Knowledge as a social kind[1]

Conhecimento como um tipo social

Leandro De Brasi[2]

ABSTRACT

This paper motivates an account of knowledge as a social kind, following a cue by Edward Craig, which captures two major insights behind social and feminist epistemologies, in particular our epistemic interdependence concerning knowledge and the role of social regulative practices in understanding knowledge.

Keywords: epistemic anti-individualism, regulative epistemology, practical explication, testimony.

RESUMO

Este artigo motiva um relato do conhecimento como um tipo social, seguindo uma sugestão de Edward Craig, que capta dois grandes pontos de vista das epistemologias sociais e feministas, em particular a nossa interdependência epistêmica em relação ao conhecimento e o papel das práticas reguladoras sociais na compreensão do conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: anti-individualismo epistemológico, epistemologia reguladora, explicação prática, testemunho.

This paper motivates an account of knowledge as a social kind, following a cue by Edward Craig, which captures two major insights behind social and feminist epistemologies, in particular our epistemic interdependence concerning knowledge and the role of social regulative practices in understanding knowledge. This view, which falls within a truly social regulative epistemology (*i.e.* an epistemology which aims to guide our epistemic conduct and which renders our epistemic reliance on others ubiquitous), does not succumb to epistemic relativism and can accommodate other "traditional" tenets that render it anyway "real epistemology" (given Alvin Goldman's characterization).

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section, "Varieties of epistemology", introduces the two insights related to social and feminist epistemologies and motivates an anti-individualist approach to epistemology and the regulative project in epistemology. The second section, "Testimonial practice and knowledge", presents the two key components of the Craigian framework and develops a novel practical explication of the concept of knowledge related to the testimonial practice from which a particular account of knowledge as a social kind is derived. The third section, "Some advantages of the account", concludes by pointing out some advantages of the resulting account of knowledge.

Varieties of epistemology

Some believe that we have come to the end of episte-mology. They deny that knowledge is an appropriate object of philosophical enquiry. This idea can be found in French philosophers, such as Jean-François Lyotard (1984), Anglo-American ones, such as Richard Rorty (1979), and other postmodernists. Although epistemology was once at the centre of philosophy (in particular, during the Modern period, which can be most clearly appreciated in the work of Descartes), now it is suggested it should be put aside and rejected. But, of course, not everyone thinks that epistemology is dead, although some, such as social and feminist epistemologists, think that epistemology needs changes. What these social and feminist epistemologists criticize is some "old ways" of traditional epistemology (as conceived by analytical philosophers) but, *pace* Rorty and company, they also develop new epistemic alternatives.[3] Consider, for instance, Alvin Goldman's (2010, p. 2) characterization of traditional epistemology by means of some central tenets that it holds:[4]

   (a) the epistemic agents are individuals;

   (b) the focus is on the study of epistemic evaluation or normativity;

   (c) the normative standards aren't merely conventional or relativistic but have some sort of objective validity;

   (d) the central notions of epistemic attainment either entail or are closely linked to truth;

   (e) truth is an objective, largely mind-independent, affair;

   (f) the central business of traditional epistemology is the critical examination of doxastic decision-making: adopting, retaining or revising one's beliefs and other doxastic attitudes.

Many social and feminist epistemologists reject one or more of these tenets. The more they reject, the more revision-ist they are, up to the point of not being "real epistemology" anymore.[5] But here I'm interested in one central commitment of much epistemology which is in fact absent from this list, which is very much part of the tradition and which most social and feminist epistemologists reject. In fact, its absence from (A-F) suggests how deeply ingrained the commitment can be even for the "godfather" of social epistemology.

Epistemic anti-individualism

This commitment, present in traditional accounts of knowledge, which social and feminist epistemologists often reject, is *epistemic individualism*. This is the view that, roughly, no knowledge-relevant normative status depends on factors that lie outside the cognitive agency of the knower. Although there is somehow a trend in mainstream analytic epistemology toward an appreciation of the "social character" of knowledge, it is correct to say that individualism in epistemology still has paradigmatic status. This focus on the individual knower is the legacy of the Cartesian tradition in epistemology. At least since Descartes, the focus on epistemology (in part of the Western tradition) has been very much on the individual. Descartes takes individual cognitive autonomy as a fundamental epistemic value and stresses that achieving knowledge is an individual feat.

