Diversity Statement: Teaching

My commitment to diversity is guided by specific beliefs and practices. One key belief is that fostering diversity is not only morally but also epistemically obligatory. I am guided here by further idea, namely that marginalization can lead to epistemic privileges *and* deficits for different students. For example, marginalized students may be in the best position to understand, how unjust power differentials structure our social institutions, or to analyze concepts of class, gender, and race. However, they may also lack easy access to many of the tacit norms that structure academic knowledge production. Crucially, acknowledging these epistemic differences and actively working to overcome them can improve the learning outcomes for *all* students— there are good reasons to believe that identity diversity contributes to cognitive diversity,[1] which in turn improves collective deliberation, whether such deliberation is undertaken within the confines of the classroom or in democratic processes beyond the walls of the academy.[2]

How exactly can diversity be fostered in the classroom? At a big-picture level, I focus on treating all students as intellectual peers, each with potentially unique claims to knowledge, because I view this as a way of *making them* my intellectual peers. As Shannon Brick has argued,[3] educators should often extend more credibility to their students than is warranted by their actual knowledge within a domain. This involves taking an attitude of *hopeful trust* toward students, wherein we treat them as our intellectual peers precisely in virtue of their potential to become such. My finding is that students are more likely to engage seriously with course materials when they are taken seriously, no matter the contingencies of their background (and sometimes *precisely because* their lived experience has not included many experiences of being taken seriously as an intellectual peer).

Taking students seriously as interlocutors is also a matter of taking them seriously as human beings. I express this attitude through a pedagogy of *humane course design*. For example, difficulties in philosophical learning arise from different students' cognitive starting points; the difficulty of a philosophical text is always relative to the inquirer. Therefore, I have experimented with some practical policies. These include a recently piloted soft deadline policy, whereby students were only made to submit their course assignments by a terminal date late in the semester. This policy accommodates the studying practices of students from diverse walks of life, many of whom have serious extracurricular commitments to family or employers (though it is best implemented in smaller classes where one is less likely to be overburdened with many late submissions). I also always aim to assign take-home exams in lieu of in-person ones.

Another example is my practice of assigning, as far as I am able, readings that are freely available, so as to not alienate economically underprivileged students. This is another (often invisible) way of taking students seriously as inquirers. So far, I have upheld this policy in every course that I have taught (this does require some effort, of course, in terms of sifting through library subscriptions or scouring the internet for preprints).

As a final point, I wish to note that I envision the distinction between teaching statements and diversity statements to be somewhat artificial. Good pedagogy just *is* humane pedagogy, and humane pedagogy cannot be articulated independently of moral considerations. I believe that this is reflected in my syllabi and teaching.

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[1] See Brian Kim (2022), "Collective Virtue Epistemology and the Value of Identity Diversity", *Social Epistemology*. https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2022.2062066

[2] See Hélène Landemore's *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*, 2013.

[3] "Epistemic Neglect," Social Epistemology, 34:5, 490-500, 2020.

<u>Diversity Statement: Research</u>

Beyond pedagogical considerations, my research is also increasingly bound up with philosophical issues of diversity and inclusion. In my paper "Bots: Some Less-Considered Epistemic Problems", recently published in *Social Epistemology*, I draw attention to a unique way in which prejudice can lead agents to dismiss certain pieces of testimony on social media. In the cases at issue, agents assume that certain posts were likely produced by bots, and that the designers of these bots have certain identity characteristics (toward whom prejudices are directed). In the paper, my main example comes from Twitter in 2016, in which many users were persuaded that Russian operatives had designed massive swaths of deceptive bots to post misinformation about the USA federal election. Agents who were sufficiently prejudicial against these alleged Russian operatives would be more likely to dismiss any testimony that they took to be proliferated by Russian bots.

      Beyond my work on internet epistemology, my work on self-knowledge and first-person authority is also acquiring a greater focus on epistemic injustices that result from prejudice. In my paper "Self-Knowledge and Interpersonal Reasoning", forthcoming in *Dialectica*, I consider cases in which a speaker's self-attributions of mental states are doubted by interlocutors who harbor prejudicial attitudes against the speaker. These instances of testimonial dismissal might be viewed as threats to speakers' claims to self-knowledge, and this threat is hard to square with the common presumption that each of us has epistemically secure access to the contents of our own occurrent states of minds. I consider how to respond to these kinds of cases in the paper, and I elaborate further about the social-epistemic consequences of these kinds of cases in an unpublished manuscript titled "Authority as (Qualified) Indubitability".