Finding a Path from Idealized Epistemology to *Our* Non-ideal Epistemological Landscape

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Philosophy can successfully clarify and explain without those explanations needing to be transcendentally true for all time or completely adequate to all aspects of the object it studies.

—Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*

All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

We want to walk: so we need *friction.* Back to rough ground!

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

A veces necesitamos compañías como cinceles

Otras como lijas de 800 llenas de dulzura

—Tia Patricia Fuentes

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Introduction

Before you is *one* path that I have found to lead us from an idealized epistemology back to our current non-ideal epistemological landscape. I have chosen the metaphor of a path to point out that our theoretical paths are constantly changing and being made and remade by the people who walk them. Just as the path made by one lone traveler can disappear quickly, paths that are used by many can stay entrenched in our collective imagination without any other reason than that they are clear, and they have been widely used. The path that I have found is not new, and I am most certainly not the first to walk it; there are many footprints throughout it made by figures like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell, Linda Martín Alcoff, José Medina, Kristie Dotson, Charles Mills and many more. With this being said, as we metaphorically walk along this path, what I want you to notice is how slippery it is at the beginning and how progressively we find *our* footing by the end.

This thesis is broken up into three chapters, which interlock at three distinct points. The first chapter is an overview of Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein's treatment of Cartesian skepticism. By the end of the chapter, we will use the Cavellian insight into the "truth of skepticism" to move on to a critique of Robert Pasnau's historical investigations of Rene Descartes's idealized epistemology. Using Alcoff's concept of a "transcendentalist delusion," we will come across various moments where Pasnau suffers from this delusion. Chapter two, which includes this critique, will showcase Dotson's uncovering of the epistemic engine of Jane Crow dynamics and Medina's sociogenesis account of privileged subjects' epistemic vices. Chapter two ends by outlining how Pasnau's transcendentalist delusion can be understood under Medina's notion of active ignorance. Finally, in chapter three, we will encounter the meliorative part of Medina's model of *The Epistemology of Resistance*. This will be done by outlining the

various epistemic virtues found in oppressed positionalities and the methods that can be employed in order to meliorate the active ignorance that was introduced in chapter two. By noticing and changing our collective epistemic habits, we will return to rough ground and begin our journey to fostering a kaleidoscopic consciousness.

Chapter 1: The "Truth of Skepticism" and Its Epistemic Consequence

> Failures of the individual and the collective imagination are often failures to *acknowledge* experiences and lives that deserve to be taken into account and to be made *sense* of.
>
> —José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*

In Stanley Cavell's reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein's response to traditional epistemological skepticism, we can find a crucial insight that highlights problematic aspects of traditional epistemic metaphilosophical commitments, the philosopher's craving to transcend their situatedness, and as a result, the rejection of natural language's communal origins. This chapter aims to elucidate what Cavell calls the "truth of skepticism" so that we can come to understand the danger of succumbing to theoretical pursuits that repudiate our ordinary language criteria. This impulse is best exemplified by the radical skeptical position found in traditional epistemological investigations *and* the traditional attempts to ground our epistemology in a solid foundation. The Cavellian and Wittgensteinian insight that I am referring to is that the skeptical impulse will always be a live option to the philosopher as long as their epistemology is abstracted from the concrete forms of life that subjects find themselves in, most notably in response to what Cavell calls "intellectual tragedy."[1] Later chapters will use this insight to elucidate some ways to improve our epistemological investigations uninfluenced by traditional epistemology's methodological bias. This Wittgensteinian insight, accessed through Cavell's reading, will be the motivating factor to turn to epistemological investigations that link our

[1] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

philosophical investigations with our ordinary practices (including practices of care) and the unequal epistemic landscape that they are situated in.

In line with orthodox Wittgensteinian readers, the work of many Cavellian scholars has resulted in a 'standard' reading of Cavell's thoughts regarding the semantic status of the traditional epistemologist words. Broadly speaking, the standard Cavellian reading is thought to be claiming that traditional epistemologists like Descartes, who use radical skepticism to find an epistemological foundation, are violating communal criteria of meaning through their skeptical investigation. By communal criteria of meaning, I am referring to the criteria of meaning formed by what Wittgenstein calls a form of life.[2] These ordinary language criteria allow for any competent speaker of a language to identify the meaning of a word or a set of words. Ultimately, the skeptic is charged with casting these communal words into exile, outside of the bounds of sense, because they divert radically from the contextual conditions that give their words a positive semantic status. The traditional epistemologist is motivated to do this because they need to remove themselves and their words from any context to establish a best-case scenario for their epistemological investigation to find an absolute epistemic foundation. Under the traditional Cavellian reading, the skeptical conclusion and the need for an Absolute epistemic foundation are *literal* nonsense. Cavell and Wittgenstein's rebuttals are interpreted as providing an account that ultimately dissolves the skeptical conclusion *once and for all*.

Although this reading of Cavell and Wittgenstein has been accepted quite broadly, there is a branch of Cavellian scholars, Sanford Shieh and David Macarthur, who disagree with the view that Cavell and thus Wittgenstein are in the business of crafting an *absolute* refutation

[2] For further discussion on this topic and its implications on the political, see Sandra Laugier, “This Is Us: Wittgenstein and the Social.”

against epistemic skepticism.[3] Instead, they argue that Cavell and Wittgenstein divert radically from the traditional conception of philosophy and that a philosopher's role is to state facts about the world. In other words, both Cavell and Wittgenstein divert from the pattern of traditional philosophy wherein there is an argumentative method that relies on stating facts about the world. In this traditional philosophical convention, the "correct" interpretation of the world is awarded to the philosopher who has supposedly uncovered "objective" truth through their argument. This traditional convention shifted slightly with the introduction of Wittgenstein's early philosophy found in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by influencing philosophers to focus on questions regarding what can be meaningfully said instead of what can be rationally understood to exist in the world. However, under this conception of philosophy, the philosopher still held an exclusive vantage point, but instead of delineating our ontological boundaries, they were now in the business of scoping out the exact bounds of what can be meaningfully said. Although this second metaphilosophical commitment is closer to Cavell's and Wittgenstein's overall project, it misses the radically different understanding of the philosopher's role in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. This radically different conception of philosophy will be laid out in the first section of the chapter. It will become clear that under their metaphilosophical commitments, Cavell's and Wittgenstein's appeal to everyday criteria is not to denounce the skeptic as breaking the rules of meaning as if appealing to an objective and independent fact or standard but rather to attempt "to bring the basis of [the] community into being."[4]

By laying out some of the problems found in the traditional reading and exploring what Cavell has called the "truth of skepticism," I hope to showcase an example of how traditional

[3] See Sandford Shieh "The truth of Skepticism" and David Macarthur, "Cavell on Skepticism and the Importance of Not- Knowing".
[4] Sanford Shieh, "The Truth of Skepticism," in *Reading Cavell*, ed. Alice Crary, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2006), 154, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203597149.

epistemology (including the standard interpretation of Cavell and Wittgenstein) is the other affirmative side of the skeptical impulse. This means that, in response to the failure of attunement between the skeptic's words and our ordinary criteria, traditional epistemologists are in the search for a higher or lower order objective criterion that is presupposed to exist before their investigation began. Under the standard reading, the philosophers' delineation and discovery of this criterion and its violation by the traditional skeptical conclusion dissolves the skeptical conclusion once and for all. In other words, traditional epistemologists believe that there is a static criterion outside of the interlocutor and the skeptic, in the case of the traditional reading, an intelligibility criterion (a notion that will be unpacked later on in the chapter). However, Shieh, Macarthur, and I read Cavell and Wittgenstein to be pointing out that in their investigation of the skeptic's words, such an appeal to an abstract static higher or lower (objective) criterion is not available to either the skeptic *or their interlocutor* (this includes the philosopher). This radically different view found in Wittgenstein's and Cavell's methodological and metaphilosophical commitments is easily misunderstood. This tendency to misinterpret both Cavell's and Wittgenstein's philosophy is why we should spend the first chapter of this thesis on getting them right. Once this is accomplished, we will see the reward in subsequent chapters as we delve deeper into our collective epistemological practices and the role of epistemic friction in developing our cognitive and affective habits.

I have structured the following chapter into four sections. The first section concentrates exclusively on Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical commitments throughout his later philosophy. This section will be crucial to comprehend the faults found in the standard reading of Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy. The second section will be an exegetical overview of the standard reading of Cavell's "solution" to epistemic skepticism of the external world found in

The Claim of Reason. The third part of the chapter will focus on Cavell's understanding of skepticism as such. This conceptual clarification will be the background that will make my alternative reading not only viable but ultimately crucial to fully understand Wittgenstein's and Cavell's treatment of the skeptical impulse. The fourth section will then develop this alternative reading further and highlight Cavell's notion of "the truth of skepticism" as a guiding insight as we go forward with our epistemological investigations. We will end the section by bringing in Linda Martín Alcoff's voice and developing a link between Cavell's insight into the skeptical impulse of the philosopher and Alcoff's concept of a "transcendental delusion."[5]

§1.1 Wittgenstein's Metaphilosophical Commitments

The following brief sketch of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical commitments draws heavily from José Medina's lecture "Love and Other Demons: Wittgenstein and Skepticism" delivered at Vanderbilt University in 2014.[6] In the lecture, Medina identifies two broad facets of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical commitments. The first is that philosophy is not a doctrine but rather a practice. As Wittgenstein remarks: "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything."[7] The type of practice that philosophy is for the later Wittgenstein is a type of conversational therapy. This means that philosophy, when done well, entails having a conversation either with yourself or others, preferably with others, about philosophical problems that one encounters. The aim of philosophy is not to reach a solid

[5] Linda Martín Alcoff, "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance," in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhause, Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 398.
[6] José Medina, *Love and Other Demons: Wittgenstein and Skepticism* (Vanderbilt University, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvvYJxvGVPQ.
[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951*, ed. James Carl Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hacket Pub. Co, 1993), 177.

foundation of knowledge but rather to order our concepts so that the initial puzzle is dissolved as we are reminded of how concepts are used in our everyday lives. As Medina notes:

> [Philosophy] is not about answering problems, not about finding solutions, not about developing theories or systems of thought that will then solve practical problems, it is about learning how to live with those problems.[8]

This practice, for the philosopher, is never-ending. It is a constant struggle that requires the reworking of one's cognitive habits and the tendency to believe that one has reached "new, deep // unheard of // elucidations."[9] The second major aspect of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy is that philosophical practice should be continuous with ordinary practice. In other words, the way to undo a philosophical knot is by contemplating and discussing the ways that the concept under investigation is deployed in our familiar everyday practices. This process, as Wittgenstein remarks, is what philosophers should do, which is "to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."[10] This interaction between philosophy's idealized scenarios and concepts and the straightforward and context heavy concepts of our everyday life create a type of *friction* needed to overcome the philosophical delusion that one has discovered a new theoretical realm. The important aspect of this Wittgenstein demand to bring our concepts back to their familiar home is a clear critique of a philosophical tendency to idealize and venture into abstract frictionless theoretical worlds. However, it is important to point out that Wittgenstein *is not critiquing the activity of idealization per se* but rather the fact that philosophers do not come back to test these idealizations against the everyday practices that we are a part of. Wittgenstein's

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[8] José Medina, *"Love and Other Demons*."
[9] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951*, 179.
[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Rev. 4th ed (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §116.

critique of philosophers' idealization tendencies will be a key component of this chapter's overall insight (Cavell's truth of skepticism) and my subsequent critique of traditional Western epistemology.

There are two main ways in which Wittgenstein is found to criticize philosophical idealization. The first is when idealized conclusions or theories become irrelevant to our lives. In other words, Wittgenstein despises when philosophical inquiries become idle as they clearly do not have any connection to the world of our everyday practices. Wittgenstein articulates that critique in the following manner:

> We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not *the* order. For this purpose we shall again and again emphasize distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook. This may make it appear as if we saw it as our task to reform language.
>
> Such a reform for particular purposes, and improvement in our terminology designed to prevent misunderstandings in practice, may well be possible. But these are not the cases we are dealing with. The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work.[11]

The second way that Wittgenstein criticizes philosophical idealization is when it distorts our thinking or does not allow us to comprehend our lives as they really are during our day-to-day interactions. In other words, when philosophical idealizations distort your perception of the world and others around you, you are not doing philosophy but rather creating new philosophical

[11] Wittgenstein, §132.

to untie later. Wittgenstein is especially concerned with theoretical distortions that change our expectations of others and the standards that we use to hold them accountable. As we will see in the standard Cavellian interpretations, the problem is that these two tendencies of bad philosophical idealization are a constant danger --a danger that both Cavell and Wittgenstein were aware of and could not escape.

§1.2 Standard Reading of Cavell on Skepticism

Stanley Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein's response to philosophical skepticism is a central feature of his body of work. Thus, the scholarship that exists surrounding this topic is vast and philosophically rich. Through this engagement, a standard reading of Cavell's thoughts has emerged. To see some of the problems with this reading, we have to pay attention to the claims/positions that critical scholars have attributed to Cavell and Wittgenstein and see how they match Cavell's own central beliefs his interpretation of Wittgenstein's therapeutic treatment to the skeptical thesis. In order to make a cohesive and broad exegesis of Cavellian scholars' reaction to Cavell's criticisms of the skeptical conclusion and traditional epistemology, I will use what Sanford Shieh identifies as "Cavell's central argument concerning the nature of skepticism."[12] Shieh locates this central argument in the sections of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* titled "The philosopher's basis," "The philosopher's context is non-claim," and "The philosopher's conclusion is not a discovery." An exegesis of these sections will be accompanied by Marie McGinn, Michael Williams, and Stephen Mulhall's interpretations. I hope that by bringing in various voices into the conversation in conjunction with a close reading of Cavell's text, we will end with a charitable and transparent interpretation of what has become the standard

[12] Shieh, "The Truth of Skepticism," 14.

reading. This backdrop will be used in later sections of this chapter to clarify the specific lines of thought that do not align with Cavell's and Wittgenstein's explicit beliefs about the threat of the skeptical impulse and the place of philosophy in dealing with this constant threat.

