

Believing Ancient Women: An Introduction and Feminist Epistemological Field Guide

As suggested by the title *Believing Ancient Women*, this volume takes recent global movements to address inequities in credibility as its impetus. For instance, studies have found that in US law courts women expert witnesses who are cross-examined are perceived as ‘less confident, trustworthy, likeable, believable, and credible’ than their male counterparts.¹ In healthcare settings, women typically report more pain than men but receive less treatment.² Deficits in perceived credibility also routinely endanger maternal and foetal health; the US CDC’s ‘HEAR HER’ campaign, the organisation’s response to high maternal mortality rates, urges ‘partners, friends, family, co-workers, and providers – anyone who supports pregnant and postpartum women – to really listen when she tells you something does not feel right.’³ This credibility deficit is especially visible in cases of sexual violence. Police officers in both the US and UK routinely overestimate the frequency of false rape allegations.⁴ Similar attitudes pervade media coverage and societal opinion. As demonstrated by the #MeToo and #BelieveWomen movements, it can take scores of women coming forward with similar accounts for their claims to be taken seriously.⁵

Feminist epistemologists have pointed to the credibility deficit as a particularly clear instance of how epistemic concepts – which are often treated by academics as highly steadfast notions, beyond the pale of social and political interference – are in fact shaped by systems of domination and subordination.⁶ Credibility is, however, only one among many epistemic concepts that are sensitive to power relations. As such, the case studies included in this volume address a variety of epistemic concepts from Greco-Roman antiquity and its reception. All use feminist epistemological theories to demonstrate how the epistemic notions are impacted by social and political identities and their intersections. To succinctly illustrate the spirit of this project, we begin with two cases not analysed

¹ Larson and Brodsky 2010.

² Lloyd, Paganini, and Brinke 2020. Non-white patients have also been shown to receive inadequate pain intervention: see Pletcher, Kertesz, Kohn, and Gonzales 2008.

³ Barfield 2022.

⁴ Tuerkheimer 2017; for UK, see McMillan 2018.

⁵ On the epistemic significance of the #Metoo movement, see Freedman 2020.

⁶ On credibility, see Fricker 2007 and Medina 2013.

elsewhere in the volume. These cases, though admittedly too brief to do justice to the identities and epistemic views they express, nevertheless serve to motivate this project. Each demonstrates how exploring the intricate ways that systems of power infiltrate the epistemic realm promises to uncover rich and fertile ground for future scholarship about the classical world and its reception.

Ischomachus's wife: In the discussion of household roles in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Socrates inquires about how Ischomachus's wife was educated. What did she know from her upbringing and what did her husband have to teach her? Ischomachus's reply addresses his wife's epistemic standing: 'And what knowledge (ἐπισταμένην) could she have had, Socrates, when I received her? She was not quite fifteen when she came to me, and before that time she was under constant supervision, seeing, hearing, and speaking as little as possible (ὅπως ὡς ἐλάχιστα μὲν ὄψοιτο, ἐλάχιστα δ' ἀκούσοιτο, ἐλάχιστα δ' ἔροιτο, 7.5–6).'⁷ Save for a basic knowledge of weaving and a docile temperament, he claims, she came to him largely *without* knowledge, a *tabula rasa* upon which her husband inscribes her wifely duties. What is especially noteworthy is how Ischomachus's wife's subordination extends to her epistemic life (at least as reported by her husband); she learned what she learned, knows what she knows and believes what she believes as governed by the highly restrictive gender norms of 4th-century Athens. Her lack of knowledge, experience, and confidence – held up as an ideal by the men discussing her – are all symptoms of the way in which her society exerts control over women, reinforcing and perpetuating male domination. But the education of Ischomachus's wife does not stop there. Ischomachus eventually entrusts her with the education of an enslaved woman; it will be a pleasure, he claims, to pass on her domestic knowledge, to make the enslaved woman who was originally ignorant (ἀνεπιστήμονα) into someone knowledgeable (ἐπιστήμονα), and in so doing, double the enslaved woman's worth (7.41). He also promises her the pleasure of rewarding those enslaved people she finds particularly docile and helpful (σώφρονάς τε καὶ ὠφελίμους) and of punishing (κολάσαι) any enslaved person who reveals themselves to be trouble (πονηρός). In this way, Ischomachus invites his wife to enjoy some of the 'perks' of the patriarchal system, provided that she continues to increase the value of his

⁷ Translations are our own unless otherwise noted.

property. His ‘generosity’ is eventually rewarded by his wife’s adoption of a man’s style of thinking (ἀνδρικήν τὴν διάνοιαν), a quality praised as particularly impressive (10.1). Ischomachus’s wife, who came to him a blank slate in her youth, is now fully transformed into an agent of epistemic domination herself; not only has she had the lessons of her oppressors inscribed upon her, she now inscribes them upon others.

A concept familiar to feminist epistemological theory, namely ‘epistemologies of ignorance’, helps us understand Ischomachus’s wife as both *victim* and *perpetrator* of epistemic domination. Whereas traditional epistemology has largely concentrated on the production of knowledge, assuming that ignorance is simply a lack thereof, feminist epistemologists argue that ignorance is often much more complex, the result of social and political forces which sustain and perpetuate collective unawareness of liberatory ways of thinking.⁸ Philosopher José Medina, whose project concerns contemporary white supremacy, argues that ‘collective ignorance may not be of one’s choosing,’ still ‘[o]ne’s participation in the collective bodies of ignorance one has inherited becomes *active*, because one acts on it and fails to act against it, whether one knows it or not, and whether one wills it or not.’⁹ In this way, Ischomachus’s wife, despite clearly inheriting her belief system from her oppressors (first her parents and then her husband) nevertheless becomes an *active* agent in perpetuating the enslaved/free hierarchy within her household. Still, Medina writes: ‘different agents have different *kinds* and *degrees* of responsibility with respect to particular injustices depending on their (quoting Young) “*position* within the structural processes” that produce those injustices.’¹⁰ In this way, Ischomachus’s wife’s epistemic responsibility might be of a different kind and degree than that of Ischomachus. This is not to excuse her as an active agent, but merely to suggest that she likely fails to recognise or resist the systems of dominance in which she participates in part because elite male Athenians maintain the collective ignorance of women of her class. The methods by which they do so are on display in Xenophon’s dialogue, where a group of elite men openly discusses Ischomachus’s methods for

⁸ See, for example, Sullivan and Tuana 2007; Medina 2012, Maguire 2015, and Fricker 2016, Fricker and Jenkins 2017, and Tanesini 2020.

⁹ Medina 2012.

¹⁰ Medina 2013: 160 quoting Young 2006: 126.

instilling in her the values of the patriarchy. Once again, the purpose of recognizing that Ischomachus's wife's ignorance is maintained by her oppressors is not to excuse her as active participant in grotesque institutions like slavery, but to show that she has less control over her ignorance than her oppressors. A central tenet of Medina's project is that paying this kind of fine-grained attention to the sources of ignorance will be necessary for dismantling the systems which produce it.

Vibia Perpetua: At another end of antiquity, Vibia Perpetua (c. 182–203 CE), an African woman living in Roman Carthage, wrote a surviving prose account of the time she spent in a Roman prison that numbers among the very few extant women-authored ancient texts. In the short portion of the text generally attributed to her hand (sections 3–10),¹¹ Perpetua recounts a series of visions she experienced in the days leading up to her martyrdom. These are full of vivid, sensual language, which communicate her heightened physical, bodily experiences (for example, 'I saw a ladder,' *video scalam*, 4.4; 'I stepped on [the snake's] head, *calcaui illi caput*, 4.7; 'I chewed the bit of cheese,' *buccellam ... manducavi*, 4.9). Yet it turns out that Perpetua is giving far more than a report of her own, first-hand, subjective religious experience; she also claims authoritative, God-given knowledge with which to interpret these visions and their meanings for the past, present, and future. We see this in the fact that she uses first person forms of verbs of knowing to bracket the descriptions of her visions – she employs first person forms of *cognoscō* twice, of *sciō* three times and of *intellego* five times. In the first instance, at her brother's request, Perpetua agrees to ask God for a vision on the grounds that she knows she can speak with him: 'and I, because I knew (*sciebam*) that I communicated with God...promised him I would do so' (4.2). After describing the experience of the vision, she marks the end of her description and the beginning of her interpretation with a second claim to know: 'we understood (*intelleximus*) that there was going to be a martyrdom' (4.10). In similar fashion, she marks the beginning and ending of her second vision of her late brother Dinocrates with epistemic claims, saying both that she knows (*cognovi*) she is capable of praying on the boy's behalf (7.8) and later, that she understands (*intellexi*) that her prayer-vision was successful (8.4). Finally, after recounting her third and final vision in which

¹¹ See Gold 2013 and 2018.

she becomes male and fights a gladiator amidst a throng of cheering supporters, she returns to a more sobering style, this time doubling down on her identity as a knower: ‘and I understood that I was going to fight against the devil, not wild animals; but I knew that victory would be mine,’ *et intellexi me non ad bestias, sed contra diabolum esse pugnaturam; sed sciebam mihi esse victoriam* ().¹² In short, the spectators of her execution may see animals (*bestias*), but Perpetua claims there is something more sinister lurking beyond the physical bodies of these creatures. Likewise, the spectators may see Perpetua die in gruesome fashion, but she glosses this apparent loss as a real victory. By closing her short account in this way, Perpetua correctly foresees the vast potential for future misunderstandings that martyrdom entails and works to wrest control of the narrative of her coming death through her authoritative epistemic claims.

