OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE AND THE COMMUNITY: A *COMPREHENSIVE* APPROACH TO SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract
This paper proposes an alternative approach to social epistemology – A *comprehensive* approach. It argues that the dominant approaches to social epistemology, which it identifies as communitarian and veritistic, are inadequate. It observes that the nature of the emphasis that the communitarian approach places on the epistemic community foster mindless tolerance in epistemology, which makes the pursuit of the cognitive goal of truth difficult to attain. It also observes that the veritistic approach that seeks to refocus social epistemology on the pursuit of the cognitive goal of obtaining truth does this at the expense of the affective goals of social epistemology. To overcome the inadequacies of the communitarian and the veritistic approaches and to ensure that social epistemology effectively pursues its cognitive and affective goals, this paper offers the *comprehensive* approach. This approach imbibes the virtues of the communitarian and the veritistic approaches while avoiding their errors. Hence, it thrives on a view of truth that posits an objective and a subjective dimension of truth. The objective dimension ensures that the community only fosters and never impedes social epistemological projects such that social epistemology continues to pursue the cognitive goal of truth. The subjective dimension guarantees that the concern for truth does not lead to the neglect or abandonment of the pursuit of the affective goals of social epistemology. The rationale behind this approach is that for social epistemological projects and practices to remain truly epistemological and social, they must always take into consideration the cognitive and affective features of knowledge and *knowers*.

Keywords: Affective, cognitive, community, knowledge, truth

Introduction

Social epistemology is consistent with classical epistemology in terms of its claim to be committed to the pursuit of the cognitive goal of truth – which has been identified as the main cognitive goal of every valid epistemology or, in the words of Steve Fuller, the "macro-epistemic project" (Fuller 2012, 3). Most social epistemological projects start by stating that they aim at attaining truth and avoiding falsehood or error; believing rationally and eschewing irrationality (Anderson 1995, 55; Fricker 1998; Goldman, 1999; Fallis 2007, 267-8; Whitcomb 2011, 4-6). However, in disagreement with classical epistemology, social epistemology further commits itself to exorcising epistemology of the idea of the isolated epistemic agent by insisting on the significance of society in the epistemological enterprise. This commitment motivates social epistemologists to pursue other essential and legitimate goals. Examples of these goals are epistemic justice – as championed by Miranda Fricker (Fricker 1998, 174) – happiness or well-being – as advocated by Miika Vähämaa (Vähämaa 2013, 4) – group cohesion, communication, and stability. Hence, while social epistemology seeks to continue the pursuit of the cognitive goal of truth, it distinctively pursues certain affective goals (Vähämaa 2013, 10-11).

Now, a survey of reflections in analytic social epistemology (ASE) reveals that there is a controversy on the question of how best social epistemologists and epistemic communities are to undertake social epistemological projects so that social epistemology continues to effectively pursue its cognitive and affective goals. This controversy is simply a dispute on the structure of an

adequate approach to social epistemology. There are two dominant positions in this controversy, namely, communitarianism and veritism. Communitarians propose and defend a communitarian approach to social epistemology. For communitarians, the epistemic community is the focus of social epistemology (Calvert-Minor 2011, 341). For them, this is because the epistemic community is both the "source and summit" of all epistemic practices or activities (Vähämaa 2013, 4); it "provides all the necessary and sufficient epistemic resources for its constituents, and nothing can be known outside [it]" (Calvert-Minor 2011, 351).

Veritists label the communitarian approach "veriphobic" (Goldman 1987, 125; Fuller 2012, 3). They argue that its excessive concentration on the community is a manifestation of its aversion to the idea of objective truth. They maintain that this approach to social epistemology leads to the sacrifice of the cognitive goal of truth for the satisfaction of the affective goals of social epistemology. Vähämaa's project of making epistemic practices within epistemic communities conducive to happiness (minimizing suffering and maximizing well-being) rather than truth (Vähämaa 2013, 4) would be a classic example of veritists. Veritists also point out that social epistemology, based on the communitarian approach, tends to promote mindless tolerance, anti-rationalism, and non-rationalism in epistemology as it encourages the equal validation and legitimization of truth claims and practices of all epistemic communities. For veritists, ASE has failed to make significant advances because a good number of social epistemologists and epistemic communities subscribe to the communitarian approach.