Cavell's response to traditional epistemology and skepticism is based on his investigation of Descartes's "First Meditation" and the setting that this traditional epistemological project is situated in. He begins his criticism by asking: "*Is* the example the philosopher produces imaginable as an example of a particular claim to knowledge? What are his examples examples of?"[13] Cavell answers these questions by making an important distinction between an "Austinian object" or "specific object" and a "generic object" as the type of object in question found in the Cartesian skeptical argument.[14] To understand this distinction, let us use J. L. Austin's example of an instance where one is identifying a goldfinch. In comparison, we will come to understand how the doubt that can be raised in the case of the example differs from the type of doubt raised about a generic object which is the one found in Descartes epistemologist investigation.

Picture two people in a garden and one person says: "There is a goldfinch on the tree." Their interlocutor then asks them: "how do you know?" The person who identified the goldfinch then responds by saying: "from the red head." In response, their interlocutor says: "But that's not enough; woodpeckers also have red heads."[15] We can find in this example crucial presuppositions that are needed for the person's claim to knowledge of the goldfinch to make sense to their interlocutor. Marie McGinn points them out in the following manner:

[13] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 205.
[14] Cavell, 52.
[15] Cavell, 132.

> "1. There is a real question whether the object has been identified (i.e., assigned to its kind) correctly.
>
> 2. The idea of someone's having the necessary expertise to identify the object correctly makes sense.
>
> 3. In making the identification of the object someone could be supplying *genuine information* to his audience."[16]

Using these presuppositions, we can spot various distinctions between a generic object (found to be the object of investigation in the Cartesian example) and the Austinian object (found in the example). The first important distinction that an Austinian object has from a generic object is that doubt over the person's claim to know about the goldfinch does not then lead to a universal dismissal of all of our claims to knowledge. Instead, we would conclude that the person has misidentified the bird in question because they either did not have the proper training or did not remember that woodpeckers also have red heads. The failure of the initial claim to knowledge does not have the force it would require for us to seriously consider that *all* of our claims to knowledge are unjustified. For this reason, Cavell makes the distinction that, unlike in the case of identifying a bird, the type of object found in the traditional epistemologist's investigation is one that no one can claim expertise over, through an appeal to their credentials or their location in the world. In other words, "no one's position, with respect to identifying them, is better than anyone else's."[17] This type of neutrality and abstract position is a necessary and sufficient condition of the traditional epistemologist's investigation.

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[16] Marie McGinn, *Sense and Certainty: A Dissolution of Scepticism*, Philosophical Theory (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 1989), 80.
[17] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 56.

It is important to point out that this is a *deliberate* methodological choice that the traditional epistemologist needs to hold. Without it, they could not conclude that the inefficacy of a particular claim to knowledge results in the failure of all knowledge claims. Stephen Mulhall puts this point in the following way:

> With the epistemologist's generic objects, neither restriction on the ramifications of his skeptical worry can be invoked: anyone equipped with normal human perceptual and linguistic capacities, anyone capable of knowing anything at all, must know that this object is in front of her eyes—it will seem that if we know anything, we know that. And then, if the epistemologist can succeed in getting us to admit that we do not know that, to admit that our basis for claiming knowledge of that seemingly fundamental sort is inadequate, the conclusion that we do not know anything well be inescapable.[18]

Furthermore, the skeptic's use of a generic object as their subject of investigation leads the discussion to questions about its existence rather than any more questions of the identity of the object or the expertise of the knower. This shift from questioning identity to existence is because the reasons that one could give for doubting an Austinian object have been exhausted when one claims to know a generic object in "ideal" epistemic conditions. Once you make a claim "this is a hand," the skeptical response of "how do you know" cannot be answered by expanding on the features of the hand in question or by justifying the claim with one's expert knowledge of hands as it was done with the bird example. Now, the question of "how do you know?" can only be interpreted as "how do you know that your hand *really* exists?" This linguistic checkmate allows

[18] Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 88.

the skeptic to derive a general conclusion about *all* of our knowledge claims from our inability to justify a particular claim to knowledge.

After Cavell uncovers the presuppositions of the Cartesian skeptic's object of inquiry, Cavell then turns his attention to the context that Descartes finds themself in while making his claim to knowledge about a generic object and the subsequent doubt of such a claim. In this part of the argument, Cavell's critique centers around the oddness of someone claiming to know a generic object. Put more concretely, Cavell is interested in questioning the coherence/meaningfulness behind the initial claim to knowledge that the skeptic doubts. Interested in making the Wittgensteinian point, Cavell points out that for someone's words to have a meaning to the broader community, they are typically found "in definite contexts, in a language [human beings] share: *hence* the obsession with the use of an expression."[19] McGee, Mulhall, and Michael Williams interpret this point to mean that certain conditions need to be fulfilled in order for an assertion or a claim to knowledge to be intelligible. This is the standard interpretation of Cavell's philosophical remarks against epistemological skepticism, which Williams summarizes in the following way:

> Take Stanley Cavell, who thinks that the skeptic can be convicted of only seeming to make sense. Cavell argues that though the skeptic speaks in grammatically correct sentences, he uses them in a peculiar, indeed finally unintelligible, way. This results in a kind of illusion of sense. The skeptic deploys familiar words and phrases. But in a way that makes it impossible to see what *he* means *by* them. However, because we know what

[19] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 206.

> they mean, it seems that his pronouncements must mean something, even if we can't quite grasp what it is.[20]

To understand this semantic point more clearly, we need to develop Cavell's notion of a concrete claim. Cavell argues that certain conditions must be in place for an utterance to be interpreted as an assertion. He notes that: "I am interested here merely in suggesting that there are conditions, not in trying to elicit a rationalized list of them."[21] Cavell gives us a sample of two conditions that allow for an utterance to be a concrete claim. The first condition is that the utterance typically has new information that the person receiving it "is in a position to understand."[22] The second condition, nearer to the skeptical dilemma at hand, asks us to imagine what the conditions would typically be if someone tried to tell someone else a piece of information that the initial person thought was new (informative) and the person receiving the information was already aware of the situation. For example, if someone uttered the phrase "I have a hand" or "this is a piece of paper," the person receiving the relevant information would say "yes, I know" in order to clear up any relevant factors that would suggest otherwise. However, it would be genuinely odd and incomprehensible if the person responding to the initial statement followed up with the question, "how do you know?" The point is that in the traditional epistemological investigation, "there are no special reasons for believing that we might not know"[23] the utterance that was first entered into the conversation. The skeptic is entering a claim to knowledge and a claim to doubt of that knowledge, even though there is no contextual reason for these claims to be said. In response to this objection, the Cartesian epistemologist could respond by saying that there is an

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[20] Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996), 16.
[21] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 209.
[22] Cavell, 209.
[23] Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 100.

important reason for uttering his initial assertion, mainly that they are asserting an evident truth! They would most likely push the Cavellian point by asking if Cavell is arguing that we cannot make statements about evidently truthful states of affairs. In response to the Cartesian epistemologist and according to the standard reading, what Cavell is trying to point out is that "you cannot say something, *relying on what is ordinarily meant in saying it*, and mean something other than would ordinarily be meant."[24] In other words, Cavell is reminding the Cartesian epistemologist that he has taken words out of their ordinary context by using them differently. By stripping away the context in which words like knowledge and doubt are normally found, the Cartesian epistemologist is repudiating the ordinary criteria that are normally used to make sense of those words and replacing it with a new set of criteria without us becoming aware of the switch. So, has Cavell refuted the skeptic once and for all by showing how they have violated the shared criteria that allow us to understand our everyday words?

One of the central questions that have gripped all of the philosophers explored throughout this chapter is: What does a *successful* refutation to philosophical skepticism look like? Furthermore, does Cavell provide one? McGinn, Williams, and Mulhall take the skeptical impulse seriously because there is a rift between our philosophical conclusions (that there are no epistemological foundations) and our everyday activities. McGinn expresses this rift and the desire for a reconciliation between the two perspectives in the following way: "What we want is a philosophical account of ordinary practice that does not generate a conclusion that is in conflict with our ordinary common-sense outlook."[25] In the same manner, Williams is also troubled with the bifurcation between the conclusion that exists between our philosophical investigations and

[24] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 212.
[25] McGinn, *Sense and Certainty*, 11.

our common-sense outlook.[26] However, he notes that this bifurcation results from philosophizing in a certain way found in traditional epistemological investigations. Williams responds by denouncing the traditional epistemic assumptions underlying foundationalism and coherentism, ultimately laying out the benefits of leaving them aside for a contextualist approach and dispelling the presupposition that led us to the skeptical conclusion in the first place, leaving them aside once and for all. Mulhall diverts significantly from the other two thinkers, as he is mostly concerned with developing a coherent and philosophically enticing—to professional philosophers— account of Cavell's overall philosophical project. For this reason, he is interested in the skeptical dilemma because of its centrality throughout Cavell's work. This motivation allows him to reiterate crucial aspects of Cavell's philosophy that the other two scholars miss. I bring this up in the middle of my exegesis to allow us to understand how each philosopher's interpretation of Cavell's treatment of the traditional philosophical skeptic advances their projects. However, despite these differences, they are united in the sense that they take Cavell to be offering a *once-and-for-all refutation* to the skeptical dilemma by critiquing the skeptic with his contextualist response and relegating his words outside of the bounds of sense. Now that we have completed a brief introduction of Cavell's interpretation of the Cartesian epistemologist investigation and the motivational background behind our three Cavellian scholars, let us turn to a more detailed account of Cavell's "solution" to the skeptical conclusion and its reception by the scholars just mentioned.

The standard reading of Cavell's "solution" or *final* dissolution of the skeptical conclusion is interpreted to be an example of the type of therapeutic approach to philosophical problems that orthodox Wittgensteinians would be familiar with. Instead of providing a

[26] Williams, *Unnatural Doubts*, 9.

refutation that sees the skeptic's claims as false, Cavell is said to counter the skeptical argument by pointing out the senselessness of the skeptic's words. This approach, close to Peter Hacker's and Gordon Baker's orthodox reading of Wittgenstein, views the philosopher to no longer be in the business of stating facts about the world. Instead, the philosopher's task is to demarcate the bounds of sense that certain language games possess, mainly by reminding the philosopher that they are using the ordinary sense of the word "incorrectly." Hacker and Baker summarize this Wittgensteinian point in the following way:

> To grammar belongs everything that determines sense, everything that has to be settled antecedently to questions about truth. The grammar of an expression, in Wittgenstein's generous use of 'grammar,' also specifies the licit combinatorial possibilities of the expression, 'i.e., *which combinations make sense and which don't*, which are allowed and which are not allowed.'[27]

This rendition of Wittgenstein's later philosophical project, to specify the grammar of our words in order to organize our claims into meaningful and meaningless, is broadly the underlying schema that Cavellian scholars like Mulhall, McGinn, and Williams have assumed to be Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein and the spirit in which he treats the Cartesian epistemologist. However, they all identify that Cavell has a modified response to the skeptic compared to the orthodox Wittgensteinian project. This modification is that Cavell does not believe that the skeptic's words are purely nonsensical, like the words 'jhng' or 'tuspp' but instead that the skeptic's words are

[27] Gordon P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning*, ed. Gordon P. Baker, 2nd, extensively rev. ed ed., Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations, v. 1 (Oxford, UK ; Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 145–46.

found in an investigation that produces "illegitimate or unintelligible"[28] claims. To put this in simpler terms:

> [T]he skeptic transgresses the bounds of sense, on this story, by using familiar meaningful words outside the conditions that govern intelligibility employment. It is not that the words as such as meaningless—they have, let us say, their standard dictionary definitions and a history of past uses—it is the skeptic's distinctive employment of them that flounders.[29]

This interpretation is a mixture of contextualism combined with a distinction between what a word means, using a dictionary, and what it would mean while deployed in a context. For example, if a teacher utters the words "time to read!" in the context where a recess bell has gone off, we can understand the words to mean that it is time for the students to head back to class to resume their studies. However, if the same words are now deployed in a different context, say at the specific time that students have a reading break, then it is assumed that these words act as a prompt for students to bring out the books that they have been assigned to read during their reading time. In both contexts, the words hold a particular "fixed" meaning that can be found in our dictionaries. Cavell's point is that other semantic content is needed for the words to be comprehensible/intelligible. In the standard reading, the skeptic/traditional epistemologist lacks the context for their words to hold this more nuanced meaning, and they are charged with violating our conventional norms of meaning.[30] This interpretation then holds Cavell to be arguing that the Cartesian epistemologist's words are unintelligible. At that point, the skeptical

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[28] McGinn, *Sense and Certainty*, 85; Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 85.
[29] David Macarthur, "Cavell on Skepticism and the Importance of Not-Knowing," *Conversations: The Journal of Cavellian Studies*, no. 2 (July 8, 2014): 5, https://doi.org/10.18192/cjcs.v0i2.1100.
[30] McGinn, *Sense and Certainty*, 92; Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 104; Williams, *Unnatural Doubts*, 149.

conclusion that seemed to have a real consequence for our everyday beliefs is dissolved by relegating the skeptic's words to the realm of unintelligibility. In order to see how this standard reading does not align with some of the metaphilosophical commitments of Cavell's and Wittgenstein's project, it will be necessary to develop how Cavell interprets the notion of skepticism.