Feminist epistemologists like the philosopher Lorraine Code have written about stereotypical associations of women with experience and sensation. Code introduces a case where both doctors and nurses, the former mainly men and the latter mainly women, were asked to testify about a contentious malpractice case: the doctors were asked questions about what they knew whereas the nurses were asked about what they had experienced. Rather than being treated as authoritative, knowledgeable and generally capable of assessing a situation objectively, women are commonly treated as able only to report what they themselves have subjectively experienced. And yet, Code continues, ‘experience in our society is considered second-class as compared to knowledge.’¹³ The association of women with their own subjective experiences, bodily sensations, and emotions dates back to antiquity (as Chelsea Bowden [Chapter 15] discusses in this volume). Feminist historians of philosophy have attributed the stereotypes of male, disembodied, objective reason and female, embodied, subjective experience back to Plato and Aristotle.¹⁴ Interestingly, however, in Perpetua’s writing, we find a subtle reappropriation and inversion of these stereotypes. She routinely uses her experiential and sensuous visions to bolster her claims to authority. Furthermore, her authority is not over the merely subjective or experiential

¹² This is the penultimate sentence of her narrative; she closes by asking a witness of her coming martyrdom to record it as they see fit.

¹³ Code 1991: 222.

¹⁴ Lloyd 1984. See also Jaggar 1989: 151-52.

domain; her visions give her access to matters of objective fact (for instance, that she will be executed and not pardoned). In this way, Perpetua reappropriates her sensuous nature as a mark of her spiritual authority, embracing the stereotype of the embodied female experiencer and dissolving the boundaries between so-called 'subjective' and 'objective' claims to know.

Though a great deal more could be said about how social and political forces intersect with epistemic concepts in both Ischomachus's wife and Vibia Perpetua's prison diary, we have included these brief sketches to illustrate a simple truth well-recognized in the field of feminist epistemology: the epistemic realm is not immune to systems of power. In fact, the central tenet of all feminist epistemologies, if indeed there is one, is that social identities – gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, citizenship, nationality, language, religion, age, ability, and so forth – matter to knowledge formation and the study of epistemic concepts. This view runs counter to a long philosophical and scholarly tradition of taking such concepts, especially standards like knowledge, justification, and truth, to occupy an impartial realm separate from prejudice and other social distortions. Feminist epistemologists have demonstrated that this is not so; knowledge, justification, truth, evidence, rationality, objectivity, authority, expertise, opinion, perception and so forth – are routinely shaped by social and political injustices. What someone knows or is perceived as knowing, who the authorities on a subject are, how credible an account is, what evidence seems pertinent, and what conclusions are most rational are all sensitive to systems of domination and oppression.

A major reason that feminist epistemological theory has grown so rapidly in theoretical circles is that it promises to expose injustices at the root of our systems of thought. Feminist epistemologists often challenge seemingly unassailable facts about the life of the mind, many of which have been perpetuated as such to systematically exclude women, people of colour, and other oppressed groups from academic and other dominant spheres of discourse (science, media, politics and so on). Feminist epistemological theory promises to break new ground in which before-unheard, ignored and suppressed groups might find space to express their unique epistemic stories. This volume aims to employ the central insights of feminist epistemological theory in the study of the classical world to the

same end, in order to investigate how epistemic concepts from Greco-Roman antiquity and its reception intersect with social identities, past and present, and in so doing reseed the field of classics with oppressed, ignored and otherwise systematically marginalized voices.

A Feminist Epistemological Field Guide

‘Epistemology,’ as it has traditionally been understood, refers to the study of knowledge. In philosophical circles, however, the term has been stretched well beyond its original meaning to denote the study of a broader range of concepts related to cognitive success and failure, including knowledge, understanding, wisdom, belief, disbelief, assent, dissent, opinion, ignorance and the varying conditions that produce these states, such as justification, evidence, proof, objectivity, testimony, intellectual ability, intellectual virtues and vices, reason, rationality, and irrationality, among others. Feminist epistemology is a growing field within many academic disciplines, and feminist epistemologies are unified, if at all,¹⁵ by the view that social and political identities – especially sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, status, nationality and their intersections – are significant in the formation and study of epistemic concepts.¹⁶

Because a major goal of this volume is to inspire and guide future feminist epistemological interpretations of ancient texts and cultures, the remainder of the introduction briefly outlines some of the more common feminist epistemological interventions. A few notes are first in order. It is regrettable that we primarily engage with English-language theories. This is a major limitation, as there are robust non-English language epistemic traditions which might be brought fruitfully to bear on classical sources. In addition, the taxonomy of views offered here is regrettably incomplete. Many of the seminal feminist epistemological works are from the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s.¹⁷ While the

¹⁵ See Dorothy Smith 1997, a response to Hekman 1997.

¹⁶ Feminist epistemology might be better cast as a species of social epistemology, which addresses, among other things, questions about the social and political nature of knowledge production, knowledge networks, and collective knowers. Many of the seminal texts in feminist epistemology, especially standpoint theory (to be discussed below) are by sociologists and political theorists. See, for example, Dorothy Smith 1974; Hartsock 1983; and Patricia Hill Collins 1990.

¹⁷ See Poole 2021 for some mediaeval and early modern precedents.

field is over 30 years old, it has grown exponentially in the past ten years. Google Scholar indexes over 27,000 results for ‘feminist epistemology’, with more than 15,000 from after 2010.¹⁸ Since a complete survey of this literature is beyond the scope of this (or perhaps any) volume, our aim is instead to provide some key points of entry into this vast and growing literature.¹⁹ Furthermore, isolating particular feminist epistemological approaches, as we do below, is highly artificial; most of the views that we introduce as distinct interpretive stances have significant theoretical overlap. Nevertheless, for clarity, we adopt this artifice. Finally, we envision this volume in dialogue with recent trends in scholarship about women in antiquity, in particular, the substantial literature on narrative authority and its relationship to gender,²⁰ the culture of sexual violence and victim-blaming in antiquity,²¹ women and religious authority,²² and the gendering of knowledge about bodies.²³ In each of the following sections of the introduction, however, we focus almost entirely on precedent works in classical studies which make use of feminist epistemology; largely for reasons of space, we have left out a great deal of classical scholarship that, though it is generally consistent with feminist epistemological theorising, does not engage with it directly. The individual chapters that follow do a much better job of situating their particular projects within the relevant classical scholarship.

I. Feminist standpoint theory

A common thread within feminist epistemologies is known as ‘standpoint theory.’ Standpoint theory, sometimes talked about in the language of ‘situated’ or ‘differentiated’ knowers, contends that an

¹⁸ ‘Google Scholar: Feminist Epistemology.’ August 18, 2022.

https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=%22feminist+epistemology%22&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C26&as_ylo=&as_yhi=

¹⁹ Other useful field guides include Grasswick 2018, Anderson 2020, and Poole 2021. For a good entryway into the most recent literature, see the PhilPapers index of the topic: <https://philpapers.org/browse/feminist-epistemology>.

²⁰ See especially Fulkerson 2005, Spentzou 2003, Kahane 2005, Wyke 1994, Greene 1998, and Stevenson 2005.

²¹ See especially Richlin 1992 and 2017, Rabinowitz 1993 and 2011, Deacy & Pierce 1997, Witzke 2016, Omitowoju 2002, and James 1997, 2003 and 2016

²² See especially Kraemer 2010, Strong 2016, Staples 1998, and Dillon 2003.

²³ See especially Dean-Jones 1994, King 2002, Flemming 2000, Richlin 2014.

epistemic agent's identities have significance for the formation, use and study of epistemic concepts. More specifically, different 'standpoints,' especially those acquired by non-dominant or marginalised knowers, can result in privileged access to certain facts or values unavailable to the dominant culture. Standpoint theory has roots in the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois, who introduces the idea of a 'double-consciousness' between his own lived experiences as black man striving for self-actualisation and an awareness of the racist constructs through which his oppressors perpetually view him.²⁴ Karl Marx is another predecessor to standpoint theory, in that he thinks the proletariat can break out of their 'false consciousness,' or the set of beliefs about their economic, social and political lives as perpetuated by a capitalist and aristocratic society. By developing 'class consciousness,' by coming to be aware of these beliefs and their causes, the underclass can begin to transform society. In these ways, standpoint theory – though not yet feminist – is born out of early racial and economic justice movements.