This can be seen as a reaction to the intellectual crisis of his times. Given the fall of the Textual Tradition in the 16th century and of Aristotelian Science in the 17th century, many thinkers of this period were particularly wary of the testimonial practice. So, for example, Francis Bacon clearly rejects the authority of past thinkers. And he wasn't alone in not sharing a reverence for the past. The Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge, whose motto was *Nullius in Verba*, was one of many parallel institutions in Europe that shared this anti-scholasticism and anti-traditionalism. Indeed, Descartes tells us, in the *Discourse*, that he found him-

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[3] So they do not merely encourage us to abandon *some* (but not all) key epistemic tenets or projects, they also put forward alternative *epistemic* ones to replace them. Of course, there are feminist and social philosophers who are influenced by post-modernism (*e.g.* Flax, 1993). Those thinkers are also "negative," in the sense that they encourage us to abandon *every* epistemological project. In fact, given there are a variety of feminist approaches (Anderson, 2015), it seems misleading to talk about "feminist epistemology" as if there were one such epistemology (as if there were one approach or set of tenets under which all these feminist views fall). To be clear, I will be using the phrase "feminist epistemology" to pick out those feminist epistemologies that are critical of presuppositions of mainstream analytical epistemology but are not "negative" (*a la* Rorty). So I also speak of "feminist epistemologists" given that commonality. These epistemologists distance themselves from the tradition, but also claim that their work ought to be recognized as being concerned with "many of the problems that have vexed traditional epistemology" (Potter and Alcoff, 1993, p. 1). Similarly, "social epistemology" is used to pick out "positive" social epistemologies.

[4] Of course, there are other ways of characterizing what traditional epistemology is: say, by means of projects or topics, as opposed to tenets. These other characterizations are not likely to be co-extensive with Goldman's preferred characterization. Anyhow, for present purposes, this needn't concern us (as it'll become clear below—see also fn.3).

[5] Goldman (2010) tries to make sense of Alston's remarks that Goldman (1999) "would be rejected by many contemporary epistemologists as 'not real epistemology'" (2005, p. 5) and so suggests that the more revisionist approaches (as opposed to preservationist and expansionist approaches, which are more continuous with the tradition) are not "real epistemology." So a work such as Fuller (1988) might not count as real epistemology for being too revisionist. Such a view must be controversial since it is very much debatable whether continuity with traditional epistemology, understood as a set of tenets, is the way to understand what counts as real epistemology and how much discontinuity renders an approach non-epistemological. But, for present purposes, this debate is not relevant since Goldman's characterization seems to be the most stringent and I will offer an account of knowledge that respects most of the (A-F) tenets while rendering knowledge anyway a social kind.

self forced to become his own guide, emerging from the control of his teachers and texts and resolving to seek "the true method of attaining the knowledge of everything within my mental capabilities" (AT VI 17; also AT VI 9).

For Descartes, it is only one's own epistemic achievement that can render some belief knowledge, and only for oneself: knowledge is a personal feat.[6] The Cartesian ideal of epistemic autonomy (metaphorically, that the individual epistemic agent ought to stand on her own epistemic feet[7]) that lies behind this picture is what seems to motivate the individualism adopted by the tradition. Descartes sets forth the view that knowledge can be achieved only if one is not influenced by traditions or the community. Knowledge requires autonomy as absence of external interference. And traditional analytical epistemology remains since then firmly individualistic (in this Cartesian way[8]).

But one overlap between (much) social and feminist epistemologists is their emphasis on the importance of the social/communal aspects of knowledge-yielding practices, *contra* Descartes. For them, a solipsistic knower is implausible: there is no viable "Robinson Crusoe" conception of knowledge.[9] The main focus of dissatisfaction with traditional epistemology derives from its neglect of our epistemic interdependence. Taking this dependence seriously is not just a matter of expanding our testimonial dependence, it also means recognizing the more complex practices of interdependence found in our division of epistemic labour that are not reducible to transmitting knowledge. It is a mistake to take information sharing as exhausting the forms of epistemic dependence to which our beliefs are subjected (*e.g.* Goldberg, 2011; Pritchard, 2015; Townley, 2011). In fact, in epistemic communities, members not only share information, but also act as exemplars, co-operators and trainers, among other things. Some are exemplars and mentors for me as a knower; some enable me to fine-tune and improve my epistemic standards and practices. We depend on others in order to calibrate our own standards and we assist others (directly or indirectly) to maintain appropriate standards.

So our epistemic reliance on others needn't be limited to instances in which one exploits an inter-personal knowledge-yielding procedure, such as testimony.[10] It can be, and it is (*e.g.* De Brasi, 2015a; Simon, 2015), much more pervasive. For example, although the knower needn't possess the positive grounds for the endorsement of the procedures that she and other members of the community rely on, someone does (in the sense that some subject or, more likely, a group of subjects of the knower's epistemic community have undertaken, over time, the positive epistemic work for the endorsement of the community's established procedures (De Brasi, 2015a).[11] Indeed, there is some sort of epistemic policing that prompts the correction or perfection of suboptimal knowledge-yielding procedures (*e.g.* Bruner, 2013; Goldman, 2011).