§1.3 Stanley Cavell's Skepticism and Wittgensteinian Criteria

Contrary to Mulhall, Williams, and McGee, I do not take Cavell's concern to be that the skeptical argument is unintelligible. Instead, I see him pointing out instances where there is a disagreement between our ordinary criteria and our philosophical criteria, resulting in failures of attunement between the philosopher and the community of natural language speakers. Cavell describes what he means by attunement in the following manner:

> In speaking of the vision of language underlying ordinary language procedures in philosophy, I had in mind something I have suggested in discussing Wittgenstein's relation of grammar and criteria to "forms of life", and in emphasizing the sense in which human convention is not arbitrary but constitutive of significant speech and activity; in which mutual understanding, and hence language, depends upon nothing more and nothing less than shared forms of life, call it our mutual attunement or agreement in our criteria.[31]

To understand this alternative response, I will take a careful look at Cavell's understanding of skepticism, drawing on Shieh and Macarthur's work. The alternative reading that I am proposing is understood most clearly once we have Cavell's conception of skepticism in focus. Throughout

[31] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 168.

the following section, sometimes, the complexity and radical divergence of Cavell's understanding of skepticism will make the exposition challenging to follow. However, if at any time you find yourself confused, please come back to the following passage in *The Claim of Reason* to anchor your thoughts:

> What remains here of first importance is that the skeptic's discovery (apparent discovery) repudiates or undercuts the validity of our criteria, our attunement with one another. That just *this* is the consequence of skepticism is something I take as equally significant about what skepticism is and about what a Wittgensteinian criterion is.
>
> I should say that it is what I just called the skeptic's apparent progress and his apparent assumption, together with certain further related features, that constitute what I am calling skepticism, or characterize what I am interested in in skeptical arguments. I do not, that is, confine the term to philosophers who wind up denying that we can ever know; I apply it to any view which takes the existence of the world to be a problem of knowledge… I hope it will not seem perverse that I lump views in such a way, taking the very raising of the question of knowledge in a certain form, or spirit, to constitute skepticism, regardless of whether a philosophy takes itself to have *answered* the question affirmatively or negatively.[32]

To unpack this nuanced view of skepticism, it will be helpful to precisely understand what the skeptical impulse is repudiating, this being our ordinary criteria or, in the case of a

[32] Cavell, 46.

philosophically frame skepticism, Wittgensteinian criteria. At this early stage of the analysis, we should distinguish that there are two different types of skepticism that Cavell is interested in. The first concerning a skeptical thesis, like the one found in Descartes's philosophy, and the second a broader universal human impulse to repudiate communal ordinary language criteria. In a sense, for Cavell, these two examples are the same since the philosophical impulse is a manifestation of the universal impulse. However, we should try to keep these separate for now as we look to unpack what Wittgensteinian criteria are and how they are deployed to return the philosopher's words from their metaphysical status to their everyday usage. This conceptual and methodological clarification will be useful in section three when we turn to what Cavell means by the "truth of skepticism."

In the first part of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason,* he argues that Wittgenstein's notion of criterion found in the *Philosophical Investigations* resembles the **ordinary everyday notion of criterion**. Cavell uses this exploration of the ordinary sense of criterion as a backdrop to compare and contrast Wittgenstein's notion, which he says diverts from the ordinary sense in three aspects (more on this later). Cavell uses eight separate excerpts from books, newspapers, and institutional documents, chosen randomly, where the concept of a criterion is deployed in ordinary language. From these excerpts, he creates a taxonomy of the salient features of the "ordinary idea of the criterion":[33]

1. Source of Authority
2. Authority's mode of acceptance
3. Epistemic goal
4. Candidate object or phenomenon
5. Status concept

[33] Cavell, 9.

6. Epistemic means (specification of criteria)
7. Degree of satisfaction (standards or tests for applying #6)[34]

To see this taxonomy in action, let us use one of Cavell's examples:

> A. "American officials listed four criteria for judging a government here [in Saigon] as stable: ability to maintain law and order in the cities, the capacity to raise and support effective armed forces, an adequate degree of protection for vital American and Vietnamese installations, and the presence of responsible officials with whom their American counter parts can conduct useful discussion." [New York Times, Wednesday, November 25, 1964][35]

In this example, we can see that our sources of authority are the "American officials." Their mode of acceptance of fulfilling the established criteria is to set up and establish the said government. The epistemic goal is to *judge* whether the Vietnamese government in place aligns with its four criteria. The candidate object of investigation is the Vietnamese government. The status concept is 'stable.' The specification of the criteria or epistemic means of establishing the status concept are: maintaining law and order, the capacity to raise and support effective armed forces, providing adequate protection of Vietnamese and American installations, and having responsible officials with a clear line of communication. Cavell provides us with a broad definition of the ordinary sense of criteria that encapsulates the features that were mentioned:

> On this lay-out, criteria are specifications a given person or group sets up on the basis of which (by means of, in terms of which) to judge (assess, settle) whether

[34] Cavell, 9.
[35] Cavell, 8.

> something has a particular status or value. Different formulations bring it close to other regions of Wittgenstein's surface rhetoric: Certain specifications are what a person or a group mean by (what they call, count as) a thing's having a certain status; the specifications define the status; the status consists in satisfying those specifications.[36]

Cavell now turns to the disanalogies between this ordinary notion of criteria and the Wittgensteinian notion. These three disanalogies will help us see some of the underlying motivations behind Wittgenstein's deployment of criteria in response to philosophical puzzles and how they are supposed to be understood. Also, they clarify why Wittgenstein's notion of criterion, in alignment with Cavell's use of everyday criterion, is not used, in either of their work, to construct an absolute refutation of the skeptical problem.[37]

The first disanalogy from our ordinary sense of a criterion and the Wittgensteinian notion of a criterion is that "in no case which he appeals to the application of criteria is there a separate stage at which one might, explicitly or implicitly, appeal to the application of standards."[38] In other words, the ordinary notion of criterion differs from the Wittgensteinian criterion because in the ordinary notion, there is a distinction between the criteria and the standards that satisfy the criteria "to a greater or lesser degree."[39] However, Wittgenstein never appeals to standards when he uses criteria to dissolve a philosophical puzzle. Take into consideration the criteria set by the American soldiers to judge the stability of a Vietnamese government. Although the soldiers can generally identify that a Vietnamese government provides adequate protection to American and

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[36] Cavell, 9.
[37] Cavell, 7.
[38] Cavell, 13.
[39] Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 78.

Vietnamese assets, this criterion will have different standards depending on who is assessing the current situation, which is vital in interpreting the criterion mentioned. In comparison, "to have criteria, [in Wittgenstein's] sense, for something's being so is to know whether, in an individual case, the criteria do or do not apply."[40] For example, if a skeptical impulse takes over a philosopher who starts to wonder how it is that we know what a chair is, Wittgenstein will then appeal to the criteria of the chair (that it has four legs, people can sit on it, etc.) Wittgenstein, at no point in the investigation, appeals to what degree the criteria are fulfilled; we can either identify the chair or not. If there is doubt about applying Wittgensteinian criteria to a certain case, then this means that we do not possess a type of criteria that can be deployed in all possible cases. This inability to apply Wittgensteinian criteria tells us that we are dealing with a borderline case, which is information that we did not have before our investigation.

The second disanalogy from the ordinary notion of a criterion is that the notion of a Wittgensteinian criterion has to do with the "nature of the "objects" which are candidates for judgement (the fourth element) together with the concepts which assign to the objects a certain "status" (the fifth element)."[41] In the ordinary sense of a criterion, the identity of the objects of judgement is not being questioned. Rather what is needed is an evaluation of the object's/subject's performance in comparison to the criteria that is provided. For example, we can think of the type of criteria employed to judge a dog show, a government's stability, and a diving competition. At no point does the judge of a dog show start to question the existence of a poodle that they are judging. Instead, they doubt the extent to which the poodle in question is in accordance with the guidelines/criteria set out in the rule book. On the other hand, the objects

[40] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 13.
[41] Cavell, 14.

that Wittgenstein is interested in are ordinary objects and concepts like toothaches, following a rule, believing, thinking. Wittgenstein uses the fact that criteria are object-specific in order to flip the investigation on its head. Instead of starting with an object and then eliciting the criteria that would help us evaluate the object, as it is normally done in the employment of ordinary criteria, Wittgenstein starts with our shared criteria to learn about the kind of object under investigation. These are called grammatical investigations, and they serve to learn the web of concepts that would be available for us to intelligibly use "in contexts in which the concept of that object has its application."[42] In the context of epistemology, Cavell wants to make the crucial point that Wittgensteinian criteria emphasize *a different* aspect of our epistemological life. He makes this crucial distinction in the following manner:

> When epistemology raises the question of knowledge, what it asks for are the grounds of our certainty. But we are reminded [by Wittgensteinian criteria] that what we call knowledge is also related to what we call getting to know, or learning e.g., to our ability to identify or classify or discriminate different objects with and from one another. Criteria are criteria of judgment; the underlying idea is one of discriminating or separating cases, of identifying by means of differences. (this is reflected explicitly in the sense of "discrimination" as "prejudice".) All I want from these considerations so far is a prospective attention to Wittgenstein's emphasis upon the idea of judgement. In the modern history of epistemology, the idea of judgment is not generally distinguished from the idea of statement generally, or perhaps they are too completely distinguished. The problem is not that in focusing upon those forms of utterance which are characterized by their

[42] Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 79.

> exclusive possession of truth or falsity a philosopher fails to attend to other "uses" of language. One may presumably study what one chooses. The problem is to see *whether the study of human knowledge may as a whole be distorted, anyway dictated by this focus*.[43]

Cavell wants us to see that Wittgensteinian criteria and Wittgenstein's work in epistemology, in general, help us remember these missed aspects of our epistemological life. Wittgenstein's work reminds us about the effect of our communally constructed practices influence and shapes the language that we possess and, with it, the way in which we can make judgements of what is and what is not the case. As we will explore in chapter two, my argument will center around this complaint and make the case that our philosophical work in epistemology, at least in the Western tradition, *has been distorted* by the legacy of equating knowledge solely to the "sum (or product) of true statements, and hence construe the limits of human knowledge as coinciding with the extent to which it has amassed true statements of the world."[44] As we will come to understand, this distortion has been so encompassing that it has hidden from view incredibly important and diverse ways of knowing ourselves and the world around us.

The third and final disanalogy has to do with the authority behind establishing criteria. Under the everyday notion, as we saw with the initial example, a specific authority determines the criteria. This authority will generally vary in the common conception of criterion, depending on the object being investigated and the goal in the evaluation or ranking of the object. However, the authority behind all of Wittgenstein's criteria does not vary at all. "It is, for him, always *we* who "establish" the criteria under investigation."[45] This means there is a direct link between

[43] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 16–17 (emphasis added).
[44] Cavell, 17.
[45] Cavell, 18.

Wittgensteinian criteria and the community of human beings as the ultimate authority of its construction and successful deployment. When Wittgenstein articulates our shared criteria, he is doing it as a representative of our language community. This is not to be interpreted as the "right" way to speak or as the limits of intelligibility. Instead, it is a sample that he deploys, and in that same sense, a sample that tests whether the criteria that he is developing *has* a community. As Cavell notes: "one sample does not refute or disconfirm another; if two are in disagreement they vie with one another for the same confirmation. The only source of confirmation here is ourselves."[46]

To solidify our understanding of Wittgensteinian criteria, let us recap some of its important features. Cavell believes that Wittgensteinian criteria are a modified version of our everyday notion of criteria. Like a standard criterion, a Wittgensteinian criterion helps us discriminate between cases and provides us a framework to judge whether a certain case falls under a certain status. However, there are three salient differences found in Wittgensteinian criteria: 1) they are concerned mainly with identifying if the case can be identified as the general kind of thing under investigation 2) the objects under investigation are ordinary objects/concepts and are not the type of object or concept that would require evaluation 3) Wittgenstein believes that the authority or group who has established the given criteria is the general public and not a specific entity that changes between individual investigations. Now that the notion of a Wittgensteinian criterion is reasonably clear in comparison to the notion of everyday criteria, we can come to understand Cavell's notion of skepticism as to the repudiation of such Wittgensteinian criteria in the philosophical (found to be the case in the philosophical context)

[46] Cavell, 19.

and more broadly Cavell's view that skepticism in a more general sense is the repudiation of our ordinary criteria.