Distinctively *feminist* standpoint theory first arises in the women's movements of 1970s and 80s.²⁵ Seminal works include the sociologist Dorothy Smith's (1974) development of 'the standpoint of women' in her critique of male-dominated sociological practices²⁶ and political scientist Nancy Hartsock's Marxist feminist project, which argues that women, because they have historically been tasked with childrearing and caregiving, occupy a 'privileged vantage point on male supremacy.'²⁷ Because of the nature of caregiving work – especially the relational, concrete, bodily and continuous nature of their labour – Hartsock argues that caregivers are in a unique epistemic position to detect the inadequacies of male-dominated, capitalist societies. The sociologist Patricia Hill Collins is another seminal thinker in this movement. She expands the field of feminist standpoint theory by considering the unique positionality of Black women and draws attention to the way white feminisms have failed to take Black women's lived experience into account.²⁸ Collins argues that 'African-American women

²⁴ Du Bois 1903. See also Nardal 1932 [2002] and Anzaldúa 2015 and 1987.

²⁵ Poole 2021.

²⁶ Smith 1974.

²⁷ Hartsock 1983: 284.

²⁸ Collins 1986 and 1990. See Haley 1993 for an early application of Collins work in the field of Classics.

have not only developed a distinctive black women's standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge.²⁹ The white, male, Eurocentric knowledge validation processes, by which scholarly institutions grant and credential epistemic authorities, work to suppress and alienate Black women's knowledge. Collins outlines an alternative knowledge validation process, which is evident in the epistemic norms – norms like the importance of experience, dialogue, expressiveness, emotion, empathy and accountability in assessing a speaker's commitment to a claim – that have arisen out of necessity, and often survival, within communities of Black women.³⁰ More recently, standpoint theory has grown to include queer,³¹ trans,³² non-Western,³³ indigenous,³⁴ and disability³⁵ centred approaches, among others.³⁶ While some of these interventions might seem to fall beyond the scope of feminist standpoint theory, we believe that a truly intersectional account will attend to the ways that different social locations overlap, interact and compound in oppressive societies.³⁷ For this reason, we find these approaches essential to realising the aims of this volume.

Feminist standpoint theory, then, is shorthand for a number of different theses.³⁸ First, as we have seen, standpoint theorists accept that there is *situated knowledge*, that a person's social location has epistemic significance. Feminist philosophers of science have been careful, however, to point out that accepting the existence of situated knowledge does not entail that there is no hope for universal

²⁹ Collins 1990: 202.

³⁰ See also Mills 1988.

³¹ See Hall 2017. Bailey 2021 gives an overview of standpoint theory as it applies to queer studies.

³² Transgender 'autoethnographies' are perhaps a more familiar term in sociological research. See, for example, Nordmarken 2014. De Vries 2015 discusses the standpoint of transgender people of color. For a discussion of the value of first-personal transgender theorizing [arguably a defense of the value of transgender standpoint(s)], especially in discussions of the metaphysics of gender, see Bettcher 2018.

³³ See, for example, Narayan 1989.

³⁴ See, for example, Nakata 2007: 213–16.

³⁵ See, for example, Garland-Thomson 2016 and Silvers 2013.

³⁶ See, for example, Martinez 1996 and Hurtado 2003 on forming a Chicana Feminist Epistemological Standpoint. Medina-Minton 2019 considers age, especially whether there is a unique child's standpoint.

³⁷ Crenshaw 1991. See also Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier's 1977 *Combahee River Collective Statement*.

³⁸ The first three of these theses come directly from Toole 2019.

truth or transcendent understanding; instead, situated knowledge entails only that there is no singular objective, detached, unemotional, value-neutral standpoint, or what has sometimes been called ‘the view from nowhere,’ from which one can investigate the world.³⁹ Second, as has already been hinted at, feminist standpoint theorists tend to posit some variety of *privileged access*, or the view that there are facts and values available only from nondominant social locations.⁴⁰ A common example is of sex-specific bodily processes; for instance, womb-bearing persons who have gestated babies will have privileged access to the pain and discomfort of gestation. Third, feminist standpoint theorists, following the notion of consciousness-raising in both Du Bois and Marx, believe that standpoints are largely acquired or earned. Philosopher Briana Toole writes: ‘one is not epistemically privileged in virtue of occupying a particular social location. Rather, epistemic privilege may be achieved through the process of consciousness-raising.’⁴¹ Occupying a standpoint is not the result of mere social difference, but also of an *earned awareness*. Fourth, many feminist standpoint theorists, following the philosopher Sandra Harding,⁴² also accept the *strong objectivity* thesis, or the view that marginalised or outsider standpoints are, due to their privileged access, uniquely poised to offer critiques of dominant narratives, ultimately resulting in a more accurate, and less distorted, belief system (hence the name ‘strong objectivity’).⁴³ For example, the strong objectivity thesis would hold that the above mentioned gestator’s standpoint is of greater epistemic value than those who have not had the experience of gestation when it comes to critiquing, developing and implementing more just childbirth practices.

In some ways, applying feminist standpoint theory to classical studies is new in name only. *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, the revolutionary volume of feminist interpretations edited by Nancy

³⁹ Haraway 1991 discusses ‘the view from nowhere.’ Haslanger 1995 addresses the failure of the subjective/objective distinction. For a good summary of the literature on objectivity, a great deal of which overlaps with feminist philosophy of science, see Anderson 2020.

⁴⁰ See Tuana 1993: 283.

⁴¹ Toole 2019: 600.

⁴² Harding 1992, 1995, and 2015.

⁴³ Harding is in dialogue with a view often termed ‘feminist empiricism.’ Feminist empiricists hold that scientific systems, despite their claims to objectivity, produce socially-situated results. See, for example, Longino 1990, Nelson 1990, and Anderson 1995. For an overview of this literature and its relationship to standpoint theory see Intemann 2010.

Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin, is bound together by the view that the identity of the interpreter matters.⁴⁴ For example, Shelley Haley's contribution to that volume uses her experiences as a Black feminist to rethink Cleopatra's treatment by the field of classics; and Amy Richlin's chapter grounds her pessimistic literary stance in the violence she witnessed friends who are women endure in contemporary society.⁴⁵ That volume as a whole has a similar aim to this one, to expose how institutions in the field have systematically excluded diverse viewpoints. As Rabinowitz puts it: '[w]hat is construed as the avoidance of any special interests in reality reflects one special interest group's attempt to maintain its authority and control.'⁴⁶ She goes on to suggest that what has been touted as the objective philological stance, a stance that claims to avoid theoretical musings in favour of dispassionate linguistic information, is in fact a method of institutional control, maintained to mute and exclude outsider voices. While feminist standpoint theory appears by name in this work only a handful of times, it is nevertheless clearly present as a guiding principle, both in its methodology and its aims.

There have, of course, been many other publications that take identity as an important maker of meaning with regard to the discipline of classics and the Greco-Roman world.⁴⁷ The myth of the objective philologist, however, remains nearly-ubiquitous in every subfield of the discipline, a point to which Dan-el Padilla Peralta returns as he reflects on a racist assault against him and his identity as a knower at the 2019 meeting of the Society of Classical Studies.⁴⁸ Citing some central insights from Feminist Standpoint Theory, Peralta denounces the discomfort white classical scholars, even the most well-intentioned ones, experience at the idea that his black identity is a scholarly asset:

⁴⁴ Rabinowitz and Richlin 1993.

⁴⁵ Haley 1993: 23-43 and Richlin 1993: 714-18.

⁴⁶ Rabinowitz 1993: 29.

⁴⁷ Chae 2018 and Umachandran 2020 explore ways the discipline of classics is hostile to people of colour. See also Fulkerson 2005, Spentzou 2003, Kahane 2005, Wyke 1994, Greene 1998, Stevenson 2005, Dean-Jones 1994, King 2002, Flemming 2000, Richlin 2014, Kraemer 2010, Strong 2016, Staples 1998, and Dillon 2003, among others.

⁴⁸ As part of a 2019 SCS panel entitled 'The Future of Classics,' Peralta presented a paper about the field's complicity in systemic injustices facing the publication process for women and people of colour. During the question and answer session that followed his talk, independent scholar Mary Frances Williams publicly suggested that he obtained his faculty position at Princeton University because he was black. For more on the incident, see Poser 2021.

