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What is Ethical Enfranchisement? Community Research and the Social Infrastructure of Ethics

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ABSTRACT: Epistemic injustice occurs when people are harmed as knowers, especially when we lack the conceptual and interpretive resources to recognize people as knowers of their own experience. This essay addresses the ways in which concerns about epistemic injustice create a positive obligation to include diverse knowers of ethics within the academy and models a community-based alternative. This is *ethical enfranchisement*, by which we mean expanding the range of people included within ways of knowing ethical concepts, reflecting on the way people's experiences are represented in ethical discourse, and allowing priority ethical conversations to be identified by community research. The goal of teaching ethics through enfranchisement is the creation of social infrastructure and exchange between community and classroom. We describe our Re-envisioning Ethics Access and Community Humanities (REACH) Initiative at Salisbury University as an example; a community-based research partnership between public philosophy and community psychology in descriptive ethics. We also explore the obligation held by ethics professionals and academics to enfranchise community members in their conceptualization of ethical concepts, priorities, and knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Community-based research, enfranchisement, epistemic justice, ethics, philosophy, public philosophy

Introduction

When we discuss ethics, do we have any particular obligation to garner input from individuals and community groups? On the plausible assumptions that the impacts of ethical decision making will have community effects, and that some community members will have experiences relevant to our ethical inquiry, it is worth entertaining the notion that we do. However, to address this obligation would be no trivial thing; it would require the development of social infrastructure (trust, shared spaces, participation in community events, addressing language barriers) through which difficult discussions around ethics could be maintained, and through which remedies to ethical problems can reflect community voices and priorities.

In this essay, we argue that ethicists, particularly those who work within public universities or other public institutions, have an obligation to pursue the widest possible enfranchisement of ethical knowers to support and revise their work. We exemplify how this obligation can be met through the activities of the REACH Initiative by way of a collaboration between philosophical ethics and community psychology. When ethics is taught in isolation from communities, without deference to community concerns and without engaging in forums for community participation, it runs the risk of proceeding in an epistemically unjust manner. These concerns about epistemic injustice create a positive obligation to *ethically enfranchise* our most proximate communities and use them to orient and enrich our ethics work. It may be that this work even produces novel ethical concepts or identifies problems that we would not otherwise recognize as ethical because of our social positioning. Ethicists should seek out and enfranchise a broad community of ethical knowers to support, revise, and orient their work.

In this paper, we first raise several alternatives for conceptualizing community and consider several difficulties when developing epistemically just approaches to community. We then outline our framework for developing enfranchisement as a model for ethics and describe our community-centered ethics work, the REACH Initiative. Finally, we present ethical enfranchisement as a distinct practice area for public philosophy. Throughout we demonstrate that building social infrastructure around ethics is itself an expansion and application of epistemology and the ethics of knowing as articulated by Fricker (2007) and that her framework can move ethics educators in a productive way from emphasis on formation of beliefs to the creation of social infrastructure. We provide examples of how this approach can strengthen student learning and interdisciplinary engagement by more deeply embedding community ethics across the university curriculum.

1. Epistemic Injustice and Epistemic Community

1.1. Fricker and Challenges to Epistemically Just Communities

Miranda Fricker's (2007) work on *epistemic injustice* has brought attention to the consequences of failing to recognize certain people as knowers: as fully constituent persons whose testimony, experiences, and understanding can be relied upon and included as valid, bearing due normative weight. Addressing epistemic injustice requires the revision and expansion of our conceptual resources but also that we take a broader canvas of people seriously as knowers and mitigate against social factors that may affect our ability to trust the accuracy of people's reports on their own experiences. We argue that addressing matters of ethical significance for our immediate community can assist in the formation of an epistemically just community. Highlighting some key aspects of Fricker's work, as well as several responses, will help us to understand in principle why ethical dialogue can play a role in facilitating epistemically just communities.

Doing so requires critical reflection on some of the social mechanisms mentioned by Fricker, such as stereotypes, trustworthiness, and credibility gaps between knowers, as well as issues such as relative degrees of empowerment in affecting change, or conflicts between professional, institutional, or other roles that such knowers may play in the community. Fricker's work highlights the need to gain epistemic access to people's experiences in a way that accounts for these social factors as they affect our ability to trust what we hear as representative of people's experience (Fricker 2007). An epistemically just community requires more than just doxastic work (work on beliefs) as we rely on "social generalizations of epistemic trustworthiness—competence and sincerity—of people of the speaker's social type" (Fricker 2007, 32). But then the social mechanisms of community formation are themselves implicated in epistemic justice for the simple reason that our engagement with people of different social types mitigates the heuristic deficiencies (e.g., stereotype, distrust, etc.) that lead to epistemic failures. If one can establish community trust around the discovery of matters of ethical concern, would this not also function to mitigate our reliance on social generalization when understanding the members of our own epistemic communities? In other words, can the "ethics of knowing" give insight into how just epistemic communities can be formed around a collective enterprise of "knowing ethics?"

