From a Statement of Its Vision Toward Thinking into the Desire of a Corporate Daimon
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"We are taught that corporations have a soul …" —Gilles Deleuze

This paper, my brief contribution to a collective vision statement, is composed of three parts. First, a general statement of how I envision the enunciating of a collective vision statement. Second, a practical recommendation. Third, following the standard established by previous SERRC vision statements, a few comments on social epistemology.

Part I

As a guiding question: What is the relationship between the knowledge produced by the collective labor of a group and the individual members of that group? Frankly put, invoking a comparison with *gestalt* figures is appropriate here. It is as if the whole of the knowledge produced by the collective labor at any given point in its history may not be unproblematically reduced to a measured amount attributable to each member of the group as the origin of that knowledge. Now, since this is a large topic that can be handled in many ways, the scope will be narrowed here to the following issue. Namely, what to make of the analogy that moves from the knowledge produced by a collective to the vision of that collective?

Some social epistemologists have gone so far as to speak of group epistemic agency. It would be as if knowledge states may be attributable to a group in such a way that the group as epistemic agent may be said to have knowledge which the collective members may not (yet) possess. Again, this may be taken up in multiple ways, of which I will provide two brief examples. First, attributing epistemic agency to the group allows for a comparison between the individual collective members as epistemic agents and the group as an epistemic agent. Some theorists unpack this distinction by suggesting that the group epistemic agent is more primary than the individual agents, insofar as the group is considered. Second, knowledge policy and institutional structures may be seen as determining the lines of influence available to the group epistemic agent from the collective labor of the individuals, and this includes what may be characterized as the policies the individual members set in place to effect constraints on the knowledge states of the group epistemic agent.

Given this brief sketch of how to envision a group epistemic agent and the relations between the group and the members who people it, it is possible to move toward an understanding of to "whom" the *gestalt* whole of the knowledge produced by a collective may be attributable. This question is not to be taken as inquiring about knowledge consumption. Rather, this question considers the accuracy of using the term "agent" in the label "group epistemic agent." The approaches to justifying the term agent emphasize the relation of the individuals to the moving forward decision of the group for which any minority grouping of individuals may or may not be in support. In this way, individuals of the collective may be seen to be required to suffer the decision of some agent; however, this agent is no one individual of the group. Further, an approach to justifying

the term "epistemic" may emphasize the group agent as the locus of the aggregate knowledge of the collective. Though this aggregate refers to a kind of virtual state out on which future knowledge production and group guiding decisions will depend, that to which the aggregate refers is efficacious.

Finally, the question may be answered regarding the analogy that moves from the knowledge produced by a collective to the vision of that collective. If an individual were able to acquire insight into the virtual state, the individual should be able to discern, given an awareness of the group's knowledge policy and institutional structures, the directions in which the group epistemic agent is tending. Insofar as this tending may be characterized as the "desire" of the group epistemic agent, the collective's "vision statement," as the vision of the group (epistemic agent), will be an expression of the group (epistemic agent)'s desire(s). For an extended discussion of multiple ways in which group epistemic agency has been considered (including an extensive bibliography), see Eric Kerr's Collective Vision Statement (Kerr 2013).

Part II

After reading through the SERRC Vision Statements toward gaining insight into the desire of our group epistemic agent, so to speak, perhaps there are two interdisciplinary issues that we would like the group agent to eventually resolve. First, there is the question of how to understand or define social epistemology. Second, there are criticisms grounded in the sociology of knowledge practices in which the collective members otherwise participate. These issues overlap, at least, regarding the question of how our collective vision of social epistemology will overcome various (non-SERRC) institutional policies regarding knowledge production such as, for example, peer review practices geared more toward perpetuating a brand than allowing for critical discourse and interdisciplinarity (cf. Peters and Ceci 1980).

Susan Dieleman, in her vision statement, asks: "So what does it mean to study social epistemology?" and "What does it mean to *do* social epistemology?" (Dieleman 2013, 70). Mel Orozco asks: "What is social epistemology?" and "What contributions can a social epistemologist make?" (Orozco 2012, 16). Moreover, consider the following from Fred D'Agostino's vision statement titled "How Can We Collectivize a Set of Visions about Social Epistemology?"

> This tension—between the conditions of the production of knowledge in the contemporary academy and the facilitating conditions for a social epistemology that attends to new ideas and approaches that are unlikely to be rewarded through already-existing 'criteria of return'—is one which it will take some courage to address (D'Agostino 2014, 6; cf. Reider 2014).

In addition, then, to articulating a collectively advanced issue on the horizon within the group vision, it is already clear that the SERRC itself is developing toward the resolution of these issues (cf. Collier 2012).

As we begin to determine a kind of hierarchy that may be characterized as differentiating our various influences on the group epistemic agent's desire, here are some practical suggestions. (1) As we continue to address the first issue of how to understand or define social epistemology, perhaps we might consider engaging Jim Collier's initial exercise regarding SERRC, as reported in his interview with Mike Thicke of The Bubble Chamber (2013) regarding "reputation-based epistemic practices." The idea here would be to purposefully construct a special issue or two on the (perhaps) more marginal approaches to social epistemology. This would not only (most likely) lead to disagreement, which may function in a clarifying manner (cf. Matheson 2014; cf. Martini 2014), but also bring more scholars into the space opened up by the collective's new hierarchical identity. There are, of course, many possible topics that could serve the purpose of such a special issue. However, we might consider Max Scheler's perspective, e.g. as found in his *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge,* and specifically his "phenomenology of community" (Scheler 1980).