The most maddening aspect of [the] episode was in some respects the most predictable. Seeing as no one in that room or in the conference corridors afterwards rallied to the defence of blackness as a cornerstone of my merit, I will now have to repeat an argument that will be familiar to critical race scholars of higher education but that is barely legible to the denizens of #classicssowhite. I should have been hired because I was black: because my Afro-Latinity is the rock-solid foundation upon which the edifice of what I have accomplished and everything I hope to accomplish rests; because my black body's vulnerability challenges and chastises the universalizing pretensions of colour-blind classics; because my black being-in-the-world makes it possible for me to ask new and different questions within the field, to inhabit new and different approaches to answering them, and to forge alliances with other scholars past and present whose black being-in-the-world has cleared the way for my leap into the breach.⁴⁹

Peralta here expresses the strength of his unique epistemic standpoint. Part of his argument is that identity as a Black man strengthens his scholarly perspective; he has earned awareness and privileged access to questions and answers unavailable to White scholars. The epistemic resources accessible to classicists as a whole are, therefore, expanded and strengthened by his inclusion, and the inclusion of other marginalised voices, in the field.

In this volume, feminist standpoint theory is deployed first – following Rabinowitz, Haley, Richlin and Peralta – as a first-personal interpretive method. In keeping with her earlier work, **Haley (Chapter 10)** employs a black feminist standpoint and critical race feminist theory to connect an account of violence against a woman of African descent in the *Acts of Peter* to the racialised-gendered treatments of Vergil's Dido and Livy's Sophoniba. Haley proposes that the concept of racialised gender helps to locate the origins of such anti-blackness and misogynoir in the Augustan age, thereby revealing the epistemological framework which enabled similar attitudes to flourish in later periods. A second, and somewhat novel, way that the volume employs feminist standpoint theory is as a critical apparatus for re-examining marginalised perspectives represented, imagined or distorted by ancient sources. For example, **Weiberg (Chapter 2)** argues that the complex nexus of desire and embodiment presented in Sappho's poems is best understood as expressing a queer standpoint that resists gender binaries. **Gilbert (Chapter 3)** demonstrates that the chorus of Oceanids in *Prometheus Bound* occupies a de-centred standpoint with respect to other Greek gods that allows them to play an important,

⁴⁹ Peralta 2019.

underappreciated role in the knowledge production of the play. **Nally (Chapter 5)** argues that, in Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima argues from the standpoint of a caregiver to reveal something about *eros* that the dominant group, the elite Athenian paederasts, fail to consider: the best form of *eros* manifests, not merely as a desire to pursue and possesses a beloved but also as the impulse to perpetuate and nurture what one loves. **Witzke (Chapter 8)**, expanding on Richlin's ground-breaking book on the topic, explores how the outsider standpoints of Plautus and Terence, both non-citizens lacking wealth and privilege, gives them privileged epistemic access to critiques of the customs, morality and injustices of the citizen elite.⁵⁰ **Bowden (Chapter 15)** considers, among other things, how Stoic epistemology is inconsistent with feminist epistemological conceptions of situated knowledge and privileged access. **Damer (Chapter 16)** reflects on her experiences reading with the Martha Marchina Group during the coronavirus pandemic and identifies in Marchina's poems a maternal/caregiving standpoint from which she challenges the worldviews of both her classical predecessors and contemporary scientific advances.

ii. Anti-Atomism

A second major strand of feminist epistemic theorizing is its critique of a powerful and engrained orthodoxy about epistemic agency, known as 'atomism' or the 'atomistic knower.' This orthodoxy, which we have already addressed partially above, has been perpetuated by Euro-Anglo-American academic traditions and treats knowers as 'atomistic' in the sense that knowledge is stereotypically identified with disembodied, objective reasoners, rather than their embodied, subjective experiences.⁵¹ The thought is that knowledge results from sufficient rationality, no matter an epistemic agent's social location. To this extent atomism treats knowers as entirely fungible; anyone with properly functioning rational capacities and access to the same evidence can develop the same insights.⁵² Feminist standpoint

⁵⁰ Richlin 2017.

⁵¹ However, interventions in trans theory reveal that this lived, bodily experience is itself subject to social and historical construction, such that lived, bodily experiences are not always uncomplicatedly available to the experiencer. See, for example, Salamon 2010.

⁵² Grasswick 2004, Kukla 2006, and Toole 2019.

theorists reject this outright, since it appears that some facts and values are only available via the first-hand experience of marginalized knowers.⁵³

But there are further dimensions of this atomistic orthodoxy against which feminist epistemologists have argued. For example, many have borrowed a critique from social epistemology, a field sometimes taken to be the genus of which feminist epistemology is a species,⁵⁴ that knowledge is rarely if ever produced by a single individual. Instead, knowledge production can often be a long, collective endeavour. Linda Martín Alcoff has suggested that were we to take this tenet of social epistemology seriously, we would be less obsessed with notions of justification, warrant and evidence – the means and methods of atomistic, individualist epistemology – and would instead turn to an altogether different epistemic agenda:

[W]e would need a more complicated understanding of the epistemic interrelationships of a knowing community; we would want to understand the relation between modes of social organisation and the types of beliefs that appear reasonable; and we would need to explore the influence of the political relationship between individuals on their epistemic relationships.⁵⁵

Taking this suggestion seriously would completely transform our epistemic (and academic) lives; rather than maintaining the myth that individuals can single-handedly justify their own narrow claims to know, a myth that scholars and teachers routinely perpetuate, we would instead begin to evaluate knowledge claims as relations among knowers and their communities.⁵⁶

Another deeply problematic facet of atomism is its insistence that objective knowledge is produced by dispassionate reasoners. As we have already seen, taking objectivity as an epistemic goal is problematic for excluding valuable subjective standpoints; but the demand for objectivity also works to discredit emotional and sensuous modes of investigation and expression, which are historically associated with women and other non-dominant groups. The Euro-Anglo-American tradition privileges the epistemic norms associated with elite white male institutions: the ideal investigator

⁵³ Code 1991.

⁵⁴ Grasswick and Webb 2002 and Grasswick 2018.

⁵⁵ Alcoff 2008: 709. See also Goldberg 2011 for epistemic labour.

⁵⁶ For an overview of key topics in social epistemology see Goldman and Whitcomb 2011, Schmidt 2017, and Fricker, Graham, Henderson, and Pedersen, 2019.

occupies the ‘view from nowhere,’ being not only objective and fungible, but also unemotional, disembodied, impersonal, public-facing, and therefore fully rational.⁵⁷ By contrast, women and other marginalised people are stereotyped by epistemic institutions as subjective, emotional, embodied, personal, private-facing, and generally irrational.⁵⁸ Feminist philosophers of science have identified these stereotypes as a chief source of discrimination against women in science and other academic institutions. It is commonly held that scientific investigations (which other academic disciplines routinely mimic) should be as value-neutral and undistorted as possible; thus, investigators who are thought incapable of maintaining these standards have been routinely excluded. Susan Bordo traces the philosophical origins of these stereotypes to the dualist (mind-body) theories of antiquity and the early modern period.⁵⁹ Alison Jaggar locates their origins in the positivist mandate that ‘truly scientific knowledge must be capable of intersubjective verification.’⁶⁰ Jaggar further contends that atomism’s rejection of emotion hurts us all; since emotions can and should play an important role in careful observation and evaluation, the myth of objectivity deprives knowledge communities of important observational and evaluative tools.

Whether or not the dichotomies perpetuated by atomism are ever true is a different matter. It is one thing to reject atomism for perpetuating the myth of objective investigation that alienates women and other marginalised groups historically thought to violate this ideal; it is another thing, however, to contest the existence of gendered or otherwise identity-differentiated modes of thought or expression. Take for example, so-called *feminine* cognitive styles, or the view that certain ways of thinking or abilities might be gendered feminine.⁶¹ This is not an essentialist view, as it is consistent with these

⁵⁷ See Mignolo 2010, Castro-Gómez 2007 for the assumption that there could be a detached, neutral observer, absent geopolitical or racial ties. See also Lugones 2010 for discussion of this view in decolonial feminist theory.

⁵⁸ Collins 1990 and Alcoff 2008 write about white male epistemic institutions. Bordo 1987, Jaggar 1989, Rooney 1991, Code 1991, Shotwell 2011 identify gendered (and, though to a lesser extent, racialized) epistemic stereotypes within these institutions.

⁵⁹ Bordo 1987.

⁶⁰ Jaggar 1989: 152.

