The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations (Oxford University Press, 2012, 352 pp.)
by José Medina
Laura Beeby, California State University, Fullerton

José Medina's picture of epistemic resistance is compelling because he presents epistemic activism as something that regular people can do in the course of their day-to-day lives. This is not a book about firebrands and grand sweeping change. Instead it is mostly about what Medina calls "the everyday struggle toward epistemic justice". Though he does highlight "epistemic heroes" like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Rosa Parks — people who resist unjust norms when few others have the courage and clarity to do so — it is clear that Medina intends that each of us take up a habitual stance of epistemic resistance, and moreover that this is not a particularly unreasonable expectation. We can participate in epistemic resistance while we work, while we raise families, or while we discuss news with our friends. This leaves the door open for those who do not see themselves as particularly radical — epistemically or otherwise — to join in the movement towards epistemic justice. For Medina, epistemic resistance is something both radical and unassuming. In fact, the most subversive and radical knowers may be those who practice epistemic resistance almost unconsciously while they visit a supermarket or gather with friends and family. For Medina, to be epistemically resistant is to feel friction when relying on a single understanding, to constantly allow room for other voices and other ways of understanding and being in the world.

Epistemic resistance, or "the use of our epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains those structures", (2012, 3) may seem daunting if you look to heroes like Sor Juana and Parks for inspiration. However, it seems considerably less daunting after Medina situates these heroes in the context of social movements or social networks that echo and reproduce the heroic actions of emblematic figures. While iconoclastic figures are (rightly) celebrated, there is no need for everyone to be a hero. As members of epistemic networks, you and I can quietly transform our epistemic world just by remaining open to the idea that we may play a part in sexist and racist knowledge practices and by doing what we can to remain sensitive to the obligations generated by our roles as members of knowledge communities.

Understood in this way, epistemic resistance is not a temporary tool for social change or a transitional stage in our socio-epistemic development. It is a mode of relationality (4) that is necessary for what Medina calls democratic sociability. In other words, we all must practice epistemic resistance as a way of life if we want to live together in a flourishing democracy. Resistance is no longer the sole realm of the guerilla fighter. Instead, resistance becomes the epistemic and political mechanisms that make democratic interaction possible. Resistance is sensitivity to our own knowledge practices and those of others. It is contestation — the practice of challenging dominant beliefs and ideologies. And most importantly, it is not a solo endeavor. The things we must resist —

distortions in our collective knowledge resources and practices caused by racism and sexism — affect everyone.

> Racist and sexist ideologies make us all cognitively worse off: they instill distrust, they lead people to underestimate or overestimate their cognitive capacities; and they are the breeding ground for all kinds of biases and prejudices that distort perception, judgement, and reasoning (28).

We get ourselves into epistemic trouble as communities, and therefore the responsibility for fixing and adjusting shared social understandings lies on our communal shoulders.

There are two basic sections to Medina's book. In the first three chapters, Medina introduces us to epistemic injustice, focusing on the key notions of epistemic insensitivity and epistemic irresponsibility. In the final three chapters, he presents an account of the epistemic stance that we should occupy in order to minimize and avoid complicity with epistemic oppression and facilitate a "kaleidoscopic social sensibility" (306). Throughout the book Medina develops (and re-interprets, where he borrows from existing work in critical race theory and feminist epistemology) a set of useful terms and concepts that will advance scholarship on epistemic injustice. Perhaps the most useful of these are the concept of *meta-ignorance* and the related discussion of *collective epistemic responsibility.*

In keeping with the broad focus of the book, Medina devotes considerable space to a discussion of the epistemically privileged, or people who are in positions of social power and are therefore less likely to be epistemically marginalized and oppressed. Privileged people are vulnerable to epistemic vices like arrogance and laziness. They may be epistemically spoiled, to use Medina's words.

> But the powerful can be spoiled not only by enjoying in a disproportionate way the privilege of knowing (or, rather, being assumed to know), but also by having the privilege of not knowing or of not needing to know. Sometimes there are entire domains that people in a position of privilege do not have to familiarize themselves with (32).

And because they don't have to familiarize themselves with these domains, they are ignorant about their ignorance — or *meta-ignorant.*

An interesting example of this corrupting privilege comes from Medina's own experiences at Vanderbilt University. A scandal about a drunken student prank involving a pig's head left on the steps of the Jewish community center serves to illustrate both the privilege of not needing to know — the student claimed ignorance about the pig as a symbol of Jewish persecution and harassment — and the collective responsibility borne by the Vanderbilt community for this ignorance. Is an appeal to ignorance a justification for this student's actions? Did the student fail to know, or did the community fail to be appropriately sensitive to marginalized groups? What I find interesting about this

discussion is Medina's focus not only on the failures of the Vanderbilt community to teach a mostly Christian student body about minority religious groups on campus, but also on their failure to recall the fact that Christians have been largely responsible for the historic persecution of Jews. In other words, in so many cases of ignorance and insensitivity, powerful groups are ignorant not only of the experiences of the less powerful, but also of their own role in those experiences (135).