This sort of epistemic interdependence entails epistemic anti-individualism, which is the claim that the (positive) epistemic standing of a belief depends epistemically on properties and actions other than the knower's (cf. Carter and Palermos, 2015; Pritchard, 2015). So, as social and feminist epistemologists have for some time noticed (*e.g.* Potter and Alcoff, 1993; Schmitt, 1994), traditional individualist positions seem doomed. Indeed, this anti-individualist approach, by emphasizing the cooperative and interactive aspects of knowing, corrects the unfortunate individualist simplifications of much current mainstream epistemology, which are unsuitable for theorizing about knowers who are members of social communities and so seem to be stopping us from making progress (Fricker, 2010; Goldberg, 2010; De Brasi, 2015b).

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[6] Different readings can be favoured. One might favour a weak reading that only requires that knowledge is *primarily* a personal feat. A strong positive reading requires the pursuing of knowledge to be carried out in a solitary way, without the aid of others, and so knowledge becomes an *exclusively* personal feat. A negative version of the strong reading states that the individual epistemic agent does not require interaction with others in order to acquire knowledge (cf. Antony, 1995). This negative thesis can in turn be given a strong and a weak reading. The strong negative thesis claims that the individual epistemic agent does not *in fact* require such interaction. The weak negative thesis claims that the individual epistemic agent does not *in principle* require such interaction. It is clear that Descartes in some moods has the strong positive reading in mind (cf. Locke, 1975, *Essay*, I.iv.23).

[7] Better put, a given belief can only have a positive epistemic status for its possessor if such status is achieved through the possessor's epistemic capacities (*e.g.* perception, memory and reason).

[8] In the sense of "the attainment of knowledge as a project for each individual on her or his own" (Jaggar, 1983, p. 355).

[9] Relying on others seems to be cognitively fundamental for beings like us (Burge, 1993—more on the section "Testimonial practice and knowledge"). So any investigation into *human* knowledge should be at odds with this Cartesian ideal and its accompanying individualist framework. As Jonathan Kvanvig says, "[…] we should never begin to think that the deepest epistemological questions concern the isolated intellect" (1992, p. 177). That's because "[…] one is reminded here of the attempt to do ethics by beginning with 'desert island' cases; even if such cases are possible, it is absurd to think that we can come to be enlightened about the nature of the moral life we share by focusing on such cases. Just so in the epistemological case" (1992, p. 178). See also Welbourne (1986, p. 83).

[10] Testimony has rightly received copious attention recently—*e.g.* Lackey and Sosa (2006)—but it is not the most epistemically interesting social phenomenon; see below.

[11] Knowledge needn't be a *reflective* success of the knower. Although responsiveness to the world is required for knowledge, responsiveness to reasons does not seem to be (*e.g.* Ayer, 1972; Lewis, 1996; Millar, 2010—not even reasons concerning the procedures exploited; cf. Bonjour, 1985). Much of our responsiveness to the world is achieved without responsiveness to reasons. Indeed, the fact that "knowledge attributions can be underwritten by a believer's *reliability*, even when the *believer* is not in a position to offer *reasons* for the belief" can be seen as "the Founding Insight of reliabilism" (Brandom, 2000, p. 99). This is an "insight" because, regardless of one's sympathies, no such reflective responsiveness seems required of the *knower herself*.

Regulative epistemology

However, one overlap between these feminist and social epistemologists, on the one hand, and Descartes, on the other, is their commitment to the *regulative epistemic project* which aims to determine appropriate ways of obtaining knowledge (and other epistemic goods) and which mainstream epistemology hasn't pursued. This regulative project, as Stephen Stich says, "tries to say which ways of going about the quest for knowledge [...] are the good ones" (1990, p. 1). So, when engaged in this project, we try to determine legitimate ways of obtaining knowledge. And many historical figures, such as Bacon in *Novum Organum*, Descartes in the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* and Locke in *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, among others, have pursued it. Moreover, Stich correctly says that "those who work in this branch of epistemology are motivated, at least in part, by very practical concerns" (1990, p. 2). This is clearly exemplified in the case of the aforementioned philosophers, who, responding to the intellectual crisis of their time, propose reforms to people's epistemic conduct by providing knowledge-yielding procedures.[12] So there is clearly a practical orientation within the regulative project. Indeed, as Robert Roberts and Jay Woods say: "Regulative epistemology is a response to perceived deficiencies in people's epistemic conduct, and thus is strongly practical and social [...]. This kind of epistemology aims to change the (social) world" (2007, p. 21).