⁶¹ This terminology comes from Anderson 2020. See also Gilligan 1982, Noddings 1988, and Simson 2005.

supposed gendered differences being entirely socially constructed.⁶² For example, Elizabeth Anderson writes that:

[I]t is seen as masculine to make one's point by means of argument, feminine to make one's point by means of narrative. Argument is commonly cast as an adversarial mode of discourse, in which one side claims vindication by vanquishing the opposition. Such pursuit of dominance follows the competitive pattern of male gender roles in combat, athletics, and business. Narrative is a seductive mode of discourse, persuading by an enticing invitation to take up the perspective of the narrator, which excites one's imagination and feeling. Its operations are more like love than war, and thereby follows a mode of persuasion thought more suitable for women.⁶³

Other proposed feminine cognitive differences include relational, as opposed to rule-based, reasoning,⁶⁴ teaching tools that grow out of caregiving, like modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation,⁶⁵ and particularistic/contextual, as opposed to universal/abstract, reasoning.⁶⁶ Whether any of these proposals hold is very much up for debate; yet the general approach of looking at whether and how identity affects cognitive differences is highly consistent with the anti-atomistic critique and with the general aims of this volume.⁶⁷

Again, there are scholarly precedents within classical studies that address the atomistic epistemological stance. Rabinowitz's critique of the objective philological stance is very much a critique of the atomistic knower; the careful philologist's constant retreat to purely linguistic analysis as a mode of knowing that exists in the abstract logical sphere, apart from lived or identifying experiences, is a way of systematically devaluing and rejecting those experiences.⁶⁸ Moreover, in a later publication, Rabinowitz makes the case for breaking free of the masculinist assumed scholarly stance, one that

⁶² As we see it, the existence of feminine cognitive styles is entirely consistent with the social construction of sex and gender.

⁶³ Anderson 2020.

⁶⁴ Gilligan 1982.

⁶⁵ Noddings 1988.

⁶⁶ Simson 2005.

⁶⁷ Though we do not address other identities here; ethnicity, race, and nationality have also been studied as markers of cognitive style difference. See, for example, Shade 1982, Tomes 2008, and Zmigrod 2018.

⁶⁸ Rabinowitz 2001.

pretends to disembodied universality (again, the atomistic knower), in favour of adopting one's own, socially-positioned, and therefore more fully transparent, way of analysing literary texts. As it stands, she continues, much of classical scholarship is written from a particular social location, without acknowledging it:

Much classical scholarship has in fact been interested, but it has not acknowledged that partisanship. For instance, in the debate of the status of women in antiquity, men made comparisons to the treatment of women in their own era and geographical location; thus in defending Greece, Kitto [1925] and Gomme [1951] were defending themselves. Similarly, political interests arguably shaped scholarship about slavery in antiquity. What about the relationship between Platonic studies and nineteenth-century male homoeroticism? [Dowling (1994)]. Feminist theory and postmodern theory in general hold that to acknowledge one's position and the consequences of that position for one's reading or interpretation is responsible behaviour, not self-indulgence.

Rabinowitz's point is that the pretence to atomism in classical scholarship, the pretence to distanced and therefore objective scholarship, is utter artifice; and like most artifice, it aims to obscure its own failings. By contrast, making space for scholarship in the personal voice, making room for lived experiences in the field of classics and beyond, though not a way of ensuring objectivity, is at the very least a more honest way of reading and interpreting.

Contributors in this volume advance the anti-atomistic critique in a variety of ways. For example, following Rabinowitz's call to the personal voice, a number of our contributors make use of autobiography in their interpretive projects: See especially **Haley (Chapter 10)** and **Damer (Chapter 17)**. Other contributions address anti-atomistic themes within ancient sources. For example, **Weiberg (Chapter 2)** posits Sapphic sensuality as a type of 'knowing otherwise' that defies static expressions of identity binaries; **Gilbert (Chapter 3)** claims the chorus of Oceanids in *Prometheus Bound* exhibits feminine cognitive styles especially in their gentle but persistent questioning of Prometheus, even when they disagree with him; and **Damer (Chapter 16)**, who argues that Martha Marchina's Latin poetry rejects classical themes and scientific advances in favour of a metro-centric, caregiver and experiential perspective. **McHardy (Chapter 4)**, though somewhat indirectly, advances the social epistemological critique of atomism by exploring communal knowledge processes, like gossip and hearsay, by which marginalised groups are able to influence public opinion and, ultimately, infiltrate

the Athenian justice system. **Nally (Chapter 5)** addresses Plato's somatophobic attitudes in the *Symposium* and argues that, while some have seen this as indicative of his commitment to atomism – to an identity-less knower – Diotima's speech nevertheless casts her gender as epistemically significant. In particular, her epistemic and ethical conclusions are sensitive to the experiences of *eros* on reproducing women. **Bowden (Chapter 15)** argues against recent trends in feminist interpretations of Stoicism, that Stoic epistemology is largely inconsistent with feminist anti-atomism. Because the only significant features of the Stoic epistemic agent are certain fungible capacities (that is, the capacities for *phantasia* and *katalepsis*), social identities like gender, race and class appear epistemically irrelevant. The ideal Stoic epistemic agent also pursues knowledge autonomously, rather than through group knowledge-production practices.

iii. Epistemic injustice

A third major thread running through feminist epistemological theorising is the study of epistemic injustice. Philosopher Miranda Fricker introduces the term 'epistemic injustice' to refer to forms of discrimination that impact someone's 'capacity as a knower.'⁶⁹ She defines two varieties: the first is *testimonial injustice* which 'occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word'. Fricker gives the now well-worn example of Tom Robinson in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*. In the novel, Tom is a Black man falsely accused of sexual assault by a White woman in 1930s Alabama. Although he testifies to his own innocence and the physical evidence supports thinking that he could not possibly have committed the crime, Tom is nevertheless convicted by the all-white jury. This is a literary example of testimonial injustice, since the jurors form their opinions based on bigoted stereotypes rather than the evidence before them. The philosopher José Medina identifies this fictional account as a straightforward case in which the 'social imaginary' creates a credibility deficit in a marginalised group, while affording an unjust excess of authority to a privileged group.⁷⁰ The philosopher Kristie Dotson furthers Fricker's categorisation of testimonial injustice by detailing two common forms of 'testimonial silencing': 'testimonial quieting' whereby a speaker is

⁶⁹ Fricker 2007: 1.

⁷⁰ Medina 2013.

denied authority as a knower and ‘testimonial smothering’ whereby a speaker’s account is shaped by coercive social forces.⁷¹

The second variety of epistemic injustice identified by Fricker is *hermeneutical injustice*, which occurs when ‘someone has a significant area of their social experience obscured from understanding owing to prejudicial flaws in shared resources for social interpretation.’⁷² Fricker gives as an example the administrative assistant Carmita Wood’s experience of being sexually harassed at work, despite living in an age where there was not yet a term for (or even a clear conception of) sexual harassment. Wood and others were at a loss to describe what exactly had happened to them. Fricker writes, ‘Carmita Wood suffered (among other things) an acute cognitive disadvantage from a gap in the collective hermeneutical resource.’ This disadvantage was not, however, the result of mere bad luck, not like an as-yet undiscovered medical diagnosis. Instead, carefully maintained systems of power and oppression deterred Wood and women like her from speaking out about their shared experiences. It was not until they gathered together that the phrase ‘sexual harassment’ was coined, defined and eventually prosecuted. Of course, hermeneutical injustice occurs not only where there are voids in the available conceptual resources, but also when the conceptual resources are so badly *distorted* so as to hinder their application.⁷³ The philosopher Katherine Jenkins has, for example, identified such distortions in her work on the epistemology of rape, where victims often fail to identify their experiences as ‘rape’ given false narratives about how rapes are perpetuated (that is, by strangers, under overwhelming physical force, and so on).⁷⁴

Fricker’s labelling of these forms of epistemic injustice, while exceedingly influential, should not occlude the fact that thinkers preceding her by decades (or centuries) had described similar phenomena. The feminist theorist Vivian May points out that black intellectuals like Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper discussed how Black women were routinely subject to epistemic silencing and testimonial discreditation by White men.⁷⁵ Similarly, Collins, who is clearly addressing testimonial

⁷¹ Dotson 2011.

⁷² Fricker 2007: 147-75.

⁷³ See Mason 2020.

⁷⁴ Jenkins 2017.

