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Lorraine Code

York University, codelb@yorku.ca

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Care, Concern, and Advocacy: Is There a Place for Epistemic Responsibility?¹

Lorraine Code

Abstract

Departing from an epistemological tradition for which knowledge properly achieved must be objective, especially in eschewing affect and/or special interests; and against a backdrop of my thinking about epistemic responsibility, I focus on two situations where care informs and enables good knowing. The implicit purpose of this reclamation of care as epistemically vital is to show emphatically that standard alignments of care with femininity—the female—are simply misguided. Proposing that the efficacy of epistemic practices is often enhanced when would-be knowers care about the outcomes of investigation, I suggest that epistemic responsibility need not be compromised when caring motivates and animates research. Indeed, the background inspiration comes from the thought, integral to feminist and post-colonial theory and practice that, despite often-justified condemnations of research that serves "special interests," particularities do matter, epistemically. Such thoughts, variously articulated, are integral to enacting a shift in epistemology away from formal abstraction and toward engaging with the specificities of real-world, situated knowledge projects. They are not unequivocally benign, for villains too care about the outcomes of their projects. Hence multi-faceted engagements with epistemic practices and processes are urgently required across the social-political world.

Keywords: advocacy, affect, care, knowing, responsibility

An Expert Witness?

The questions about care, concern, and advocacy I address in this essay are prompted by a 12 November 2011 report in the Toronto *Globe and Mail* of a controversy surrounding the ethics and politics of knowledge as they were being enacted in a Canadian courtroom setting (Hume 2011). Under the headline, "Credentials of famous medical ethics lecturer challenged in euthanasia case," the report engages with the question that occasioned the challenge: namely,

¹Editors' note: From time to time *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* publishes invited papers. This paper was invited to celebrate the inaugural issue of the journal.

whether Dr. Marcia Angell could justifiably qualify as an expert witness in a debate about physician-assisted suicide.

Dr. Angell had been a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School, where she “currently gives monthly lectures on ethics to faculty.” She was executive editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine* from 1988 to 1999 and interim editor-in-chief from 1999-2000. Author of an acclaimed book, *The Truth About Drug Companies* (2005), she garnered widespread professional and public respect for her policy of refusing to publish pharmaceutical-industry-funded research in the *Journal* while serving as a member of the editorial board. These background facts are noteworthy for their pertinence to the questions about advocacy and expertise I will consider.

I am reading the report as a point of entry into this controversy not in order to take a stand for or against euthanasia or to rest my case on one small article, but to examine the rhetorical presentation of the objections to Dr. Angell’s testifying it details, en route to thinking about certain modalities of the care, concern, and advocacy I refer to in the title, and addressing some effects of the instituted social imaginary that holds them in place. At issue are socially entrenched yet conflicting conceptions of epistemic responsibility and agency as they shape the debate generated by this inquiry in particular, and inform an array of often-contentious views about the place of advocacy and trust in the construction and public circulation of knowledge.

In addressing these issues with reference to an “instituted social imaginary,” I am indebted principally to Cornelius Castoriadis, drawing on my elaboration of his work, in *Ecological Thinking* and elsewhere. For Castoriadis, an instituted imaginary

carries within it the normative social meanings, customs, expectations, assumptions, values, prohibitions, and permissions—the habitus and ethos—into which human beings are nurtured from childhood and which they internalize, affirm, challenge, or contest as they make sense of their place, options, responsibilities within a world, both social and physical whose 'nature' and meaning are also instituted within these imaginary significations. (Code 2006, 30)

But the consequent position need not, and likely will not, be static, dogmatic, for to it Castoriadis opposes the *instituting* imaginary which he understands as the critical-creative activity of a society whose autonomy is evidenced in its capacity to put itself in question; to recognize that as a society, it is incongruous with itself, with scant reason for self-satisfaction (Code 2006, 31).² This conceptual framing is integral to my thinking here.

Questions about *epistemic responsibility* rarely figured in philosophical-

² My references here are to Castoriadis (1998) and Castoriadis (1994).

epistemological deliberations until, with the development of social epistemology and the new epistemologies of ignorance in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, a conceptual space opened for engaging with the issues it addresses (Code 1987; Code 2010a).³ Resistance to according such issues philosophical legitimacy was prompted and continues to derive from a residual positivistic reluctance to allow that there could be more than one way of *knowing* specific subject matters, events, objects, theories: descriptively and normatively, the assumption prevailed that knowledge worthy of the name must be univocal and definitive. From the impersonal pronouncement, “Science has proved” and its analogues, it follows that properly objective knowledge will adhere to such a formal scientific standard. It will not bear the mark of its maker(s): it could be anyone’s or everyone’s, and will claim universal validity.

Since attributions of responsibility explicitly or implicitly invoke the figure of “the knower(s)” in her, his, or their situatedness and consequent particularity and/or fallibility, the fear is that knowledge claims will be diluted or otherwise compromised in evaluative processes that invoke responsibility judgements. They may in effect fail to merit the (honorific) label “knowledge” or to achieve certainty (Smith, 1987; Code 2010a).⁴ Claiming space and explanatory power for judgements of epistemic responsibility, whether individual or collective/communal, calls for more complex assessments of cognitive achievement than paradigmatic post-positivistic practices of verifying one knowledge claim against one item, event, or utterance in the physical-social-material world could allow.

