

# The Ethics and Epistemology of Ignorance

PERITIA-CEPL WORKSHOP

When: 26-27 April

Where: UCD or Online



**PERITIA**  
Policy, Expertise and Trust



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870883.



## Ethics and Epistemology of Ignorance Workshop (Hybrid) April 26-27, 2022

### **Venue:**

Agnes Cuming Seminar Room, UCD School of Philosophy, 5th Floor,  
Newman Building, Belfield, Dublin 4

### **Co-organized and hosted by:**

Melanie Altanian, Maria Baghramian

Horizon 2020 Project, "Policy, Expertise, and Trust in Action – PERITIA"

UCD Centre for Ethics in Public Life



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## Day 1 - Tuesday, 26 April 2022

Time	Presentation	Chair
9.50 – 10.00	Welcome and Overview	Melanie Altanian Maria Baghramian
10.00 – 10.50	Katherine O'Donnell (University College Dublin) <b>Feminist Disagreements on Hermeneutical Injustice: Knowledge Acquisition vs. Knowledge Production</b>	Maria Baghramian
10.50 – 11.40	Carline Klijnman (University of Genoa / University College Dublin) <b>Deliberative Epistemic Democracy and Public Credibility Dysfunction</b>	Maria Baghramian
11.40 – 11.50	<b>Break 1</b>	
11.50 – 12.40	Clémence Saintemarie (University College Dublin) <b>The Meaning and Value of Metaphors of (In)Visibility for a Critical Theory of Social Ignorance</b>	Maria Baghramian
12.40 – 14.00	<b>Lunch Break</b>	
14.00 – 14.50	Melanie Altanian (University of Berne / University College Dublin) <b>Expert Ignorance and the Social Division of Cognitive Arrogance</b>	Danielle Petherbridge
14.50 – 15.40	Kelly Agra (University College Dublin) <b>'Philosophy as a site of Epistemic Paralysis': Philippine Colonial Miseducation, Gender Misrecognition, and Epistemology of Ignorance (Zoom)</b>	Danielle Petherbridge
15.40 – 15.50	<b>Break 2</b>	
15.50 – 16.40	Paul Giladi (Manchester Metropolitan University) <b>Ignorance and the Management of the Epistemic Economy</b>	Danielle Petherbridge

## Day 2 – Wednesday, 27 April 2022

9.50 – 10.00	Welcome and Overview	Melanie Altanian
10.00 – 10.50	Danielle Petherbridge (University College Dublin) <b>Contributory Injustice, Ignorance and the Exclusion of Indigenous Knowledges</b>	Clémence Saintemarie
10.50 – 11.40	Samuel Ferns (University College Dublin) <b>Critical Theory, Ignorance, and the Poetics of Epistemic Emancipation</b>	Melanie Altanian
11.40 – 11.50	<b>Break</b>	
11.50 – 12.40	Gerry Dunne (Marino Institute of Education / Trinity College Dublin) <b>Deliberate Ignorance and Epistemic Exploitation</b>	Melanie Altanian
<b>Close of workshop</b>		

### Speaker Abstracts & Short Bios

#### **Katherine O'Donnell, Feminist Disagreements on Hermeneutical Injustice: Knowledge Acquisition vs. Knowledge Production**

Miranda Fricker's conceptualisation of 'hermeneutical injustice', which is relatively briefly sketched in her book, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, has worried other feminist anti-racist epistemologists such as Linda Martín Alcoff, Nora Berenstain, Kristie Dotson, Rebecca Mason and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. Criticism has tended to focus on Fricker's argument that in the case of hermeneutical injustice, those who belong to the more socially privileged and culturally dominant group are also harmed by the ignorance that arises when the testimony of those who endure social oppression and cultural and economic disadvantage are not attended to properly. Fricker assumes that 'knowledge' is a good that is so necessarily precious to human flourishing that any diminishment in its rigour and sensitivity is a profound harm for all of us and that we all suffer an injustice if we fail to have adequate hermeneutical tools for interpreting how social oppression in particular is enacted. Yet, Fricker agrees with her critics that:

... hermeneutical gaps are typically *made* rather than found ... One group's marginalisation is typically motivated by the interests of another group whose purposes are served by the marginalisation. It is therefore in the nature of any marginalisation that ideology, and other kinds of privileged motivation, will be chief among its causes. Hermeneutical injustice, like testimonial injustice, is typically a face of oppression – it tends to preserve ignorance that serves the interest of the dominant groups.