Cavell does not think that skepticism is a denial of our capability to know a certain part of our lives, such as the external world, other minds, or a specified set of epistemic states of "certain knowledge, or everyday knowledge, or justified belief."[47] Instead, he is interested in the battle between skeptically manufactured criteria by the philosopher and our ordinary criteria. In a philosophical context, Cavell thinks that the skeptical impulse is present anytime that the philosopher is disappointed with our ordinary criteria because "[our shared criteria has] fail[ed] to conclusively establish the reality of whatever the criteria are criteria of."[48] The skeptical response to this failure of our ordinary criteria is then met once again with the skeptical impulse, which manifests in either constructive or destructive ways. In other words, the Cartesian epistemologist will either conclude that we cannot *really* know anything, or they will create new criteria for the concept of knowledge that they believe to be suitable. Cavell believes that this is seen in either traditional academic skepticism or other on the positive side in modern epistemology. Let us look at some examples in order to understand how even though their presentations are different, one negative and the other positive, they both yield the same result (a repudiation of our ordinary criteria).

Let us begin with a positive and negative skeptical philosophical approach to our ordinary concept of cleanliness. In an everyday context, we can deploy the concept "clean" in relation to a table when it has met more or less the following criteria: there is no clear dirt or stain on a surface, no clear pieces of trash, and the surface does not have an unpleasant smell.

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[47] Macarthur, "Cavell on Skepticism and the Importance of Not-Knowing," 11.
[48] Macarthur, 12.

However, someone with a powerful microscope, let us say a philosopher of science, engages us in conversation and explains that we can only pronounce the surface as clean only once we have verified with a powerful microscope that *all* of the microbes and bacteria have been wiped away. The criteria used by the philosopher of science for the deployment of the concept "clean" would be the following: A surface is clean if and only if it does not have any microbes or bacteria on the surface. Under Cavell's understanding of skepticism, this philosopher has repudiated the common criteria that are normally used and replaced them with more stringent criteria, which are a positive or constructive mode of skepticism. On the other hand, another philosopher of science who is convinced by this new criterion for the concept "clean" might start to develop a new theory on why we should suspend our judgement about the cleanliness of *any* surface because the microscope that was initially used to make the criterion has been proven to miss .00001% of bacteria and microbes. We can never *really* know if the surface in question is a surface that is actually clean under this new criterion. The person who accepts this new criterion would then think that we have been misusing the word clean in our everyday life, and we should now start to explain to ourselves why we had taken the liberty to say that a surface is clean when in reality it was never this way. A negative cleanliness skeptic has been born!

The point of the example is to show how easy it is to fall out of attunement with our linguistic community, which is essentially what the impulse of skepticism does. In either its positive or negative manifestation, skepticism is luring us away from our shared criteria and attacking these criteria' validity. In the case of the Cartesian epistemologist, Cavell is worried about them because they have cast themselves out of attunement with the rest of the linguistic community in order to pursue an epistemic ideal that is so far removed from our epistemic practices that any theoretical conclusions found in the investigation have no connection to the

world that we live in. This condition of dogmatism that the Cartesian epistemologist finds themselves in cannot be combated within the "traditional and widely accepted conception of philosophical criticism."[49] This is the case because a traditional philosophical approach presumes that when one has encountered a difference of opinions, one must look for an independent, objective, and impersonal "basis of correctness" in order to conclude which side is "correct." As we will come to understand in the next section, Cavell's response to the skeptic deviates radically from this traditional philosophical approach to conflicting viewpoints. Instead of looking for and appealing to an objective standard outside of the fact that people agree in deploying the concept of knowledge, Cavell wants to invite the Cartesian epistemologist back to the community of language users who have used the concept of knowledge multiple times without a problem.

§1.4 The "Truth of Skepticism" as a Guiding Insight

Cavell's account of what he calls "the truth of skepticism" or "the moral of skepticism" will serve us greatly as a guiding insight as we move onto the history behind the Western tradition's epistemological methods and the impact it has had eclipsing diverse ways of knowing. It will also clarify our initial investigation into why the standard interpretation of Wittgenstein's and Cavell's treatment of philosophical skepticism does not align with their overall philosophical project. So, we will begin by dissecting what Cavell means by the truth of skepticism in the various passages that it is mentioned in *The Claim of Reason*, and then connect his insight later

[49] Shieh, "The Truth of Skepticism," 151.

in chapter two with what Linda Martín Alcoff calls a symptom and a cause of the Eurocentrism found in Western academic philosophy; a "transcendentalist delusion."[50]

Cavell mentions the terms "the truth of skepticism" in *The Claim of Reason* in the following ways:

> The fate of criteria, or their limitations, reveals, I should like to say, the truth of skepticism—though of course this may require a reinterpretation of what skepticism is, or threatens.[51]

> One misses the drive of Wittgenstein if one is not sufficiently open to the truth of skepticism (i.e. to the skeptic in oneself); or if one takes Wittgenstein… to deny the truth of skepticism.[52]

In the following quotation, Cavell comes the closest to defining what he means by the terms "the truth of skepticism," as he appeals to the term to describe a salient bond between Martin Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's philosophy:

> The bond is one, in particular, that implies a shared view of what I have called the truth of skepticism, or what I might call the moral of skepticism, namely, *that the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of knowing.*[53]

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[50] Alcoff defines the transcendentalist delusion in the following way: "a belief that thought can be separated from its specific, embodied, and geo-historical source.
"Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance," 397.
[51] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 7.
[52] Cavell, 47.
[53] Cavell, 241 (my emphasis).

Found in these three quotations are the concepts and claims we have been exploring in sections one and two of this chapter. Mainly, that there are limits to our ordinary and Wittgensteinian criteria, a philosophical tendency to be disappointed with them and the attempt to escape them by creating new philosophically stringent criteria, and in Cartesian epistemology, how this constructive skeptical response builds an epistemology that is detached from our everyday practices. According to the standard interpretation of Cavell's response to the Cartesian skeptic, scholars interpret the line "anyway not what we think of knowing" to refer "to the philosophical idea of knowing with certainty, the goal of the traditional quest for certainty which dominated modern epistemology for centuries."[54] This interpretation is still under the supposition that Cavell wants to refute the skeptic once and for all, breaking away entirely from Cartesian epistemology. However, as we will come to understand, this is the step that Cavell does not presuppose to be taking in his diagnosis of the skeptic's words. Instead, Macarthur, Shieh, and I take Cavell's "point [to be] more radical: that *traditional epistemology as a whole* fails to do justice to the ground of our attunement in language, our natural relation to the world and each other."[55] In other words, the skeptical impulse that takes our relationship to the world, ourselves, and others to be based solely on a type of knowledge that can be compounded (through an accumulation of true statements and the correct method to find these true statements) is a misguided myth. Rather, as we will see throughout the rest of the thesis, our epistemological lives and our relation to the world, ourselves, and others are composed of a myriad of cognitive-affective habits that are influenced by many different social and historical factors. In regard to the conversation between Cavell and the Cartesian skeptic, Cavell cannot refute the skeptic's beliefs about the external world or other minds because neither he nor the skeptic is able to

[54] Macarthur, "Cavell on Skepticism and the Importance of Not-Knowing," 19.
[55] Macarthur, 19.

appeal to an objective standard outside of the criteria that Cavell has inherited and the new criteria that the Cartesian skeptic has created. It is this inability to reach outside of the conversation to form a refutation with an appeal to an objective standard that disallows Cavell's or Wittgenstein's refutation to be final once and for all. In this sense, the Cartesian skeptic will always be in our philosophical history, ready with his exclusive criteria for who counts as a knower and waiting for us to go along with said criteria. The lesson that we can draw from Cavell's and Wittgenstein's exchange with the skeptic is that a failure of attunement in criteria, leading to our inability to speak to one another, is always available to us. This attunement in criteria, which is to say that we judge the world and its concepts in similar ways because of a way of life, is a requirement that Cavell and Wittgenstein take to be fundamental to our ability to communicate. It is important to note that there is no philosophical explanation for this agreement in criteria or a guarantee that it will be the case. All that can be said is that we witness it in our everyday lives and presuppose it in our daily conceptual deployments. Here we find ourselves with one of the crucial differences between Cavell's understanding of philosophy and the standard conception. Shieh summarizes how this difference manifests in both metaphilosophical commitments:

> Traditional philosophy goes with the idea that in philosophizing one may come to possess a truth or occupy a vantage point that is simply missed by those one criticizes. By contrast, for the philosopher of the ordinary, there is no such asymmetry in intellectual position between herself and those whom she opposes…It is also not the case that while

> the skeptic is "confused" or "unintelligible" or "abnormal," the philosophical critic is not. In a failure of attunement, the loss of intelligibility is mutual.[56]

Cavell's philosophical project in *The Claim of Reason,* which is a complete and thorough analysis of Wittgenstein's project, reawakens the Cartesian epistemologist to the fact that *they are in the world* and are related to the world, not in an abstract and disembodied way. Macarthur sums up the way in which this elucidation shifts our mindset, freeing us to start to reimagine our relationship to ourselves, the world, and other people:

> The traditional project of epistemology attempts to build a fortress against skepticism from an impersonal perspective—in modern philosophy, typically (and hopelessly!) from sensory materials. On Cavell's view this project, far from ensuring our relation to the world, actually stands in the way of giving a realistic account of the depth or intimacy of our attachment to the world and others, even—something I have not touched on –the distinctiveness of our relation to ourselves. These are subjective matters of (the achievement or failure of) *acknowledgement* and *responsibility* rather than objective matters of knowledge and doubt."[57]

If skepticism is an attack on our attunement that we possess in our ordinary criteria, and the way that we relate to the world is not through an impersonal epistemological position (the truth of skepticism), then it would follow that there needs to be a better understanding of the social aspects of our knowledge claims based on actual-world interactions. This methodological shift from an ideal/removed epistemological investigation towards a socially embedded one comes as a result of an understanding of Cavell's "truth of skepticism." This Cavellian notion reminds us

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[56] Shieh, "The Truth of Skepticism," 162.
[57] Macarthur, "Cavell on Skepticism and the Importance of Not-Knowing," 22 (my emphasis).

that our attunement with our linguistic community is tied directly with our ability to know, which directs us to an unideal world where our commitments (to the world, to others, to ourselves) are not based solely on absolute certainty, justification, and doubt but also *acknowledgement* and *responsibility* to understand and be understood by our peers. In the following chapter, we will look at the history behind the Cartesian epistemologist's assumptions and the Eurocentric portrayal of this history in Robert Pasnau's *After Certainty: A History of Our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions*. It will be through this analysis that we will come to understand how a Eurocentric framework leads to the eclipsing of the truth of skepticism (the fact that we are in a world of embodied knowers) and ultimately to a harmful "transcendental delusion" found both in Pasnau's own recounting of history and in Descartes epistemology.

Cavell often cites the following Wittgensteinian passage as a counter myth to the myth that our relation to the world is one of Cartesian knowing:

> The more closely we examine actual language, the greater becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not something I had *discovered*: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming vacuous. –We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction, and so, in a certain sense, the conditions are ideal; but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to rough ground![58]

If we are to take the insight of the truth of skepticism seriously in our epistemological investigations, then we have to be wary of an ideal theory that does not *come back to our rough*

[58] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Rev. 4th ed (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §107.

ground, which is filled with socio-political struggles, power structures, and historical contingency. It is for this reason that the second chapter will focus first on the history of the Cartesian epistemological method and the colonial/exclusivist baggage that it holds. Once we come to understand the historical contingency of this method and its limitations, it will be easier to turn to a contemporary account of social epistemology that takes the truth of skepticism seriously and tries to grapple with the current non-ideal epistemological landscape found in Canada and the United States. To guide us down this path, I have chosen the work of Kristie Dotson and José Medina. First, we will uncover the epistemological engine behind current day Jane Crow dynamics through Dotson's work and get a sense of how un-ideal the epistemological really is. Then we will zoom in on an individual level and consider the cognitive-affective habits that are found in privileged positionalities in Medina's model of the epistemology of resistance. One of my hopes with this chapter was to make sure that you do not succumb to a transcendental delusion when reading chapter two. Rather, we should regard the rest of my thesis in the same way that Medina presents his model:

> This book will not present or rely on a theory of epistemic justice (for Wittgensteinian reasons, I suspend judgement whether or not there can be a *unified* theory of what is just in all our epistemic interactions). Rather, it will offer contextualist elucidations of particular epistemic problems and injustices, some of which are so pervasive to the point of seeming omnipresent.[59]

In the same respect, the second chapter will outline ways in which our epistemic practices are affected by certain epistemic vices and virtues which are inculcated by complex social practices

[59] José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations,* Studies in Feminist Philosophy (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.

and the result of interactions between subjects and their environments. One of the overall goals of these two chapters will be to resist the urge to escape into ideal theory and display the benefits and elucidations of an epistemology that is grounded in the every day, and for that to be accomplished, we need *friction*!

Chapter 2: *Our* Non-ideal Epistemological Landscape

Throughout the last chapter, I was mainly concerned with the discourse surrounding Cartesian epistemic skepticism. The reason for this case study and my development of its Cavellian and Wittgensteinian rebuttal was to showcase a philosophical tendency that has been inherited and uncritically assessed by dominant voices in the discipline. This tendency, in the context of epistemology, is to develop theories that presuppose that the best human epistemic state that anyone can achieve is an accumulation of true statements acquired *only* by a specific method that removes the knower from the object of knowledge. The philosopher Robert Pasnau develops the history of this tendency in his book *After Certainty: A History of Our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions*. I bring Pasnau's historical investigation into our conversation in order to emphasize two distinct points. The first point is that I will be drawing on Pasnau's findings and his characterization of epistemology as idealized, demonstrated in his findings throughout the pre-modern and modern periods of Western philosophy. He tracks this ideal from Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics*, through to scholastic thinkers in the Medieval ages, and finally in the disintegration of Scholasticism in the modern era through Descartes, John Locke, and David Hume. Idealized epistemology is defined in the following manner:

> Rather than take as its goal the analysis of our concept of knowledge, an idealized epistemology aspires, first, to describe the epistemic ideal that human beings might hope to achieve and then, second, to chart the various ways in which we commonly fall off from that ideal.[60]

[60] Robert Pasnau, *After Certainty: A History of Our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions*, First edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3.