Yet such evaluations, I propose, are required for assessing the complexity of knowledge that eschews abstract formality to return to the world of (individual or collective) experience, experiment, and expertise, where all of these issues may figure in processes of evaluation. There are often choices about how, responsibly, to establish and implement knowledge in situations, both scientific and quotidian, that are more multi-faceted, more variably textured, than traditionally paradigmatic empiricist examples of knowing the cup is on the table, or the cat is on the mat.

In the inquiry at the Supreme Court of British Columbia where the disagreement reported in the 2011 article occurred, the lawyer for the Canadian

³ *Epistemic Responsibility* has been something of a sleeper since its publication, but the conceptual apparatus it introduces is currently claiming a place in post-positivist social epistemology and the politics of knowledge.

⁴ Pertinent is Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s observation, “[N]o judgment is or could be objective in the classic sense of justifiable on totally context-transcendent and subject independent grounds. ... [O]bjectivist claims may operate quite negatively under certain conditions and for certain members of the community and are in the long run perilous for the community at large” (1987, 294). Such is the objectivism that condemns Marcia Angell.

federal government reportedly maintained that Dr. Angell should not be recognized as an expert witness “because she is an advocate for euthanasia and because her experience and training doesn’t involve original research.”⁵ Alleging that Dr. Angell is “passionate about [advocating for] assisted suicide”—in view of having written articles in support of the practice—the government lawyer maintained that she had “sacrificed her impartiality” and was therefore incapable of providing objective testimony. The implication is that *because* she cared, as an advocate by definition presumably would, she *could not* be sufficiently objective—impartial—to present knowledgeable, well-informed testimony: her capacity to fulfill the obligations of an expert witness is thus subjected to radical contestation.

Advocacy as such, regardless of whose it is or how well informed, finds ready, unreflective, condemnation in this scenario, infused as it is by the presupposition that caring passionately can only be irrational, and must therefore overstep the boundaries of reason.⁶ (It needs also to be observed that Marcia Angell is ambivalently positioned in respect to advocacy, for she had deplored and acted to block the advocacy enacted in drug-company-funded research. Here she finds herself condemned and excluded for views derogatorily cast as advocacy.)

The argument centres on Dr. Angell’s capacity, as an “eminent medical ethicist” whose “expertise [is] recognized by Harvard Medical School,” to serve as an expert witness in the hearing. I am parsing the report but I think not distorting it to enlist it as a way into thinking about whether caring about an outcome, even caring deeply, unequivocally damages a putative knower’s capacity to know responsibly and well, more seriously than caring “not a whit” or being utterly disinterested would do. I put the alternatives baldly, but they are integral to larger questions about advocacy which, in the remarks I cite, is cast negatively, as a reprehensible, truth-inhibiting practice, without further ado.

In my view, as I argue in *Ecological Thinking* (Code 2006, esp. ch. 5), advocacy often makes knowledge possible, in the strongest sense of that word: in certain circumstances it is a requirement *sine qua non* for the production, validation, and circulation of knowledge. In making these rather extravagant claims, I am referring not to knowledge-in-general, which to my mind is an empty category, but to knowledge pertinent to/in specific domains of inquiry and deliberation, where people who need to know perhaps cannot (again, in a strong sense of the word) be expected to know for themselves by their

⁵ This and all subsequent quotes pertaining to Dr. Angell and the controversy surrounding her ability to give expert testimony are attributable to Hume, 2011.

⁶ My claim is not that caring is always reasonable or valuable, but that its worthy modalities are absorbed by its unacceptable associations with the putative irrationality of affect and emotion.

independent efforts, for diverse reasons. Would-be knowers may find themselves constrained not for want of intelligence, but owing to situation-specific constraints on their expertise, access, or understanding: consequences of social-historical divisions of intellectual labour and/or entrenched structures of power and privilege which circumscribe their capacities to think toward new possibilities, away from fixed, sedimented ideas and expectations. In short, often, would-be knowers can neither find nor create the requisite breaks in a putatively seamless epistemic imaginary to allow untried ideas to claim a hearing; cannot practice or produce the “critical openness” that would allow them or their interlocutors to recognize their “biases and limitations” for what they are (Medina 2011).

Nonetheless, although the thought will not be new to feminists, Science and Technology Studies scholars, and other contributors to “post-epistemology” projects, I am suggesting that the dogma of objectivity in its starkest positivistic all-or-nothing construal has not served “us” well.⁷ The implications of this claim bear rehearsing in connection with Marcia Angell’s testimony, together with more wide-ranging questions about the place of care, concern, and advocacy in situations where it matters to know and act responsibly and well. Such places and situations are more common, more complex, and usually more ambiguous than classical empiricist questions about how to know for certain whether the cup is on the table, or the barn facades that draw tourists to New England are fake or real. These more elaborated questions are germane to addressing the social implications and enactments of knowledge that involves, produces, or thwarts responsible social-epistemic recognition and interaction. My intention, then, is not to contest the value of objectivity in knowledge, from simple empirical claims to such convoluted questions as are at issue in the euthanasia case, but to urge more nuanced understandings of its scope and limits.