For example, when feminist philosophers turned their attention to the field of epistemology, in the early 1980s, it did not take long for them to realize that the standardly available epistemological analyses were ill-quipped to handle their feminist concerns. This was in part because mainstream analyses were simply irrelevant to assessing biases found in the messy social world of knowledge practices.[13] But feminist epistemologists believe that our knowledge-yielding practices can be changed and improved: they can be transformed (by responsible epistemic agents) into practices that do a better

job at achieving our epistemic aims (the same can be said about social epistemology; see *e.g.* Goldman, 1999).[14]

This transformative potential of feminist epistemology, concerning the actual social practices of knowing, is in line with the regulative project. It considers how practices can be improved upon and whether they should be maintained or abandoned. Still, feminist epistemologists who attend to our social practices of knowing are sometimes criticized for being engaged with no more than description, or in "mere sociology". As Rooney (2011) tells us, feminist epistemology is not normally thought to be epistemology "proper" by mainstream epistemologists (see also Potter and Alcoff, 1993, p. 1). At best when feminist epistemology is given some acknowledgement in mainstream epistemology, it's recognized as epistemology but only in a restricted sense, as a form of applied epistemology, as if it were a bad thing[15] (for example, something that might be applicable in contexts where gender roles or practices are epistemically significant).

But this either misses the concern of feminist epistemology in evaluating, rather than simply describing, practices or misses the emphasis of feminist epistemology on situated knowers (*i.e.* knowers that aren't stripped of their specificity deriving from social and cultural location). For feminist epistemologists, knowledge is in a way the product of social practices and so knowledge emerges as a socially located phenomenon.[16] The notion of a "standard knower", undifferentiated from any other knowers, is not viable.[17] Not only is the social location of the knower relevant to epistemic evaluation, but also the actual social practices can determine what is knowledge.[18] For feminist epistemologists, to equate the realm of the epistemically normative with idealized epistemology is a mistake. And missing this point can cause the disregard for actual social practices in the study of the nature of knowledge and so devaluing the theorizing of feminists.

Mainstream epistemology is not concerned with the norms and methods embedded in the practices for achieving knowledge in a given context, whereas feminist epistemolo-

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[12] They actively engage in the project to remedy the deficiencies of our epistemic practices (say, to increase their truth-conduciveness). So, Bacon famously draws our attention to the biases that stand in the way of acquiring knowledge, giving us a four-fold classification of these obstacles, "Idols", in *Novum Organum* and providing us with procedures that counteract these bad intellectual habits and tendencies. Similarly, Descartes in the *Rules* provides us with a set of rules to guide us in the acquisition of *scientia* and to avoid *praejudicia* (see also *Discourse*, AT VI 17-9). And, Locke in *Of the Conduct* is interested in correcting our epistemic conduct to achieve knowledge by developing good intellectual habits through training.

[13] Another reason was of course they were completely wrongheaded in their abstraction: as seen, by being removed from their social environment.

[14] In fact, Goldman (2011) characterizes a whole branch of social epistemology, systems-oriented social epistemology, as being concerned with this.

[15] Some take applied epistemology to be "a departure from the central issues taken up in epistemology" (Feldman, 1999, p. 172). And in many books about the present and future state of epistemology (*e.g.* Hetherington, 2006; Hendricks and Pritchard, 2008; Steup *et al.*, 2014) feminist epistemology does not make an appearance.

[16] For example, Nelson (1993) argues that individuals could not know if they were not members of a community. And Heckman (1990) argues that the theory of knowledge studies a system of rules that is contextual and historical. Both agree that the empirical study of communities' practices is vital for epistemology.

[17] The contrast with mainstream analytic theories of knowledge could not be starker.

[18] Compare, for instance, Stroud's complaint that we "cannot conclude simply from our having carefully and conscientiously followed the standards and procedures of everyday life that we thereby know the things we ordinarily claim to know" (1984, p. 69).

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gies are "liberatory", in the sense that they attempt to improve actual knowledge-yielding practices.[19] This attempt goes hand in hand with formulating epistemologies that help to guide our intellectual enquiries adequately. But mainstream analytic theory of knowledge has very little to say about it and this narrow focus of mainstream epistemology marks a radical departure from Descartes's (and others') concern with the methods and rules of enquiry. And insofar as feminist and social epistemologists discuss questions of methodology, it appears more correct to see their epistemologies, rather than mainstream epistemology, as continuous with the tradition with regard to this regulative aspect. In fact, mainstream epistemology seems irrelevant to many because it does not even attempt to be a guide for our intellectual endeavours. As David Kaplan says, an epistemic theory "deprived of any role in methodology or the conduct of inquiry and criticism is a theory that divorces epistemology from the very practices that furnish it with its only source of intuitive constraint. It is epistemology on holiday" (1991, p. 154).

