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A New Era and a Continuing Mission

Adam Riggio, Royal Crown College

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The year 2018 is coming to an end and I, frankly, could not be happier. A time of continuing upheaval, the year began with a durable pessimism, and its ending is tolerable to the democratically-minded only because of those few elements of hope in scattered opportunities around the world. Yet despite optimistic outlooks for some, literally billions around the globe have felt oppressive forces crushing them with ever greater intensity.

This volume of the Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective also saw its first editorial transition. Having learned the ropes of the official position of Digital Editor over the end of 2017, Volume Seven was the first year I felt comfortable to begin crafting my own mandate for SERRC. In this essay reflecting on the end of the year, let's make ourselves a little manifesto of what those mandates are, how we worked on them over this year, and how they'll develop in the future.

Taking Globalism Seriously

SERRC has been, for some time, a global community. In 2018, I continued our global activities and steered harder into growing our planet-wide influence and relevance. SERRC's community of affiliated researchers now includes members based on all continents but Antarctica. This summer's accession of [Helen Lauer](#), professors at the University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania, became our first member based in Africa.

We have also begun projects that actively engage with work being done in Africa. In particular, I'm thinking of connections SERRC built through Lauer's network with professors at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. This began with reviews of a book of essays on the [state of philosophy in contemporary Africa](#), edited by Wits' Edwin Etieyibo. I plan to build further connections with researchers throughout the continent over 2019.

Without much fanfare, SERRC also crossed its first linguistic border since the project began in 2011. Late this year, Nuria Anaya-Reig became the first contributor to make a contribution entirely in a language other than English. The Madrid-based professor provided a version of her article "[Implicit Theories Influencing Researchers](#)" [in her native Spanish](#). SERRC has many Spanish-speaking members, and many of our platform's followers speak Spanish as well, and live in countries where Spanish is a majority language.

More than this, Spanish is another global language, one of the most widely spoken on Earth. For SERRC to take its responsibilities and obligations as a genuinely global organization seriously requires linguistic diversity. English will remain the official language of SERRC, of course, reflecting its founders, home base, and actual editors.

So my standard policy going forward is that, if any fluently multi-lingual contributor wishes to translate their English article into their other tongue, I will encourage and possibly plead with them to do so. 2018 saw SERRC's first Spanish article. It would be wonderful if 2019

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could see SERRC's first article in – I don't know – how about French? Russian? Mandarin? Zulu? Turkish? Any takers?

Let the Challenge Be a Herald

Definitely the biggest expression of SERRC's commitment to a globalizing project of knowledge exchange was our long-running review symposium of Bryan Van Norden's popular book *Taking Back Philosophy*. Van Norden is a specialist in [Chinese](#) philosophy and its history, based in Singapore.

His book expands upon and continues the [challenge](#) of his famous essay in the New York Times, [provoking](#) philosophy departments across North America and Europe to include seriously the [works of other regions](#) around the world – [China, India, Africa, Indigenous peoples](#) throughout Earth – or rebrand with the suitably regional title they deserve.

Van Norden's book challenged us all, and I was glad to hear this challenge. Only in the last five years have I, as a college educator and philosophical writer / researcher, begun exploring the classic works of Chinese philosophy. I had read literally no Chinese philosophy whatsoever by the last months of my doctoral degree. My dissertation supervisor Barry Allen was just wrapping up an intense period of his own research work: the books *Vanishing Into Things* and *Striking Beauty*.

Allen's books casually enlighten the reader in the vibrant history and remarkable concepts and systems of the great thinkers of China, and leave you inspired to explore what other sharp arguments and brilliant ideas you can find in the great works of Kongzi, Mengzi, Lao Tzu, Sunzi, and Shang Yang, among many others. Having read the *Analects*, *Dao De Jing*, and *The Art of War*, I feel as inspired and dwarfed as I was when I first cracked open the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, *De Anima*, and *Critique of Pure Reason*. I feel like I'm back on the first steps again, reading the Chinese classics. It is a humbling and divine experience.

Here was Van Norden's challenge to all of us who are so proud to name ourselves doctors of philosophy. Accept that the world of living human thought includes traditions equal to your own but of which you know nothing. Can we overcome our egos enough to accept becoming a student again? Accept that we are educators in the Earth's philosophical traditions. Can we change our institutions to become such educators instead of overblown, hyper-specialized subject-matter experts?

The Great Debates

One delightful part of SERRC's production is our back-and-forth. This past year has, like others, seen some strong debates among fiery personalities about profound concepts, illuminating perspectives, and arguments equally nimble and maddening.

Most impressive was a series of exchanges over Moti Mizrahi's development of his conception of and argument for scientism regarding knowledge. It began in mid-2017,

before I even took the position as Digital Editor. Christopher M. Brown laid out a series of objections that [meticulously identified complications](#) in Mizrahi's argument that science offers the resolutely best model for human knowledge. [Brown's essays](#) were rewards for the discerning reader, and [Mizrahi resolutely dove](#) into the tight corners of the fray.

Then he was faced with the full blast of Bernard Wills' hurricane, attacking the most fundamental premises of Mizrahi's scientism and any other. Here was a greater challenge than the usual critiques philosophers face, arguments over detail with companions in a sub-discipline. Mizrahi and Wills faced each other as near-opposites, sharing [seemingly none](#) of the same premises [about how](#) knowledge itself worked. It was an [engrossing exercise](#), and [showed](#) how [intractable conversation](#) between disciplines of knowledge can really be.

The year also saw a long-running debate between [Jeff Kochan](#) and several critics of his latest book *Science and Social Existence*, one of which was me. We all probed, from different directions, whether Kochan's central conceit [would or could work](#). Could the philosophical [concepts of Martin Heidegger](#) make a [fruitful influence](#) in the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge? [We all had our doubts](#), but Kochan fended us off with the [agility](#) of a twirling [wuxia hero](#).

As usual, Steve Fuller was an indispensable presence in the SERRC community, inspiring a series of responses to some of his recent reflections on what it would mean to live in a 'post-truth' world, whether such a condition is genuinely new, not as recent as we think, or perennial.

But my favourite Fuller moment was the joy I experienced at SERRC founder and former Editor [James Collier's four-part takedown](#) this August of Fuller's entire philosophical edifice and direction. It was at least a takedown of the [normative dimensions of that stance](#). Collier launched an operatic challenge to the techno-utopian ethics and politics of Fuller's approach to transhumanism. But the greatest pathos was his [frustration at Fuller's methods](#) that sometimes channelled the worse elements of Socrates: pugnacity, irony, mischief. [No prestige should go unchallenged](#), especially that of our friends.

Tackling the Political and the Cultural

If I could identify one general theme to sum up how SERRC has developed now that I've taken more confident leadership as Digital Editor, it would be engagement. All too often, it's dangerously easy for an academic community to fall away from public relevance. The public can't read work in our research journals; they're increasingly priced out of the range of even most university libraries.

Open access venues like SERRC have an obligation to bring the leading edges of our research to a place where the interested public can read it. Knowledge that is unavailable to people falls short of its ideals. It may be discoverable in principle, but it becomes practically unknowable.

If SERRC is a vehicle for making public the knowledge of our worldwide multi-disciplinary community of researchers and writers, then SERRC also has an obligation to speak to the public's concerns. Social epistemology may be, technically speaking, a defined sub-discipline. But I prefer to think of it as a description of the many-vectored work we all do here together.

We all examine different aspects of how knowledge production unfolds as a social process, how to navigate the political and cultural paths we travel as we investigate the world and our lives. This is the pivot of how thought and action unite. Here is our territory.

Contact details: serrc.digital@gmail.com

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