The claim that Angell has “sacrificed her impartiality” because she cares about, is deeply “passionate about” assisted suicide is so simplistic yet so rhetorically definitive a dismissal as to close off space for thinking more deeply about subjectivity, power, knowledge, and the place of care, responsibility, and concern in evaluating knowledge claims, expert opinion, and the ethics and politics of knowing. Although I present it as a small moment in what was undoubtedly a fuller argument, such a flat refusal to accord epistemic respect to advocacy for the reasons adduced is emblematic of larger politics-of-knowledge issues that require critical-constructive attention.

As I read the report, in this exchange Dr. Angell is being subjected to an egregious form of epistemic injustice, in a sense akin to that articulated by Miranda Fricker in her 2007 book.⁸ She is impugned in her capacity as a knower

⁷ See also Lorraine Daston (1994).

⁸ Fricker characterizes testimonial injustice as “a kind of injustice in which someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*” (2007, 20; italics

and a trustworthy expert testifier on flimsy if not spurious grounds. Yet the condemnation finds support in the larger social-epistemic imaginary precisely because of the entrenched and often warranted distrust of advocacy I refer to, in twentieth- and twenty-first-century epistemology, scientific inquiry, and in the wider world which, as Lorraine Daston shows, is constitutive of current conceptions of objectivity that embrace “not only freedom from theoretical bias but also a complete elimination of the personal and of the emotional” (Daston 1994, 58).

Still today, the conviction prevails that advocacy can make no legitimate contribution to establishing the veracity of a knowledge claim or to informing claims that are embedded in or supply the background for giving and receiving testimony. I contend that despite its frequent aptness, such distrust cannot universally be justified or indiscriminately directed toward advocacy *as such*.

As I observe in *Ecological Thinking* (Code 2006) there are good reasons to distrust advocacy, and no need to rehearse the substance of its persistently negative images. But some version of what I have called “taking subjectivity into account” (Code 1995) is surely required in evaluating those reasons. It would involve investigating at a deep (genealogical) level, not a shallow, superficial level “whose advocacy is at issue, here?” (where “whose” may be singular or plural): addressing the detail of embodied “situatedness,” the credentials and epistemological “record” of would-be advocates, and the social-political-historical positioning, genealogy, and conduct which confer a presumption of trustworthiness or its opposite upon their putative knowing.

For Donna Haraway, whose conception of “situated knowledges” stands as a late-twentieth-century conceptual landmark (1991), such practices could—and in contentious situations often *should*—be enlisted to evaluate her, his or their suitability for performing *these* acts of advocacy, here, in *these* circumstances. Enlisting the conceptual resources of situated knowledges denies the possibility of a view from nowhere (which, for Haraway, counts as a “god trick”), to recognize that knowing is always somewhere, and both constrained and enabled by its situation. In consequence of such a conceptual shift, inquiries often come down to dealing with particulars, but in responsibly deliberative processes they would do so without embarking on a pernicious slide into particularism (Code 2010b). No definitive answer may be available in every case, but in eschewing the individualism and instantaneity of one-off, infinitely replicable propositional claims of which empirical knowledge before social epistemology allegedly was made, democratic deliberative inquiry can make room for the care in investigation that engaging such questions, ethically and epistemologically, requires. The issues cannot responsibly be judged, and dismissed, in a simplistic “S has sacrificed the objectivity required to know *p*” discrediting.

Yet the requirement is not quite so simple, for this report confirms that Dr.

original).

Angell's credentials *are* addressed and impugned, and her ethical-epistemological record which in many quarters would be judged impeccable, is cited to discredit her. The discrediting is not definitive, but it shows that her intellectual-professional eminence is no guarantee against the egregious distortions on which advocacy's detractors base their condemnations. The larger point is that deliberations such as these must almost by definition be engaged *in media res*, nor can they be conducted from or on a perfectly clean slate, a *tabula rasa* cleansed of all traces of an instituted epistemic imaginary that shapes the situations of their making, or a place where no preconceptions will infuse and colour the debate. And the disputes may terminate in impasse. This is the stuff of which situated, real-world epistemic disputes are made: they rarely lend themselves to the sanitized analyses formal Anglo-American philosophy of science and epistemology offer and on which orthodox positivism relies. Yet, the outcome need neither be a disdain for objectivity and principles of inquiry, nor a slide into epistemic, ethical, or legal-political chaos.

Some of these thoughts are implied in the charge that Dr. Angell's concentration "on issues concerning pharmaceuticals" leaves her uninformed on matters related to euthanasia. The claim is not trivial. It attests, in this dimension, to a failure of epistemic responsibility on the part of her detractors, evident in their apparent failure to have investigated and attempted to understand well enough to determine substantive overlaps between medical ethics—her recognized area of professional expertise—and the pertinence of the questions that preoccupied her throughout her editorship of the *Journal* to the case at hand. Although there may be no good reason to expect the government lawyer, without further inquiry, to differentiate within areas of specialization that are not her own when it is a matter of disqualifying the testimony of an eminent practitioner and scholar, the public whose future choices will be influenced by the outcome has reason to expect more by way of establishing why, in this instance, trust should be conferred or withheld. Such expectations are integral to ensuring that the proceedings are informed by a background commitment to just epistemic practice.