1.2. The "Ordinary" Pathway Through Ethics

Fricker's work famously indicates how the development of specific concepts, such as *sexual harassment*, affect the "credibility economy" that underwrites many people's social beliefs. Despite extensive commentary, it is not clear how exactly concepts such as *sexual harassment* are formed in the first place or how their formation can be facilitated by way of adequate social infrastructure or

engagement across community boundaries. One proposed pathway to epistemically just communities is through "social philosophy," as articulated by Sanford Goldberg (2017), who seeks to identify rational, normative expectations about what responsibilities people have for knowing, given a specific epistemic circumstance and social context. Here there is an important role of epistemically just concepts—that is, conceptual schema which provide ethically adequate resources about what one ought to know once they are assigned certain responsibilities in a certain situation. The concept of *sexual harassment* may not be necessary for all enterprises, but it would be necessary for someone who participates in or manages a professional team. When discussing ethics at all, certain such reasonable and contextual social expectations adhere to us. One should know something about what people think and why, how problems originate that are not just problems for ethicists, but problems in our communities that require ethics to solve or mitigate them. But to make this requirement of ethical knowing may also mean they require new, more epistemically just concepts and a revised sense of who is a credible "knower" of right from wrong, who is better able to set priorities among competing ethical goods, or something similar. Even a focus on generating more epistemically just concepts may lead one back to the question of our capacity to engage in serious ethical discussion via concrete contexts and institutions (schools, churches, professions, etc.)—what we are broadly calling *social infrastructure*. At a basic level, we assume that the specifics of these configurations will matter for our capacity to recognize or consider someone as an ethical knower.

Goldberg emphasizes the social mechanisms we have for setting epistemic expectations of professionals, such as doctors and lawyers. We rely on these professions to establish not only what is known in each field of inquiry but the norms according to which things can be legitimately expected to be known; "in our reliance on . . . doctors or consultants . . . the sort of reliance connecting ordinary people to such authorities is itself answerable to various sets of standards" such as professional ethics or the law (Goldberg 2017, 215). This answer, however, would seem to create a problematic circularity. To hold people epistemically responsible, we rely on authorities, who are regulated by explicit norms and laws of their professions. But if those laws and professions may not give us epistemically just norms but just differently unjust norms, or that certain professional norms are only reasonable because they are acceptable to a wide range of people a given professional ordinarily has contact with (e.g., a doctor's patients, a lawyer's clients), then the generalization of social type from those people would seem to be epistemically suspect. It is also not clear, outside of professional organizations and licensure, that there are any other examples of such epistemic verification in other social groups, and so it could be true that Goldberg's claims are only true for certain kinds of licensed professional groups.

We return to the question: *who* is the relevant community of knowers? Is it really the professional community of doctors, or rather the "ordinary people" who rely on them? Or a third community socially otherwise inaccessible to both? These difficult questions are complicated by the fact that such professions are organized by specific social mechanisms of expertise (of medicine, the law) such that even the people considered ordinary or worthy of representing a type may not be taken seriously in knowing their own experiences, such as cases where Black patients are less likely to be believed when they report pain, etc.

1.3. Epistemic Injustice, Power, and Failures to Listen

To address this difficulty, one could look to critiques of power structures as a meaningful avenue to expand our ability to adjust our epistemic standards and develop new ethical concepts. In contemporary social science, descriptions of power via concepts of oppression and marginalization also function to identify epistemic groups as they evidence (political, economic, social) power in various ways that affect their positioning in a credibility economy. One should investigate critically what it means to be "ordinary" in the first place, as doing so means at least that one plausibly has an epistemic advantage via one's credibility that reflects systemic (historical, political, etc.) power. This avenue provides a structural account of why communities may approach questions of trust and credibility already positioned relative to each other in various unjust ways. Lisa Guenther links epistemic justice with addressing economic, political and other enduring power structures (Guenther 2017) where others identify vectors of disenfranchisement via disability (Tremain 2017) or enduring colonial institutions and social realities (Pitts 2017). Each of these authors, notably, indicates a specific community of knowers (decolonial feminists, disability advocates, etc.) who would need to be taken more seriously, especially by professionals and epistemic authorities. Attending to marginalized or disempowered voices regulates what is possible to hear from one group by another, especially when considering the history of political and economic power that has created our communities in the first place. These can be read into the processes of how communities divergently interpret the world they inhabit in such a way that an interest in epistemic justice makes way for "collective political action" (Guenther 2017, 202), and so epistemically just concepts are those that include an awareness of power dynamics and their phenomenological implications.