The second point is that I will use Pasnau as an exemplar of the type of philosopher who is actively ignorant. This active ignorance is seen most clearly in Pasnau's omission of critical historical influences in the development of Descartes's idealized epistemology and in his call to action to return to idealized epistemology. This active ignorance makes it impossible for Pasnau to tackle seriously the normative implications of these epistemic idealizations and a critical analysis of why we should keep these norms in circulation.

Before we accept Pasnau's call to action for philosophers to revert to a modified idealized epistemology that set its sights on a less ideal epistemic ideal[61], we need to critically address what he identifies as the central normative question concerning an *idealized epistemology*: "What should we regard as the normative epistemic ideal for us, given our capacities and circumstances?"[62] This critical address will question whom Pasnau had in mind when he wrote the words, we, us, and our in the previous quote. As I will argue in the first section of this chapter, Pasnau misses critical historical information regarding the colonial legacy of Western philosophy's epistemic idealizations and how these epistemic ideals have been used to prop up systems of white and male supremacy. We will end this chapter by sketching a possible link between this epistemic idealization found in the history of philosophy, which is upheld by uncritical dominant voices in philosophy (Pasnau in this case), and Medina's notion of *active ignorance*, which comes as a result of socially developed epistemic vices.

[61] Pasnau, 138.
[62] Pasnau, 125.

Pasnau's colour and gender insensitivity[63] are challenging to bring up as a criticism in the philosophical context. This difficulty stems from two interrelated phenomena. First, “the canon's" philosophical legacy of white and male supremacy is found in many of its prominent figures' background assumptions. Second, resultant negative cognitive habits from a lifelong uncritical study of these texts are quite entrenched in many of the dominant voices in the discipline. These interrelated phenomena allow contemporary philosophers to ignore racial and gender differences and report universal conclusions from a transcendental position without adequate push back. This chapter will help us become sensitive to the type of gender and colour insensitivity displayed in Western philosophy more broadly by critiquing both Pasnau's Eurocentric historical investigation and continuing to critique Descartes's epistemic investigations. These two critiques will be focused on two major fault lines. The first will question and answer how and why a work of extensive philosophical history can avoid the cultural and historical lineage of philosophical figures and their association with white and male supremacy systems. The second will focus specifically on the unacknowledged history of Descartes’s epistemological project and the way it was built to eclipse diverse ways of knowing. With the help of feminist decolonial theorist Linda Martín Alcoff and Pasnau's historical investigation into the field of epistemology, I will argue, in line with Alcoff, that western philosophy’s Eurocentrism has led to a greater pathology: which Alcoff calls a "transcendentalist delusion."[64] Through this process of Eurocentric legitimization and the impulse for transcendentalist delusion, diverse ways of knowing are eclipsed, and whole swaths of our

[63] Jose Medina defines insensitivity as: “being cognitively and affectively numbed to the lives of others; being inattentive to and unconcerned by the experiences, problems, and aspirations; and being unable to connect with them and to understand their speech.”
Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, xi.
[64] Linda Alcoff, “Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of; Ignorance,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhause, Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 398.

everyday epistemic practices are perpetually overlooked. The first section's takeaway will be the identification of this transcendentalist delusion, which is broadly defined by Alcoff as a “belief that thought can be separated from its specific, embodied, and geo-historical source.”[65] This transcendentalist delusion is found in both the work of Robert Pasnau and Descartes and connects it to Medina’s notion of active ignorance. By understanding this process, we can surpass this colonial tendency and prepare ourselves to get a more exact portrayal of the contemporary "geography of epistemology"[66] in sections two and three of this chapter.

The second section of this chapter will follow the effects of a wider phenomenon of active ignorance in the contemporary epistemological dynamics of the United States. The discussion in the first section will give us a great entry point into a problem of 'unknowability' expressed by Black feminist theorists and explored in Dotson's paper "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability." By taking stock of Dotson's epistemological account of Pauli Murray's Jane Crow dynamics, we can get a thorough understanding of the epistemic landscape in the contemporary United States. After describing a holistic account of our contemporary epistemic landscape, I will introduce José Medina's epistemic resistance model. Medina's conceptual machinery will allow for a closer look at the phenomena of racial and gender insensitivity by providing a developmental account of our cognitive and socially generated epistemic habits and the subsequent epistemic vices and virtues. In keeping with the chapter's theme, uncovering our oppressive socio-epistemic landscape, the last section's focus will be on epistemic vices. The second and third section's primary goal will be to highlight how un-ideal our actual epistemic practices really are. This realization will be used as the motivation not to

[65] Alcoff, 397.
[66] Alcoff, 400.

look for a way out of this condition once and for all (as this is the transcendental delusion at play). Rather it will be used to look for meliorative political, ethical, and epistemic projects that give us the tools to constantly improve ourselves, our relations with others, and our collective imagination.

§2.1 Eurocentrism and The History of Cartesian Idealized Epistemology

In this section, what I propose is up for debate is the effect of Descartes's philosophical investigations in the field of epistemology on one subsection of the population. This subsection includes anyone who identifies as an academic philosopher. All this to say is that I want us to situate "the father" of modern philosophy in his social, theoretical, and moral context in order to have a better sense of where his academic goals came from and the impact of these goals on the philosophical conversations and communities that have inherited this philosophical legacy. Following from this thought, my main concern throughout this section will be Descartes's elaboration of *scientia,* a term which he inherits from Aristotle, and which Pasnau argues convincingly is Descartes's theory of knowledge or, in other words, "an idealized epistemology, a theory of *scientia*."[67] If Pasnau's argument holds, which I think it does, we ought to consider this idealized epistemology in conjunction with Alcoff's decolonial account of the history of Descartes's thoughts and its relation to European expansionist and imperialist projects. With this foundational work done, we can trace the impact that Descartes's idealized epistemology has had on current philosophical investigations and the harm it has caused through its uncritical uptake by contemporary philosophers who are caught up in a transcendentalist delusion. In this historical detour, we can find Descartes's impulse to a Cavellian skepticism in both the negative

[67] Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 24.

and positive sense where he repudiates other commonly held criteria by elaborating his own criteria of what counts as knowledge. More importantly, we can also see how Western philosophy's uncritical uptake of the Cartesian legacy limits the scope of our epistemological investigations and eclipses crucial epistemic investigations.

Pasnau is concerned with the tendency that out "of all the main branches of philosophy today epistemology is the most alienated from its history."[68] Throughout his book, he argues that this alienation has led to a field mostly concerned with questions of meaning and conceptual analysis, or "lexicology," rather than more substantial questions regarding our epistemic ideals. This proneness to lexicology in epistemology is "because [epistemology] lacks other sorts of stable grounds on which to build."[69] He makes this point clearer by comparing the debates found in epistemology with debates found in the philosophy of mind over consciousness in philosophy of mind and debates over causation in the philosophy of science. Pasnau notes that in the debates found in the philosophy of mind and consciousness, scholars typically do not stop to ask about the meaning of the word 'consciousness' or 'cause.' Instead, philosophers in these areas are concerned with clearly laid out paradigmatic cases and then try to reason some of the problems associated with these cases. However, as we can conclude from chapter one of this thesis, paradigm cases in epistemology have significantly been debated to the point that philosophers do not have a paradigm case to conclude from, as is done in the other parts of the philosophical landscape. As a result, questions about the meaning of the term 'knowledge' become the only way out of the philosophical weeds. Pasnau argues that by resurfacing epistemology's history, we

[68] Pasnau, 1.
[69] Pasnau, 21.

can move away from lexicology to something more substantive, a theory of idealized epistemology.

This section's primary focus is not to refute Pasnau's uncovering of Descartes's idealized epistemology but rather to see how it reinforces western philosophy's Eurocentric practices and curricula. The argument then centers more broadly on the active ignorance that is at play in Pasnau's historical account of Descartes's idealized epistemology and how this is evidence of Pasnau's transcendentalist delusion, which, as it was mentioned in an earlier footnote, is his "belief that thought can be separated from its specific, embodied, and geo-historical source."[70] This claim might seem surprising, especially in Pasnau's case, where he is clearly interested in the historical details of Descartes's idealized epistemology. However, as we will come to understand, the transcendentalist delusion is manifested in Pasnau's case as a Eurocentric portrayal of philosophical history and the erasure of colonial and European expansionist influences. In contrast, recent work in decolonial theory has situated the starting point/endpoint of idealized epistemology and its role in colonial practices throughout European imperialism. Although I agree with Alcoff and Enrique Dussel, whom Alcoff draws heavily from, that the Cartesian epistemic project brings about the most transparent case in the history of philosophy linking the European expansionist project with idealized epistemology, I want to make it clear that neither Alcoff nor myself are claiming that the disastrous colonialist violence and the subsequent destruction of a vast array of cultures and communities was a product of Descartes's writings. Instead, what I think is the case is that Descartes's investigations and subsequent theory give us a glimpse of a paradigmatic case of the type of methodological tendency that was used by "followers of Enlightenment ideas [who] began to develop putatively scientific and

[70] Alcoff, "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance," 397.

philosophical forms of argumentation that would legitimate colonial rule on the basis of rational superiority rather than religion."[71] With this in mind, let us weave Alcoff's and Pasnau's historical investigations together.

Descartes receives the legacy of an idealized epistemology from the ancients, more specifically from Aristotle and his work in the *Posterior Analytics*.[72] However, Descartes's idealized epistemology rejects various aspects of Aristotle's theoretical machinery. More specifically, he rejects the syllogism as a method to acquire knowledge, Aristotle's restrictions of universal premises in his method to acquire knowledge, and Aristotle's reliance on inner essences, which ground Aristotelian explanation.[73] Still, as Pasnau points out, Descartes keeps the framework that theoretical inquiry should aim towards an epistemic ideal. Before we move into the history behind the influences that impacted Descartes's conception of this epistemic ideal and why he chose to divert so widely from his Scholastic background, it is important to note that in Pasnau's account, he portrays Descartes's rejection of Aristotelian epistemology as though Descartes was breaking philosophical ground for the very first time. Only armed with Pasnau's account, we would be led to presume that Descartes brilliantly rejected swaths of Aristotelian scholasticism without *any* help from other thinkers. This is an example of Pasnau's transcendentalist delusion as it removes Descartes's ideas about Aristotlean epistemology from the background of influences that led him to that theoretical conclusion. In this sense, there is an omission of a more nuanced story behind the origin of Descartes's methodology and the intellectual influences that shaped his response.

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[71] Alcoff, 398.
[72] Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 22.
[73] Pasnau, 22.

Pasnau's most evident neglect in his account of the emergence of Descartes's philosophical investigation is the role of the Jesuit educational context in which Descartes was brought up. Alcoff draws from Enrique Dussel's and Walter Mignolo's work to highlight this neglected history and how it connects to Descartes's inherited methodology. In a broad sense, Alcoff uses Dussel's historical account in conjunction with Mignolo's concept of theo-politics, which is defined as: "the classification of people by blood and religions instead of by biology and skin color,"[74] to point out that "Descartes's habitus was very much unreflectively informed by the theo-politics of Christian conquest, producing an ego-politics with the imperialist mindset that rejected all external influences out of hand."[75] More specifically, Alcoff draws this line of thought by tracing the origin of the method of self-reflection/examination of consciousness, which is evident in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, to the Portuguese philosopher Fonseca, whose thought was mainly focused on debating the proper philosophical method, and the philosopher Francisco Sanchez "who proposed a means to arrive at certainty through a process of doubt."[76] The point here is not to debate whether Descartes plagiarized his unique method, as there is already an ongoing debate about this, but rather to highlight the fact that Descartes's rejection of Aristotelian scholasticism was based on an already developed understanding of the "proper" manner of ascending to a secure epistemic location. As I had noted earlier, Pasnau's omission of these influences is evidence of his transcendentalist delusion. This "proper" method, as was noted earlier, is steeped in the Jesuit theo-political procedures that were used to convert indigenous populations into Christianity as a manner of "protection" from abuse

[74] Walter Mignolo, "Decolonizing Sexualities: Foreword by Walter Mignolo," *Critical Legal Thinking* (blog), November 3, 2016, vi, https://criticallegalthinking.com/2016/11/03/decolonizing-sexualities-foreward-walter-mignolo/.
[75] Alcoff, "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance," 405.
[76] Alcoff, 405.

but also in order to exploit as workers in mines and plantations.[77] In other words, the Jesuitical practice of classifying indigenous populations as either heathens or people relied solely on the indigenous people's ability to reach a certain "capacity for self-reflection on their beliefs, meaning, values and the relation of these with the divine purpose."[78] The connection that Alcoff wants to make is that Descartes's idealized epistemology might have shed its theological language for a secular one, but it kept the theo-political "overarching framing assumptions and teleology."[79] Alcoff notes that this is the point that Mignolo's concept of theo-politics is trying to bring out into the open:

> That the teleological and exclusivist conceptions of intellectual, cultural, and scientific development that are used to rank varied global achievements and contributions are still operating within a political world view with significant elements of theology.[80]

In other words, the modern conception of epistemology, as seen in Descartes's investigation, was the inheritor of a thought system that aided in Christianity's systematic destruction of "all of its competing sign systems, expelling peoples, committing genocide, burning temples and books en masse, and redrawing universal maps of location, history, and value on its own terms."[81] This exclusionary nature of Christian ideology, where the *Other* is defined as *what they are not* without the need to delve into their practices or culture, will play a large role in Descartes's idealized epistemology. More concretely, we can see how the theological framing assumptions and teleology are transformed into their secular copies by outlining how each phase in the theological teleological framework is transformed into its secular modality:

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[77] Alcoff, 404.
[78] Alcoff, 404.
[79] Alcoff, 402.
[80] Alcoff, 403.
[81] Alcoff, 401.