'Epistemic Injustice and the Preservation of Ignorance', in R. Peels & M. Blaauw (eds.) *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 176.

However, curiously, Fricker continues to insist that ‘hermeneutical injustice is not necessarily a face of oppression.’ This paper proposes that the disagreement between Fricker and her critics might lie in the different conceptions of what constitutes knowledge. I argue that Fricker’s horizontal model of a shared social project of *knowledge acquisition* where facts are objectively external, cannot be readily reconciled to the ‘theory laden facts’ assumed by many feminist critiques of hierarchical (and often oppressive) *knowledge production*.

**Bio.** Katherine O’Donnell is Associate Professor in the History of Ideas, UCD School of Philosophy. Her most recent publications include *Ireland’s Magdalenes: A Campaign for Justice* (Bloomsbury, 2021) which she co-authored with Claire McGettrick, Maeve O’Rourke, James M. Smith and Mari Steed, her fellow colleagues in Justice for Magdalenes Research and also the co-edited collection, *Redress: Ireland’s Institutions and Transitional Justice* (UCD Press, 2022).

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### **Carline Klijnman, Deliberative Epistemic Democracy and Public Credibility Dysfunction**

*Deliberative* epistemic democrats hold that democratic decision-making is valuable due to its epistemic merit, in virtue of the egalitarian features of public deliberation. This epistemic value of democracy is typically understood instrumentally, as approximation of a procedure-independent standard of correctness or goodness. Over the last few decades, the way citizens obtain and consume information has changed drastically, the most prominent developments being the introduction of the internet and social media. This has led epistemic democrats to consider potential effects on the epistemic merits of democracy. This paper aims to give an analysis of how these developments have impacted the workings of public deliberation by employing analytical tools from social epistemology in general and the epistemology of testimony in particular. I argue that these developments thwart the possibility for epistemically healthy functioning public deliberation, in as far as they affect crucial mechanisms of testimonial trust. As a shared social epistemic practice, the functioning of political deliberation is largely dependent on the effective exchange and uptake of (expert-) testimony. In order to gain justified beliefs from (reliable) testimony, citizens need to be able to recognize good reasons for trusting someone’s say-so and/or be able to detect reasons for doubting the credibility of sources. In the current (online) epistemic environment, the conditions for successful knowledge transmission through testimony are under threat, risking what I call *public credibility dysfunction*. Briefly put, this identifies a state wherein citizens have become uncertain about which information sources to trust, or worse, end up making poor choices in this regard. As a result, the testimonial exchange of knowledge, that is so fundamental to the functioning of public discourse, collapses. The notion of public credibility dysfunction aids in our understanding of potential risk to instrumental epistemic democratic legitimacy. Additionally, it hints at potential implications for procedural legitimacy.

**Bio.** Carline Klijnman is currently pursuing a PhD degree at the University of Genoa with a scholarship from the Northwestern Italian Philosophy Consortium (FINO) in the ‘Ethics and Politics’ curriculum, after completing two M.A.s cum laude at Utrecht University (History and Philosophy). February-May 2022 she is conducting a research visit at UCD in association with the PERITIA project. Her research project analyses challenges of contemporary public discourse from an applied (social-) epistemology perspective. Her research interests include voting ethics, democratic legitimacy, epistemic democracy, moral responsibility, social epistemology and epistemic justice.

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## **Clémence Saintemarie, The Meaning and Value of Metaphors of (In)Visibility for a Critical Theory of Social Ignorance**

Metaphors of '(in)visibility' have increasingly been rallied to make sense of, characterize and eventually address heterogeneous sets of social ills: from socio-economic poverty and precariousness, through identity-based discrimination and marginalization, to exclusion from representation and participation in politics and society. This presentation addresses problems in metaphorical uses of '(in)visibility' and related terms ('social blindness', etc) with the aim to defend the use of sensory metaphors in social theory and thus explore the sensory dimensions of 'social ignorance'. It first outlines the epistemological use of (in)visibility in early (Marx) and recent (Honneth) critical theory. Secondly, it tackles the ethical dimension and value of eye-centric metaphors of social recognition thanks to recent literature on hermeneutic injustice (Fraser, Medina) as well as a phenomenological critique of (in)visibility going "beyond recognition" (Gordon). Finally, it sets out to defend the efficacy of conceptual recourse to (in)visibility beyond mere heuristic use and towards a theory of what can be tentatively called a 'politics of the senses' (Ranciere, Nancy).