While not explicitly addressing Fricker's work, an especially subtle reading of these relationships of power as they affect our ability to hear others is demonstrated by Jill Stauffer in *Ethical Loneliness*. This text raises "the injustice of not being heard" (Stauffer 2015, 1) within a specific profession and set of procedures, namely restorative and criminal justice procedures. Stauffer's work, like Guenther's, is phenomenologically informed in that it attends to *how* we listen to people and whether we are engaging in a fully critical cognizance of their lived

reality when we attempt to hear what they have to say. So, Stauffer is implicitly addressing the heuristic role of trust, credibility, and power that Fricker's analysis raises explicitly. *Ethical Loneliness* is, among other things, an extensive document of the failures of an ethically circumspect professional community (international criminal law) to listen well and adequately assign credibility around people's experiences.

Stauffer concludes that listening to communities, especially disempowered communities, requires that we treat ethical situations not as problems to be solved but as ongoing and collective attempts to communicate about what matters. This includes the discovery, creation, and revision of the stories that identify who the community is in the first place. This process can and ought to be oriented toward repairing present or past wrongs. Ethics can thus be burdened or empowered by a sense of what *ordinarily takes place* in my own community, the givenness of certain social types, or stories about a community—all of which subsist not because of their truth but because of a lack of contact between people who would have differing senses, roles, etc. What matters most for Stauffer is "what stories we tell ourselves about who owes what to whom and for what reasons," but also that doing so establishes that "we are all responsible for building worlds where a life's ordinary rhythms might resume or originate" (Stauffer 2015, 140). Following these authors, we understand ethics to involve the creation and sustaining of social contexts where attentive listening to a proximal community's articulation of right and wrong is possible. This type of listening is a role that an ethicist should properly be considered as playing, and we refer to this goal as a process of *ethical enfranchisement*.

2. Ethical Enfranchisement and the Development of the REACH Initiative

2.1. The REACH Initiative: A Community Focus for Ethics Research and Teaching

These concerns were at the heart of the design of the REACH Initiative, a public philosophy project which centers community ethical enfranchisement. The collaboration began between a philosopher and a community psychologist as an exploration of the possibility for descriptive ethics research in the community as a way of expanding pre-professional ethics training for psychology majors beyond standard topics such as research ethics and professional codes. In 2019 the program was awarded a NEH planning grant to establish a community network to form the basis of our ethics activities. This network includes over 400 community members in our region, to include representatives of nonprofit organizations, elected local political leaders, civil servants employed by local government departments, businesses, religious and faith-based institutions, and members of advocacy groups.

Throughout 2020–2021 we conducted a series of "listening sessions" (focus groups) with members of the network to collect qualitative data on specific ethics concepts as they play a role in organizational policies, decision making, role

conflicts, and public accountability. These listening sessions provide confidential space for members to discuss ethics issues in our local community. During these sessions, REACH team members lead community members through guided discussion on emergent concerns in our local community, structural (social, organizational, political) factors that create or contribute to the concerns, and what assets and barriers exist in the community to address them. Participants also discuss our community's priorities, and what needs are deprioritized or overlooked.

We used data gathered from 14 hours of these listening sessions to create nine ethics cases that we use in a range of academic and community settings. Specific ethical dilemmas raised within the group (especially when raised in different ways by participants with different roles) are recounted, but with names and affiliations removed to protect confidentiality. In some instances, details of the cases are fictionalized. These case studies are a durable and reusable community-sourced tool for use in class discussions and civic engagement or other public forums, as well as professional training and workshops for local leadership. Cases are matched by their subject area to relevant communities, for example, a case study centered around the responsibility of elected officials to meet diverse constituent needs was included in an on-campus political candidate training program. Importantly, these case studies are worded in such a way to stipulate facts and facilitate open-ended discussion while constraining available information into a realistic epistemic field—that is, to one that captures the scope of information (contextual, social, political, organizational, etc.) that was available or present to mind when our participants addressed a recognizably ethical decision. As of 2023 we have 9 complete ethics cases with data sourced for at least 9 more, and we hope to construct a database of local community cases for use by a wider array of community partners for public discussions, civic reflection, and workshops, and to build public accountability.

These cases have now been incorporated into an Ethics Across the Curriculum workshop, after having been tested on a pilot basis in drop-in sessions from Spring of 2021 to Fall of 2022. This Ethics Across the Curriculum group also supports a Faculty Learning Community and 12 embedded ethics projects across campus. The multi-faceted complexity of each case allows for broad implementation across the disciplines; our cases have been used in Environmental Sciences, Biology, Psychology, and Mathematics courses, among others. We have found that the same case generates substantively distinct discussions in different classrooms. Our preliminary assessment of student learning outcomes finds the case studies expand student's access to understanding the role of their disciplines in contemporaneous ethical discussions within our immediate community.