To deal with the inadequacy of the communitarian approach, veritists, on the other hand, offer the veritistic approach to social epistemology. For the veritist, truth remains the focus of social epistemology; social epistemology must always be truth-oriented, truth-centered, or truth-directed. Although the affective goals of social epistemology remain legitimate, they argue that we must not pursue them at the expense of objective truth. On this note, communitarians criticize veritists for imitating classical epistemologists in their neglect or disdain for society in the epistemological enterprise (Vähämaa 2013, 4). They accuse veritists of sacrificing the affective, legitimate, and essential goals of social epistemology in favor of the goal of truth – a goal, which for most communitarians, is not unique and remains abstract, unrealistic, and unattainable.

The limitations, shortcomings, or pitfalls of the communitarian approach correctly pointed out by veritists and those of the veritistic approach rightly identified by communitarians show the danger of undertaking social epistemological projects using these approaches (mutually exclusively). With these approaches, social epistemology risks sacrificing the cognitive goal of truth for its affective goals or vice-versa. Hence, there is a need for a more thoroughgoing approach if social epistemology must attain both the cognitive goal of truth and the affective goals of social epistemology.

In what follows, therefore, I offer a different approach to social epistemology – the *comprehensive* approach. I proceed by elaborating on the arguments that the communitarian and veritistic approaches are inadequate. I elucidate the dimensions of the *comprehensive* approach and show how it is the most adequate approach to social epistemology. With the *comprehensive* approach, I hope to re-orient social epistemology, based on the communitarian approach, to the pursuit of *Truth,* and re-orient social epistemology, based on the veritistic approach, to the pursuit of the affective goals of social epistemology.

Social Epistemology and the Dominant Approaches

Classical epistemology is thoroughly individualistic or "asocial" (Goldman 1987, 109; Fricker 1998, 160). Epistemic agents, in classical epistemology, are individuals and the relevant processes for obtaining knowledge (such as perception, memory, or reasoning) usually involve only a single individual (Mathiesen 2007, 210; List 2011, 222-223). Hence, the interaction of an isolated single knower with objective reality mainly characterizes classical epistemology. This approach to epistemology remains inadequate as it concentrates on the individual to the exclusion of the social or society. An Epistemic agent is never genderless, cultureless, classless, ageless, or a disembodied self (Miller and Fox 2001, 676). Social interactions and the social dimensions of epistemic agents are crucial to the knowledge-forming process (Goldman 1987, 109). Hence, the reductionist tendencies, in terms of its conception of epistemic agency, render the classical approach to epistemology unsatisfactory (Mathiesen 2007, 214).

Social epistemology sets out with an emphasis on broadening the conception of epistemic agency. Social epistemologists have carried out this task of broadening in two ways. While the first is moderate, the second is radical. Moderately, some social epistemologists, like classical epistemologists, consider epistemic agents as individuals. However, they emphasize how individual knowledge acquisition must involve social interaction (Goldman 1987, 109; 2011, 13; List 2011, 222-223). Epistemic agents never *know* in isolation since they are not disembodied selves, but embodied subjects situated in a social context (Miller and Fox 2001, 676). In other words, the individual epistemic agent must rely on the reports of others in the pursuit of truth and the acquisition of knowledge. Radically, some social epistemologists consider formal or informal communities, groups, or collective entities as epistemic agents capable of acquiring knowledge (Mathiesen 2007, 209; List 2011, 222-223). They emphasize the importance of epistemic communities and their epistemic goals, methods, standards, and norms of inquiry.[1] In most cases, they argue that the community (as an epistemic agent) is over and above its members (List 2011, 222-223).

The Communitarian Approach

Examining the moderate and radical ways epistemologists have carried out the task of broadening, we see that one thing remains constant: the emphasis on the indispensability of the society or community in epistemology. Hence, most social epistemologists, whom I consider "communitarians," argue that the community is the center of all social epistemological discourses, projects, and practices (Vähämaa 2013, 4). They maintain that we must always understand truth (as well as standard epistemic variables such as knowledge, fact, evidence, justification, and rationality) relative to the epistemic community (Boghossian 2011, 38 and 41). They believe that epistemic categories are never "out-there" categories that obtain independent of social interactions or the epistemic community. In other words, they argue that there are no absolute, privileged, or universal knowledge or truth claims independent of the community. Barry Barnes and David Bloor insist that, "there are no context-free or super-cultural norms of rationality" (Barnes and Bloor 1982, 27). Hence, for communitarians, epistemic categories are products resulting from social

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[1] I do not find Goldman's distinction between epistemic community and epistemic system relevant. In my estimation, the concept of epistemic community covers the idea of epistemic system. See Goldman, "A Guide to Social Epistemology," 18.

interactions and serving social functions (Miller and Fox 2001, 682). In addition, for communitarians, especially à la Vähämaa, in the social world, individual and collective epistemic goals have primacy over veritistic or analytic epistemic goals (Vähämaa 2013, 10).