**Bio.** Clémence Saintemarie (MA, UCD; MPhil, Paris-Sorbonne) is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at UCD, funded by UCD College of Social Sciences and Law (2019-2024). Her thesis focuses on political invisibility at the intersection of political theory and aesthetics, with comparative French and German Critical Theory as theoretical framework. She also researches imagination at large and imaginaries of resistance and emancipation more specifically. She works as a teaching and research assistant for UCD School of Philosophy, French instructor for UCD Applied Language Centre, and translator-interpreter for migrant support networks, as well as academic and artistic purposes.

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## **Melanie Altanian, Expert Ignorance and the Social Division of Cognitive Arrogance**

"Just as there are socially designated authorities for expert knowledge in particular epistemic domains, there are also socially designated authorities for expert ignorance in particular epistemic domains", Medina (*The Epistemology of Resistance*, Oxford: OUP, 2013: 146) writes in his chapter on the "social division of cognitive laziness". In this paper, I critically examine this idea in relation to colonial and specifically genocidal "expert" ignorance and argue that it involves the social division of cognitive arrogance. I focus on the epistemic vice of arrogance rather than laziness, because as a vice of superiority, it is particularly pertinent to ignorance in the domain of colonialism and genocide. In colonial or genocidal contexts, members of the dominant or perpetrator group are likely to exemplify this vice because norms of superiority are part of their group identity, which "justify" or normalize domination. Insofar as cognitive arrogance goes along with unwarranted high cognitive esteem, it arguably is more likely to prompt discrediting responses in the face of what is perceived as self-esteem threatening information. Such high defensive self-esteem characteristic of arrogance is particularly effective in sustaining practices of denial, hence active ignorance.

**Bio.** Melanie Altanian is a postdoctoral research assistant in Philosophy at the University of Berne, Institute of Systematic Theology, as well as the Project PERITIA at UCD School of Philosophy. Her most recent publication, 'Remembrance and Denial of Genocide: On the Interrelations of Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice,' appeared in the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* special issue on 'Themes from Testimonial Injustice and Trust', which she guest edited with Maria Baghramian. Her book *The Epistemic Injustice of Genocide Denialism* is forthcoming with Routledge, Studies in Epistemology.

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## **Kelly Agra, 'Philosophy as a site of Epistemic Paralysis': Philippine Colonial Miseducation, Gender Misrecognition, and Epistemology of Ignorance**

Philippine philosophical institutions are sites of epistemic paralysis. In this presentation, I show how epistemic paralysis can be caused by philosophical institutions, such as the ones in the Philippines, through colonial miseducation, gender misrecognition, and an epistemology of ignorance. I conceive of epistemic paralysis as (a) the inhibition of knowers' means of acquiring, confirming, or expressing knowledges, and (b) the blocking of the intersubjective and institutional acknowledgement and uptake, as well as the generation and distribution, of knowledges. In the context of my discussion, I do not refer to all kinds of epistemic paralysis, but only the ones that are caused by unjust and oppressive social-epistemic conditions and means of social-epistemic interaction. By this, I mean to suggest that epistemic paralysis is not inherently negative, and there are forms of epistemic paralysis that are not caused by wrongful and harmful conditions and interactions. In my discussion, I claim that the critiques against the prominence of identity in the 'indigenization' and 'Filipinization' movement in Philippine philosophy and social sciences which began to take place in the latter half of the 20th century, are symptomatic of how philosophy can be inhibiting of epistemic agency and the democratic production of knowledge. Through intersectional counter-critique, I show how the said critiques (1) fail to recognize the salience of intersecting identities in fostering resistant imaginations and liberatory epistemologies, and (2) perniciously ignore and thereby reproduce the multiple forms, intersectional sources, and varying degrees of identity-based oppression within philosophy. Furthermore, I highlight how coloniality is not the only axis of oppression that is being deployed in these philosophical institutions. They also foster gender-based marginalization. Ultimately, I argue that philosophical dismissals of the relevance of identity in philosophising function as ideological guarantees to identity-based violence and they proceed from an epistemology of ignorance that fails to acknowledge: (1) how oppression can be based on identity, (2) the epistemic authority of marginalized knowers about their marginalization and resistance, including the validity of their knowledges about these, and (3) how through such ignorance, philosophy can be contributory to communicative and recognitive dysfunctions and ultimately frustrate its critical potential.