These campus activities have also allowed for the direct connection of faculty expertise to community problems, which in turn has led to the creation of resources for the community, including a white-paper, ethics newsletters and spotlights, and a workshop on accountability practices for nonprofits. Case

discussions have been facilitated in various community and institutional contexts, such as a middle-school ethics workshop at the local library, an ethics discussion program at a state prison, and a professional development program for campus administrators. Future planned activities include the development of more sustainable partnerships by way of internships and community-based faculty-involved research projects, and partnerships with local government agencies. Each of these priorities will be tested for feedback against a community advisory board selected from highly engaged network participants. One overarching conclusion we have arrived at in the current implementation phase of the project is that any *space where ethical agency is implemented benefits from transparency and is open to revision with community oversight* and that *ethics provides an excellent focal point for sustained campus-community engagement*. This social infrastructure is something we have increasingly come to recognize as the central outcome of our research.

2.2. Ethical Enfranchisement: Responding to Epistemic Injustice Through Social Infrastructure

We contend that social infrastructure and establishing pathways of trust around community issues is itself work proper to epistemology and the ethics of knowing as articulated by Fricker. By building community pathways to discuss critically what it means to be a knower of ethics, the REACH Initiative instantiates a research model where ethical concerns are *identified by the community* and then pass through multiple layers of reflection both on and off campus, before being formalized and returned to the community stakeholders that first articulated them. On the one hand, it indicates that community psychology and public philosophy can work together to be catalysts for the creation of otherwise absent pathways of communication about ethics in real time, that current community issues can take a priority in campus discussions of ethics, and that the field of who is enfranchised as a knower of these problems can be continually expanded and revised. Community enfranchisement may provide alternate pathways for conceptual revision that depend on the direct participation of otherwise disenfranchised members of our community. We believe that academic ethicists are uniquely positioned to pursue the widest possible enfranchisement of ethical knowers to support and revise their work. This is not because universities are any more neutral than other centers of power but because we already play an epistemically validating role for professions and disciplines; we increasingly seek to include the full diversity of the public we serve as well as our capacity to set agendas and priority concerns and draw attention to emerging issues and opportunities.

Our project adopts the principle of "listening first," extending curiosity to our community as to who is and who is not considered as a knower of ethics. We seek to empower community members to have an indirect impact on

university curricula (if not ultimately professional and institutional norms). Our community-based research identifies areas of priority ethical concern and collects input into how community members perceive the scope and meaning of justice, equity, the public good, and other foundational concepts. These framings and priorities are notably distinct from most accounts of ethics articulated from a philosophical (moral-theoretical) basis. There is a decreased emphasis on principles guiding action but an increased consideration given for the specific mechanisms of transparency (e.g., public review, internal review, etc.) in which the decision would be reviewed.

Additionally, we have discovered a novel articulation of the relationship between *transparency* and *accountability* in ethical decision making. Our participants mostly understood their ability to impact community norms by raising the question of *who was reviewing actions or decisions*, and *what capacity they had to request revision of future decision-making processes*. Participants anticipate a field of possible interpretation—that is, who is likely to be included in reviewing their position and decisions, and these social factors were seen as more decisive than the ethicality of a given action in some cases. Interestingly, this seems to imply that ethical decision makers understand that the review of their actions may not always be epistemically just. Additionally, we discovered important differences between mechanisms for transparency and accountability, meaning that most community members felt that the ways in which ethical decision making is reviewed is typically disconnected from structures of accountability for future decisions. In other words, the results of public deliberation on ethical decisions are not generally considered to form the basis of accountability measures to prevent similar issues arising in the future.

These efforts circumscribe a novel area of public philosophical practice; here, public philosophy is a point of translation between unrelated social or institutional groups for the sake of mutual understanding around the meaning of ethics. Philosophical knowledge of ethics entails not merely the application of moral theory but the maintenance of social knowledge infrastructures such that the real convictions, attitudes, and persons that frame the public square can be mutually understood and safely deliberated. It is also a public philosophical practice that seeks to address epistemic injustice. In identifying and enfranchising community stakeholders, we have created a pathway to address credibility gaps in the meaning of ethics and to translate the experience of community members into knowledge producing practices. Viewed the other way, we have also enfranchised the Salisbury University classroom as a member of the greater community in that it is responsible to discuss and develop resources for priority community concerns.