Regulative epistemology is strongly practical since it aims to provide us with adequate regulatory procedures that guide our epistemic conduct. But feminist and social epistemologists, *pace* Descartes and mainstream contemporary epistemology, want to emphasise as well the importance of the social/communal aspects of knowledge-yielding practices and so reject the individualism promoted by the Cartesian ideal of autonomy. So the recent regulative and anti-individualist turns in analytic epistemology, exemplified by these feminist and social epistemologies, can be seen as responding to the acceptance of a traditional goal to ameliorate our epistemic practices and the rejection of the above Cartesian ideal. In other words, changes that have been taking place since the latter part of the 20th century in the epistemological landscape can be understood as the result of the rejection of a Cartesian thesis, doomed by our increasingly clearer awareness of our epistemic interdependence, and the acceptance of a Cartesian goal, more in line with our practical interests.

Testimonial practice and knowledge

Having introduced the two major insights (and related theses) of social and feminist epistemologies, I will now de-

velop an account of knowledge as a social kind that can capture and explain these insights, inspired by the work of Craig (1990). To do this, let me present the two key components of the Craigian framework and develop a novel practical explication of the concept of knowledge related to the testimonial practice from which a particular account of knowledge as a social kind is derived.

Craig (1990), disenchanted with the state of much post-Gettier mainstream epistemology, suggested a methodological innovation and a methodological presupposition to investigate knowledge, as well as giving up two pretensions of the time, namely: the standard post-Gettier methodology (that exploits *only* intuitions about particular cases, which can deliver fatal blows to analyses) and the accompanying analyses (which are taken to provide individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for knowledge). However, before getting into all of this, it is important to consider the nature of the testimonial practice, since the purpose of the concept of knowledge depends on a conceptual need generated by this practice.

Testimonial practice

Our testimonial practice seems to serve the human need for truth (*e.g.* Craig, 1990; Williams, 2002). It seems that the goal of our testimonial practice is to satisfy our fundamental need for truth: a universal and inescapable need that is understood as being a part of our nature (*e.g.* Dretske, 1989, p. 89). This need for truth requires as a matter of natural necessity to be satisfied. Moreover, there is no denying that we are inherently social creatures that depend on each other (including, as seen, epistemically) and many, throughout the times, have noticed it (*e.g.* Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a2; Tuomela, 2007, p. 149ff). We live in social groups in which we form strong relationships and coalitions and, importantly, cooperate with each other (Bowles and Gintis, 2011). Indeed, since splitting from the chimpanzees, we have undergone rapid evolution of the body (and particularly the brain), developing remarkable intelligence, cultural capacities and pro-social capabilities that have enabled us to live in norm-governed ways in larger and larger groups.[20]

So the idea is that, in a socially interdependent lifestyle, the other members of the community can be sources of truths, which would be particularly beneficial for one in those

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[19] Work on epistemic injustice demonstrates how feminist and social epistemology can be performed in the service of quite explicit liberatory enterprises (*e.g.* Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013). Some of these transformative projects address issues of race, sexuality, class, etc., and not just gender.

[20] On our capacity for regulation of ourselves and others by social norms, see *e.g.* Sripada and Stich (2007); Chudeck and Henrich (2011). Some have suggested that as human groups became larger, a shift had to occur from cooperative mechanisms that relied on altruistic sentiments (sympathy, compassion, etc.) to those that relied on a "norm psychology" that applied more abstract norms that did not depend on those sentiments (*e.g.* Boehm, 2012; Kitcher, 2011). So it is not surprising to find humans to have an other-things-equal disposition to acquire and conform to local norms. Indeed, on the issue of acquisition of normative structures to regulate behaviour, see also Andrews (2015); Zawidzki (2013). Here, I will be taking practices as being norm-governed. Also, norms (or the procedures on which they are instantiated) needn't be different from (cognitive) habits (derived from socially-shaped practices) and habits certainly play a role in our conduct.

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cases in which they enjoy some "positional advantage" and/ or expertise which one does not.[21] That is, given our nature, our need for truth can be more effectively addressed by the pooling of truths within the community (that is, by the gathering of truths from others), as well as using our "on-board" capacities, such as perception and reason (Craig, 1990, p. 11).

So, given our testimonial practice is in place to address our need for truth, for this practice to be successful, it ought to be instrumentally adequate: *i.e.*, promote the truth. But, since we do not always cooperate and are not always competent, if we are to bracket the myriad differences between particular people (in large communities) and render a practice that aims to satisfy a fundamental need safer, we must regulate this pooling of information. Cooperating with those who share the same norms as you do would be not just safer but also more efficient than cooperating with out-group members. This is a solution that seems to be employed in social life: the existence of norms and roles that limit the space of interactions with others, providing us with forms of norm-governed interactions that obtain even with strangers (see fn. 20).