My claim is emphatically not that once such an investigation has occurred, then saying makes it so even if the "sayer" is a recognized expert: this is no simplistic argument from authority. But it is a claim against invoking crude categories and mechanisms of condemnation without taking care to determine how well they "fit" the specificities of the situation. On a different level, it shows that one consequence of eschewing epistemic individualism is that patterns of verification and falsification must spread out more widely than purely individualistic, top-down inquiry has tended to presume. In a well-functioning epistemic-scientific community, these are questions for discussion and negotiation not for univocal dismissal, even in a courtroom situation where a counter-argument might be ventured to the effect that time is money!

To commend advocacy as a sometimes legitimate epistemic practice and to

claim a place for care and concern in knowledge on the basis of one small newspaper article would be flimsy indeed, inviting and warranting a charge of epistemic frivolity. But Marcia Angell's contested positioning in the euthanasia case is exemplary beyond the courtroom setting. It poses urgent questions about the ethics and politics of knowledge and professional expertise that indicate some directions philosophical engagement with testimony and "expert" knowing has to take when it moves away from the abstraction of positivism's formal modalities to engage with and adjudicate real-world power-infused knowledge-making and -circulating practices, where science, epistemology, ethics, and politics cannot be disentangled.⁹

Addressing such questions "in situation" requires engaging with epistemic subjectivity in a manner quite foreign to Anglo-American philosophers' image of "the knower" as a disengaged, "remote" (following Val Plumwood 2002),¹⁰ interchangeable place-holder in the pursuit of knowledge, itself typically conceived as consisting of discrete facts. Whether advocacy practices participate in making knowledge possible or in contesting its claims, or whether they are denied epistemic respectability, it matters who the advocates are, what credentials and justifications they supply for advocating as they do, and how their trustworthiness is established or gainsaid in deliberative processes.

Moreover, for purposes of this discussion and more generally, it makes sense to assume that advocates, singly or as members of an advocacy group, will *care* about the claims and positions for which they advocate. This is the aspect of advocacy, in some of its modalities, that elicits condemnation; and it is clear that advocacy *tout court*, simply as such, can be neither applauded *nor* deplored. Yet even from a commonsensical point of view, it is hard to imagine undertaking the difficult, frequently contestable and contentious work advocacy projects require, without caring about the outcome. Hence, *ex hypothesi*, advocates cannot routinely claim the impartiality—the principled "escape from perspective" (Daston 1992)—allegedly integral to achieving objectivity "properly so called," a-historically conceived and formally enacted, as it dominates the epistemic imaginary of the Anglo-American mainstream. It is because she *cares* that Angell faces the criticism that seeks to disqualify her, as though it were, by definition, impossible to care reasonably, rationally, and knowledgeably.

The entrenched image of the dispassionate, disconnected knower works with a curiously implausible conception of subjectivity: a person detached from the world who does not care in the slightest about what he or she knows, whose affectivity is excised from her or his intellectual life, and who need not—borrowing Karen Barad's (2007) apt phrase—evince any concern about "meeting

⁹ Such is the thrust of Daston's argument in "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective," *supra*.

¹⁰ Remoteness, as normatively characteristic of mainstream epistemology, ethics and politics, is a theme in Val Plumwood (2002). See especially pp. 71-82.

the universe halfway." How, one must ask, could such a person *be* or *be imagined*, other than between the covers of an orthodox Anglo-American epistemology text?

As I note in *Ecological Thinking* (2006, 208ff), such a knower would be unlikely to know things well enough to do anything with or about them, or to care about them, positively or negatively. Nor does artificially separating contexts of discovery and justification offer a plausible solution, although there may be a certain wisdom in producing concentrated internal analyses of the activities and projects that shape each side. But while some messiness and chaos may be taken for granted in contexts of discovery, traditionally represented (contentiously, I suggest) as occurring prior to *real* epistemological analysis, the separation process presupposes a solitary "individual" knower-justifier, who need not engage in the back-and-forth of communal deliberation or discussion, and who adopts and inhabits a position immune to debate, reconsideration, collaboration, change. These thoughts are not new, but their persistence is evident throughout the instituted epistemic imaginary of the late twentieth- and twenty-first-century Anglo-American epistemological, ethical, scientific, and legal world.

I am not proposing that all contentious testimonial or other knowledge claims require advocacy to establish their veracity, but many do, and these merit a differently elaborated kind of analysis from received, top-down, spectator-epistemology practices of validation or falsification. Thinking and deliberating communally, ecologically, horizontally, across multifaceted situations and circumstances is often the best and even the only way to establish or discredit the plausibility of novel or disruptive knowledge claims that unsettle the status quo, and rely upon or test the putative reliability of their would-be advocates. This is how it is in situations where reputations of expertise are established or challenged, which call for more complex justificatory practices than one-off, punctiform claims and counter-claims do.

Requirements such as these are writ large in advocacy situations that engage—as the Angell case does—with issues analogous to those Bruno Latour singles out as "matters of concern," where I propose reading his distinction between matters of fact and matters of concern more expansively than its initial presentation suggests, to make space for affirming connections between concern and care. Latour deplores a tacit philosophical obligation to erase from epistemological analysis "the work required in order to establish the persistent, stubborn data.... to limit 'facts' to the final stage in a long process of elaboration" (2004, 95 ff.).¹¹ Such a requirement expunges genealogical traces from scientific practice, confining them to the allegedly superseded "context of discovery" which disappears in the putatively real work that happens in the "context of justification." It discounts the interactive, often conflictual labour from which

¹¹ Cited in Code (2006, 101).