Though we clearly cannot be held responsible for knowing *everything,* Medina presents us with a compelling argument to the effect that we, as reasonably privileged knowers, ought to be responsible for knowing more than we do now. Many of us have become complacent about knowing. Knowledge, Medina says, requires work. "[I]ts acquisition will not happen without the active participation of the knower. Becoming lazy is letting oneself go epistemically; and it damages the objectivity of one's perspective and limits one's epistemic agency" (34). We must actively cultivate solidarity, curiosity, and a sensitivity to the fact that our public communities are unavoidably plural.

This is the point at which epistemic resistance begins to seem a bit less accessible, a bit more difficult to achieve. How are we to achieve this robust sensitivity and network solidarity? Are the conditions Medina sets for achieving what he calls epistemic responsibility too high? Or is this standard meant as a wake-up call to many of us who will not count as responsible epistemic agents? Medina notes that the Vanderbilt student body continues to be largely unaware of the location of the Jewish center on campus and the historic significance of the pig as a symbol of Jewish stigmatization. And in this case, Medina calls this a shared epistemic failure.

> The collective ignorance may not be of one's choosing, but one cannot inhabit it comfortably and without making any effort to combat it (even when opportunities to do so present themselves), and legitimately use this inherited ignorance to excuse one's actions. ... One's *inattention* to the ignorance one partakes in becomes *complicity and active participation* (140).

It seems right to say that the pig-head-dropping student should have been more aware of the context of his actions and the potential for harm and offense that he might cause. It also seems right that a certain level of ignorance (willful or not) might plausibly be called complicity. The difficulty arises when we begin to explore how to become epistemically responsible.

Relying on Iris Young's social connection model of responsibility, Medina turns to social networks and "the chained actions of interconnected individuals" to explain how we can come to be responsible and appropriately sensitive epistemic citizens. Though we may not be equally responsible for epistemic harms and gaps in social knowledge and sensitivity, we are all connected to each other, and so to the harm done by meta-insensitivity and meta-ignorance. This connection is either via a direct link to persons in one's own epistemic community or a less direct link by means of overlapping networks

and connections that we share with others outside of our own social circles. On the flip side, we are also all connected to flourishing networks of resistance. Medina's model of social change relies heavily on transformation through collective action generated by these networks and their associated chains of action. But how do we instigate that collective action? How do we become collectively sensitive? Medina's model seems to rely upon individuals or communities sitting up and taking notice of the fact that we are not the only kind of person out there, and that there are others who experience life differently than we do, and that these differences are not necessarily bad or frightening. This is an excellent starting point, morally, politically, and epistemically speaking. It is clear that epistemically responsible and virtuous people will practice this kind of sensitivity and awareness. But how do you teach someone to take on this kind of perspective who is not already governed by norms of epistemic openness, virtue, and justice?

My worry is connected to a recent concern from the philosophical literature on empathy.[1] (Medina himself mentions empathy several times, and he couches the stance of epistemic resistance as a cognitive-affective stance. Indeed, he says of his approach, "This new focus on *sensitivity* and *insensitivity* is intended to bring to the fore the role of empathy and affect in the epistemology of social recognition" (315).) There has been a recent concern among theorists of empathy that our understanding of what empathy is remains too broad, and that such breadth is not conducive to rigorous investigation and study. Is empathy taking someone else's perspective? Or is it mimicry or the singular experience of mirroring? If we understand empathy in terms of perspective-sharing (and not mimicry or imitation), how do we teach each other to adopt perspectives radically different from our own? Is it possible to teach empathy?

Medina's solution to my worry is to think of empathy in terms of an interrelation between the moral-political and the epistemic. Citing recent work by Karen Jones (1996, 2002) and Naomi Scheman (2011) on trust and empathy, he argues that individual epistemic responsibility is unavoidably social. For Medina, the individual can only be understood in relation to collectives, and the collective "inevitably implicates individuals" (85). This interdependence between individual and collective may ameliorate any tensions about responsibility, but it does not offer insight into how to get our sensitivities going in the first place. I think Medina is aware of how difficult this task will be. In best-case scenarios, we will rub up against people who are different and embrace the challenges presented by such interactions. As Medina says, "[w]e need disruptions, provocations, and, in short, resistance from others, so that our interactions with significantly different others can trigger productive self-problematizations and beneficial epistemic friction" (315). My worry is that people in worst-case scenarios have little hope of piercing the blindfold of meta-ignorance if they cannot find sufficient provocation. In the normal course of affairs it is hard to ask people to strive towards self-problematization.

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[1] For a discussion of some problems in the current literature on empathy, see Coplan (2011).

The Epistemology of Resistance is a useful contribution to scholarship on epistemic injustice and oppression. One of the book's singular strengths lies in its bringing together diverse areas of scholarship from critical race theory to feminist philosophy, from classical pragmatism and Wittgenstein to work on political agency. Anyone seeking to gain an overview of recent work on race and gender-based oppression and the burgeoning connections between these fields and other areas of mainstream contemporary philosophy will do well by this book. For a more specialist audience already familiar with the challenges presented by epistemic injustice, Medina's book is an engaging addition to a continuing conversation.

Contact details: laurabeebyis@googlemail.com

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