2.3. Learning Community from Community Psychology: An Example

As an example of one such concern, there has been a particular focus in our groups on the importance of addressing the needs of unhoused people in our area. Ethics network members who address the needs of unhoused people would have, through community-based participatory action-research, a means that people experiencing homelessness in our area could participate in for shaping discussions around the right to housing, rather than taking such a right as an unelaborated and decontextualized fact. Philosophers can learn about the complexity of participatory action-research (PAR) through engagement with community psychology, where quite a bit of existing literature has developed around the participation of unhoused people in particular in decisions which impact them (Farquhar et al. 2014). Community psychologists have also developed a set of best practices that unseat longstanding research norms, crucially the involvement of community conversations and data collection *before* central research questions have been fully articulated, so that community voices are foundational to the production of research programs (McKinsey 2019) and are aware of and resistant to political cycles and structural injustices (Whitzman 2017). Our listening sessions with housing advocates exposed us to the broadly-held awareness among local organizations serving people experiencing homelessness that housing connects at a particular juncture with mass incarceration, insofar as local property owners have asserted the right to consult public criminal records as a heuristic—that is, a simple, low-effort decision-making tool—to narrow the field of prospective tenants, effectively denying housing to formerly incarcerated people (Stock 2021). It is noteworthy that these practices were not publicly disclosed, and so the ethicality of the decision was only ever validated informally across different rental organizations and local housing providers.

This project enhanced, in a concrete way, discussions on our campus and community around homelessness. And these value orientations are not new; they underscore a sympathy between public philosophy and the goals and research designs that community psychologists have been developing since the 1970s. Our initiative takes community psychology as a model for public philosophy in its emphasis on the enfranchisement of research participants into the process of the research itself, via PAR. People experiencing homelessness (and other people) are, from a PAR perspective, fundamental both as a methodological principle (in that valid results around value-ladened and context dependent problems are not really possible within a subject/observer paradigm) and as a value-orientation (in that community research should take its principle aim to be addressing systemic inequities via redistribution of social and political power, such as the power differential, which is sustained by the subject/observer research paradigm). Our listening sessions led us to develop a secondary process of municipal intervention where we participated as facilitators of a multistakeholder conversation around the use of criminal history in housing

rental decisions. The REACH Initiative was able to create an instance of social infrastructure where a philosophical conversation about housing policy could take place between stakeholders whose epistemic "bubbles" (Nguyen 2020) prevented them from understanding what criminal background check procedures were in place, what policies were acknowledged to be reasonable matters of consensus, where practices were outliers, and what the effects of these policies were on individuals on the verge of experiencing homelessness. Consensus around responsive city policy was surprisingly easy to find once these facts were clarified despite strongly divergent value orientations and interests across stakeholders, and we assisted in developing a policy that was acceptable to unhoused advocates, landlords, and city officials. One weakness of this process was that law enforcement and unhoused individuals were only indirectly represented within policy-centered conversations. In retrospect our group noted this absence and planned to play a vetting role on invitees to future similar discussions. Public philosophy can clearly assist in clarifying ethical priorities and their divergence across stakeholders in this issue (landlords' concern for *safety to residents and property* balanced against activists' concerns for a *human right to housing*) and, crucially, developing transparency around what standing practices were before the intervention took place.

3. Ethical Enfranchisement as Public Philosophical Practice

3.1. New Directions for Ethics in the Classroom

The ethics classroom is a natural model for ethical enfranchisement, and classrooms are already community spaces. Despite this, the classroom may be one of the least public-facing types of public philosophical engagement on the "spectrum" of public philosophy (Collins 2020, 81). Underrepresented voices, which are also ethically relevant voices, may be excluded from the classroom in a way that is not explicit, intentional, or easily remedied. Philosophers, even public philosophers (as well as ethics professionals), do not often have a broad ability to generate social infrastructure by which to receive and incorporate community feedback; for example, a hospital may find itself to be more responsive to its board, donors, underwriters, and accreditation bodies than it is to the community it serves. Ethics education does not always include the many forms of extra-collegiate engagement such as civic engagement, organizing, or advocacy projects, and in particular those community-engaged projects that go beyond charity-based service-learning—a pedagogical approach that can reinforce stereotypes—reinforce perceptions that institutional knowledge is more credible than community-based knowledge and is systems-maintaining (Allahwala et al. 2014; Verjee 2010). Each of these engagement opportunities entail deeper grappling with community-situated ethical tensions in a way that focuses on transforming specific institutions and systems. It goes without saying that these systems are also the same systems that students are likely to engage with as they

enter their professional lives after college. By raising the problem of ethical enfranchisement, we mean to highlight a possible new avenue for ethical education. For philosophical ethics teachers embedded in professional ethics programs, they must be oriented toward connecting students with specific and at times ethically divergent epistemic communities.