“factuality” is frequently achieved. For Latour, by contrast, and germane to this discussion, “The only way to respect ... heterogeneity and ... locality is ...to do a lot of philosophy. But philosophy is not about unifying factors.... [It] is a *protection* against the hegemony of the present sciences” (Latour 1993, 218). Here, as I show in *Ecological Thinking* (2006, 60-61), questions about knowledge, responsibility, and agency are inextricably intertwined with the unevenly distributed cognitive resources and moral-political-affective effects of institutional knowledge production in present-day societies. Practices of advocacy participate, albeit diversely, in shaping these interconnections.

Very Vulnerable Bodies

To think further about advocacy in a wider dimension, in relation to its bearing upon a related aspect of the content, inspiration, and public/local impact of scientific research, I turn now to consider advocacy issues as they figure, if implicitly, in Kristin Shrader-Frechette’s 2007 book, *Taking Action, Saving Lives: Our Duties to Protect Environmental and Public Health*.¹² There, among numerous matters of urgent public concern, she documents the exceptional bodily vulnerability of children—for now conceived generically—to the effects of environmental pollution. She assembles scientific evidence with care and with a purpose: as an illustration of the kinds of advocacy practice my analysis applauds, hers is an over-arching, transparently caring and committed, profoundly intelligent project. Questions about knowing well and advocating responsibly again, if from a different direction, are pivotal in her analyses.

Plainly, in this text as in her earlier works, Shrader-Frechette is no neutral observer: she is deeply invested in—like Marcia Angell, she cares passionately about—the harms she addresses. She is no impartial bystander yet, I suggest, her inquiry is objective in a strong sense with affinities to both Haraway’s “situated knowledges” and Sandra Harding’s “strong objectivity” (Harding 1986, esp. ch.5).¹³ For Harding, *strong* objectivity achieves its strength to the extent that it takes the epistemic positioning of the scientist/knower as fully as possible into account in evaluating the adequacy of her/his knowledge claims. Its project is not to cleanse inquiry of materialities, commitments, interests, presuppositions, or of the constitutive effects of situation and place, but to analyse these as carefully as it analyses traditional “objects of knowledge.” Its strength is thus significantly attributable to its self-reflexivity, manifested in ongoing monitoring of its own processes of inquiry. Analogously, I am suggesting that Shrader-Frechette’s work achieves the level of objectivity it does *because of*, not in spite

¹² Germane also is Kristin Shrader-Frechette (2002), *Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy*.

¹³ Here I draw on my discussion of Harding in *Ecological Thinking*, pp. 61-62. Harding’s epistemological position departs markedly from the empiricism that informs Shrader-Frechette’s work.

of her passionate commitment. One reviewer observes: “Shrader-Frechette’s analysis is informed not only by her wide-ranging knowledge of relevant scientific material but also by her close familiarity with ethical theory. It is enlivened by a sense of indignation, compassion, and urgency...” (Lacey 2008, 761). Such is the compassion that animates the advocacy that makes certain kinds of knowledge possible.

As Shrader-Frechette’s investigations show, knowing responsibly and well is urgently required for thinking compassionately about and acting to foster social justice, in response to the ecologically outrageous situations she analyses. The contrast, at the simplest level, is between knowing situations or things “in general,” and knowing them well enough in their specificity and variable detail to engage well with them—to “meet” with them (in Barad’s sense)—carefully. These are matters of epistemic and ethical responsibility. Yet because so few non-scientists are capable of knowing well enough without sensitively interpreted empirical data— without engaged evidence such as she offers— they/we are reliant on advocacy such as Shrader-Frechette produces if we/they are to doubt intelligently, or to protest plausibly against repeated statistically-derived and authoritatively uttered public assurances that things environmental are “getting better” (Whyte and Crease 2010).

Thus, countering what she calls “the longevity objection” whose adherents argue that “people seem to be living longer and getting healthier” (Shrader-Frechette 2007, 32) as a way of contesting charges that pollution damage to people’s health in the USA is ubiquitous and increasingly dire, Shrader-Frechette responds that the objectors “forget that people would be even healthier if pollution were reduced” (33). More urgently, she observes: “Regardless of longevity, environmental pollution . . . gives the most vulnerable people – children, particularly minority children – poorer health than they otherwise would have had.” (34).

Nonetheless, in state-of-the-art published reports of pollution levels, the specificities of children’s vulnerabilities to a range of noxious substances are frequently invisible: they vanish into the numbers to count as just one person, one statistical unit among others. People tend not to look for them or think of taking them separately into account when they are routinely “included” as one unit in a set of statistics. Yet children’s small bodily size, relative fragility, and general incapacity to look after or speak for themselves perpetuates a general ignorance of their disproportionate susceptibility, which varies also across multiple forms of social marginalisation, and cannot responsibly be left unaddressed. Shrader-Frechette’s recognition that she and “we” need to care about them, to look behind the statistics to expose the gaps and exclusions on which they stand, is a noteworthy achievement of this investigation, whose epistemic and ethical imperatives are inseparably interconnected and reciprocally constitutive.

