it need not be). It is in this sense that one might describe a work of art (a novel, a film) as parochial. The parochial novel is rooted in a particular place, in the particular concerns of people in that place.

It is hard to cite uncontroversial examples of parochial works of art. The word "parochial" is usually used in a pejorative sense, so anyone who finds value in a work of art is usually inclined to deny that it is parochial. Moreover, parochialism is often seem as closely connected to other "isms" that many would regard as problematic: nationalism, patriotism, romanticism. I don't intend to get embroiled in these debates, though what I say below goes some way towards disentangling parochialism from these other "isms" (for useful discussion see Calhoun 2007; Gosetti, Walsh, and Finch-Race 2023; Tomaney 2013). Instead, I want to urge the importance of distinguishing between two attitudes, one of which seems to be to be far more problematic than the other.

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[1] https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138040?redirectedFrom=parochial#eid

There is a difference between taking a special interest in the narrow area or region one happens to call home and thinking that one's own region is more important/ interesting than, or superior to, other regions. We might say that this is the difference between parochialism, understood as a particular interest in things or places one has a special attachment to, and *myopia* (for relevant discussion of myopia see Kidd 2023). Parochialism and myopia are similar in that they both involve a narrowing of one's horizons. But they differ in that the parochial stance need not involve any dismissal of other horizons (or of the horizons of others) whereas a dismissal of others, and of their interests and attachments, is definitional of myopia. The parochial individual is interested in the local, in what is around them. The myopic individual thinks that all that matters is what is around them.

It is for this reason that myopia is far more problematic than parochialism. Indeed, parochialism can be entirely harmless, and sometimes even positively valuable. As John Tomaney puts it in a defence of parochialism, "a parochial outlook values the local, its culture and solidarities, as a moral starting point and locus of ecological concern and a site for the development of virtues including commitment, fidelity, civility and nurture" (2013, 659). This is not to say that parochialism is never problematic. One can value the local in a way that is problematic, or one can refuse to broaden one's horizons in ways that reveal that one is really myopic. But the crucial point is that myopia is always problematic whereas parochialism need not be. Or, at least, myopia is always a good deal more problematic than parochialism.

Perhaps you aren't convinced that the difference I'm trying to capture is best put in terms of the difference between parochialism and myopia. You might insist that what I am calling myopia is simply a certain kind of parochialism. This may be right, but it is then important to distinguish between two different kinds of parochialism, or perhaps better, two different stances that we can describe as parochial. You can be parochial while being aware of your parochialism. For example, you can be primarily interested in events within your own country (or within your own region of a country) while recognising that this is so. This may go along with recognition that things are different elsewhere, and how they are elsewhere is also important.

You can however also be parochial without being aware of your parochialism. The most problematic kind of parochialism is the kind that isn't conscious of itself as parochialism. Consider the attitude of someone who is convinced that what they are interested in is what everyone is interested in (isn't everyone interested in the sexual hang-ups of middle-class white men?). Or imagine someone who views the ins and outs of political events in their country as of paramount importance to the world wasn't everyone interested in Boris Johnson's parties at 10 Downing Street?). These individuals confuse their particular interests, obsessions, and worries with universal interests, obsessions, and worries.

What, then, would it mean to say that political epistemology is parochial? Well, political epistemology is parochial to the extent that it is focused on political events in particular countries, or assumes a framing of more universal events that is specific to particular countries. This might mean *inter alia* focusing on what is happening in certain countries (e.g. the election of a new president, or a momentous referendum), "political dynamics" within those countries (e.g. whether the politics of the country is "shifting" left or right, and why), or on the citizens of those countries (e.g. aspects of their psychology). Some of the examples of recent work in political epistemology that I cited in the introduction illustrate this sort of parochialism: the election of Trump and the Brexit referendum, the Covid-19 pandemic (clearly important for the whole world, but often discussed through the lens of US politics, or of the political contexts of the researchers). It seems clear, the, that political epistemology is parochial, at least to some extent.

Before I continue, let me emphasise two points. First, in describing work on, say, the Brexit referendum as parochial I am *not* necessarily intending to criticise that work, still less dismiss it. What would be worthy of criticism is a situation where one researcher could easily publish their philosophically informed analysis of the Brexit referendum, yet another researcher can find no takers for their equally philosophically informed analysis of, say, politics in the Balkans.