**Bio.** Kelly Agra is an Irish Research Council Postgraduate Scholar and University of the Philippines Doctoral Fellow at the UCD School of Philosophy. She is the current Editor-in-Chief of *Perspectives: UCD Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy*, and one of the core organizers of Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) UCD Chapter and of Women Doing Philosophy in the Philippines. Kelly's work falls within the intersection of Social Philosophy and Social Epistemology, and her dissertation project is entitled 'Philosophy, the Philosophical Institution, and Epistemic Paralysis'. Two of her most recent publications include 'Epistemic Injustice, Epistemic Paralysis, and Epistemic Resistance: A (Feminist) Liberatory Approach to Epistemology' and 'A Critical Theory of Epistemic Injustice'.

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## **Paul Giladi, Ignorance and the Management of the Epistemic Economy**

Privileged people often tend not to really understand the sexist-misogynist-racist-ableist-classist world in which they live. This is because knowledge of institutional designs and social formations that are directly responsible for an array of intersecting social abuses is either erased or mythologically re-packaged, entrenching intersecting structures of privilege and maintaining the *status quo*. Indeed, the careful and deliberate management of historical memory – most explicitly evidenced by memorialisation and statues – and the long-standing proficiency in habits and cultures of motivated ignorance are not simply features of governmentality (in Foucault's technical sense) but are also the lifeblood of practices of

regressive states and institutions. My aim in this paper is to argue that ignorance is central to the operational life of the “coloniality of power” (Quijano 2000). Specifically, I contend that the function of ignorance is threefold: to erase sense-making frameworks that challenge ideological posturings of Western modernisation discourse, to prevent the unimpeded circulation of rival hermeneutic constellations, and to maintain practices of epistemic exploitation. The coloniality of power, under my reading, then, goes beyond the Foucauldian notion of *pouvoir-savoir*: it is entangled with the normative constitution, production, and management of the epistemic economy itself. Managing the epistemic economy through the threefold functions of ignorance identified is orientated around reproducing and preserving, what Iris Marion Young (1990) identified as, the five faces of oppression: marginalisation, exploitation, violence, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism. Ignorance is weaponised to stop, as Hannah Arendt calls it, the ‘springing up’ of power established by and nourished through the local intersubjective relationships between oppressed folk and the more global intersubjective relationships between oppressed folk and their allies. The more all these intersubjective relationships develop, the more one starts to disclose the coloniality of power and ‘unlearn’ it through decoloniality.

**Bio.** Paul Giladi is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University, where he is on the Steering Group of the Research Network for the Study of Race and Racism. He is also and co-founder of the Naturalism, Modernity and Civilization International Research Network. Paul has published articles on Hegel, pragmatism, critical social theory, feminism, and contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. He is the Editor of *Responses to Naturalism: Critical Perspectives from Idealism and Pragmatism* (Routledge, 2019) and *Hegel and the Frankfurt School* (Routledge, 2020). Paul is also the Co-Editor of *Epistemic Injustice and the Philosophy of Recognition* (Routledge, forthcoming August 2022).

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### **Danielle Petherbridge, Contributory Injustice, Ignorance and the Exclusion of Indigenous Knowledges**

The work of theorists such as Kristie Dotson, José Medina, Linda Martín Alcoff and Charles Mills, points to the relation between knowledge, power, truth and the distinctive relation between epistemic practices and unjust social formations by specifically highlighting forms of epistemic oppression, injustice, and the perpetuation of ignorance. This growing body of work has resulted in the conceptualisation of different forms of ‘epistemic injustice’ as well as alternative articulations of ‘ignorance’. Such approaches not only emphasise different conceptions of ignorance, but also provide alternative forms of critique and solutions to address normative epistemic deficiencies in contemporary societies. In this paper, I examine the phenomena of epistemic ignorance and sketch an approach to address this problem by considering a specific case of epistemic ignorance in the context of Australia. Specifically, I examine the perpetuation of ignorance in relation to knowledge-claims by Indigenous Australians, while considering alternative conceptions of ‘ignorance’ and the marginalization of diverse hermeneutic resources. Ultimately, I argue for the importance of a ‘contributory’ and ‘agential’ account of epistemic practices, highlighting the need for an account of epistemic recognition that addresses not only democratic, inclusive, and expansive epistemic practices and forms of knowledge (co)-production, but one that centres on the contestation of hermeneutic resources and forms of knowledge.