Statistical population analyses are not well attuned to the particularities and specificities that, for many concerned/caring inquirers— among them feminist epistemologists and others who depart from the positivistic norm— require special attention.¹⁴ Thus with respect to the assurance “statistics have shown,” the question is more pressingly about what statistics do not show and have not shown, what they are selected or constrained to show, what picture of social beings they work from and generate, and why “we” should care. Knowing well enough to advocate well in these and analogous circumstances frequently requires reading statistical evidence “against the grain,” learning to recognize when and where “there is more to be said.” In short, there are many ways to read the statistics! Here informed advocacy is frequently required to counter the epistemic and ethical-political injustices consequent upon the knowledge/ignorance (in Shannon Sullivan’s apt term (2007)) through which “facts” purporting to show that there is no danger from environmental pollution are circulated to a non-scientific public.

All of this being said, however, David Michaels’s insistence on the *negative* status and effects of advocacy demands a response. It is a tangled issue. Referring to the tobacco industry’s concentrated efforts to “manufacture uncertainty” so as to destabilize the “growing consensus linking cigarette smoking with lung cancer and other adverse health effects,” Michaels contends: “Opinions submitted to regulatory agencies by corporate scientists and, especially, the product defense industry must be taken as *advocacy*, primarily, not as science” (Michaels 2008, 91, 102; italics added).

Although it will be apparent from the foregoing that I reject this stark opposition between advocacy and science, his contention both confirms *and* contests the position I am taking. Given the rhetorical force and extensive financial backing of campaigns to encourage people to keep on smoking, of which he is deeply critical, and given the extent to which “bad science” is co-opted to sustain an effective level of uncertainty about potential harms, thus promoting the agenda of the tobacco industry, Michaels’s condemnation of the “opinions” is well warranted. They are, as he observes, devoted more explicitly to advocacy conducted in the service of private, corporate interests than to scientific truth. But when scientific claims from the “other side” are brought to bear on the same issue, again animated by strong interests, even when these interests run counter to the agenda of the uncertainty pedlars, they too must be acknowledged as advocacy and evaluated accordingly.

Here, then, is the conundrum: the contrast is less between science and advocacy *simpliciter* than between epistemically *irresponsible* science informing advocacy conducted in the service of harmful agendas, and advocacy informed

¹⁴ I am thinking of Karen Messing and Rachel Carson, whose epistemological practice I discuss in *Ecological Thinking*, and of Barbara McClintock.

by epistemically responsible science conducted in the service of beneficial, ecologically sound agendas. The criteria need to be negotiated, deliberated, interpreted and the processes will be long and complex, but such is the way with temporally and geographically located knowing that does not conform easily to pre-existing models or presuppositions.

Putting the point too simplistically, practitioners in the second of these groups will undoubtedly care how their findings contribute to such presumably uncontroversial goods as human health and well-being, and to reducing, preventing, or repairing damage to the physical-natural world; while those whose relationship to knowledge is primarily opportunistic and self-serving will likely care differently. But if advocates on both sides *care*, then clearly, caring is not enough, is not the decisive ingredient. Hence adjudication processes will have to involve intricate ethical-political deliberations, not separated from but interwoven with the over-simplified advocacy-versus-science debate, to prevent the situation descending into a crass adversarial contest between conflicting advocacy camps, with matters of social justice and scientific “truth” falling by the wayside in the process.

These are live and urgent issues that resist premature closure. Without doubt, “the facts” need to be established; but if achieving this end reduces to a power struggle between advocacy informed by epistemically responsible science, contrasted with advocacy funded by private-interest science, when the criteria invoked to distinguish them may also be unstable, then the issue will remain fraught, epistemologically, ethically, and politically. Nor can it legitimately be assumed before the fact that private-interest research, by definition, abdicates allegiance to “the truth.”

Nonetheless, as with the challenge to Marcia Angell, if somewhat differently, so advocacy on behalf of “scientific findings” tends to be discredited as dangerous because in the received epistemic imaginary it is frequently, if unjustly, identified *only* with condemnable modalities of private-interest science which compromise, when they do not negate, such measured objectivity as may be achievable. While there cannot be a “one size fits all” condemnation or commendation of advocacy projects, the alternative is not to leave them open to whatever interpretation may be convenient. Care needs to be taken to ensure that such judgements respond to the specificities of situations and populations, horizontally and vertically, and across a range of intersecting and even contradictory values.

How those specificities are to be known, and what responses they rightfully elicit, may require ongoing deliberation, which might issue in action at a point that falls short of producing definitive answers: to settle for achieving a balance between tolerating a certain degree of ambiguity—of open-endedness—while needing also to act. Indirectly, outlining the impasse thus recalls Daston’s astute observation: “... the most important factor in the ready acceptance of Baconian facts, despite their strangeness and/or irreproducibility, was trust,

extended almost *carte blanche* to at least a small circle of respected colleagues and informants” (1994, 49). If indeed the debate comes down to decisions about where, reasonably, to confer or withhold trust, then clearly it is as urgently a matter of ethics, responsibility, and care as it is about bare matters of (empirical) fact.