Second, my claim is not that all political epistemology is parochial in this sense. Political epistemology is a broad field, and its practitioners are often concerned with issues and problems that transcend particular political contexts. An interest in epistemic conceptions of democracy may betray a special interest in democracy as a political system, but it need not involve focus on any one democratic country. It need not even betray a positive stance vis-à-vis democracy: one might argue *against* democracy on broadly epistemic grounds (Brennan 2016). Similarly, while studying trust and distrust of expertise may lead to a particular focus on local contexts of trust or distrust, one can also sensibly discuss the role of experts at a level of abstraction that avoids the need to consider any particular political context (see, for example, Goldman 2001). So political epistemology is not *always* parochial. At least, it's not always any more parochial than any branch of contemporary philosophy.

If political epistemology is parochial in the sense and to the extent that I have outlined, what (if anything) should we do about this? I suggested above that parochialism is not necessarily problematic. Or, at least, I suggested that it is less problematic than myopia. I see no clear grounds for claiming that political epistemologists are myopic. The simplest explanation why political epistemologists tend to focus on events like as Brexit or the election of Donald Trump is that most political epistemologists work in the UK or the US and these events were particularly salient to them. This is parochialism, not myopia, and as I have argued above parochialism need not be problematic as such. In the rest of this paper, I am going to discuss the ways in which parochialism in political epistemology is and isn't problematic.

3. A Method for Political Epistemology

So far I have argued that political epistemology is often (though not always) parochial. In this section I argue that there need not be anything wrong with researchers being primarily interested in political events in their particular geographical region. Indeed, the right method for political epistemology involves a good deal of focus on narrow geographical areas and regions. The crucial point is that we need to ensure sufficient *variety* of local contexts.

Let me start with some general points about philosophical methodology. There is a difference between having a relatively narrow philosophical outlook (focusing on particular questions or historical periods, doing philosophy in a particular way) and thinking that this is the only or best philosophical outlook. As a researcher (though not as a teacher!), I'm typically interested in a small number of problems, and an even smaller number at any one time. My work is entirely within the analytic tradition, and it is ahistorical. But that doesn't mean that I regard other problems or traditions as uninteresting.

Imagine a researcher who decided to focus entirely on the value of knowledge, as it is understood within contemporary analytic philosophy. In doing so they would certainly be guilty of a narrowness of focus. But, so long as they recognise that there are valuable philosophical problems that have nothing to do with the value of knowledge, it isn't clear that this is so terrible. (You might think that a topic like the value of knowledge isn't worthy of anyone's attention. But there are worse things than spending your life on philosophical problems that don't matter much). Of course, if this researcher doesn't recognise that there are other valuable problems, then they are guilty of myopia, and this is clearly problematic (cf. Kidd 2023). But the point is that there is a clear difference between provincialism and myopia, both in general and as they apply to individual research programmes.

Things look a little different when we consider the field as a whole. If every philosopher (or at least every philosopher at a prestigious institution) were only interested in the value of knowledge, this would be very problematic. This would be problematic even if none of these researchers were particularly myopic. They could all pursue their research on the value of knowledge, fully acknowledging that other philosophical projects are worthwhile, but not viewing them as the sorts of things that they are qualified to pursue. Of course, it's not exactly realistic to imagine a situation where everyone studies the value of knowledge. But the point should be obvious: you can have situations where important philosophical issues and problems aren't discussed, even though individual researchers ignore them for reasons that are largely defensible. You can have a bad division of cognitive labour even though individual researchers do valuable and important work (Kitcher 1990). Indeed, you could have a bad division of cognitive labour even though individual researchers focus on what are in fact the most important questions. Someone has to deal with the slightly-less-but-still-important questions after all.

We can apply this point to political epistemology. There is not necessarily anything wrong with a researcher in the US writing about Covid scepticism in the US (what drives it, the particular shape it takes). Similarly, there is nothing wrong with me writing about the Brexit referendum (I didn't, but I could well have). But it clearly would be a problem if, within political epistemology as a whole, the only concrete political contexts that were considered (at least in the pages of prestigious journals) were the political contexts of predominantly English-speaking countries in the Global North, plus the contexts of other countries insofar as they are similar to or overlap with those contexts. I submit that this is, by and large and with some important exceptions, the situation in political epistemology.

Let me try to be a little more constructive. I am going to argue that, once we have a plausible methodology for political epistemology on the table, it is going to turn out that the right method for political epistemology involves a good deal of focus on narrow geographical areas and regions. The important thing, though, is that, at the level of the discipline, a wide range of geographical areas are considered.