3.2. Social Infrastructure as an Outcome of Public Philosophy

While we have had some limited success in developing social infrastructure and ethical enfranchisement, it is important to emphasize why these activities are the result of philosophical exploration and not as predetermined outcomes. In order to do so we will focus on why community-based research ought to be a public practice of *philosophy*. The purpose of public philosophy is not merely to expose the public to philosophical ideas but to make public activity a constitutive component of the practice of philosophy itself. As is documented in this journal (Collins 2020) and in recent publications (Brister 2020; McIntyre, McHugh, and Olasov 2022), there are many models to turn to that support this orientation. As A. Todd Franklin reflects when considering the Freedom Schools as a model for a community engaged classroom, public philosophy should be conceptualized as "engaging communities who are experiencing particular social realities that are theorized and discussed in classroom settings" (Franklin 2022, 303). The phrasing is important. Simply by conceptualizing certain social realities, in our case considering certain decisions, policies, power dynamics, and social contexts as "ethical," we thereby become responsible to the experiences of certain communities. Creating vectors for these communities to be represented and have a voice, or have their perspectives and conceptualizations witnessed and translated, extends public philosophy from simple engagement to an explicit process of philosophical *enfranchisement*—that is, the social enrichment of the discipline and the teaching of ethics.

Franklin's example of the Freedom Schools is instructive, which responded to systems of segregation and racial oppression by introducing "scores of young Black Mississippians to long-withheld truths concerning their oppressed condition . . . to develop ways of actively contesting it" (Franklin 2022, 307). Our initiative challenges Salisbury University instructors to discover truths within the experience of our community partners and to counteract any naïve sense that the epistemic scope of campus conversations is universal or exhaustive. The teaching of ethics should reflect the priorities (i.e., real ethical concerns) of our community. Academics and students have resources germane to the discussion of community justice. Yet, as classrooms are not fully representative of the larger communities in which they are situated, they often lack the resources to responsibly identify what most needs to be discussed. For this reason our cases also serve to identify to students and faculty which *community priorities* deserve deeper consideration and attention in their classes.

What academics and especially academic philosophers can do is use our training and experience to create durable communities of inquiry, to witness, conduct, and translate discussions across institutional or disciplinary barriers through discourse and reflection. Our question to academic philosophy is: *of whom and on whose behalf do we speak when we speak about ethics*? All students should learn about ethics during undergraduate training, and ethics is essential to science and professional education in particular (Morris 2015). Local to Salisbury University, Ethical Reasoning has been codified but not realized as a general education student learning outcome, and we are currently assessing the implementation of our community-based ethics resources as a part of an Ethics Across the Curriculum program. Assessment data finds that the focus on community issues increases student engagement with ethics while it facilitates a sense of shared responsibility across involved faculty and increased applicability of philosophy across the disciplines.

3.3. Benefits to Students

In addition to increased engagement, students benefit from discussing the conceptualizations of ethics expressed by our community simply because they are *real* and *locally relevant*, touching on issues that students have likely encountered in the surrounding community. The experience is empowering, since class discussions provide students the opportunity to articulate and address beliefs directly and apply knowledge gained from their discipline. It gives the philosophical discussion of ethics an immediacy and an opportunity to take responsibility. In turn, we provide the community an opportunity to reflect on the social context of their commitments and to develop "collective hermeneutical resources" for addressing ethical concerns (Fricker 2007, 6). Our ethics case studies (see appendix 2 and 3) capture not only a priority ethics concern but are framed to capture a particular epistemic field reflective of the framing of our focus group participants. The goal is to facilitate "critical social awareness that is distinctively reflexive in its operation" (Congdon 2017, 246). Such actions build procedural justice in which people have equal and fair involvement in the decision-making process itself (Tyler and Lind 1988). This process of enfranchisement can also be seen as adding justification and a new articulation to "experimental" philosophy (Appiah 2007), one that takes community-based and participatory research as an improvement on the experimental-philosophical approach.

Health research increasingly uses participatory processes, for example, although there is debate about how to involve patients in scientific practice. Training patients in scientific practice may compound issues of epistemic injustice by "professionalizing" their point of view and excluding other relevant testimony (Hutchison et al. 2017). We argue that it is better to expose future health researchers to robust community conversations around ethics, in effect introducing the complexity of community conversation into professional training.

We hold that this pathway provides a broader philosophical practice within professional development and more complex senses of responsibility than a professional testimonial network.

