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Just Reason

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During significant periods of the history of Western philosophy, the pursuit of epistemic goods such as reason, truth, and knowledge was considered quite distinct from the pursuit of moral and political values such as goodness, rightness, and justice. Knowledge was often theorized as the product of universal norms of reason and unbiased observation, that is, untainted by individual interests or by cultural or political values. During these past centuries (since the Scientific Revolution especially) epistemologists and philosophers of science have regularly taken scientific knowledge as their model of epistemic achievement in theorizing conceptions and ideals of reason and knowledge.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, logical empiricists distinguished meaningful scientific knowledge from value claims, and yet in the early years of the Vienna Circle some of its members emphasized the role of science in the political project of making the world a better place (Okruhlik, 2004). In the latter decades of the twentieth century the traditional distinctions between science and values and between reason and justice came under more thorough critical scrutiny. In particular, Thomas Kuhn's (1962) *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* provided the catalyst for significant philosophical work examining the role of historical, social, cultural, and political values in the development of scientific knowledge. Two decades later, Genevieve Lloyd's (1984) *Man of Reason* set the stage for feminist examinations of the ways in which philosophical ideals of reason encompassed male norms and associations, often through the explicit devaluation of female or "feminine" traits or experiences (cited in Rooney, 1994).

As work in feminist or, as it is now sometimes called, *liberatory* epistemology has continued to show, traditional ideals of reason and knowledge regularly accommodate, if not reinforce, unjust social divisions, particularly those relating to gender, race, and class (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). In

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consequence, feminist and liberatory epistemological work is centrally concerned with motivating accounts of reason and knowledge (including scientific knowledge) that make visible social inequities among reasoners and knowers, something that traditional accounts of a universal, transhistorical, disembodied Reason fail to do. This visibility and critical attention is considered necessary to the development of accounts of “just reason.” Such accounts of reason and reasoning underwrite concepts and theories of social justice that explicitly aim toward meaningful social progress in a world still significantly constrained by unequal access to social and political goods.

In challenging the traditional philosophical segregation of reason and knowledge from politics, feminist and liberatory epistemologists are not suggesting that knowledge reduces to a political contest. They argue, instead, that understandings of reason and knowledge need to engage more constructively with the ethical and social specificities that frame scientific and other knowledge projects, including social and political knowledge projects that explicitly seek to advance social justice. In particular, such understandings draw attention to the fact that the ways in which theorists conceptualize, think, or reason about social and political issues have regularly given voice to specific perspectives over others, thus limiting opportunities for insight and resolution. All of the papers and the book review in this volume advance “just reason” in this way: they give reason and voice to concepts, views, or perspectives that have usually not been included in standard debates about particular social and political issues. These issues include identity politics in multicultural societies (Mason), discourses about war and violence (Stone-Mediatore), debates about same-sex marriage (Jaarsma), the role of consciousness-raising in meaningful social change (Fischer), and the recognition of indigenous knowledges and epistemes in the academic institutions of the global North (Lange on Kuokkanen).

New or previously disregarded concepts and voices show us ways to provide more adequate reasoning about social justice. In “Reorienting Deliberation: Identity Politics in Multicultural Societies,” Rebecca Mason argues that in debates about identity politics *rights* discourse is not sufficient to address the concerns of non-dominant cultures. The perspective that Shari Stone-Mediatore urges we consider is the anti-war perspective of many families of slain and wounded soldiers. In “Epistemologies of Discomfort: What Military-Family Anti-War Activists Can Teach Us About Knowledge of Violence,” she reveals the inadequacy of standard but distant political expertise that claims neutrality. The perspective that Ada Jaarsma challenges in “Rethinking the Secular in Feminist Marriage Debates” is shared by feminists and liberatory thinkers on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate, as well as right-wing opponents to same-sex marriage. That perspective rests on the uncritical assumption of a divide between the secular and the religious, and it thus fails to recognize that the religious-secular divide is a politically loaded distinction that requires contextualized critical appraisal. The development of progressive forms of understanding at the level of the knowing individual or self is the subject of Clara Fischer’s “Consciousness and Conscience: Feminism, Pragmatism, and the Potential for Radical Change.” Fischer views consciousness-raising as significant in the development of new cognitive practices that are necessary for sustained social change, something that many accounts of social change overlook.