We can draw a distinction between two parts or approaches to political epistemology. The first part is concerned with foundational questions and issues. Questions like: what is the epistemic value of democracy? what is the appropriate stance to take towards experts? how should we respond to political disagreement? The second part is concerned either with answering these questions in particular social and historical contexts (even if there is an epistemic argument for democracy in theory, that doesn't mean it supports this particular democracy), and/or with questions that only arise once we try to make sense of particular social and historical contexts. Questions like: what drives acceptance of particular conspiracy theories? do new technologies fundamentally change social-epistemic dynamics? if so, what are the epistemological implications?

Much like any distinction, this distinction between two parts of political epistemology can become blurred in practice. But it is an instance of a more general distinction one can draw between *ideal* and *non-ideal* epistemology (McKenna 2023). There are many ways in which this distinction might be drawn (see, for example, Carr 2021; Pasnau 2013). The way in which I like to draw it is roughly as follows. One branch of epistemology—the ideal part—is interested in basic epistemic ideals or values (such as knowledge) and foundational epistemological problems (such as the nature of knowledge). Another branch of epistemology—the non-ideal part—is interested in how these epistemic ideals and values might be realised in practice, in the problems one might face in trying to realise them, and in epistemological problems that only become apparent once one starts to focus on the real world, with all its imperfections.

I don't want to get too far into the relationship between ideal and non-ideal epistemology here. (See my book!). Suffice it to say that ideal and non-ideal epistemology are, to a large extent, separate enterprises. You can profitably engage in one without really engaging with the other at all. But there are also some connections. In particular, even at the level of abstraction of ideal epistemology, we can identify certain tensions between our basic epistemic ideals and values. For example, as William James famously argued in 1896 essay *The Will to Believe*, there is a tension between two basic epistemic goals: the goal of having true beliefs and the goal of avoiding false beliefs. In aiming for true beliefs, one runs the risk of having some false beliefs; in aiming to avoid having any false beliefs, one runs the risk of having few if any true beliefs. Descending to the non-ideal perspective, one must balance these risks if one wants to do a good job of forming beliefs about the world. This is something that we need to do as individual inquirers (see Ichikawa n.d. for an interesting discussion). But it is also something that we need to do at a more institutional level. For example, empirical scientists need to make decisions about how to balance the risk of type I errors (false positives) against the risk of type II errors (false negatives)

We can say something similar about political epistemology. One part (the ideal part) of political epistemology is concerned with basic ideals and values and with foundational problems. Of course, because political epistemology slides into other areas of philosophy (particularly political philosophy), the sorts of problems that are of interest to political epistemologists are quite different from traditional epistemological questions. They are foundational in the sense that they arise from reflection on basic ideals and values (epistemic, ethical, political), not in the sense that they concern the basic problems of mind and world.

A foundational problem in political epistemology that I'm particularly interested in is the tension between democratic ideals and the ideal of scientifically-informed public policy (McKenna 2023, chap. 4). This tension—or at least a version of it—goes back to Plato, but it is put in a particularly clear form in Anderson (2011). Put simply: responsible public policy making in a technologically advanced society should be based on the available scientific evidence. But, to be democratically legitimate, there must be broad (though not universal) acceptance of the policies which are put in place. This, in turn, requires broad acceptance of the science on which these policies are based. There is a tension here because, clearly, this acceptance may sometimes not be forthcoming. What do we do then?

It may be that we can say lots of interesting things about this tension without considering how it manifests itself in concrete political contexts. But, at some point, you might decide to look at the particular contexts in which this tension manifests itself. This is where the second part (the non-ideal part) of political epistemology comes in. It is this part of political epistemology that requires us to pay attention to a wide range of political contexts. If we want to consider how philosophical tensions and problems "play out" in the real world—and look to the ways in which these tensions and problems are resolved in practice as a starting place for thinking philosophically about their solutions—we can't confine our attention to the small corner of the real world that we inhabit.

Take, for example, an issue such as climate change and climate change scepticism. This issue is interesting from the standpoint of political epistemology for at least two reasons. First, climate change scepticism might be cited as an example of human irrationality and evidence of the impact of politically-tinged cognitive biases on our beliefs (for a contrary view see Levy 2021). Second, climate change scepticism, particularly in its guise as a political movement, highlights the tension between democratic values and the vision of public policy making as informed by scientific expertise. The problem is precisely that, at least in certain parts of the world, large groups of people are resistant not just to climate change mitigation policies but sometimes even to the threat posed by climate change.