⁷⁵ May 2014: 97-8.

injustice, albeit without the label, writes that ‘power relations shape who is believed and why.’⁷⁶ What is more, others have pointed out that Fricker’s categories are not exhaustive of all forms of epistemic injustice. Dotson argues for a third variety not addressed in Fricker’s two-part framework, *contributory injustice*, which occurs when dominant groups privilege one set of hermeneutical resources over others.⁷⁷ Dotson argues that marginalised groups often develop alternate bodies of shared hermeneutical resources that are systematically excluded from dominant narratives. One suffers a contributory injustice when a dominant/powerful person refuses to take these alternative resources seriously. Relatedly, the philosopher Louise Rexzy P. Agra has written about the *epistemic paralysis* that strikes marginally-situated knowers when dominant knowledge systems exclude them, thereby incapacitating that group’s epistemic abilities within dominant discourse.⁷⁸

Another category of epistemic injustice that has been widely discussed arises out of eurocentrism and coloniser epistemologies: for example, the literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies *epistemic violence* in the ways that colonising regimes actively silence and destroy the knowledge systems of colonised peoples.⁷⁹ Similarly, the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos addresses *epistemicide*, or the intentional destruction of indigenous knowledge communities, especially in the Global South by Western domination.⁸⁰ Furthermore, feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that ‘Western feminist discourse’ has routinely appropriated the knowledge systems of ‘third world women’⁸¹ and the sociologist Anibal Quijano writes about the way that Eurocentric colonisation dominates ‘knowledge and the production of knowledge under its hegemony.’⁸² These are arguably a form of what philosopher Emmalon Davis dubs ‘epistemic appropriation,’ which occurs when ‘epistemic resources developed within the margins gain uptake with dominant audiences,’

⁷⁶ Collins 1990: 270.

⁷⁷ Dotson 2012 argues that Fricker’s view, by contrasting testimonial and hermeneutical injustices with epistemic luck, is itself guilty of contributory injustice.

⁷⁸ Agra 2020.

⁷⁹ Spivak 1988.

⁸⁰ Santos 2016.

⁸¹ Mohanty 1984. The term ‘third world women’ is her term, not ours.

⁸² Quijano 2000.

despite being ‘overtly detached from the marginalised knowers responsible for their production.’⁸³ A number of theorists have also identified the related concept of ‘epistemic exploitation’ that occurs when the onus of explaining and educating a dominant culture about injustices suffered by an oppressed group falls to members of that group.⁸⁴

A further form of epistemic injustice of enormous relevance to this volume is one that we struggled to find clearly identified in the feminist epistemological literature. It will, however, be immediately familiar to anyone working in an historical field: women and other marginalised groups were and are, for much of Euro-Anglo-American history, systematically underrepresented, especially as authors/creator but also in some respect as subjects, in the dominant, widely-disseminated, and ‘canonical’ corpus (that is, literature, philosophy, history, and art, among others). The products of their intellectual and creative toil have been ignored, suppressed, or otherwise excluded from the elite-sanctioned catalogue of ‘great works.’ This is the case during many periods of Greco-Roman antiquity. In much of the surviving literature, there is an utter paucity of first-personal evidence about marginalised groups; what we do have is filtered through elite, male authors. In other historical periods, however, larger numbers of sources exist but have been relegated to the fringes, as, for example, is the case with women writing in the medieval, Byzantine and early modern periods.⁸⁵ For these periods, it has taken revisions of what was considered important, authoritative, and/or canonical to elevate these sources and bring them into wider circulation (although much work remains to be done outside of the academy to, for example, put the name recognition of Marie de France or Anna Komnene on par with that of Geoffrey Chaucer). Another important aspect of this type of epistemic injustice is that women and other marginalised groups have not only been excluded from the canonical bodies of evidence but from what are considered the ‘masterpieces’ or ‘works of genius.’⁸⁶ Whether these exclusions are a new

⁸³ Davis 2018 gives as examples of this phenomenon the appropriation of Harriet Taylor Mill’s ideas in John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, now believed to be largely authored by Taylor Mill, and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s appropriation and caricaturization of Sojourner Truth’s enslavement in ‘Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl’. See also Podosky 2021.

⁸⁴ Berenstain 2016, Davis 2016, Spivak 1999, Lorde 2007 [1984], and Holroyd and Puddifoot 2020.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Waithe 1997-2001 and Gertz 2012.

⁸⁶ There is contemporary research showing that women are still stereotypically disassociated with so-called ‘brilliance fields’. See, for example, Bernstein 2015.

form of epistemic injustice is up for debate: they might be thought of as merely the wide-scale result of many testimonial and contributory injustices, something like mega-contributory, mega-testimonial silencing. Furthermore, many of these exclusions are likely related in important ways to epistemicide, though not all are the (direct) result of colonialist forces. However, given the centrality of this type of exclusion to our work and to classical scholarship more generally, we think these phenomena need a clearer label: we dub these cases forms of *evidentiary injustice*. Evidentiary injustice occurs when the intellectual products and first-personal accounts of marginalised groups are suppressed or excluded enmasse from the received bodies of evidence, or relegated to the fringes, due to a perceived lack of importance or relevance.

Since, as we have seen, epistemic injustice comes in many, disparate forms – forms which are being more clearly identified all the time – it will be best to adopt something like Kidd, Medina, and Polhaus Jr's fuller account of epistemic injustice, as including all:

forms of unfair treatment that relate to issues of knowledge, understanding, and participation in communicative practices. These issues include a wide range of topics concerning wrongful treatment and unjust structures in meaning-making and knowledge producing practices, such as the following: exclusion and silencing; invisibility and inaudibility (or distorted presence or representation); having one's meanings or contributions systematically distorted, misheard, or misrepresented; having diminished status or standing in communicative practices; unfair differentials in authority and/or epistemic agency; being unfairly distrusted; receiving no or minimal uptake; being co-opted or instrumentalized; being marginalised as a result of dysfunctional dynamics; etc.⁸⁷

This definition has the benefit of being expansive rather than exhaustive, allowing for the future identification of as-yet illuminated epistemic injustices that remain occluded by our current hermeneutical limits (limits which are no doubt the product of dominance and subordination within contemporary feminist and social epistemological thought).

In addition to identifying different varieties of epistemic injustice, feminist epistemologists have also addressed its roots and causes. One common view is that epistemic injustices, along with entire systems of oppression, arise from *active ignorance*. Studies of what are sometimes called 'epistemologies of ignorance' examine how powerful groups build and maintain their epistemic norms

⁸⁷ Kidd, Medina, and Polhaus Jr 2017.

to intentionally obscure information that challenges their social and political ideology. As philosopher Marilyn Frye, who is writing about white supremacy in the women's movement, puts it:

Ignorance is not something simple: it is not a simple lack, absence or emptiness, and it is not a passive state. Ignorance of this sort – the determined ignorance most white Americans have of American Indian tribes and clans, the ostrichlike ignorance most white Americans have of the histories of Asian peoples in this country, the impoverishing ignorance most white Americans have of black language – ignorance of these sorts is a complex result of many acts and many negligences. To begin to appreciate this one need only hear the active verb to 'ignore' in the word 'ignorance'. Our ignorance is perpetuated for us in many ways and we have many ways of perpetuating it for ourselves.⁸⁸

Frye proposes that ignorance is not passive. It is a choice that dominant groups have whether to acknowledge the experiences of those less powerful (as is the case of the exclusion of women of colour by white feminists).⁸⁹ Choosing to stay unenlightened, is what the philosopher Gaile Pohlhaus Jr labels 'wilful hermeneutical ignorance,'⁹⁰ which, much like Fricker's hermeneutical injustice and Dotson's contributory injustice occurs when 'dominantly situated knowers refuse to acknowledge epistemic tools developed from the experienced world of those situated marginally.'⁹¹

While some forms of ignorance appear to be a matter of *choosing* to remain in the dark, others appear more psychologically complicated (though no less *active*). For example, Olson and Gillman explore ignorance in 'unconscious habits that inform our mental schemas, our social interactions, and our physicality.'⁹² Others have examined forms of ignorance that are perpetuated by entire epistemic systems (though no less composed of active individuals).⁹³ For example, the philosopher Nancy Tuana details the practices that perpetuate mass ignorance surrounding the female orgasm in the scientific literature.⁹⁴ The queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick examines how ignorance is 'harnessed, licensed, and regulated on a mass scale for striking enforcements, perhaps especially around sexuality.'⁹⁵ These

⁸⁸ Frye 1983.

⁸⁹ See also Ortega 2006 and Bailey 2008.

⁹⁰ Pohlhaus Jr. 2012.

⁹¹ Dotson 2012.

⁹² Olson and Gillman 2013.

⁹³ See Pitts 2020 on the role of individual self-knowledge in structural patterns of ignorance.

⁹⁴ Tuana 2004. See also Tuana 2006 on the women's health movement as an epistemic awakening.