First, we must commend communitarians for their immense contribution to the epistemological project. The communitarian acknowledgment of the significance of the community in the knowledge-forming process facilitates the generation of a robust knowledge of reality. This is because a focus on epistemic communities allows the consideration of objects from different perspectives in which we feature the affective concerns (values and interests) of different epistemic agents. This approach also engenders epistemic equality and justice. It ensures that no single epistemic agent or community has a monopoly on truth. Based on this approach, social epistemologists do not give a *prima facie* privilege to one epistemic agent or community over others; they take seriously the truth claims of all epistemic agents or communities; they amplify the voices of all epistemic agents or communities; they give a fair hearing to all epistemic agents or communities.

However, the communitarian advancement of the idea of the primacy of the community in epistemology comes with some negative consequences. It tends to promote mindless tolerance in epistemology, resulting in the sacrifice of epistemic rationality and the abandonment or undermining of the pursuit of the cognitive goal of truth. If communitarians reject the idea of the existence or possibility of a community-independent truth, considering truth as a mere construction of epistemic communities or consensus opinion, there would be no objective center for social epistemology (Miller and Fox 2001, 668). In other words, there would be no valid standards or criteria for evaluating or accessing the beliefs, truth claims, and epistemic practices of epistemic communities. In this situation, we would have to tolerate, legitimize, validate, or sanction every kind of truth claim or belief, even idiosyncratic, counter-intuitive, and harmful ones (Okwenna, 2021, 7; Feldman 2011, 140). This is because all epistemic agents or communities would be justified in having its truth (Kurzman 1994, 268).

The Veritistic Approach

To correct the deviation of social epistemology from the pursuit of the cognitive goal of truth caused by communitarians, social epistemologists, whom I call "veritists," present an alternative approach – that is, the veritistic approach or, as Fuller calls it, "the teleological approach" (Fuller 2012, 3). According to this approach, the goal of truth is the common denominator of all intellectual pursuits and all methods and practices must be adapted to this end (Goldman 1987, 124; Fallis 2007, 267-8). For veritists, the interest in truth (and nothing else) must motivate and guide all social epistemological projects; social epistemic practices must never be self or community-serving. The basis for the veritistic approach is the assumption that there are truths or facts independent of what epistemic agents (individuals or groups) believe or negotiate (Goldman 1987, 136 and 137). In other words, the veritist maintains that truth and epistemic standards arise from and are largely maintained by processes that are independent of the desires and capacities of epistemic agents. Hence, for the veritists, epistemic agents ought only to be concerned with whether their beliefs correspond to the epistemic standard that exists independently of individual or collective epistemic activities (Fuller 2012, 10).

The veritist insistence on the importance of the pursuit of the cognitive goal of truth in social epistemology is worth commending. This is because the pursuit of the goal of truth, unlike the pursuit of other epistemic or practical values, distinctively characterizes epistemological projects (cf. Mueller 2021, 4; David 2014). In other words, truth is a fundamental epistemic value compared to other epistemic or practical values that are of interest in epistemology (David 2014). Epistemology qua epistemology must have the goal of achieving accurate or true beliefs about the world or reality at its center. This is because epistemic practices cannot progress effectively on false and irrational claims or beliefs; valid epistemic practices depend on having true and rational beliefs. It is true and rational beliefs that properly direct our reasoning, judging, and acting. False and irrational beliefs are mostly the sources of irrational reasonings, decisions, and actions (Mueller 2021, 5). Hence, in agreement with veritists, the pursuit of the cognitive goal of truth in social epistemology remains sacrosanct.