How should we think about climate change scepticism as a problem in political epistemology? We can start by trying to understand how prevalent climate change scepticism is, and what drives it. This requires looking at how prevalent it is within a particular country, region, or community. As one might expect, there are a huge number of studies focusing on the US (see, for example, Ballew et al. 2019). But, while there is an undeniable focus on the US, one can find studies on other countries, including China (Yang et al. 2021) and India (Thaker, Smith, and Leiserowitz 2020), as well as studies that provide a global perspective (Tranter and Booth 2015).

It is also important to understand what drives climate change scepticism. Tranter and Booth (2015) suggest that conservative political ideology is a key driver of climate scepticism, though other factors matter too (climate scepticism is more prevalent in countries with high levels of CO_2 emissions, for example). The role of political ideology in driving climate scepticism has been widely documented in the US, with liberal Democrats considerably more likely to view climate change as a serious threat than conservative Republicans (Ballew et al. 2019). There is some evidence that one finds a similar split in Western European countries, but the picture in Central and Eastern Europe seems a lot more complicated (Fisher et al. 2022). All told, we certainly have far less of an understanding of what drives climate change scepticism outside the US than we do inside the US.

At least in my view, another important question concerns ways in which climate change sceptics might be persuaded to change their minds—to reconsider their scepticism. This question has two dimensions (cf. McKenna 2023, chap. 4). The first, which is basically empirical, concerns which methods of persuasion are likely to be successful. The second, which is more philosophical, concerns which methods of persuasion are permissible, both from the basic standpoint of not being overtly manipulative, and from the standpoint of respecting the values that democratic societies are meant to respect (e.g. autonomy).

Let's focus on the first question. This is a question for the psychology of persuasion, and the best place to look for relevant data is (the science of) science communication (Jamieson, Kahan, and Scheufele 2017). In the literature one finds various suggestions including framing, choice of messenger, and prebunking. With framing, the idea is that one can try to find ways of framing the basic scientific issues, or particular climate change mitigation strategies, in ways that are more likely to gain uptake (Kahan et al. 2015). With the messenger, the idea is that the "impact" of a "persuasive message" depends both on the content of the message and the person delivering it (Kahan, Jenkins-Smith, and Braman 2011). With prebunking, the idea is that you can give people the tools they need not to be "tricked" by false claims, misinformation, and disinformation strategies (van der Linden et al. 2017).

A lot can be said for and against these strategies, both in general and in more specific forms (e.g. framing *this* climate mitigation strategy *this* way will be effective). But the important point here is that, insofar as we have evidence of their efficacy, that evidence comes from a small number of countries, typically from the US, but sometimes the UK and the rest of Europe. This is important because a central message from the psychology of persuasion is that good persuasive strategies are *tailored* to their intended audience (Petty, Wheeler, and Tormala 2003). One shouldn't expect a strategy that works with one audience, given their backgrounds, interests, values, etc., will work with another audience. (This is, after all, why companies go in for targeted marketing). What we need are studies in a wide range of countries, looking at which persuasive strategies have the best chance of succeeding in those countries, or of reaching particular groups that are more inclined towards climate change scepticism than is typical.

Similar things can be said about the second question (the question of which methods of persuasion are permissible). While there are considerations that must be borne in mind when considering the ethics of persuasion in any context (brainwashing is always bad, for example), certain contexts will raise ethical concerns that are particular to those contexts. For example, when we consider the phenomenon of vaccine hesitancy, we find that some groups are reluctant to get themselves or their families vaccinated due to well-grounded distrust of public health officials, government, pharmaceutical companies, or some mixture of all three (see (Furman 2020; Goldenberg 2021). In such situations, there are ethical reasons to tread carefully when engaging with these groups as well as pragmatic reasons. I'm merely scratching the surface of an enormous issue, but the point here is just that we can't even get started thinking through these issues without focusing on specific local contexts.

I have been focusing on one (or two) examples, chosen because they fit with my own interests. But I think the points I have been making generalise. Let me finish by drawing these points out. First, while political epistemology has a more theoretical part, it also has a more applied part that is concerned with how issues play out in particular local, national, and regional political contexts. Second, we cannot assume that these issues play out in the same way in all such contexts—we need relevant data, and we need to be alive to the possibility that different contexts may have different moral and political dimensions. Therefore, third, we need to think about ways of structuring the field so that there are incentives to focus on a wide range of different geographical contexts. I turn to this third point in the final section of this paper.