⁹⁵ Sedgwick 1990: 5.

mass, carefully-maintained systems of ignorance, Sedgwick continues, are on display in the US legal system's treatment of rape (ignorance of a victim's lack of consent is a potentially exonerating plea), AIDS patients (it was initially legal for employers to fire people with AIDS so long as they claimed ignorance of the evidence that AIDS is unlikely to be transmitted in the workplace), and antisodomy laws (as Justice Harry Blackmun wrote in dissent of the Supreme Court upholding these laws: 'Only the most wilful blindness could obscure the fact that sexual intimacy is a sensitive, key relationship of human existence, central to family life, community welfare, and the development of human personality').⁹⁶ Furthermore, this mass, maintained ignorance appears to perpetuate the very sort of binary thinking – homo/hetero, private/public, natural/artificial, among others – that Sedgwick (and future generations of queer and trans theorists) aim to dismantle, as they create false consciousness and force false choices about our desires, sexuality, gender, relationships, bodies and so forth.⁹⁷ The philosopher Charles Mills has written about intentionality in systems of mass ignorance. What he dubs 'white ignorance' occurs both intentionally, as when those with straightforward racist motivations maintain false beliefs about non-white groups and less intentionally, as when there is mass 'social suppression of the pertinent knowledge.'⁹⁸

Medina has further identified the roots of active ignorance in 'epistemic vices' like epistemic arrogance, laziness, and closed mindedness.⁹⁹ Medina's work, like many in this sphere, is not merely descriptive but ameliorative: he advocates for a form of 'epistemic resistance' through the habituation of epistemic virtues, like epistemic humility, curiosity/diligence, and open-mindedness. Furthermore, he argues that we have an epistemic duty to overcome active ignorance via 'beneficial epistemic friction in interactions with significantly different epistemic others.'¹⁰⁰ If we were to take this suggestion seriously, then knowledge production would take place through a kind of 'guerilla pluralism' in which our epistemic differences are in constant combat, eventually resolving in epistemic equilibrium. In

⁹⁶ *Bowers v. Hardwick* 478 U.S. 186 (1986) (Blackmun dissenting opinion).

⁹⁷ See for example, Fricker and Jenkins 2017 who address ignorance as it contributes to hermeneutical injustices in trans experiences.

⁹⁸ Mills 2007: 21 and 2015. See also Tanesini 2020.

⁹⁹ Medina 2013. For epistemic vice see also Tanesini 2018 and 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Medina 2013: 27-55.

short, rather than avoiding, minimising or rejecting views that are different from our own, Medina envisions open and, if need be, jarring exposure to these views.

Classicists have marshalled the literature on epistemic injustice to address injustices within the field of classics itself. For instance, Yung In Chae draws on Fricker to explore her own disciplinary experiences and those of other people of colour in the field, and Mathura Umachandran explores methods for ameliorating systematic epistemic injustices within the discipline.¹⁰¹ Classicists have also employed the framework of epistemic injustice to unveil biases inherent to extant literary and material culture from the ancient world. Serena Witzke uses the framework of epistemic injustice to dismantle long standing harmful pedagogical practices and encourage students to get beyond the ‘dominant narrative’ of ancient texts in order to ‘see also the marginal perspectives that are otherwise suppressed.’¹⁰² Drawing on Fricker and de Sousa Santos, Dan-el Padilla Peralta employs ideas of ‘epistemic injustice’ and ‘epistemicide,’ in particular, to explore how ancient indigenous knowledge and culture was appropriated, disrupted, fragmented and deliberately destroyed by various Roman colonisation projects. In contending that ‘Roman imperialism was responsible for the extermination of contingent, context-dependent, and multi-generational ways of knowing that were tied directly and inalienably to the people and places responsible for their transmission and evolution,’ Peralta suggests a new way of seeing Romanisation, not as a benign melting pot of cultural difference but as a kaleidoscope of oppressions rife with episodic epistemic violences.¹⁰³

This volume addresses many different varieties of epistemic injustice that arise in ancient sources and their reception. Some of these contributions also make use of closely-related theories in the epistemology of rape, epistemologies of ignorance, and epistemic resistance. **McHardy (Chapter 4)** identifies various epistemic injustices perpetrated against a metic woman named Zobia in Demosthenes’ *Against Aristogeiton* (25.56-8). She draws an analogy between Zobia’s decision to speak out about the epistemic violence she has suffered, which places her at considerable risk, and the epistemic significance of the #MeToo movement. McHardy further locates in Zobia’s account a

¹⁰¹ Chae 2018 and Umachandran 2022.

¹⁰² Witzke 2022.

¹⁰³ Peralta 2020.

powerful form of epistemic resistance, akin to Bailey's 'knowing resistant anger,'¹⁰⁴ by which she is able, through unofficial channels outside the Athenian justice system, especially gossip and public opinion, to find 'a voice that effectively pushes back against the weight of imposed silences.' **Kim (Chapter 7)** addresses the monumental presence of Cynisca, a dynastic woman who sponsored athletic events, within the context of Hellenistic dynastic exceptionalism, which, Kim argues, obscures her historical achievements and raises questions about the epistemological gaps facing archival and archeological work. Kim also compares Cynisca's monuments to the ways in which women are excluded/included in contemporary statuary and identifies in these comparanda epistemic injustices, like epistemicide, related to the nature of the construction of evidence. **Witzke (Chapter 8)** explores the testimonial injustice and epistemic silencing that citizen, non-citizen free, and enslaved women face regarding rapes and pregnancies in Plautus's *Truculentus* and Terence's *Hecyra*. Furthermore, Witzke employs Pohlhaus Jr's concept of wilful hermeneutic injustice to argue that the citizen men of Roman Comedy deliberately misinterpret the actions and language of non-citizen sex laborers. **Milnor (Chapter 9)** addresses evidentiary injustice in the 'incidental' women depicted in the letters of Cicero. In particular, Milnor argues that these women are part of 'a deeper anti-history, which Cicero both represents and resists in his correspondence.' Milnor further makes use of epistemologies of ignorance to consider why Cicero's letters contain only the information that they do, thereby illuminating the dynamics of history and historiography within his correspondence. **Haley (Chapter 10)** uses the concept of racialised gender to examine the hermeneutical structures which enabled the portrayal of a Black woman as demonic in the *Acts of Peter*. She locates the roots of these hermeneutical structures in the racialised gender of Vergil's Dido and Livy's Sophoniba. Moreover, in her interpretation of these characters, Haley engages with notions of epistemic injustice, especially epistemic silencing and epistemic violence. **Bowen (Chapter 11)** analyses differing accounts of Leucothoe's rape in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to reveal the hermeneutical resources that rendered rape intelligible/unintelligible in ancient Rome. Bowen addresses how Roman law and false cultural narratives about rape would have reinforced and perpetuated rape myths at the time and argues that Ovid's narrative draws attention,

¹⁰⁴ Bailey 2018.

though not unproblematically, to this site of epistemic injustice. In this way, Bowen demonstrates how epistemic injustices frequently play into epistemologies of rape and sexual violence. In a similar vein, **Freas (Chapter 12)** argues that Eumolpus, the narrator of the *Pergamene Boy* in Petronius's *Satyricon*, commits contributory injustice by casting his sexual relationship with the boy in terms of Athenian pederasty and thereby concealing how his actions fit the Roman legal definition of *stuprum*. **Teets (Chapter 13)** employs the framework of hermeneutical injustice to show that Josephus presents the Hasmonean women, Alexandra and Mariamme, as conscious of the fact that they are victims of domestic abuse by Herod though they lack the hermeneutical resources to describe their experience. Teets engages in a form of scholarly epistemic resistance: naming their abuse and correcting an injustice that remained obscured for millenia. Similarly, **Hines (Chapter 15)** explores the ways that medieval literature and theology constructed ignorance of queer sex and desire. By examining several medieval receptions of the Iphis myth, she argues that in some cases this led to a silencing of queer women's desire as *amor impossibilis* and in others a queer resistance to that silence. **Murray (Chapter 11)**. **Strong (Chapter 17)** analyses popular movies and television shows depicting the rape of enslaved persons by Roman elites. She addresses how the hermeneutical structures that governed sexual violence in the ancient world often differ radically from their portrayal in the mass media and further highlights a variety of undiagnosed epistemic injustice perpetuated against enslaved victims on screen. Obscuring these acts *as* rapes – a common theme in the contemporary epistemology of rape – is part of the rose-coloured fantasy surrounding Roman sexual violence against enslaved persons.

Methodological notes

As mentioned at the outset, as a volume primarily interested in exploring the relevance of a broad theoretical spectrum to an entire field, this book is not intended to be comprehensive. It should be read, instead, as a series of case studies that apply different feminist epistemological theories to particular ancient texts (literary or material) in order to elucidate both how ancient epistemic systems exclude and pathologise the experiences of ancient women and other marginalised groups and how the

institutional biases of modern epistemic systems have resulted in contemporary distortions in the way scholars approach ancient Greece and Rome.