Nevertheless, the veritistic approach has also received some valid criticisms. Steve Fuller points out that the approach fails because it is merely concerned with maintaining the status quo and ensuring that social epistemology remains "real epistemology" (Fuller 2012, 1, 3, and 9). For him, while it remains important that social epistemology "aims for the truth," it is even more important for it to determine which truths are worth pursuing and how they are to be pursued (Fuller 2012, 3). He argues that the pursuit of the truth (understood in terms of the quest for the ultimate systematic representation of reality) is only carried out today by those physicists who quest for a "Grand Unified Theory of Everything" (Fuller 2012, 3). For him, the "aiming for the truth," in the manner the veritist presents and emphasizes it, comes with the negative consequence of making social epistemology only concerned with examining reliable processes for arriving at the truth, providing abstract definitions and criteria for knowledge. Social epistemology, in this way, ignores the formation of beliefs in which the mediation of consciousness remains indispensable (Fuller 2012, 3 and 4). Fuller concludes that the veritistic approach is simply an approach to epistemology fit for androids, not humans (Fuller 2012, 3). For him, such an approach to knowledge hinders the innovation and creativity that are supposed to characterize social epistemological projects.

In light of Fuller's criticism, one can argue that the veritistic approach perpetuates in social epistemology the idea of the epistemic agent as asocial – an idea that was prevalent in classical epistemology. Also, with the veritistic approach, the affective concerns of social epistemology are given either minimal consideration or none at all. In most cases, they are even abandoned. Hence, as Miika Vähämaa rightly observes, the veritistic approach (alone) is not sufficiently complex for explaining how knowledge commonly arises in epistemic communities (Vähämaa 2013, 4).

The above shows that social epistemology cannot make significant progress in the pursuit of its truth and affective goals based on the communitarian and veritistic approaches (taken individually). On the one hand, the communitarian approach, although useful for its emphasis on the significance of epistemic communities in knowledge formation, fails because it makes talks on objectivity/*universality* across epistemic communities difficult. On the other hand, the veritistic approach, although commendable for its attempt to re-orient social epistemology to the cognitive goal of truth, fails because it neglects the affective concerns of epistemic agents and takes lightly the role of the community in knowledge acquisition. With the veritistic approach, we see the dangers of thinking that the epistemic community is not important in epistemology and of

concluding that the social dimension and affective goals of social epistemology are illegitimate (Vähämaa 2013, 11). Hence, while the lack of objectivity in the communitarian approach renders it inadequate, the lack of (sufficient) subjectivity in the veritistic approach also renders it inadequate. On this note, we are confronted with the task of offering an approach to social epistemology that makes up for what the above approaches to social epistemology lack.

A Comprehensive Approach to Social Epistemology

The Antinomic Structure of Truth and Knowing

The comprehensive approach is based on what, for the reason of convenience and lack of a better term, I refer to as the *antinomic structure of truth and knowing.* According to this understanding, truth and the process of *knowing* are antinomic in the sense that they are characterized by two dimensions, aspects, components, or elements. In the case of the antinomy of truth, truth is presented as existing in two dimensions, namely, the objective and the subjective. While the former represents facts about an object or an event that are absolute, universal, and independent of a knower (that is, a "limited" epistemic agent), the latter represents facts about the same object or event that are considered relative and dependent on the knower. Also, while the former remains *hidden*, unavailable, and never wholly accessible to the knower, the latter is open, available, and accessible to the knower at the material time. The *hiddenness* of the former sustains the latter, and the accessibility or availability of the latter makes the postulation of the former and its pursuit reasonable. Therefore, according to the antinomic structure of truth, regarding any object or event, while there is such a thing as the *Truth* of that object or event, there is at the same time such a thing as the *truth* or *truths* of such an object or event. In other words, according to this understanding, we can speak correctly of the mutual existence of objective *Truth* (or Fact) and subjective *truth* (or fact).

Related to the antinomy of truth, the antinomy of *knowing* reveals that knowledge acquisition thrives in a paradox of completeness and incompleteness. In *knowing*, while on the one hand, the knower seems to have arrived at complete knowledge, he immediately realizes that concerning the so-called complete knowledge there are still unexplored grounds and unknown territories. This is why knowledge has been rightly characterized as unfolding, gradational, ever-expanding, cumulative, and progressive. Hence, the knower sees *knowing* as characterized by perfection and imperfection, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and stability and change.