The first phase ("a state of grace (or state of nature)"[82]): The peaceful reign of Aristotelian idealized epistemology over our epistemic endeavors. Presumably until the Middle ages.

The second phase (a fall from grace): The deterioration of Aristotle's system of knowledge and authoritarian scholasticism becoming clearer and clearer throughout the development of new methods of enquiry.

The third phase ("a developmental trajectory of salvific, philosophical enlightenment"[83]): Descartes's rejection of vast aspects of Aristotle's idealized epistemology through his Jesuitical influences. And the introduction of a self-governed and self-sufficient epistemological method.

Fourth phase ("a period of divine or transcendental punishment and judgement"[84]): Descartes enlightened followers now have a standard to judge whether one should count as a rational and enlightened person or not. Making them the sole arbiters on who is given this status.

Pasnau inadvertently traces this theo-political framing through his exposition of Descartes's idealized epistemology. This teleological frame is most clearly seen in Pasnau's argument that Descartes was not interested in a theory of knowledge, as it is thought in contemporary discussions, but rather a theory of *scientia*. Pasnau makes this distinction to highlight that Descartes is after a model or an idealized target of the type of *scientia* (or absolute certain knowledge) that any investigation should aspire to. Unfortunately, and for reasons, we will come

[82] Alcoff, 402.
[83] Alcoff, 402.
[84] Alcoff, 402.

to understand in sections two and three, Pasnau *is not sensitive* to this epistemic ideal's political implications and how it is connected to the theo-political baggage previously outlined. Pasnau's ignorance of these historical influences is made evident by the two reasons he uses to defend his reading of Descartes's epistemological goals. Pasnau's exposition shows us two things. First, it gives us more evidence that Descartes's epistemological goals were heavily influenced by the contextual influences of his time, and second the extent to which dominant philosophical voices, like Pasnau's, are insensitive to these influences.

The first reason he gives us is that Descartes's "theory is so demanding that virtually no one other than Descartes and his followers can be said to have achieved *scientia*."[85] This acknowledgment of the exclusionary nature of Descartes's cognitive ideal shows that Pasnau is insensitive to this epistemic gatekeeping's normative/political background. In Pasnau's view, it is as though Descartes and his followers were simply laying out the requirements of an epistemic ideal in a vacuum. Pasnau's insensitivity to the theo-political frame that encapsulates Cartesian *scientia*, and its influential reach on followers of Enlightenment thinking that actively erased diverse ways of knowing, is once again clear. This is evident when he notes that Descartes did not mean to create a theory of knowledge but rather a theory of *scientia* because the latter was only for believing Christians, and the former was still available to the atheists. Pasnau uses the following quote to argue what was previously stated:

[85] Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 24.

> Thus I see plainly that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him.[86]

For Pasnau, this exclusionist tendency in Descartes's most theoretical concerns (finding solid undoubtable epistemic grounds for *scientia*) is evidence of the idealized character of Descartes's target. In Pasnau's view, this idealization has had no evident consequences in the everyday world of epistemic agents, nor does he address how it might impact that it has had on other philosophical projects. Essentially there is a severing of Descartes's theoretical demands and our ordinary sense of what we should count as legitimate knowledge or knowledge production methods. However, as we have seen, philosophical ideas are not made in a vacuum. The theo-political framing that Alcoff brought up previously puts Descartes's exclusionist understanding of *scientia* directly in line with the Christian church's cultural genocidal projects in the 15th and 16th centuries.[87] The most crucial aspect of acknowledging the historical context that Pasnau seems to be insensitive to highlights how by creating these epistemic ideals, Descartes is creating a boundary "that works via negation, denying the Other a substantive difference."[88] In other words, once Descartes declares that he and his followers have attained *scientia*, even if minimally, this exclusionary epistemic status can be used to classify the people who lay outside of this boundary. All that needs to be noted is that they *do not* possess *scientia* because they lack the proper method of inquiry, Christian faith, and intellectual capacities. The result, as Alcoff puts it, is that "…the contrast class for establishing the boundaries of civility or humanity is

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[86] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 49.
[87] Alcoff, "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance," 401.
[88] Alcoff, 401.

defined in terms not of self/Other, but in terms of self/*not-self*."[89] The troubling aspect of Pasnau's account is that he frames Descartes's investigation's exclusionary prerequisites as accidental consequences of embarking on an ideal theoretical pursuit. This is troubling, especially in a historical account that is supposed to frame Descartes's investigations in their proper colonial lineage. It not only distorts Descartes's history but, more importantly, it hides how his epistemology can be used to categorize the Other as someone without a self. As Alcoff notes: "this [framework] is what spurred debates about whether the indigenous were human beings, capable of personhood, endowed with even a modicum of rationality or even self-regard."[90] It is clear that by emitting Descartes's colonial influences that even while working on the history of philosophy, Pasnau is still caught up in a transcendentalist delusion believing that Descartes's idealized epistemology could in some respects be separated from the "specific, embodied, and geo-historical source."[91] This delusion is even more evident in Pasnau's second remark on why Descartes's theory of knowledge should be thought of as only a theory of *scientia*.

The second reason that Pasnau provides in his argument that Descartes was not interested in a theory of knowledge but rather a theory of *scientia* is "that Descartes denies that *scientia* should regulate [everyday] belief."[92] In this remark, Pasnau is pointing to Descartes's belief that philosophy works at a different level than our ordinary conversations and experiences. This disconnects the theoretical accomplishments of philosophy (*scientia*) from the world of the ordinary. In a letter to Princess Elizabeth, Descartes clearly lays out this belief, as he relates it to

[89] Alcoff, 401.
[90] Alcoff, 401.
[91] Alcoff, 397.
[92] Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 25.

the way that the union between the soul and the body is influenced solely by ordinary life and not by the theoretical pursuits of philosophy:

> That's why people who never come at things in a theoretical way and use only their senses have no doubt that the soul moves the body and that the body acts on the soul. They regard soul and body as a single thing, i.e. they conceive their union. I equate those because conceiving the union between two things is conceiving them as one single thing. Metaphysical thoughts, which exercise the unaided intellect, serve to familiarize us with the notion of the soul; and the study of mathematics, which mainly employs the imagination (in thinking about shapes and motions), accustoms us to form very clear notions of body. But what teaches us how to conceive the soul's union with the body is the ordinary course of life and conversation and not meditating or studying things that exercise the imagination.[93]

Following this example, it is clear to see why Pasnau points out that Descartes is not interested in grounding everyday beliefs about the external world or other minds in his epistemological pursuit. Rather, as Pasnau notes, Descartes believed that:

> If we must act, we should act only *as if* we have beliefs about the world. Because Descartes sees no such connection between *scientia* and belief, his form of skepticism (if it should be called that at all) is of a purely theoretical sort.[94]

What needs to be highlighted here is that Descartes's purely theoretical pursuits "requires no dialogic interlocutors, no collective process, and yet can achieve a truth for all."[95] By framing the

[93] René Descartes, "Correspondence Between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth," trans. Jonathan Bennett, n.d., 5.
[94] Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 25.
[95] Alcoff, "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance," 405.

universal ideal of knowledge as *scientia,* Descartes creates a hierarchy of thought which further supports supremacy and exclusion. Pasnau inadvertently acknowledges this point, but rather than question the possible questionable historical reasons why Descartes's method "is of a purely theoretical sort[,]"[96] Pasnau just notes that Descartes did not intend for his method to be used by the ordinary intellect to guide their everyday beliefs. It is clear that Pasnau is insensitive to the influences behind Descartes's theoretical decisions and frames them as if they came out of a value-neutral drive for objectivity. The two assumptions he makes are that Descartes' inquiry into *scientia* could be made with no connection to the normative beliefs of what society deems to be epistemically essential and necessary and that Descartes's motivation for his theoretical pursuits was not influenced by the European context that he was in. These assumptions clearly come as a result of Pasnau's transcendentalist delusion. Once again, we have evidence that shows Pasnau's uncritical account of philosophical history and the reinforcement of the belief that ideas and intellectual work do not have a direct impact, or are not influenced by, the current political, social, and ethical habitus that they sprout in.

As we have concluded from this small detour into the history of Western philosophy, it is important to highlight that our investigations regarding our epistemic ideals have been historically asked from a particular perspective. This specific perspective has been cloaked in the garments of universality and pronounced to be only available to a certain type of person. More notably, this Cartesian inheritance has dictated where philosophical investigations were needed (inquiry into *scientia*) and where it would be foolish for a philosopher to try and find absolute knowledge (everyday life). It is not hard to see the link between this Cartesian inheritance with

[96] Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 25.

the type of justificatory norms found in philosophy departments today.[97] The connection between these considerations and the first chapter is that a "God's Eye view of truth, or, more accurately, a No Eye view of truth — truth as independent of observers altogether"[98] like the one used by Descartes and his demand for an idealized, sterile non-contextual epistemic space, is inhabited even by philosophers who are more than sympathetic to contextualism or Cavell's insights into the truth of skepticism. This methodological tendency was seen by Wittgensteinian and Cavellian scholars as a metaphilosophical belief that philosophers can delineate the bounds of sense-making and cast away the people that do not conform to the already specified linguistic norms. This is not far off from Descartes's epistemological idealization, which drew the line of what should count as *scientia* and who has the epistemic privilege of standing inside it. The philosophers who proposed that we should get on with critical philosophical investigations by discarding the traditional epistemologist's words once and for all have been captivated by the same Cartesian transcendentalist delusion. This delusion manifested in their attempt to delineate the bounds of sense, discarding the ideas of the other (now Descartes) and ignoring the context and ongoing influence that those ideas have had on the field of epistemology as such. This desire to purge Descartes's flawed starting point from contemporary epistemological investigations is not only impossible but also deeply problematic as it does not allow one to develop the epistemic tools to deal with the transcendentalist delusion because one does not even know that one is under the influence of the same delusion.

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[97] See Kristie Dotson, "HOW IS THIS PAPER PHILOSOPHY?," *Comparative Philosophy: An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (December 30, 2012), https://doi.org/10.31979/2151-6014(2012).030105.

[98] Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 50.

As we have noticed throughout this section and the first chapter, both Pasnau and the philosophers who hold the standard Cavellian reading do not fully acknowledge that their grammatical and historical investigations are also contingent on social practices. I believe this is why there are so many misreading of Cavell's and Wittgenstein's work. In other words, the perspective that Wittgenstein and Cavell were fighting against throughout their work, mainly the skeptical impulse that repudiates our standard criteria in a delusional attempt to find a perfect theoretical, epistemological realm, continues to be alive and well throughout the philosophical discipline. Might there be a more profound bias at work in the philosophers' retreat into ideal theory? Perhaps the skeptical tendency, and the subsequent transcendentalist delusion, can be tied to philosophy's hesitancy to deal with, as Wittgenstein used to say, the bloody hard way[99]: the racial/historical origins of this God's eye view perspective. As we will see throughout this chapter, our epistemological starting points (which are shaped by our embodied social experience) lead to certain normative epistemological conclusions (who count as a knower and who does not). As we move on to section two, I propose that the duty of the philosopher to come back to the rough ground is not only tied to our love of wisdom or truth, in whatever way it is presumed, but it is also tied to the duty that we have to recognize and reject the colonial white male gaze by not retreating to its barren theoretical landscapes. Our epistemological investigations and our theoretical starting points need to include the lived experience of racialized minorities; without this inclusion, we do not only have lousy epistemology but, most importantly, perpetually reinforce "the conceptual or theoretical whiteness of the discipline."[100]

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[99] James Conant, "On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy," in *The Possibilities of Sense*, ed. D. Z. Phillips and John H. Whittaker (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave, 2002), 85.
[100] Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1998), 2.