3.4. Centering Multi-disciplinary Projects Around Social Configurations

Appiah's *Experiments in Ethics* opened a wide field of inquiry around the validity of claims about ethics in psychology and philosophy and advocated for experimental collaboration between the two fields. His work is foundational in forging a pathway between empirically and conceptually oriented disciplines (Appiah 2008, 17) but fails to include work in community psychology that critiques the epistemic warrant given by standard experimental methods. For instance, community psychologists have argued that randomized control trials often obscure important person-environment fit interactions (Barile and Smith 2016) and should not be used as a universal methodological standard (Grossman and MacKenzie 2005). On the side of philosophical methodology, it's not clear why intuitions about fundamental concepts gleaned from local leaders are any more or less important than the intuitions of philosophers themselves or why community research would be less translatable into "echt" philosophy (Appiah 2008, 13). Community psychology and public philosophy can produce a distinct form of public philosophical practice with enfranchisement as its explicit goal and social infrastructure as a direct outcome. This may extend beyond the categories of public philosophy documented to date (Collins 2020, 74; McIntyre, McHugh, and Olasav 2022) as the outcomes are not framed in terms of how it affects other senses of philosophy so much as it prioritizes the capacity for philosophical practice to be a catalyst for transparency and accountability pathways across a community. This sort of "community philosophy" could have as its ultimate orientation the critical capacity for any given set of people to listen to disenfranchised members and even revise the foundational sense of what the community itself is.

One could look at ethical enfranchisement within philosophy as an evolution of experimental philosophy that runs parallel to the emergence of community psychology from critiques of mainstream psychology. Both share a focus on local social formations of trust and credibility, partnership, and a commitment to ongoing engagement. It is worthwhile for philosophers to know what conceptualizations of responsibility, fairness, or accountability are held by members of a given community, as well as what are the (pragmatic, religious, political, social, or other) rationales are for holding to the conceptualizations they do. Community-based methodology itself emphasizes the experiences of people within their specific social, political, and historical contexts over the reduction of data to decontextualized causes and effects or measurement. This would lead to a more socially engaged conception of epistemic validity, which here would fall under a broadly pragmatic focus on the validation process itself. One can differentiate

between concepts whose ethicality is only valid under special conditions (e.g., a professional organization, a philosophy classroom, a group of landlords) and those that are valid on a broader social canvas and can be tracked across other normative differences. Academic philosophers don't (generally) require greater intellectual humility so much as greater social humility—that is, a more modest conception of how broadly a given ethical truth is applicable to different lived contexts or social realities. We argue that, although a great deal of attention has been directed toward the role of intellectual humility in science (Ballantyne 2021), scientists and professionals should become not necessarily humbler so much as more socially aware, able to adapt the truth of their insights to different social contexts and revise or deprioritize them when context demands.

This is all in line with the worthy goal that ethics would incorporate epistemic justice concerns at a fundamental level. The existing pedagogical approach to ethics education in the sciences can also benefit from embedding philosophical ethics within their curricula (such as we find in the Harvard Embedded EthiCS program). We are interested in what impact embedding community ethics concerns has both on communities and undergraduate students learning about ethics and hypothesize that the focus on a proximal and intuitively understood community will have unique strengths in extending ethical inquiry beyond the philosophy classroom. A contextual, community-focused approach anticipates and responds to the fact that professionals often fail to recognize how ethics influences their work until faced with a real-world ethical conflict (Morris 2015).

Through the REACH Initiative, we regularly discuss and reflect on the implementation of community-sourced ethics cases in a broadening field of classrooms across campus, and we are aware of several emerging conclusions about teaching ethics broadly. Ethical enfranchisement ought to be its own domain of inquiry, obviating an exclusive orientation toward truth and the functional assumption that such truths (or beliefs about such truths) have their own moral force independent of the social pathways in which they are found. Ethics inquiry can cogently be organized around social inclusion and exclusion in addition to other framings (act, rule, virtue, etc.). We recommend that social problems should be part of the discussion, especially insofar as specific social configurations (e.g., institutional barriers, etc.) either interrupt or deliver pathways for transparency and accountability. Ethics is also about who has the power to shape or speak to the norms that underwrite a given case, who are agents and who are patients of a given ethical choice, and who could be further included to improve or revise these norms and power relationships. In this way ethics cases can be oriented toward broader issues of wrongs, care needs, institutional or systemic injustices, responsibilities, etc. that are not revisable at present or in each situation.

3.5. Being Surprised by What Matters

Including community voices completely changed our sense of what is a priority ethical concern. Our 6th REACH Case "Getting Worked up about Traffic Calming" demonstrates this; it is hardly the case that a typical sourcebook for teaching ethics would include concerns about speed bumps. What this case demonstrates, however, is how the simple question of access to municipal authorities can reflect social configurations and macro-issues of justice, especially racial and economic justice in our region. The case frames an unjust distribution of traffic calming and traffic safety modifications, but also highlights the way in which decisions about use of limited community resources are made. This case provided the opportunity to have a focused discussion in a Community Psychology class, which had the goal of developing psychology research projects oriented toward systemic change and social justice. With a relatively straightforward (Socratic-style) discussion, students in class were able to articulate multiple ways in which values conflict played out into inequalities of distribution, as well as several research project areas (such as community survey projects, awareness campaigns, and alignment with Maryland's "Vision Zero" initiative, and advocacy) that could directly use the issue of traffic calming to raise broader ethical issues of equity in safe-city design.