The antinomy of *knowing* is also explained by the antinomy of truth in that while knowers can know *truth* (that is, possess subjective facts), knowing *Truth* (which is the possession or attainment of absolute facts) remains a *theoretic* and never a *real* or *practical* possibility. However, the (practical) possibility of knowing *truth* and the (theoretic) possibility of knowing *Truth* make the pursuit of *Truth* meaningful and worth undertaking.

There is also an aspect of the antinomy of *knowing* that is especially revealed in social epistemology and actual epistemic practices within epistemic communities. This aspect of the antinomy of *knowing* reveals that knowledge acquisition involves an interplay of cognitive and affective or social elements. While the cognitive elements in *knowing* aspire for objective *Truth*, the affective elements in *knowing* aspire for subjective *truths* and other social ends. Hence, in *knowing*, the knower witnesses a tension between aiming for truth and aiming at utility; a tension

between shaping inquiry completely by evidence and shaping it based on pragmatic or moral considerations (that may not always be truth-relevant); a tension between making inquiry context-independent and making it context-dependent (Mathiesen 2007, 211). This antinomic tension shows why epistemic agents and epistemology cannot be *asocial* (Cohen 1987, 3). It also corroborates the arguments as to why social epistemology must be regarded as the goal of all epistemology (Fuller 1987, 147).

To illustrate the above, we may consider the pursuit of *Truth* in an ideal legal epistemic community (a court of law) presented with a complex murder case. According to the prosecution, A murdered B. The prosecution supports this claim with all *available* evidence. The defense attorney also tries to dismantle all the evidence, claiming that A did not murder B and that the evidence provided by the prosecution is false and unsatisfactory. Now, the jury or the judge has to decide the verdict. However, according to the antinomic structure of *truth*, the best efforts of the court can only allow the court to arrive at *truths*. The *Truth* of the matter (whether or not, or how and why A murdered B) is independent of whatever has been presented, and it is only known to an *omniscient* mind or knower (if one were to exist). However, there are *truths* known to the prosecution, defense party, and jury based on the available evidence. According to the antinomy of *knowing*, even the process involved in arriving at the conclusions of the court or jury and the verdict, is characterized, on the one hand, by the paradox of an assurance of the completion of the investigation/trial and the possibility of new revelations, and on the other hand, by cognitive and affective influences. Hence, an ideal legal institution is conscious of the existence of *Truth* and *truths* and the constraints in arriving at *Truth*. This is one reason why I would insist that verdicts of an ideal legal community on *capital* crimes must exclude irreversible sentences such as the death sentence.

The antinomic structure of truth and *knowing* is supported by three theses, which I dub as follows: (i) the nature of object thesis (NOT), (ii) the nature of cognitive agent thesis (NCT), and (iii) the history of inquiry thesis (HIT). The NOT maintains that every object (including states, events, and processes) has both an accessible and inaccessible dimension. While the former is the dimension that is never fully revealed to the observer and remains unavailable to him (at once), the latter is the dimension that is revealed to the observer and remains available to him. Hence, according to this thesis, the facts about an object will be of two kinds. The first are objective or absolute facts that represent the nature of the object as it is in itself (and as known by an *omniscient* mind). The second are subjective facts that represent the nature of the object as it appears to or is perceived by the knower or epistemic agent. In other words, the fact the knower has is not all there is to know about the object. Hence, the knower both knows and does not know. When a knower makes a knowledge or truth claim, therefore, there is a *positive* dimension of *truth* which represents what the knower knows, and a *negative* dimension of *Truth* – (made meaningful by the positive dimension) which represents what the knower cannot know or does not yet know.

The NCT maintains that cognitive agents are ontologically structured in such a way that they desire and *reach for* objectivity, certainty, and absolutes. Even when they know that they have native limitations with regard to their ability to grasp objectivity, they continue to *reach for* it.[2] They are motivated by the *a priori* conviction that although objectivity lies beyond them, it is not meaningless, useless, or nothing. Hence, the cognitive agent knows that there are dimensions of

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[2] A classical presentation of this thesis is found in Desiree Berendsen's paper titled: "Are Human Beings Intrinsically Religious?" *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue,* 9, (1999): 189-206.

objectivity to subjective truth which lie beyond him (facts about objects as they are in themselves), yet he continues to pursue such dimensions. Although he recognizes that these dimensions are inaccessible or not fully accessible (because of his ontological cognitive limitations), he knows that his openness to such dimensions will ultimately be rewarded. Hence, the cognitive agent's openness to objective truth becomes a condition that makes the attainment of subjective truth possible.