§2.2 Kristie Dotson's Epistemological Engine of Jane Crow Dynamics

As we took stock of the idealized tendency of philosophers in the field of epistemology, in the first chapter and the first section of this chapter, let us now turn to a type of epistemological investigation that has as its target understanding the non-ideal situation of epistemic agents in contemporary communities of the United States. Unlike the idealized conception of epistemology explored in the last section and its concern with "purely theoretical" problems, Kristie Dotson shines a light on the epistemological conditions that facilitate the epistemic erasure of Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people who are situated in the United States. Dotson's investigation into the "epistemological engine of Jane Crow dynamics"[101] brings to light certain epistemic conditions that Black women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people[102] find themselves in as they navigate the world. There are three reasons why we need to turn our attention to Dotson's investigation. The first reason is that it situates epistemological inquiry in the rough ground of everyday epistemic relationships, which are non-ideal as they take place in the context of an oppressive society. This approach gives us a great example of the type of philosophy that is lost if one cannot get over the transcendentalist delusion explored earlier. The second reason is that it gives us the conceptual machinery to understand how women of colour lose epistemic agency and why it is hard to pinpoint how this system of epistemic erasure functions. The third reason is that it will help us understand more broadly the framework and the effects of non-ideal epistemic conditions on differently socially

[101] Kristie Dotson, "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability," *Social Epistemology* 31, no. 5 (September 3, 2017): 417–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2017.1346721.
[102] The term 'women' will be used to refer to all three of these groups: women, girls, and gender non-conforming people.

positioned agents. This is a broader overview, as opposed to a narrower account that looks at the internal/psychological cognitive-affective structures that come as a result of our un-ideal epistemological landscape. José Medina will provide us this narrower view in section three of this chapter. More specifically, Dotson's epistemic elucidations of Jane Crow dynamics will set us up well to investigate a more detailed account of the *internal resistance to know* found in insensitive epistemic subjects and their associated epistemic vices. Dotson's account will also help us to contrast these findings with the epistemic virtues that are found in oppressed subjects and, more broadly, José Medina's suggestions to the ways in which we could improve our epistemic condition, which will be the main emphasis of chapter three.

So, we will start by outlining Dotson's theoretical reworking of Pauli Murray's "little known description of oppressive circumstances" known as Jane Crow dynamics. We will introduce where Murray's ideas originate and how Dotson uses these conceptual remnants to reconstruct an epistemological story of how the system functions. We will come into full view of the "epistemological engine"[103] of Jane Crow by analyzing its three discrete parts, which are three epistemic conditions: the occupation of negative socio-epistemic space (disregard), reduced epistemic confidence (disbelief), and "a heightened epistemic backgrounding to offer an epistemological account of Jane Crow subordination" [104] (disavowal).

Pauli Murray was a legal scholar, poet, feminist, civil rights activist, and the first woman of colour ordained by the Episcopal church.[105] She was also very much ahead of her time. Dotson's work in "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability" excavates Murray's work

[103] Dotson, "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability," 418.
[104] Dotson, 422.
[105] Pauli Murray, "The Liberation of Black Women," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1995), 185.

to put together a specific “unknowability” framework that Murray coins as Jane Crow. Murray's framework is one of many that have identified a commonly theorized and acknowledged condition of Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people in the United States. This paradoxical condition is one where Black women are in a constant state of hyper-visibility but yet unknown or, as Dotson puts it: Black women are in a "condition of being both targeted and disappeared."[106] To understand how two interwoven hegemonic structures (the patriarchy and white supremacy) interact to cause such a state of "unknowability," Dotson adds the epistemological texture to Murray's skeletal theoretical framework.

Dotson uses various excerpts from Murray's writing to give an account of Jane Crow dynamics.[107] This work of "theoretical archeology,"[108] which Dotson describes as taking "fragments of concepts and/or theoretical frameworks to reconstruct the philosophical investigations that these fragments imply,"[109] reveals the underlying epistemological story of Murray's framework. However, Dotson’s epistemic reconstruction of Murray’s framework is centered around Murray's reference to Jane Crow dynamics found in the following passage:

> Black women, historically, have been doubly victimized by the twin immoralities of Jim Crow and Jane Crow. Jane Crow refers to the entire range of assumptions, attitudes, stereotypes, customs, and arrangements that have robbed women of a positive self-concept and prevented them from participating fully in society as equals with men.[110]

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[106] Dotson, “Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability,” 422.
[107] “why negro girls stay single,” “the liberation of Black women”, “Jane Crow and the law: sex discrimination and title VII” (format)
[108] Dotson, “Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability,” 418.
[109] Dotson, 418.
[110] Murray, “The Liberation of Black Women,” 186.

As Dotson points out, in this short description of Jane Crow, Murray points out various epistemically relevant causes for the type of "unknowability" condition that Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people experience while under the double subordination of the patriarchy and white supremacy. As highlighted before, Black women's "unknowability" is not plain unknowability that can be fixed by providing information to fill a particular knowledge gap. Instead, it is a state in which Black women are "both targeted and 'submerged,' both identifiable and indefensible. Jane Crow describes the condition of being hidden in plain sight."[111] The aim of this section will be to display clearly the nuances of this disappearance and targeting.

§2.2.1 Condition of Negative Socio-Epistemic Space (Disregard)

Dotson identifies three distinct epistemic conditions that Black women experience because of Jane Crow dynamics. The first is that Black women in the U.S inhabit negative socio-epistemic space to the extent that it becomes problematic – this is *disregard*. To understand what socio-epistemic space is, both its negative and positive modes, let us remind ourselves what is needed to make a knowledge claim. As we saw from chapter one, there needs to be a background of epistemic resources available to make a knowledge claim. Remember that when Descartes uttered his famous sentence: "I think therefore I am," he used ordinary words that had a specific use in our ordinary practices through their constant role *in* common everyday practices. These commonly held criteria are what Dotson refers to as "shared epistemic resources."[112] Descartes's words were intelligible to philosophers because, even though he had altered the ordinary criteria of these words by using them in a new way, he nevertheless got the necessary uptake for the new

[111] Dotson, "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability," 420.
[112] Dotson, 422.

criteria, which allowed for a new shared language to make sense and for new cognitive habits to be formed. Hence, Descartes's words were intelligible to the subset of the population that agreed with his new criterion, resulting in Descartes's ability to be part of a knowledge claim. I do not want to reopen this philosophical conundrum, but instead, I use it to highlight that before we can make a knowledge claim or knowledge per se, we need to access *shared* epistemic resources to do such a thing. As Dotson points out, and as I just mentioned, examples of these shared resources are "everything from habits of cognition to shared language."[113] We can now connect Murray's explanation of how assumptions, stereotypes, customs, and arrangements are the causes of Black women's nuanced disappearance under Jane Crow subordination. As Dotson points out, these shared epistemic resources need certain areas in our social landscapes to be obscured:

> Shared epistemic resources both facilitate knowledge production, by illuminating our landscapes, and hinder it, via the generation of negative, socio-epistemic space, i.e. those aspects of any given domain that are relegated to 'irrelevance' or 'uninteresting.'[114]

The negative and positive evaluation of socio-epistemic space is not a value judgment, but rather it refers to the areas where there are shared epistemic resources and where they do not exist or are less prevalent. In other words, negative socio-epistemic space is not inherently wrong as we all inhabit such a space from time to time. As Dotson points out: “it is simply the case that we do not perceive, nor are we trained to perceive, nor ought we be trained to perceive everything about any given group, individual, or happening.”[115] The problem for Dotson and other Black women under Jane Crow dynamics is that the hegemonic systems of subordination (the patriarchy and white supremacy) relegate Black women to live continuously in negative socio-epistemic space

[113] Dotson, 422.
[114] Dotson, 422.
[115] Dotson, 422.

due to the lack of shared epistemic resources to describe accurately the everyday lives and obstacles encountered by Black women in the U.S. This lack of shared epistemic resources is due to the dominant influence of patriarchal and racist assumptions, stereotypes, customs, and arrangements, which Murray pointed out as the causes of Jane Crow dynamics. It is important to note that neither Dotson nor Murray are saying that Black women are incapable of making sense of their own experience or that they lack understanding of their subordination. This ability to articulate and describe their own positionality is evident when you consider the deep, comprehensive intellectual work done by Black women throughout history[116]. Nevertheless, even without this intellectual work, marginalized people have always been able to make sense of their oppression and express it to others who have been under the same conditions in various examples. The problem that Dotson and Murray are highlighting is centered around the constant *disregard* for these experiences because of dominant racist and sexist ideologies held by the people who do not live in a constant negative socio-epistemic space. As we saw from chapter one, there needs to be a constant *agreement* between language speakers for there to be shared epistemic resources. In the second epistemic condition of Jane Crow dynamics, we will see how this process of *disregard* has an active element that keeps Black women in this negative socio-epistemic state. Dotson describes this as the active *disbelief* of Black women.

§2.2.2 Reduced Epistemic Confidence (Disbelief)

As a result of being forced to inhabit a problematic amount of negative socio-epistemic space, Black women encounter *disbelief* – they "fail to invoke epistemic confidence."[117] By epistemic confidence, Dotson is referring to: "levels of affective investment that track the perceived

[116] *See Word of Fire an Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*.
[117] Dotson, "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability," 424.

plausibility of some person as a knower, a given proposition or set of propositions, and/or narrative."[118] Rebecca Solnit encapsulates this condition in the following example, not in the case of Black women per se, but rather just in the case of women more generally:

> Credibility is a basic survival tool. When I was very young and just beginning to get what feminism was about and why it was necessary, I had a boyfriend whose uncle was a nuclear physicist. One Christmas, he was telling—as though it were a light and amusing subject—how a neighbor's wife in his suburban bomb-making community had come running out of her house naked in the middle of the night screaming that her husband was trying to kill her. How, I asked, did you know that he wasn't trying to kill her? He explained, patiently, that they were respectable middle-class people. Therefore, her-husband-trying-to-kill-her was simply not a credible explanation for her fleeing the house yelling that her husband was trying to kill her. That she was crazy, on the other hand….[119]

What Dotson and Murray want us to understand is that negative socio-epistemic space, created by patriarchal and racist shared epistemic resources, creates social positionalities that are indefensible. By indefensible, I mean that the oppressive acts done to these subjects are rendered unbelievable, or in other words, they do not *make sense* within the dominant socio-epistemic space, and without intelligibility, there cannot be any defense. Like in the example above, "maladjusted landscapes of epistemic confidence can render even the most believable positions implausible and the most reliable knowers unbelievable."[120] Let us look at another example, one

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[118] Dotson, 424.
[119] Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me*, Updated edition with two new essays (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2014), 5–6.
[120] Dotson, "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability," 424.

that centers around race rather than gender, in order to highlight Dotson's and Murray's case that Black women are not only disappeared by sexists shared epistemic resources but also racist ones.

In a discussion about testimonial injustice with Miranda Fricker, Medina identifies a link between racist epistemic resources and the subsequent lack of epistemic confidence in Black subjects. In Medina's discussion, he brings up a testimonial example found in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In the book, Tom Robinson, a young African American, is being tried for allegedly raping Mayella Ewell, a poor white girl. Even though Tom Robinson's lawyer, Atticus Finch, makes the case that it would be impossible for Tom to have hurt Mayella because a left fist clearly inflicted her injuries and Tom's left arm is disabled, Tom is nevertheless convicted by an all-white jury. The section that Medina brings up and is relevant to our discussion of Jane Crow dynamics is during Tom's cross-examination. In the following passages, Mr. Gilmer, the prosecutor, is cross-examining Tom about why he had decided to help Mayella complete some chores for free the night of the incident:

> Mr. Gilmer smiled grimly at the jury. "You're a mighty good fellow, it seems—did all this for not one penny?"
>
> "Yes, suh. I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of 'em—"
>
> "You felt sorry for *her*, you felt *sorry* for her?" Mr. Gilmer seemed ready to rise to the ceiling.
>
> The witness realized his mistake and shifted uncomfortably in the chair. But the damage was done. Below us, nobody liked Tom Robinson's answer. Mr. Gilmer paused a long time to let it sink in.[121]

[121] Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1. Harper perennial modern classics edition f, Harper Perennial Modern Classics (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 143.

What Medina highlights in this part of Tom's interrogation is that Tom is not only judged as a non-credible source because of the color of his skin but also the fact that he felt sorry for a white woman showcases how "certain effects and relations have been rendered *incredible* (in fact, almost unintelligible) in that culture."[122] Tom's lack of epistemic confidence is due to racist shared epistemic resources that disallow the all-white jury to make sense of the fact that a Black man could feel sorry for a white woman. This example shows how inhabiting negative socio-epistemic space can render a set of propositions or narratives to be regarded as non-sense or at least unknowable. However, this example excludes the negative socio-epistemic space that is caused by sexist ideologies. Considering the extent to which Tom's case only encompasses the effects of one oppressive system (white supremacy), it is easy to see that Black women's positionality is made even more unknowable by the shadow cast upon them by both oppressive structures (the patriarchy and white supremacy). This double epistemic disappearance (an initial disregard followed by disbelief) explains the double disappearance of Black women's position. This double disappearing might seem enough to explain the "unknowability" problem that Black women face. However, as we will see in contrast with Medina's and Solnit's examples above, there is yet another layer to Black women's epistemic disappearance in comparison to Black men and white women.

§2.2.3 Epistemic Backgrounding (Disavowal)

At this point of the enquiry, the effects of inhabiting problematic amounts of negative socio-epistemic space are experienced by Black women in two connected disappearances. The first manner is an initial disappearance (disregard) which comes as a result of the dominant racist and

[122] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 67.

sexist social epistemic resources and the subsequent creation of problematic amounts of negative socio-epistemic space. This is then followed by a second disappearance of the initial disappearance through the active *disbelief* of Black women's voices in the form of a lack of epistemic confidence. In the case of Black women, there is a third disappearance which comes in the form of *disavowal*, of "being placed in the role of serving as the backdrop of some other subject(s) of contemplation."[123] We can come to understand this *epistemic backgrounding* more easily by providing an example found in Pauli Murray's work. In Murray's essay "The Liberation of Black Women," she argues that Black male militants were prone to distort Black women's positive collective traits of independence and self-reliance in order to make sense of their subjugation under white supremacy. She articulates these sexist stereotypes in the following way:

> Yet these survival values have often been distorted, and the qualities of strength and independence observable in many Negro women have been stereotyped as "female dominance" attributed to the "matriarchal" character of the Negro family developed during slavery and its aftermath. The popular conception is that because society has emasculated the Black male, he has been unable to assume his economic role as head of the household, and the Black woman's earning power has placed her in a dominant position.[124]

What is evident from this example is that in order for Black male militants to create "knowledge" of their position under white supremacy, they had to use a distorted understanding of the lives of Black women found in patriarchal social epistemic resources as a foundation for their grievances.