The details of this regulation depend, of course, on the nature and circumstances of the community (say, when people tend to lie and what subject-matters they tend to be inaccurate about and how). That is, the particular regulatory procedures adopted vary depending on specific details surrounding the community. But we can distinguish three testimonial virtues under which the different regulatory procedures fall: the virtues of Competence and Sincerity of the speaker and the virtue of Acceptance of the hearer.[22] So *felicitous* testimonial exchanges are cases in which all three virtues are relevantly instantiated, where each of them picks out a set of truth-conducive procedures that address one of the three different acts in any such exchange: namely, the attainment of the information, its communication and its acceptance.

The two testimonial virtues of the speaker are concerned with the acquisition of the truth and the non-misleading communication of it. These two speaker-centred virtues regulate against, crudely put, the "honest fool" and "able liar" scenarios. Here, for reasons that will become clear, I focus on Competence. This virtue regulates the relationship between the speaker and the information that p to be (potentially) shared and it consists in a series of "methods of inquiry:" procedures that are concerned with the acquisition of the truth (Williams, 2002, p. 127). These procedures concern the methods of investigation that the speaker employs to access the truth, which is what the practice aims to transmit. Consider, for example, the visual identification of objects. Here we are meant to take into account the lighting conditions, shadows, degrees of occlusion, distance to the object, duration of experience, training in such identification and general cogni-

tive health, among other things. That is, there are conditions under which the identification of an object is reasonably taken to be non-truth-conducive and the different procedures guide us as to when we can and cannot testify given certain circumstances. This virtue then helps us avoid acquiring falsehoods (and consequently transmitting them if Sincere).

Legal, scientific and historiographic practices, among others, are areas with highly defined procedures (and expectations upon practitioners). In these cases, it is clear that we are exploiting a formal set of procedures. Institutions fix explicit norms governing the possible epistemic behaviours of their members. But, as suggested, we also cultivate sensitivities to different everyday procedures that we apply in order to promote the truth when inquiring as to whether p. And most everyday Competence procedures should probably be understood as being cognitive habits that we acquire through implicit social training (which can then help us make sense of the fact that we find it difficult to articulate them[23]). For space's sake, I cannot say much about the nature of the testimonial procedures here. But notice that, given their regulatory function within this practice that we foster, these are endorsed procedures that guide us in the acquisition of truths. So legitimate procedures will not only have to be *de facto* truth-conducive (given the practice's goal), but also reasonably taken to be truth-conducive by the epistemic community (that aims to regulate the practice).

Now, while some procedures are regulative of the practice, others are constitutive. Say, in the case of games, the constitutive rules are the rules which define the game and so are "intimately connected" to it (Williamson, 2000, p. 239). One cannot play the game without following those rules. But that is not so in the case of the regulative rules, since they "assess different ways of playing the game: they specify what it is to play the game well, but presuppose that there is something that counts as playing the game in the first place" (Maitra, 2011, p. 280). Given this, our procedures are not constitutive of the testimonial practice. Indeed, we can engage in testimonial exchanges badly: non-felicitous testimonial exchanges are still testimonial exchanges (nevertheless, as its practitioner, one is expected to follow these regulative procedures).

Practical explication

Against this background, let's introduce the methodological innovation of the Craigian framework, which is the use of a "practical explication" to help us make sense of features of the target phenomenon (Craig, 1990, p. 8; see also Butchvarov, 1970). Craig holds that we should ask "what the concept of knowledge does for us, what its role in our life might be, and then ask what a concept having that role would

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[21] One enjoys a "positional advantage" when one is better positioned, spatially and/or temporally, to find out whether p (Williams, 2002, p. 42).

[22] Williams (2002, p. 44) refers to Competence as "Accuracy" and, following him, I capitalize these terms to show they are terms of art.

[23] Just like in the case of language (a rule-governed activity), we cannot easily articulate its rules (whether they are innate or acquired).

be like" (1990, p. 2). According to Craig, this functional role, for epistemically interdependent social beings like ourselves, is to flag good informants (1990, p. 11; see also Williams, 1973). Roughly, Craig's story begins with the need for the concept of a good informant in a primitive state of humankind and attempts to show how such concept, through a process of "objectivisation", becomes our concept of knowledge. But many other suggestions have been made about other (related) roles (*e.g.* understood in terms of signalling out targets for blame—Beebe, 2012, terminating inquiry—Kappel, 2010, and encouraging good testimony—Reynolds, 2002).

The plausible hypothesis here explored is that the concept of knowledge picks out cases where the testimonial procedures of Competence are successful. So I implement the Craigian framework with a different hypothesis that is not susceptible to worries raised about Craig's own (Gelfert, 2011; Kelp, 2011) by doing without an imaginary state-of-nature genealogy and the need for an objectivisation of the concept. This seems in fact independently desirable since it is hard to assess the plausibility of state-of-nature and developmental stories about concepts, neither of which is anyway required for a practical explication (Kappel, 2010). The offered hypothesis about the role of the concept of knowledge, just like Craig's own, might be rejected if not considered plausible. But, if plausible, the hypothesis should be judged ultimately on its theoretical fruits.