The HIT maintains that the history of knowledge shows that while we may have taken facts about certain objects as absolute, universal, perfect, and complete at some point in time, the same facts, upon further inquiry, would be considered relative, perspectival, tentative, revisable and imperfect or in need of some revision. This shows that objects have two aspects and that a paradox surrounds the *knowing* of any object.

It is important to note that the antinomies of truth and *knowing* are not permanently resolvable. This, in my opinion, is the reason why inquiry never ends. To seek to resolve the antinomies permanently is to seek to hinder the expansion of knowledge. The antinomic tension in *knowing* is especially necessary for knowledge expansion. Also, to seek to resolve the antinomies permanently is to risk pursuing truth without affection or to pursue affection without the goal of *Truth*. I find here another reason why the communitarian and veritistic approaches are limited. The communitarian approach, through its over-emphasis on the community, seeks to permanently resolve the antinomies of truth and *knowing* in favor of the subjective and affective dimensions of truth and *knowing*. On the other hand, the veritistic approach seeks to resolve the antinomies, through its over-emphasis on truth, in favor of the objective and cognitive dimensions of truth and *knowing*. The comprehensive approach, as we shall see shortly, avoids these errors.

Comprehensive Approach: Objective Knowledge and Community

The comprehensive approach to social epistemology takes into consideration the objective and subjective dimensions of truth. Generally, it seeks to mediate between objectivity and subjectivity. As regards objectivity, the comprehensive approach takes a realist disposition (which is also characteristic of the veritist approach), maintaining that there is such a thing as mind-independent or objective truth. This mode of truth, although unspecified, makes every truth claim only provisional or tentative. As regards subjectivity, the comprehensive approach, consistent with the communitarian approach, maintains that there is such a thing as mind-dependent or subjective truth. The existence of this mode of truth does not mutually exclude the existence of objective or mind-independent truth. The comprehensive approach, therefore, acknowledges that while there are facts about a given object that exists autonomously, there are facts about the same object that depends on the epistemic agent (the individual or community).

Therefore, the comprehensive approach assigns an important role to the community in the quest for objective truth. This is because as the individual epistemic agent craves objectivity, he soon realizes how limited he is in the pursuit of this goal. Hence, in line with Alan Musgrave's observation, the agent acknowledges that he, as well as other epistemic agents, are simply fallible (Cheyne 2006, 2). Based on this acknowledgment, the agent knows that he is not ontologically well-furnished to *reach for* his cognitive goal alone; on his own, he can do very little; his best effort stretched to its limit mostly takes him a little away from his *terminus ad quo* (Elgin 2013, 146). Given the agent's ontological epistemic condition (or "most basic epistemic predicament"

as Fricker calls it) and the nature of his cognitive goal, he relies on others, sharing cognitive labor and expanding his epistemic resources (Fricker 1998, 165). In this way, an epistemic community is formed to satisfy the human need for objectivity. The epistemic community itself understands that it has no way of grasping objectivity as it is. It, however, knows that the best it can do is to thoroughly verify/assess what it thinks it knows. Once the community does that, it labels these verified/assessed truths as "facts." However, these facts remain facts of the community (that is, subjective truth), not facts of the objects as they are in themselves (objective truth). Hence, in social epistemology, we accept truth claims as true because they have been evaluated to such a degree that it would, in the words of Stephen Jay Gould, be perverse to withhold provisional assent (Gould 1981, 34-37).

In other words, the epistemic community stands as a *locus* in which attempts are made to incarnate objective truth. The epistemic community plays the crucial role of mediating between its members and objectivity (Miller and Fox 2001, 675). This mediation is crucial, as already indicated, because of the native limitations of individuals in grasping objectivity. Hence, the epistemic community offers individuals the norms, language, paradigms, theories, and frameworks for inquiry or *reaching for* objectivity (Miller and Fox 2001, 682).[3] In this way, the epistemic community can produce or generate *working, local*, *functional,* and *provisional* truths that enable the completion of quotidian tasks.[4]

In light of the above, the community is not just a context, machinery, or system for exclusively pursuing social or affective ends as communitarians would have us believe (cf. Vahamaa 2013, 4). Also, the community does not constitute a hindrance in the pursuit of objective truth as veritists would like us to suspect. With the communitarian approach, the community remains a context that makes possible the pursuit of both objective and subjective truth; it becomes a system for questing after the cognitive as well as social/affective ends of individual and collective epistemic agents. Hence, in social epistemology based on the comprehensive approach, we do not simply approve truth claims and epistemic practices because they benefit us – that is, enable us to function in the social world; we approve them because while benefiting us, they are also objectivity-desiring or truth-conducive, not merely justice or happiness-conducive.