**Bio.** Danielle Petherbridge is Director of the UCD Centre for Ethics in Public Life and the UCD School of Philosophy. She works in the areas of social philosophy and phenomenology. Her book publications include *Body/Self/Other: The Phenomenology of Social Encounters* (2017), *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth* (2013), *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays* (2011). She is PI

of the Irish Research Council New Foundations funded project BodyDementia (on Embodied-Cognitive Approaches to Dementia) and a research team member of the ERC Horizon 20/20 grant "Policy, Expertise and Trust" (PERITIA).

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### **Samuel Ferns, Critical Theory, Ignorance, and the Poetics of Epistemic Emancipation**

The tradition of Critical Theory, stemming from the work of the Frankfurt School of the 1930s and orientated toward a theory of society with emancipatory intent, has from its beginning taken up issues of knowledge and non-knowledge as matters of normativity and power. There is therefore much to be gained by bringing Critical Theory into discussion with recent work in the epistemology of ignorance. In the first instance, Critical Theory defines and distinguishes itself by its orientation toward a reflexive overcoming of ignorance at two levels. That is, it seeks to explain its own conditions of possibility by grounding itself and its theoretical categories in an emancipatory potential present in the society that is its object of study (and so does not presume itself to be independent of contextual social dynamics) even as it addresses itself to an emancipatory agent whose epistemic emancipation or empowerment it aims to bring about. In this paper, I aim to develop this metatheoretical or methodological line of thought by bringing Critical Theory into dialogue with the epistemology of ignorance. Recent work by several scholars, perhaps most notably that of Charles Mills, suggests that the concept of ignorance can usefully be conceptualised as or complemented with the central epistemic category of Critical Theory: ideology. Developing this thought, I begin by comparing the concept of ignorance with that of ideology. Furthermore, and by illustrating the manner in which ideology has been conceived within Critical Theory, I argue for the concept's enduring theoretical power. I then use the concepts of ignorance and ideology to discuss theory construction and articulation at both levels of reflexivity described above. This is a subject matter that might usefully be identified as a (theoretical) poetics of epistemic emancipation. Finally, I conclude by outlining what this paper's analysis entails for any future reconstruction of the tradition of Critical Theory.

**Bio.** Samuel Ferns is a PhD candidate at UCD School of Philosophy. His doctoral research concerns the elaboration of a critical theory of knowledge in the form of a reconstruction of the works of Adorno, Foucault, Habermas, and Honneth. He has research interests in critical social theory, social epistemology, social and political philosophy, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy. His article "Freedom, Normativity, and Concepts: Adorno Contra Brandom on the Path from Kant" recently appeared in *Critical Horizons*. He is also editing, with Danielle Petherbridge, a volume on epistemic themes in the tradition of critical social theory.

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### **Gerry Dunne, Deliberate Ignorance and Epistemic Exploitation**

Epistemic exploitation occurs when privileged persons compel marginalised knowers to educate them [and others] about the nature of their oppression (Berenstain, 2016). This paper scrutinizes some of the purported wrongs underpinning this practice, so that educators might be better equipped to understand and avoid or mitigate harms which may result from such interventions. First, building on the work of Berenstain and Davis (2016), I argue that when privileged persons (in this context, educators) repeatedly compel marginalised or oppressed knowers, to not only to educate them, but indeed others, about the nature of their oppression, they risk subjecting them to further epistemic-moral harms. This is due to the likelihood that at least some of their audience will assign them less/more credibility than they deserve based on pre-existing identity-based prejudices. Second, though some of these requests to 'educate' or 'learn more' masquerade as seemingly virtuous or innocuous epistemic inquiries, privileged persons underestimate or remain ignorant of secondary harms which stem from internalized

epistemic obligations, oppressive double-binds (Hirji, 2021), and attendant emotional burdens oppressed knowers carry in relation to the ever-present possibility of ameliorating oppressor mindsets. After surveying each context-specific harm briefly, I then turn to an applied reading of how these exploitative practices sometimes culminate in something we refer to as 'ontic burnout', a form of interminable explanatory fatigue brought on by repeated requests to educate the privileged about what it means to be oppressed.

**Bio.** Gerry Dunne works in the area of social epistemology and education, with specific interests in interpersonal-attuned approaches to ameliorating epistemic vice and injustice.

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## Location

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**Campus map:** <https://map.ucdestates.ie/>

## Contact

### General queries

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