The starting point is the thesis that the concept of knowledge is required to satisfy a certain need of ours. Of course, once we have the concept of knowledge, we might use it in a variety of different ways. But the idea is that there is a particular need that the concept is meant to satisfy that provides it with its point, which in turn helps us make sense of features of the target phenomenon (Kappel, 2010). And the suggestion is that this need arises out of the development of our fundamental and pervasive testimonial practice. More precisely, the concept of knowledge is the result of a conceptual need related to this practice.

To see this, we need to think of the possibility of failure and success in testimony. From the speaker's side, she can fail to engage in felicitous testimony by either not being Sincere or Competent (or both). But, in felicitous cases, neither being Sincere nor Competent entails that what is being told (*p*) is true. More particularly, Competent performance does not pick out only those cases in which one achieves the truth. After all, most testimonial procedures we exploit to work out whether *p* are not likely to be *perfectly* truth-conducive given a reasonable feasibility constraint (otherwise the practice would become useless). So Competence procedures are not factive.

Nevertheless, if one Competently and Sincerely testifies that *p*, then even if *p* is not the case, one is not to blame for such unsuccessful testimony. But blameless testimony is not the aim of the practice. The practice is designed to deliver truth, and without it, the testimony, even if blameless, does not satisfy the practice's goal. Successful testimony requires truth. So, given we want to be able to refer to those cases in which we do achieve the truth (*i.e.*, those cases in which the Competence procedure exploited is successful), we seem to need a new concept. This concept picks out those cases of Competence that succeed in achieving the truth and the suggestion is that such concept is *knowledge*. The basic idea, on which this hypothesis rests, is that the verb 'know' is what Gilbert Ryle calls an "achievement word" (1949, p. 143), as opposed to a task word (compare scoring to shooting). 'Know' is a "verb of success" (1949, p. 125), which indicates the successful accomplishment of a task. The suggestion is that 'know' is a verb that indicates success with regard to the Competence task. In other words, 'know' indicates the possession of the truth by means of Competence procedures.

So the concept of knowledge addresses a particular conceptual need generated by our universal and pervasive testimonial practice. This need can provide us with a practical explication of the concept of knowledge that allows us to explain why the concept enjoys such widespread use (all known cultures engage in such a practice and have such a concept). And, to repeat, given that Competence does not entail truth, we need the concept of knowledge to pick out the successful cases of Competence. So some concepts are required in connection with our testimonial practice, one of which is the success-concept *knowledge* that picks out cases of Competence that deliver the truth.

Now, it is important to note two things to appreciate the plausibility of the hypothesis. First, the concept of knowledge also applies to hearers who felicitously acquire the truth via testimony, since a competent way to acquire the truth (given the regulation of testimony and the usual scenario involving chains of testimony) is by means of testimony. This way of acquiring the truth renders it fit for further transmission by the hearer. So we can also talk of hearers as knowing when accepting testimony. Second, we can also refer to individuals who are not involved in a testimonial exchange as knowing. That is, potential testifiers as well as individuals who are not trusted or will not testify or deceive us can be thought as knowing. This is because, regardless of whether one transmits the truth and whether someone accepts it, if one Competently achieves it, one qualifies as knowing.[24]

So the point of the concept of knowledge is to allow us to pick out the successful cases of Competence.[25] Importantly, the account of knowledge we can derive from this practical explication has great explanatory power, a case that will be pointed out in the third section ("Some advantages of the ac-

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[24] For more on this and the different roles the concept can still fulfil, see De Brasi (2015b).

[25] Of course I am not suggesting that this is the only plausible hypothesis available. We have mentioned others and they might be equally plausible for all I have said. But I'm not trying to argue against these candidates. The aim is to show that the proposed hypothesis has great theoretical fruits. It is a further issue whether the alternatives do so too.

count") by way of conclusion. But, first, let's consider how this practical explication helps us understand what knowledge is.

Knowledge as a social kind

A second main component of the Craigian framework is that knowledge is a social kind: roughly, a category that human beings impose on the world (in response to central needs and interests). As Craig (1990, p. 3) says, knowledge is "something that we delineate by operating with a concept which we create in answer to certain needs". Hilary Kornblith complains that Craig does not give us "a reason to believe that the category of knowledge is socially constructed rather than a natural kind" (2011, p. 49). But, firstly, it is not clear that knowledge could be regarded as a natural kind (Brown, 2012) and, secondly and more importantly, this is to be taken as a plausible methodological presupposition and the best way to proceed is to assume its correctness and see where it takes us (Craig, 1990, p. 4). After all, the most effective way to demonstrate the limitations of any approach, including the natural kind one, is by developing a better alternative, and here I attempt to contribute to the development of a Craig-inspired alternative. This approach should be judged ultimately on its theoretical fruits and I aim to indicate the great explanatory power it can enjoy.