Furthermore, the two-view concept of truth espoused by the comprehensive approach ensures that the antinomies of truth and *knowing* remain unresolved. Its acknowledgment of objective truth only allows for a *temporal* and necessary resolution of the antinomies of truth and *knowing* in favor of objective truth. This *temporal* resolution ensures that social epistemology does not lose sight of its affective goals while pursuing the cognitive goal of truth. Also, its acknowledgment of the role of the community in the knowledge-forming process especially in terms of the generation of *working* truths allows for another *temporal* but necessary resolution of the antinomies of truth and *knowing* in favor of the community. This resolution remains *temporal* because of the consciousness of the objective dimension of truth, which remains inaccessible or never completely

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[3] This does not, however, mean that the epistemic community is indispensable. It strikes me that individuals can champion the reformation of their epistemic communities given the possibility of their being members of several epistemic communities or some encounter with objective truth which is unmediated.

[4] The conception of truth within epistemic communities is fallibilistic. In this case, truth need not have absolute/definitive warrants since in relation to objectivity, we cannot have absolute certainty to justify our truth claims. See Miller and Charles Fox, "The Epistemic Community," 669.

accessible by the epistemic community. Also, the *temporal* resolution of the antinomies in favor of the community ensures that while social epistemology pursues its affective goals, it never fosters mindless tolerance. It also ensures that while the epistemic community *enables* us in our epistemic pursuits, it does not *imprison* us or constitute an obstacle to the attainment of our goals (Miller and Fox 2001, 683). Again, it guarantees that the epistemic community never confuses subjective or *working* truths with objective truth (or vice versa).

Also, the comprehensive approach especially sets some veritists on track by showing that no individual or epistemic community possesses objective truth. As Hugh Miller and Charles Fox put it, "[no] human being can situate himself or herself (by virtue of method) in such an omniscient perspective as to know the incontrovertible Truth about any matter. At best, a small-t truth can be negotiated with others in the epistemic community" (2001, 675). In other words, an epistemic community may quest for objective truth better than others may, but it never becomes self-sufficient or the standard. Concerning objective truth, epistemic communities continue to need one another. They see themselves as one among many ways of knowing/approaching objective truth. On this note, epistemic communities continue to interact with and engage one another given their common pursuit of truth and the task to extend the frontiers of knowledge. Hence, the comprehensive approach also eliminates or reduces the chances of epistemic exclusivism and dogmatism.

The above shows how the comprehensive approach takes care of the limitations of the communitarian and veritistic approaches and guarantees that social epistemology continues faithful in the pursuit of its cognitive and affective goals. With the bi-dimensional conception of truth, the comprehensive approach resolves the controversy between communitarians and veritists.[5] It takes an ecumenical stance as it maintains that there are objective as well as subjective/relative/local truths; that there are important cognitive and affective dimensions of truth and its pursuit in society. Hence, with the comprehensive approach, the truth goal of epistemology remains uncompromised. Also, the affective concerns of social epistemology remain sacrosanct.

Potential Objections and Further Clarifications

The comprehensive approach to social epistemology may face two major objections. The first is an objection that the veritistic approach also faces – the objection from emptiness (Goldman 1987, 137). According to this objection, there are no objective truths or facts independent of what epistemic communities negotiate and posit. In other words, the category of objective truth is empty. Or it is at best identical or interchangeable with the category of subjective truth. Hence, the epistemic community, through negotiation, produces both objective and subjective truth.