4. Getting the Incentives Right

This paper has been primarily concerned with issues of philosophical method. Discussions of philosophical method can often seem a little self-indulgent. It's all very well arguing about the fine details of philosophical methodology. What difference should all this make in practice? Even if you think that discussions of methodology often improve actual practice, this is typically because these discussions yield some concrete suggestions about what to do better, or what to do differently. If you are convinced of everything I have said so far, what should we do about it?

I said above that we need to find ways of incentivising work in political epistemology, particularly on the more applied side of political epistemology, that focuses on different (not the US, UK, etc.) political contexts. I am drawing here on a tradition in philosophy of science that thinks of incentives and incentive structures as the primary drivers of structural change within science (Kitcher 1990; Strevens 2003). For example, how can we prevent a situation where researchers all pursue what are taken to be the most tractable or straightforward problems, and ignore problems that are tricker, harder to make progress on, or require conceptual innovation and revision? The answer, put roughly, is by devising a reward structure that incentivises taking risks, but not to the extent of giving everyone a reason to only work on the hard problems.

I acknowledge that this is a somewhat limited perspective on structural change, even within academic disciplines. But it's enough to get us started. Currently, there is a lot more incentive to work on political issues that are specific to a small range of countries, or to work on more universal issues yet assume a framing of them that is specific to those countries. This shows up, for example, in what gets published in prestigious journals, which examples are the focus of extended discussions in articles in prestigious journals, and so on. Following my earlier practice, I won't list concrete examples beyond my own work, which focuses on climate change scepticism in the US). One might well wonder whether what I say about climate scepticism in the US (what drives it, what to do about it) applies in other contexts. (I'm afraid that I don't really know).

The solution, then, is to change the incentive structure. Someone smarter than me will need to work through the details. But here are some thoughts. We need to create *new* incentives—incentives to focus on different political contexts, or to consider how familiar political issues might look from different perspectives. This will involve, *inter alia*, changing norms around which sorts of topics are thought of as worth discussing, particularly in leading generalist and specialist epistemology journals. A conference like this one[2] is certainly a good start in this respect. (It was what prompted me to write this paper). But clearly more is needed. Of course, norms don't change by themselves—we (or at least the ones who do the enforcing of the norms) need to change them. This might involve, for instance, asking oneself difficult questions about one's assessments of what is and isn't publishing, supporting initiatives (like this one) that encourage focus on different political contexts in political epistemology, and collaborating with researchers who work in different contexts.

It is important to highlight that I am making an *epistemic* case for the importance of considering a wide range of different political contexts in political epistemology. Accordingly, my argument for the need to diversify the range of political contexts and topics that are discussed in papers on political epistemology in leading journals is an epistemic argument. My claim is that this would be an epistemic benefit to the field as a whole—it would, in short, lead to better political epistemology. This is of course compatible with thinking that there are *other* reasons (moral reasons, for example—e.g. reasons of fairness) for making these changes. It may be that, in the grand scheme of things, these moral reasons are weightier than the epistemic reasons I have been discussing. Still, I think it is important to highlight that there is an epistemic case. (Compare: it may be that moral reasons for diversity in science are weightier than epistemic reasons. Still, one might think it is important to highlight that epistemic considerations also speak in favour of diversity).

Let me sum up. My starting point was that political epistemology is sometimes (though not always) worryingly provincial. I don't take this to be a particularly controversial point—I doubt that anyone who works in political epistemology hasn't, at one point or another, worried a bit about why we spend so much time talking about a small number of political events that are specific to a small number of countries. That is why I have been at pains to point out that, in itself, there really is nothing wrong with researchers who work in a country being particularly interested in what is happening in that country. Moreover, as I have argued, it seems like a sensible methodology for doing political epistemology will *require* a good deal of focus on local cultural and political contexts. There is nothing necessarily problematic about a sort of parochialism in political epistemology. But the word "necessarily" is doing a lot of work here. Clearly, problems can and do result when everyone working in a field has a similar set of idiosyncratic interests and preferences. Mere parochialism at the level of individuals can become myopia at the level of the field. When this happens, we need structural changes. I have briefly canvassed some suggestions, but I welcome further suggestions about what we, as a field, can do to fix things.

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[2] A conference on *The European Face of Political Epistemology:* *https://philevents.org/event/show/108377*

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