Social kinds are the causally significant human categories that, say, social practices can produce. They are categories, which we humans create in the transactions that define social life, that pick out features of the world whose significance makes them candidates for inclusion in our best theories (in causally powerful explanations).[26] And the existence or persistence or character of the category is caused or constituted by human mental states, decisions, culture or social practices. They often emerge from a concern with social regulation and given that they are products of sociocultural activity, they could *in principle* not exist or be changed. But such categories needn't be *unstable*. In fact, we have seen how knowledge is a category that responds to natural universal interests and needs, given our nature. This is not *so* arbitrary and contingent. In fact, as a matter of human natural necessity it is difficult to imagine the inexistence of the category and

changes to its character (other than to particular procedures). Knowledge, at least, is a stable-enough social category: its particular social and natural setting is guarantee enough for the category to create a stable explanatorily-relevant property cluster kind that supports our epistemic projects over periods of time. Moreover, none of the above suggests that knowledge is not a natural phenomenon: our minds and our social practices are natural real things. Human practices can produce social natural reality.

So, given the above, knowledge, although a natural phenomenon, is the kind of phenomenon that we shape. So the suggestion, echoing Craig, is that the above success concept, which satisfies a specific conceptual need generated by our basic and universal testimonial practice, delineates the phenomenon of knowledge. I suggest then that knowledge is the apprehension of the truth by means of truth-conducive procedures that are in place for Competence. So, to know is to grasp the truth by means of certain norms, where these constitutive norms of knowledge are certain procedures of testimony that are endorsed by our epistemic community.[27] And, to repeat, these procedures are legitimate *only if* they are *de facto* truth-conducive as well as endorsed.[28]

Some advantages of the account

So, with this account of knowledge as a social kind at hand and by way of conclusion, we can consider some of its advantages.[29] First, it allows us to make sense of the insights of social and feminist epistemologies pointed out above. It not only accommodates but also explains why regulative practices which guide our epistemic conduct and which are sensitive to social location have a legitimate role in the theory of knowledge. Also, it accommodates and explains why our epistemic interdependence goes beyond testimony, given the endorsement involved in the regulation, and so explains the anti-individualism that goes with it. Second, it does this without succumbing to epistemic relativism. After all, none of the above suggests knowledge should be seen as a purely social product, unconstrained by any objective epistemic

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[26] Kinds pick out those categories that are important enough to figure in our successful theories and, following Boyd (1992), are causally homeostatic property clusters. Causal homeostasis is understood as either "the presence of some properties […] tends [...] to favor the presence of others, or there are underlying mechanisms or processes that tend to maintain the presence of the properties [...] or both" (Boyd, 1999, p. 143).

[27] The regulative testimonial procedures are constitutive of knowledge in the sense that without them there would be no knowledge.

[28] Of course it is important to consider in some more detail the nature of the testimonial practice, and particularly the nature of its regulatory procedures, if we are to better understand what knowledge is. But, for space's sake, that is not something we can do here. Anyhow, see De Brasi (2015a) for some independent motivation for the sort of account of knowledge developed and some refinements that should be added to it as well as responses to some possible objections.

[29] For other advantages, see e.g. De Brasi (forthcoming), that shows how it allows epistemic intuitions to play a legitimate (but not fundamental) role in theorizing (compare a natural kind approach), but also notice that this property cluster approach explains why the Gettier literature is a doomed project and the covert social nature of knowledge explains why that research project has run for so long; and De Brasi (2015b), that shows how it can accommodate and explain the various value desiderata related to knowledge, as well as the factivity and transmissibility of knowledge.

criteria of adequacy, or even that society is the final arbiter about knowledge. Not only is the testimonial practice subject to subjective epistemic evaluations (endorsement), but also to objective ones (*de facto* truth-conduciveness). So not any procedure goes and some procedures are better than others. The absolutism/relativism dichotomy is false and some sort of epistemic pluralism is a sound, legitimate option (see also Heckman, 1990, p. 15). Moreover, none of the above rejects or is inconsistent with the other (alleged) central tenets of traditional epistemology (A, B, D, E and F).

So, this approach to knowledge is friendly to social and feminist epistemologies (it provides them with a framework on which their insights blossom and they cannot be dismissed as not being "real" or "proper" epistemology, as some seem tempted to do) and, importantly, it does not promote an "epistemology on holiday" that does not help us progress.

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