Returning to Shrader-Frechette, it would be possible to read her text as a well-documented *condemnation* of advocacy in the strongest sense, as she records case after case of corporate advocacy bent upon “orchestrating ignorance, ignoring consent” (2002, ch.2). Yet it is itself also a work of advocacy in a positive sense: informed, eloquent, caring and fully engaged with matters of fact as they inform and animate matters of concern and vice versa; a work that makes a strongly reasoned case for deliberative democracy and intelligent activism (Young 2001). It shows, unequivocally, why advocacy has been subject to the condemnation I have been discussing, as it was enlisted to discredit Marcia Angell, and is enlisted by public relations firms in the USA, “using selective facts and emotional appeals...to deny pollution problems... [or when] they cannot be denied... to show either that pollution produces compensating benefits, or that it cannot be stopped” (Shrader-Frechette 2002, 64).

But it also shows, unequivocally, why advocacy may be required to make knowledge possible, and why knowledge that satisfies the highest epistemic standards and can withstand the most rigorous scrutiny is essential, if informed, justice-committed advocacy is to attain its ends. Nor, again, are these questions epistemological alone: they are as ethical as they are epistemological. Most urgently, I believe, they are also political and ontological: *ontological* in that they silently but insistently pose the question “who do we think we are?”¹⁵

Although there are no easy answers, this is the most urgent question for putatively “first world” thinkers and activists, now. Thus Shrader-Frechette asks:

What ought citizens do to protect their rights [to know]? Instead of condemning all private interests—interests that are essential to economic prosperity—citizens ought to . . . use the tools of deliberative democracy to educate themselves and others, to help prevent conflicts of interest, and to ensure that government regulators and oversight agencies behave as they should. (2002, 74)

Nonetheless, private-interest science, in her view, is “neither scientific nor ethical” (75), where these terms are to be understood both descriptively and normatively.

¹⁵ I engage more fully with this question in “Ecological Subjectivities, Responsibilities, and Agency” (Forthcoming a), and in “Who Do We Think We Are?” (Forthcoming b).

Advocacy and Objectivity: Concluding Thoughts

In social epistemology, where I situate my reading of the disputes about Marcia Angell's testimony and of Shrader-Frechette's analyses, and especially in *feminist* social epistemology, large overarching knowledge claims tend, more frequently than in the positivistic epistemic tradition, to begin from or draw upon specific, precisely individuated and carefully narrated "real-life" examples to establish or illuminate their position.

A contrast is with punctiform one-liners and such contrived examples beloved of empiricist epistemologists as knowing that the cup is on the table, or knowing the opening times of the bank: empirical "simples" which can be paradigmatically and unequivocally true or false. Yet for all its promise, the practice of drawing on elaborated examples brings with it another set of challenges, centered again around the prospect of laying inquiry open to charges of "particularism," thereby minimizing its significance and exemplary reach. Such charges are more rarely warranted than the condemnation suggests, but they need to be taken seriously.

More complex in the current epistemic imaginary is the alleged propensity of story-telling— narrative— to slide into the anecdotal, the fictional as contrasted with the (hard) factual; the incidental as contrasted with the necessary, universal. Thus, for orthodox theories of knowledge, and *a fortiori* for moral knowledge, specifically situated narrative approaches tend to invite distrust; to be judged deeply flawed, epistemologically.

Addressing such contentions with reference to moral knowledge, Cheryl Misak (2008, 616-617) writes of a

feeling among some moral theorists that inquiry into what is right and wrong must be a rational or pure inquiry in which subjective experience takes a backseat . . . [indeed, that] moral experience is so contestable that it makes no sense to think of ethical deliberation as being a rational enterprise or to think that there is truth and objectivity in ethics.¹⁶

Social epistemology loosens such strictures with the space it opens for addressing the epistemic significance of testimony and trust, and indeed for drawing on more fully narrated examples to illustrate their implications than formal epistemology has deemed appropriate, but the shift is gradual.

Yet it is from the detail of the narrative accounts that introduce her scientific examples that Shrader-Frechette's statistical data claim a level of lay

¹⁶ Misak (2008, 617) observes: "Medicine and health policy now resolutely take themselves to be 'evidence based'... they have turned to a narrow conception of evidence epitomized by randomized control trials.... The dominant feeling is that the bad old days of subjectivity are gone and the new day of objectivity, enabled by EBM (evidence-based medicine) has dawned."

accessibility they might otherwise not have achieved. Stories can bring damaged people and their suffering into contact with the practices of other knowers and activists: through narrative they perform an advocacy function, inviting readers to *care*, showing them why, in this specific situation, it matters, yet ensuring that “this situation” cannot be dismissed as an isolated instance.

So for example, Shrader-Frechette’s book opens with the story of Emily Pearson, a child in a neighbourhood east of Chicago, who developed brain cancer at the age of three and died when she was seven (2002, 3ff.). She traces patterns of childhood cancer through the first chapter, moving back and forth through demographic analyses and stories of the effects of Emily’s dying and of other deaths, in a particularly polluted environment near the Ferro Chemical Plant. In the telling she maintains a delicate balance between narrative detail and statistical analysis, always to advance the advocacy project that motivates her inquiry but never losing sight of its materiality, and its particular poignancy. A different story introduces each chapter, grounding the accounts situationally, affectively, and corporeally; humanizing them, and championing a responsibility to know, and to *care*.