The second practical recommendation also relates to both of the issues noted above. The suggestion is to form a small group out of the collective to construct "sample syllabi" for, at least, the following courses: *Introduction to Social Epistemology*; *Epistemology: Social & Individual*; *The History of (Social) Epistemology*; *Social Epistemology and Technology Studies*, etc. These courses should be taken merely as suggestions. Rather, note the goal of such an exercise. On the one hand, we would have a working template with all its built-in promptings for discussion, for example, why that reading and not X; why that distinction and not this one, etc. On the other hand, once we arrive at some agreement, then we could post such a resource at SERRC. The power of posting those sample syllabi may be greater than we presently imagine. For instance, many adjunct professors often look for sample syllabi when constructing courses. This is precisely why the American Philosophical Association (APA) recently performed this very exercise for courses they hope to promote.

Part III

Steve Fuller, in his seminal text *Social Epistemology*, identifies the "fundamental question" of social epistemology:

> How should the pursuit of knowledge be organized, given that under normal circumstances knowledge is pursued by many human beings, each working on a more or less well-defined body of knowledge and each equipped with roughly the same imperfect cognitive capacities, albeit with varying degrees of access to one another's activities (Fuller 1991, 3)?

My comments, then, in this final part of the vision statement speak toward some of the juxtapositions which continue to help orient me when I find myself pondering the first of the two issues noted above. Though I thought I fully understood Fuller's question when I first read it, I eventually began to see it as directed at a higher philosophical position, so to speak, than my initial reading revealed (cf. Bell 2014). The following quotes and commentary briefly reflect a process of working out the fundamental nature of Fuller's question.

Just below the statement of Fuller's above question, he notes, "the social epistemologist would like to be able to show how the *products* of our cognitive pursuits are affected by changing the social relations in which the knowledge *producers* stand to one another" (Fuller 1991, 3). Notice, then, because the *social* relations between knowledge producers affect the products of cognitive *pursuits*, the question of how the pursuit of knowledge should be organized is a question about the middle term, so to speak. That is to say, the question can be taken directly in regard to the horizon of possible pursuits, or one may highlight the relation between the middle term and the major premise. In this way, it is as if the fundamental question of social epistemology points not only at the horizon of possible pursuits but also at the contingency involved in the very determination of the horizon of possible pursuits. I will continue to unpack this notion, but allow me to express my enthusiasm that in this light Fuller's fundamental question of social epistemology seems—to me —to be brilliant!

In this light, then, take the following excerpt from the abstract of Fuller's "On regulating what is known: A way into social epistemology." There Fuller notes, "I argue that the current trend toward 'naturalizing' epistemology threatens to destroy the distinctiveness of the sociological approach by presuming that it complements standard psychological and historical approaches" (Fuller 1987, 145). On my reading, rather than see naturalized epistemology as a competitor to social epistemology—as if they were merely two possible pursuits on the horizon—Fuller's point seems to be that the "naturalizing" destroys the contingent nature of the major premise.

This is why Fred Schmitt, in his "Introduction" to the *Synthese* issue on social epistemology that included, among others, the above Fuller article and Alvin Goldman's "Foundations of Social Epistemics," had the following to say.

> Alvin Goldman explores the basic form of a social epistemology as a field that may complement individual epistemology. He argues for a truth-oriented approach against relativism, consensualism, and expertism. By contrast, Steve Fuller argues that social epistemology should supplant individual epistemology, and that it does not fit comfortably with naturalistic, psychological, or even historical approaches to epistemology (Schmitt 1987, 1-2).

Hence, it seems to me it is possible to affirm Fuller's approach without, for example, saying one dislikes or disavows truth (or being truth-oriented), so long as one recognizes the depth at which Fuller's fundamental question may be directed. There is truth to be found in regard to the historical horizon of possible pursuits—are we capable of pursuing some path presently or not? However, a sociology of the knowledge determining the horizon of possible pursuits should also be able to "think into" the social dimensions conditioning the currently visible horizon.

As such, notice how the following excerpt from Fuller's *Humanity 2.0*: *What it Means to be Human Past, Present and Future* may be seen as an example of doing social epistemology, as just outlined. I quote him here at length:

> [N]either the physics- nor the biology-based sociodicy regards the individual as an autonomous agent. At least, so it seemed for most of the 20th century, when naturalistic theodicies remained rather alien from commonsense understandings of the world – let alone classical theodicies. However, I shall return to this point because as denizens of the 21st century get used to the idea that they are 'always already' risking their individual lives in various ways, the consequences of which potentially offer lessons for future generations, it is reasonable to suppose that these very naturalistic sociodicies are coming to be internalized as part of our self-understandings, and in that sense 'reflexively' applied. In effect, we have come to accept that there is a 'statistical' aspect to our being-in-the-world. In that case, again from the standpoint of reflexivity, social scientists who continue to champion a strong 'qualitative' vs. 'quantitative' distinction in research methodology may be guilty of perpetuating of a conceptually artificial dichotomy—perhaps no more than a Neo-Kantian atavism—that fails to do justice to social agents who have already arrived at ways of blending the two perspectives (Fuller 2011, 220-221).

Notice how Fuller uncovers the dimensions of social knowledge functioning as conditions for the possibility of the self-understandings of social agents. The pursuit is deeper than an epistemology of the quantitative or qualitative characterizations of social agents. Rather, similar to his discussion of the "Rockefeller Foundation" (Fuller 2014), there is a kind of sociological archaeology at work thay takes knowledge both as its point of departure and as its principle for evaluating the efficacy of its conclusions.

In closing, I will—in accordance with what seems to be something of a standard across these vision statements—note some of the pursuits to be found through social epistemology which continue to interest me. First, I hope to continue to pursue, through social epistemology, issues related to technology studies. Second, I hope to continue to pursue, through social epistemology, issues related to the contingent nature of the knowledge pursuits, and dimensions of social knowledge, conditioning our everyday experiences in regard to reflexive knowledge.

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