Mason's apologia for identity politics employs the notion of "horizons of intelligibility" borrowed from Linda Alcoff. Horizons of intelligibility are contexts for reasoning in which one can situate oneself relative to social identities, and this approach demonstrates an alternative to the rights-based view of what it means to appeal to a social identity. Mason maintains that attention to identity, understood as rational placement regarding a horizon of intelligibility, aids the recognition of each other's guiding reasons and values and thus provides a basis for communication across sociocultural differences. She argues that such an understanding of identity challenges Jeremy Waldron's account of identity politics understood largely in terms of rights claims or demands. Identity politics "ground both claims for redistribution and recognition" (p. 8), Mason acknowledges, but they need not be the obstacle to deliberation that Waldron claims, but rather can be a resource for understanding and deliberation. Waldron's formulation of identity politics as a rights claim obscures the relationship between cultural identity and reasoning that Alcoff's view illuminates because it treats identity as a starting point for reasoning.

Stone-Mediatore argues that "responsible thinking about institutionalized violence, including war, demands a distinctive kind of thinking-within-discomfort for which conventionally trained public-affairs experts are ill-suited and for which undervalued epistemic traits play a crucial role" (p. 26). Academic and professional expertise, along with the epistemic authority that expertise garners and on which it depends, shields reasoners from fully understanding the causes and effects of routine social violence. The institutionalized violence that concerns Stone-Mediatore is severe and systemic and "results . . . from established social and political institutions that systematically offend human dignity, or systematically deprive certain people of the conditions necessary for physical and mental integrity" (p. 30). She maintains that contemporary North American understandings of war reveal deep problems with the ideal of rationality as detachment. "Although typical of political discourse, their construction-project and law-and-order metaphors have little relation to the insecure and chaotic reality of war" (p. 35). The expertise of Michael Ignatieff and Fouad Ajami, in particular, "demonstrate[s] greater commitment to neoliberal and neo-colonialist discourses than to the complexity of the situation on the ground" (p. 35).

Current feminist disagreements in the U.S. over same-sex marriage can be traced to two strands in feminist theory, Jaarsma argues. On the one hand, *discourse theory* supports a version of liberal feminism that seeks access to marriage for gays and lesbians and promotes other types of marriage reform. Seeking legal reform makes sense given that discourse ethics employs communicative rationality as the means to democratic justice. The results of reform are less promising from the perspective of *queer theory* feminists who suspect the exclusionary nature of marriage, citing its sexist and racist heritage; they suggest instead that we need deeper rethinking of the nature of larger legal structures relating to citizenship. Establishing clear targets for discourse reform is difficult because of the problem of distinguishing the rational from the patriarchal elements of discourse, and that entails, in the United States especially, a need to question the divide between religious culture and the secular state. Marriage itself has religious origins and is not morally neutral.

Jaarsma argues that we must embrace cognitive dissonance as a general virtue of liberatory reasoning. The feminist debates over same-sex marriage reveal a pernicious assumption that the religious and the secular have clear mutual boundaries, whereas in fact negotiating this divide involves self-creation. Not only

religion but secularism too has a specific history with its own paradoxes. Instead of appealing to secularism, she advocates a post-secular turn in which liberatory thinkers accept the dissonance among our various ethical commitments.