For many feminists and other Others (from an invisible white masculine norm) in the Anglo-American world, however, *care* is a persistently double-edged concept and practice. Its warm, feel-good aura which has tended to situate it alongside “the feminine” as a naturally nurturing modality contrasts with a darker side where women are confined as carers to enable the serious business of life to proceed, unencumbered by the onerous minutiae of domesticity involved in reproducing the work force; or where women are “cared for” in oppressive, paternalistic social structures and arrangements allegedly designed to protect them from the harsher realities of the world.

Implausibly, for positivist-empiricists and most practitioners of the sciences Shrader-Frechette draws on for the documentation she provides, a *bona fide* knower must approach her or his subject matter/object of inquiry dispassionately, openly, following where the evidence leads, regardless of the desirability or otherwise of the directions it takes or the conclusions to which it points: she or he should not *care*, even if the outcome is unpalatable. Yet Shrader-Frechette shows how even “properly” objective inquiry can fail to take into account some of the most urgent issues peculiar to certain specifically embodied and situated *subjectivities*, which call for intervention in the epistemic and ethical injustices consequent upon the routine invisibility of *these* vulnerable bodies in conclusions available to a non-scientific public, and indeed to many scientists.

My purpose is neither to critique nor to disagree with Shrader-Frechette’s position, but to work with it as a platform from which to engage further with questions about the place of care in knowledge, and about ignorance and/or responsible epistemic-scientific practice as they figure in feminist and other critical epistemology and moral-political theory; how they contribute to showing

that assumptions about the autonomy of knowledge, objectivity and epistemic agency, and the politics of knowing have to be re-thought when they start from situated, vulnerable lives rather than from misbegotten convictions about human and locational sameness, and universal pertinence. None of these thoughts are new in themselves, but they take on a new urgency when the language of care moves into evaluations of knowledge production and circulation, to perform a fundamentally constitutive epistemic function, even if the caring involved cannot fit easily into the one-on-one interpersonal framework on which, for example, Carole Gilligan's (1983) and Nel Noddings's (1984) work on care in the 1980s tended to rely.

In the public imagination, as I have shown in my discussion of the challenge Dr. Marcia Angell faced, advocacy practices are routinely charged with egregious epistemological violations: with a failure of objectivity where vested interests override the detachment on which such starkly conceived objectivity depends; with blatant abuses of power and of the integrity of inquiry; with initiating a pernicious slide into relativism. But grouping advocacy practices together as practices that violate standards of truth and responsibility damages the possibility of engaging in the informed, knowledgeable advocacy that is commonly, and appropriately, integral to the kind of inclusive democratic activism Iris Marion Young was beginning to articulate in her final writings where, for example, she contends: "An appropriate conception of democratic communication should reject ... [the] opposition between reason and emotion... emotional and figurative expression are important tools of reasonable persuasion and judgment" (2000, 39; 2001).¹⁷ The apparent urgency of Vrinda Dalmiya's (2002) question, "Why should a knower care?" confirms how entrenched is the presumption of detachment, remoteness, consequent upon a normative and prescriptive separation of reason from affect, and derived from a conviction that affect sullies reason but with no counter assumption that reason could, *intra-actively* (again borrowing from Karen Barad), inform affect and make it wise.

Elsewhere I have proposed that knowing other people could serve as a model of knowledge more amenable to articulating the requirements of responsible inquiry than knowing the medium-sized material objects,¹⁸ which are the focus of standard empirical inquiry (knowing that the cat is on the mat, for example). In revisiting these thoughts, my intention is not to follow Dalmiya in seeing her question as applicable primarily to knowing other people in dyadic

¹⁷ Shrader-Frechette looks to Iris Marion Young's (2000, 2001) work on deliberative democracy for the conceptual apparatus that informs the ethical implications of her analysis.

¹⁸ See, e.g., *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, especially ch. 2, "Second Persons."

one-on-one relationships, but to read it more broadly within the framework I have sketched.

Such a project might start by recognizing a transformative potential that is consistently thwarted in adhering to an imperative that drives scientific and more secular knowledge toward law-like conclusions and grand generalizations, aggregating particulars and blocking possibilities of knowing them in the specificities of their effects and *meanings*, and indeed intra-actions, which vary from place to place, and which matter. In *Ecological Thinking* and elsewhere, I have discussed such a process as it informs Rachel Carson's scientific practice. Acknowledging that the matters of fact Shrader-Frechette documents are just as significantly matters of concern, and that these concerns go to the very roots of who and what we are as social-political human beings, makes care a vital component of such inquiry.

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LORRAINE CODE is a Distinguished Research Professor Emerita in Philosophy at York University in Toronto Canada, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. She is the author of *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987), *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (1991), and *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on (Gendered) Locations* (1995). In *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (2006) she develops an "ecological naturalism," which looks to ecological science where Quineans look to cognitive science, as a place—literal and metaphorical—where knowledge is "naturally" made. She is currently working on issues of gendered subjectivity as they bear on testimony, ignorance, and vulnerability, with particular reference to climate change scepticism. This research is funded by a research grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The project's title is "Manufactured Uncertainty" and Epistemic Responsibility: Implications for Climate-Change Skepticism."