The above objection comes to me as a possible anti-realist critique of the realist tendencies in the comprehensive approach. However, what remains true for the comprehensive approach is that the realist and anti-realist positions are not completely mutually exclusive. The antinomic structure of truth and *knowing* which undergirds the comprehensive approach shows that while there are territories of truth available to us, some are not yet available to us, and some others are completely

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[5] With the comprehensive approach, veritist extremes are bridled by subjectivism (as seen in the emphasis on community) and communitarian extremes are curtailed by objectivism (as seen in the emphasis on objective truth). There is, therefore, a reconciliation between objectivism and subjectivism within the comprehensive framework.

unavailable to us. The anti-realist does not have to grudge/lament over the existence of mind-independent truths, facts, or realities (since as Musgrave argues, it is only commonsensical to believe their existence). Also, the anti-realist does not have to become anxious that there exist dimensions of truth that he cannot sufficiently interrogate or evaluate; objective truth should make him curious, not anxious. Hence, what the anti-realist must do is make use of available truths, go about discovering what he can about the world, and strive towards exploring unexplored grounds (Cheyne 2006, 1).

More directly, we can answer the emptiness objection, following its emphasis on the production of truths through negotiation, in two simple ways. The first is that negotiation as a social epistemic practice hardly demonstrates that there are no truths, facts, or realities independent of negotiations in epistemic communities (Goldman 1987, 137). The history of inquiry shows that even after communal reflections on a matter, an epistemic community or epistemic communities may still be mistaken in their conclusions. The second is that negotiation within epistemic communities does not necessarily produce objective truth. It only ensures that we arrive at the best possible subjective truth and that we take inquiry far enough before we make truth claims (Goldman 1987, 137).

The second objection that the comprehensive approach may face is that it does not provide an actual objective framework for assessing or evaluating truth claims and epistemic practices since it oscillates between an objective dimension of truth that is characteristically inaccessible/unknowable and a subjective dimension that is accessible but relative. It appears that we cannot measure subjective truth in terms of their conformity or non-conformity to the postulated absolute or objective truth of the comprehensive approach. In other words, objective standards for assessing subjective truth and epistemic practices are beyond our reach or effectively absent within the comprehensive approach to social epistemology.

As already suggested above, although we may not be able to assess subjective truth from a purely objective perspective (since this remains unspecified and inaccessible), we may, however, validly assess/evaluate them based on the well-formulated norms (among epistemic communities) that weigh their plausibility, reliability, fruitfulness, usefulness, explanatory, and predictive success/power (Gadenne 2006, 98). In this wise, the communitarian approach is not radically agnostic, as some may argue, given that truth claims or beliefs can be justified or evaluated (Kurzman 1994, 268) based on critical interactions among epistemic communities.

Also, based on the comprehensive approach to social epistemology, the epistemic imperative for epistemic agents is not the *acquisition* of certain, objective, or absolute truth. It is rather the *pursuit* of objective truth in an epistemic community where believing rationally at all times is sacrosanct. Our responsibility as epistemic agents is to figure out what is true from the evidence available to us; to form beliefs that would be most (epistemically and practically) rational to have, given the evidence at our disposal (Boghossian 2011, 38). Our joint/collective epistemic task is the betterment of our communal epistemic standards; that our epistemic standards are as rational as any available alternative in the current epistemic circumstance (Elgin 2013, 145). This is why interactions or dialogues among epistemic communities are also imperative according to the comprehensive approach to social epistemology. Again, although the results of these interactions or dialogues do not aggregate into objective truth, they furnish epistemic agents (individually and

collectively) with rational warrants to sustain subjective truth and to continue the pursuit of their epistemic goals.

Conclusion

Social epistemology cannot effectively pursue its cognitive and affective goals with either the communitarian approach or the veritistic approach. The over-emphasis on society, which the communitarian approach makes, makes society stand as an obstacle in the pursuit of the cognitive goal of truth. Also, the over-emphasis on objective truth which the veritistic approach makes, makes epistemic practice *asocial,* making the attainment of the affective goals of social epistemology difficult. To prevent social epistemology from pursuing truth devoid of affection or pursuing affection devoid of truth, I offered the comprehensive approach, which imbibes the virtues of the communitarian and veritistic approaches while avoiding their shortcomings. Hence, while placing an appropriate emphasis on objective truth and the epistemic community, it does away with the inclination to mindless tolerance in the communitarian approach and the *asocial* tendencies of the veritistic approach. Therefore, to the extent that the comprehensive approach emphasizes the community, to that extent it can be considered communitarian. Also, to the extent that it emphasizes objective truth, to that extent it can be considered veritistic. However, to the extent that it departs from these approaches, it is neither communitarian nor veritistic. The comprehensive approach to social epistemology, therefore, represents a new and the most adequate general approach to social epistemology.

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