Whereas Jaarsma treats political commitments as existential leaps, Clara Fischer views our ability to transform ourselves as a gradual matter of acquiring Deweyan habits: "For Dewey, we are constantly faced with a choice between acting in accordance with the old, static self, or with the new, dynamic self" (p. 71). Fischer applies the pragmatist framework of John Dewey to understand how personal moral change that provides the basis for political change is possible because of the self-reflexive aspects of human reasoning. Knowledge depends on an engagement with the world that is motivated by uncertainty, yet having knowledge remains dynamic because "uncertainty *results from* the conversion process and characterizes one's existence as a feminist" (p. 79). Emphasizing the dynamic aspect of the self implies not simply change but moral progress. This Deweyan morality of ongoing personal transformation complements Jaarsma's prescription of dynamic embodied engagement. However, Fischer's attention to the individual reveals problems with sudden epiphanic accounts of coming to feminist consciousness, and she argues that such personal, political, and moral changes accrete slowly. It is the longstanding strength of gradually engrained Deweyan habits that provides for ongoing feminist resolve, although feminists also rely on feminist communities of approvers and reprimanders to establish those habits.

Social justice relates to reason in specific ways in each article. Mason's move away from the language of rights allows individual understanding and reasoning a role in identity politics, and thus in addressing social injustice. She acknowledges the importance of Waldron's concern with human rights, which is part of the terminology of the established dialogue for addressing social justice issues. However, Mason argues that the language of rights only provides a starting place for civic reasoning based in identity politics. Civic deliberation is an open-ended process rather than a matter of compromise among pre-defined rights.

For Stone-Mediatore, attention to those who directly suffer from its social injustice aids reasoning about institutionalized violence. "Personal ties to war, when combined with a concern for honesty about the world that homes loved ones, can help [people] to face vexing realities, even when this exposes them to intellectual uncertainty and social ostracization" (p. 38). Understanding the phenomena of war for Stone-Mediatore depends on recognizing the limits of abstract thinking and its tendency to distract us from the concrete human historical details of war.

Creating social justice is entwined with a changing self according to both Jaarsma and Fischer. For Jaarsma, the sorts of rational and political conflicts that emerge in anyone's life can be seen writ large in the feminist debates over same-sex marriage. The lesson to be learned is that our personal compromises among forms of justice and demands of rationality constitute ourselves as particular moral and rational beings.

For Fischer, personal transformation is a layered and recursive process moving with and against past habits and surrounding communities. Thus, achieving social justice in our communities requires pressing ourselves to change, but personal transformation and progress also depend on engagement with communities of like-minded people.

Reasoning that is socially just but also evolving is the issue in Rebecca Kuokkanen's book, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift*, reviewed in this issue by Lynda Lange. Kuokkanen argues that the university suffers from viewing knowledge in terms of exchange rather than giving. This view of reasoning must change if the academy is to cease marginalizing and silencing indigenous peoples. Kuokkanen proposes that universities adopt an alternative "gift logic" that is notable in indigenous cultures and that draws on virtues of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. "The marginalization of indigenous peoples is not (only) a question of racism or ethnic minority rights, but it is a marginalization of peoples with rights to self-determination" (p. 89), as Lange explains. Kuokkanen does not idealize indigenous cultures for being more virtuous, but she argues that they offer valuable alternative conceptions that will continue to develop. Only one of the benefits of an academy with a "gift logic" is greater inclusion of indigenous reasoners themselves.

In sum, *just reason* shows us social justice as a process of reasoning (among other things). It is a way of positioning ourselves for democratic engagement (Mason); it motivates reasoning about the changing material details of institutionalized violence (Stone-Mediatore), or about the contingencies of the very concepts we employ (Jaarsma); it requires self-transformation as we aim to reason justly (Fischer); and it draws attention to considerations of the cognitive resources that can be found in indigenous cultures, which will encourage the fuller participation of indigenous peoples in academic and political institutions (Kuokkanen, Lange). As all of these papers show, bringing about the changes in ourselves and the world that genuinely support greater social justice depends on *just reason* in the form of flexible and strategic reasoning from a variety of perspectives.

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