The book is organised chronologically, and, as such, retains some of the old disciplinary binaries of Greek vs. Roman, prose vs. poetry, and literary vs. material. Even so, we have attempted to demonstrate the broad interpretive possibilities of the feminist epistemological toolkit by including chapters on a breadth of topics including poetry, oratory, drama, philosophy, law, material culture, and various receptions.¹⁰⁵ Although considerations of space require that some genres and subdisciplines are not fully represented in the volume, and its scope is geographically limited to sources from Greece and Rome, each contribution illustrates the ways in which feminist epistemic theory illuminates systems of dominance in the ancient world, its reception, and the disciplinary formation of classics. Furthermore, as a volume that recognises and seeks to highlight the value of authorial positionality to knowledge systems, we feel that a number of important identities are un- or under-represented. The volume does not treat certain marginalised identities at all (for example, it does not treat disability); others are only mentioned cursorily (as is the case with age). In addition, we do not engage thoroughly with non-english language receptions or with scholarship outside the euro-anglo-american academic tradition. The vast majority of our contributors teach at North American colleges and universities. These are major shortcomings of a volume which focuses on, among other things, epistemic injustice, as these exclusions are likely to perpetuate value judgments about who and what matters in the field of classical studies. This volume, by participating in academic discourse in ‘standard’ ways, by limiting its topics, geographic scope, and authorship, among other editorial choices, participates in and reinforces many of the hierarchies that feminist epistemologies intend to disrupt.¹⁰⁶

A thorny methodological question, importantly related to the disruption of unjust epistemic hierarchies, deserves mention here. Scholars addressing Greek and Roman sexuality, and pederasty in particular, must sometimes contend with whether to cite prominent scholarship by authors who have

¹⁰⁵ The book was originally planned to include a broader treatment of Roman prose authors, but in large part because of the exigent demands of the coronavirus pandemic on women in particular, certain planned contributions were not able to be completed in time for publication.

¹⁰⁶ Many of these shortcomings are reminiscent of Audre Lorde’s 2007 [1984] observations in her now famous essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.”

been convicted of crimes against minors.¹⁰⁷ This is a discipline-specific version of a larger ethical dilemma about whether to cite scholarship by authors who have committed grave injustices. While this volume does not address this larger question, its commitment to disrupting unjust knowledge production systems strongly supports the following methodology: because citation practices are a cornerstone of scholarly knowledge production, contributions in this volume either omit authors whose morally-impermissible behaviours are intellectually entwined with their scholarship or else discuss this entwinement. If an intentional omission has occurred, as with **Strong [Chapter 17]**, this omission is noted.

A final methodological note concerns authorial intention and anachronism. Some readers may find the use of such a markedly contemporary theoretical apparatus in the interpretation of classical sources worrisome. In anticipation of this, it is first worth pointing out that none of our contributions attribute feminist epistemological motives *to* ancient authors (though **Gilbert [Chapter 4]** and **Nally [Chapter 5]** consider such motives within the realm of possibility and **Bowden [Chapter 15]** considers but ultimately rejects such an interpretation). Instead, the vast majority deploy feminist epistemological theories as a critical apparatus for analysing and problematising ancient texts. Furthermore, it may be worth pointing readers toward the classicist Alison Sharrock's helpful discussion of the different possible aims of feminist interpretations.¹⁰⁸ First, a reading can be either *resisting* or *releasing*. A *resisting* reading 'identifies the chauvinist, sexist, or other ideology of the text but refuses to play along with it.' A *releasing* reading, on the other hand, 'opens up possibilities for women's [or other marginalised groups'] voices which exist in the text, but which have traditionally been downplayed or ignored by the critical establishment.' A reading can also be *optimistic* or *pessimistic* about authorial intention. A reading is *optimistic* 'when the author is regarded as 'sympathetic to women [or other marginalised groups]', and/or shown to be exposing fluidity of gender [or other identities] against the rigidity of... norms, in a way that looks remarkably modern.' A *pessimistic* reading, on the other hand, finds the author 'more compromised to his chauvinist social

¹⁰⁷ Johnson 2016; Scullin 2016 and Yarrow 2020 discuss some of the authors in question.

¹⁰⁸ Sharrock 2020: 35.

milieu.’¹⁰⁹ These different aims (especially the possibility of a releasing albeit pessimistic reading) create space for interpretations that, while being firmly grounded in textual evidence, also have little or nothing to do with what an author intended. They make space for the analysis of texts from positions radically different from the (largely) male elite authors who wrote them. As **Milnor (Chapter 9)** notices, historical texts often contain a great deal of ‘incidental’ information about women and other marginalised groups from which we can construct anti-histories. We wager that this is possible with most classical sources, both those that depict marginalised groups and those that do not; from the fringes and the recesses, from an author’s choices of whom and what to include, a great deal can be reconstructed. These methods licence interpreters to make observations, ask questions and deploy theoretical apparatuses like ours that an ancient author would not have thought (or, in some cases, would have thought repulsive) to make, ask or deploy. Finally, we think it worth pointing out that worries about authorial intention and anachronism can themselves be tools of the patriarchy. Yes, interpreters should be careful when making authorial attributions. However, requiring of an interpretation that it make only authorially-sanctioned claims, requiring interpreters to think solely in terms of what was *intended* by elite men who routinely excluded women, found the lives of enslaved persons beneath report, and maintained systems of mass ignorance by and about most, if not all, non-dominant groups is an edict that perpetuates and replicates such exclusions. Luckily, we have at our disposal conceptual resources, resources like feminist epistemology, with which to read well beyond what ancient authors intended, well beyond what they had the conceptual resources to imagine. To reject such resources as legitimate tools for scholarship is, therefore, to claim for ourselves the limited hermeneutical resources of deeply oppressive societies. Surely, we must do better.

Conclusions

¹⁰⁹ Sharrock’s taxonomy is related to but somewhat different from Richlin’s 1993: 743 ‘optimistic and pessimistic attitudes’. Richlin, whose topic is something like what feminists and other progressives can learn from the past, writes: ‘Optimists see, in the past, or in other cultures, good things to be emulated; pessimists see bad things that determine or elucidate our own ills.’ As such, Richlin’s optimism/pessimism appears closer to the releasing/resisting dimensions of Sharrock’s taxonomy.

As is fitting a broad collection of scholars and topics, this volume reaches no overarching conclusion. Nevertheless, the book as a whole has at least three unifying themes. First, it makes a sustained case for the usefulness of the feminist epistemological critical lens, a method that treats epistemic concepts – what is known, believed, thought true, understood, heard, considered evidence and so forth – as reflective of the biases, injustices and power relations of the society in which they are constructed.

Second, the volume as a whole advances our consideration of non-dominant standpoints in ancient texts and in the discipline of classics itself. On the one hand, feminist epistemological theorising lends itself handily to projects that look to authors, texts and evidence that has been underappreciated. It encourages us to look for marginalised resources, to care about the epistemic contributions of non-dominant groups, and to mine dominant sources for anti-narratives. But the feminist epistemological lens is not only useful for examining underappreciated evidence, or what is *there* albeit at the fringes. Feminist epistemological theories can also reveal what is *not there* (or less clearly there), so to speak, by shedding light on issues of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual identities, religion, ability, age, class, familial status and citizenship that would remain invisible otherwise.¹¹⁰ As Witzske has observed (elsewhere), feminist epistemologies have the power to transform just about any text, author, or source, literary or material, into fertile ground for conversations about epistemic dominance/oppression.¹¹¹ Understood in this way, this volume makes the case for what is sometimes referred to as ‘reading otherwise,’ a practice by which readers reimagine textual interpretation as an act of epistemological resistance, a practice for not only revealing the misshapen values of dominant narratives but for expanding what is worthy of our consideration to include more than what has been handed down to us. In a time where many scholars are rightly reconsidering how to treat and teach deeply chauvinistic, sexist, racist, and otherwise oppressive texts (and the institutions built in their image), reading otherwise is a powerful tool for reorienting the future of classical scholarship.

Third, and finally, this volume as a whole exposes a variety of long-standing and complicated forms of epistemic injustice. As such, it lays the groundwork for a richer, more dialectic conversation between modernity and ancient Greece and Rome. In antiquity we find many of the traditional

¹¹⁰ See Richlin 1993 on the ‘optimistic attitude.’

¹¹¹ Witzske 2022.

epistemic frameworks that continue to shape knowledge networks today, but also a variety of less appreciated epistemic norms, whose identification may have the power to disrupt and check epistemic injustices that continue to silence and injure in our contemporary world. Readers faced with the intricate, and sometimes strange or foreign, forms of epistemic injustice described herein will be forced to reckon with an uncomfortable fact: for most, the epistemic realm is (and has always been) far from a place of intellectual refuge, a bastion of unfairness, suppression and contempt. If knowledge is possible, then, it will require, perhaps above all else, attention to the ways that one's own worldview has been distorted by injustice.

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