This example indicates that highlighting community concerns can lead to prosocial teaching and research design but can also increase awareness of how research projects can be designed to address these concerns. Most importantly, focusing on a problem identified by our local community conferred an exceptional level of engagement that even well implemented ethics teaching sometimes fails to achieve. Appiah's vision of "experiments in ethics" established that ethicists should be responsible to the psychological testing of the validity of ethical concepts and ideas. We endorse this claim but move from fruitful debates within psychology itself to advocate for CBR and, more specifically, PAR programs as the site of this validity. The enfranchisement of community voices into philosophical and academic practice has the potential to increase trust and mutual engagement between university and community, enhance an awareness of ethics as relevant for disciplines outside of philosophy, reorient the subject matter of philosophical discussion toward direct engagement with proximal ethical concerns, and emphasize context-dependent ethical reasoning that will be much more recognizable and applicable to future professionals.

Here we can observe a second case, which captured a specific conflict around distributing COVID-19 vaccine information to vulnerable populations. A local healthcare nonprofit organization struggled with competing priorities between funders and practitioners in educating the community about the severity of the pandemic (this included advice about masking, prevalence of community spread, and vaccination). We generated this case out of a listening session conducted in 2020, during the height of the pandemic, and have subsequently implemented

the case with students in three sections of a first-year Biology class. Students were able to see how their knowledge of vaccine efficacy, delivery, and function could be situated in a broader conversation as to the complex social reality in which health technologies operate. Comparison of pre- and post-discussion student assessments found that these in-class discussions increased student awareness of the role of the humanities in STEM and deeper sense of community engagement. The strongest results of our assessments had to do with an increased understanding of the relationship between technical and humanities fields.

What was surprising in each of these cases is that a rather mundane local concern (a local procedure for assigning traffic enhancements, a debate at a local nonprofit board), while seemingly the opposite of the kinds of ethics cases that grab the contemporary imagination, continue to generate student interest in ethics. Students and faculty alike note how surprised they are at the richness of conversation over what would otherwise seem a mundane issue. Perhaps this represents a benefit of a community focus, which is in this sense a local focus, in that the issues under discussion are "right sized" to a domain of social reality that our students can see themselves participating in. One final example is embedded in our environmental studies seminars. It is a discussion of the overwhelming and pressing ethical problem of climate change but focuses on a very localized ethical choice—whether to stay in a social-justice oriented book club that refuses to read books about climate change due to climate fatigue. Environmental ethics are refracted through a very difficult social decision of who to associate with in attempting to take responsibility for broad ethical concerns. Our students could see themselves struggling to make this decision and confront their imperfect access to information in doing so, while the case orients discussion around social configurations in a surprising and productive way. The systemic issues of justice that the case raises are not just indicative of a history of overlap between racial injustice and environmental harm (and they do evidence such structural issues) but show this history to be on a continuum with the social attitudes and interpretive capacities of even well-meaning partners: in their priorities and the limits of what they are able to understand as being an issue worthy of ethical deliberation in the first place.

Conclusion

Epistemic justice and the ethics of knowing are met with ethics "experiments" in the sense that the latter opens unique possibilities for testing the validity of ethics concepts against pre-philosophical understanding. But the notion of "experimentation" on others also includes a subject/observer paradigm that is subject to critique from community psychology and is especially inappropriate when addressing issues of ethics and thinking critically about how power affects knowing. Public philosophy can find common cause with community psychology in what we might call (as opposed to experimental philosophy) "exploratory"

philosophy. The methodological priority in these projects should be intellectual humility and listening first, the identification of social infrastructure and the creation of new forums for transparency and accountability, and researchers should expect to discover ethical priorities as well as social, contextual information that situates ethics concretely within particular communities. In this way one can discover the ethical ideas, projects, and norms that a given community would wish to endorse (or problems it wishes to address) and concrete reasons for doing so rather than pursuing a universal, and abstracted, pragmatic validity for ethical ideas. We have come to appreciate the practical value of developing this as an area of applied philosophy. Our research also seeks to address the difficult social problems of doing ethics well. Those include access to relevant community members, their spaces and trust, for the sake of including their voices as representative of "ordinary" experiences. This plausibly serves the function within epistemic justice of creating infrastructure that will reduce reliance on images and stereotypes for ethical positioning when considering matters of community concern. It calls ethics teachers and professionals to take seriously the degree to which conversations around ethics enfranchise (or fail to enfranchise) the stories, conceptualizations, priorities, and experiences of their most proximate communities in the process of knowing ethics well.

Endnotes

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