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[123] Dotson, "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability," 424.
[124] Murray, "The Liberation of Black Women," 187.

Dotson names this tendency “epistemic backgrounding,” and it is the third and last epistemic condition at the heart of Jane Crow dynamics.

The epistemic landscape under Jane Crow dynamics is filled with various types of invisibility landmines. Let us use Dotson' summary to see the way that her trifold framework comes together to explain Black women's "unknowability":

> First, prevailing shared epistemic resources serve to submerge entire populations [inhabitancy of negative socio-epistemic space]. Second, the pervasive nature of this submergence and its cause in the very resources we use to make sense of our worlds assures that it be very difficult to 'shed light' on the obscured population, especially from within that population [lack of epistemic confidence]. Third, and finally, one's appearance, when apparent, is conditioned by the existence of another group [epistemic backgrounding].[125]

As it has become evident, Black women's epistemic disappearance or "unknowability" is not just based on missing information. Instead, it is "a kind of disappearing that disappears itself."[126] As I noted earlier, this is not just a "theoretical" problem, like the problems that Descartes or other idealized epistemologies produced. Rather, Dotson has outlined a set of epistemic problems that impacts the everyday livelihood of Black women living in the U.S. If this is the first time that you have thought about these issues, the real-world implications of Jane Crow dynamics, as just laid out, might lead you to ask how we can improve such a horrid state of affairs. If you are familiar with this type of epistemic subordination, you most likely have read various Black theorists, poets, and novelists who have tried vigorously to enrich the epistemic resources that

[125] Dotson, “Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability,” 425.
[126] Dotson, 426.

make up our positive-epistemic spaces. Dotson names Pauli Murray, Toni Morrison, Kimberle Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and Rebecca Wanzo as a few of these voices. Before we move on to Medina's meliorative approach, found in chapter three, and attempt to enrich the epistemic resources ourselves, what we need to take from Dotson's work is that it displays an epistemic landscape that cannot be unseen. In other words, much like the "duck-rabbit" picture found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, "it is entirely likely that once one detects unknowability, as a trifold structure of disappearing, one cannot continue to ignore it or its ever-present possibility."[127] In the next section, Medina will introduce the epistemic vices of individual agents and the resultant *active ignorance* that keeps the epistemic engine of Jane Crow dynamics running.

§2.3 Epistemic Friction and The Epistemic Vices of the Privileged

Three central epistemic vices will emerge in the following section: epistemic arrogance, epistemic laziness, and close-mindedness. Now that we have a more balanced view of our epistemological landscape, with the help of Dotson's epistemological investigation of Jane Crow dynamics, let us turn towards José Medina's work. We will do this both to add to Dotson's descriptive project and fill in some of the inner processes of insensitive subjects and in order to reference a vocabulary that can point to epistemic harms and some ways that we could start to ameliorate our epistemic landscape. In this sense, this section will make connections between Medina's and Dotson's work to enrich our collective epistemic resources. Unlike Dotson's theoretical archeology, which gives a broad overview of the epistemic mechanism found in the context of Jane Crow and its effects on Black women, Medina is interested in providing a developmental account of "how our cognitive-affective lives become shaped by systems of

[127] Dotson, 426.

oppression and by different forms of resistance that appear within and around them."[128] This developmental description answers vital questions of how racial and gender insensitivity emerges. This story is told through Medina's model of an epistemology of resistance.

By the end of this section, one might feel as though the contemporary epistemic landscape is so fraught with invisibility landmines and barbwire in the case of certain subjects that it might feel impossible to start to make sense of how one could make it better. However, as we will see, Medina and other social epistemologists have found a silver lining to this fraught landscape. This silver lining will come in the form of epistemic virtues found in the oppressed positionalities that are the victims of the epistemic engine of Jane Crow. As we walk down this path together, it is important not to confuse these epistemic virtues for individualist epistemic behaviors that one can master independently or in a socio-epistemic vacuum. Instead, they are thought of as a result of a much larger socio-epistemic space. As we have come to understand from earlier explorations, contextual influences play a large role in how epistemic agency is developed and framed and how epistemic ideals are conceptualized. As we will later understand, the epistemic virtues that Medina highlights in chapter three result from the non-ideal context that we are *all* situated in and not from a disembodied/idealized state that can only be attained by a few privileged philosophers/scientists. This is a caveat that I think we all need, but I think it is even *more* important in the philosophical context.

Let us turn now to the way that Medina defines insensitivity and its connection to Dotson's work:

[128] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 14.

> Insensitivity involves being cognitively and affectively numbed to the lives of others: being inattentive to and unconcerned by their experiences, problems, and aspirations; and being unable to connect with them and to understand their speech and action.[129]

In Dotson's epistemological investigation, and under Jane Crow dynamics, the trident of the three imbricated epistemological conditions (disregard, disbelief, and disavowal) showcased the extent to which large parts of society are insensitive to the lives of Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people. This insensitivity is so pervasive that it creates an "unknowability" problem for many Black women who feel unheard and dismissed by large portions of the population. The experiences and imaginations of Black women are not only disappeared, but the process of disappearance is also disappeared (through disbelief and disavowal). As we noted, Dotson shows us how this double disappearing is caused by a lack of epistemic resources and the active ignorance that relegates the lives of Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people to constantly inhabit negative socio-epistemic space. The harms associated with this are not only epistemic but are also tied to the material conditions of the lives of Black women. As Murray pointed out, the effects of Jane Crow dynamics harm both "one's self-concept and one's full participation in society."[130] This harm leaves us with a philosophical conundrum that directly connects with the everyday lives of Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people and the rest of society that is also affected by the lack of epistemic resources. The question at hand is: "How does one break through epistemic failings that fail as sense-making features of our worlds?"[131] or in other words, "how does one disrupt unknowability understood as a trifold

[129] Medina, xi.
[130] Dotson, “Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability,” 426.
[131] Dotson, 426.

structure of disappearing, i.e., disregard, disbelief, and disavowal?"[132] This section will try to answer these questions by relying on Medina's model of epistemic resistance.

Medina's model of epistemic resistance unsurprisingly centers around the concept of resistance. This section will begin by elucidating the way that Medina conceptualizes resistance in epistemological terms. With this conceptual clarification in hand, we can then make sense of the two central epistemological principles required to assess the interaction of influential cognitive forces and their consequent epistemic friction: *the principle of acknowledgment and engagement* and *the principle of epistemic equilibrium*. The last part of this section will focus our attention on the developmental aspects that influence differently situated subjects and the consequent epistemic vices and virtues that either benefit or harm our epistemic communities. By focusing on resistant experiences, we will only be showcasing half of the meliorative project found in Medina's book. The other important aspect of our epistemological lives, as we saw from Dotson's exploration of Jane Crow dynamics, is our critical assessment of the problematic concepts and collective imaginations (socio-epistemic resources) that we have inherited. This is to say that amelioration of our epistemological landscape can only happen through the collective movements that start to change these problematic imaginations through resistant imaginations and radical solidarity. Unfortunately, due to my project's scope, this critical aspect of our cognitive (the role of collective imaginations) will not be explored in this section. Rather, only our individual cognitive-affective habits will be outlined and assessed.

[132] Dotson, 426.

§2.3.1 Epistemic Resistance and Medina's Guiding Principles

What does it mean to talk about resistance in our cognitive lives, and why is it so essential for us to foster beneficial epistemic friction? Through Medina's analysis of epistemic resistance, we will come to understand that the development of epistemic vices is mainly due to a lack of beneficial epistemic friction, leading us to be more susceptible to perpetuating epistemic harms to ourselves and others. To talk about resistance in our cognitive lives "is to talk about *opposing forces*."[133] Medina believes that these opposing forces, found in our epistemological landscape, can be understood in two modalities. The first modality of a cognitive force is a cognitive influence, typically framed as external cognitive forces trying to influence the subject through persuasion or discussion (an example will be used in the following paragraph to illustrate these forces).[134] The second cognitive force, an internal force, is generally framed as *cognitive motivations* which direct our attention to the "subject's cognitive tendencies and predispositions to believe."[135] Both of these cognitive forces "play a role in the formation of beliefs."[136] So, when we talk about epistemic resistance, we refer to the interaction of internal and external cognitive influences. There are two directions in which we can understand these interactions and their positive and negative modalities. The following table outlines these directions and modalities:

[133] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 49.
[134] Medina, 49.
[135] Medina, 50.
[136] Medina, 49.

	Positive/Beneficial	Negative/Harmful
Internal cognitive force opposing an external cognitive force. (internal resistance)	"opposing internal force that counteracts external epistemic influence can be positive as it is critical, unmasks prejudice, and biases, reacts to bodies of ignorance."[137]	"[an opposing internal force is] negative in so far as it involves a reluctance to learn or a refusal to believe—the kind of stubbornness that gets in the way of knowledge."[138]
External cognitive force opposing an internal cognitive force. (external resistance)	"External epistemic resistance can be positive insofar as they offer *beneficial epistemic friction*, forcing one to be self-critical, to compare and contrast one's beliefs, to meet justificatory demands, to recognize cognitive gaps, and so on."[139]	"[external epistemic resistance] can also be negative insofar as they produce *detrimental epistemic friction*, censoring, silencing, or inhibiting the formation of beliefs, the articulations of doubts, the formulation of questions and lines of inquiry, and so on."[140]

The table above shows us that our cognitive-affective lives are a myriad of cognitive forces interacting in various ways. Both internal and external resistances can be endured or exerted by the resistant subject, and these are felt throughout one's cognitive-affective life. One of the problems with the quantity and quality of our epistemic interactions is that it can be hard to pinpoint which ones are beneficial and which ones are harmful. With this in mind, Medina proposes two guiding principles that will help us identify different types of epistemic friction and how to deal with the different modalities.

Before moving on to Medina's principles, though, I think it will help see Medina's framework through an everyday example: Fred wakes up and checks his phone to find a message

[137] Medina, 50.
[138] Medina, 50.
[139] Medina, 50.
[140] Medina, 50.

from his uncle. This message includes his uncle's warm greetings and a video about the current COVID-19 pandemic. The video portrays the pandemic as a planned event orchestrated by a cabal of billionaires and government officials that have the ultimate goal of imposing unreasonable breaches on our civil liberties.

There are various epistemic forces in play in this example. There is the *internal cognitive force* produced by Fred's cognitive habits: this may be the thought “the source of this video is very questionable,” which would show his reluctance to believe these types of narratives. In other words, Fred’s *beneficial* cognitive habits would result in internal cognitive forces that present opposing narratives to claims that are being made by outside influences. There are also the *external cognitive forces* that come in the form of persuasive tactics and discussions in the video. For example, "experts" in white coats emphasizing that at a World Health Organization (WHO) conference in 2019, there was a presentation of a similar pandemic. This foreknowledge, in combination with other “evidence” about Bill Gates’s economic ties to pharmaceutical companies, is used to conclude that Gates, in conjunction with other elites, planned the pandemic in order to reset the global geopolitical order.

Now that we have an example of both the internal cognitive forces and external ones let us turn to the four resistance scenarios outlined in the table above in order to see how these forces interact within Fred and his social surroundings. If Fred has good internal cognitive habits and healthy skepticism, although at first, he will acknowledge the claims being made in the video as plausible, however, there would be nonetheless an internal cognitive force that drives him to confirm from *outside sources* that what is being said in the video is accurate. After a simple google search, Fred finds articles about the relationship between the planned pandemic narrative and the trope used by far-right conspiracies who hold that a powerful group of Jewish influences

are behind all the major world events and disbelieves the claims being made in the video. In contrast, if Fred has bad cognitive habits, he will not produce an internal cognitive force that is in opposition to the claims being made in the video. This inability to produce such contrary cognitive forces might be a result of Fred's cognitive habit to believe everything that his uncle sends him, as he is regarded by most as a smart man. Or it might be as a result of his epistemic arrogance in conjunction with his implicit belief that there are evil forces behind most of the biggest world events in order to control him and others like him. We can see from these two scenarios of *internal resistance* or the lack of it, how in the first scenario, where there are both the existence of internal resistance and the *acknowledgement* of it, Fred ends up learning about the type of ideological framing that is used to make the type of video he received. While in the second scenario, where there is a lack of resistance, no learning occurs, but rather a further clouding of the truth occurs and reinforcement of some detrimental epistemic vices.

Looking at the example through the lens of external resistance, we can understand how interaction with his partner Kelly in comparison to the initial interaction with the video differs. The first creating *beneficial epistemic friction* and the other *bad epistemic friction*. When Fred is confronted with a differing opinion, say from his partner Kelly, if he had bad cognitive habits and was keen on believing the video, Kelly's questioning of the facts in the video by showing him contradictory evidence to Fred's beliefs act as *good epistemic friction*. Kelly's external cognitive force creates *beneficial epistemic friction* because it places the burden of proof back on Fred and asks him to justify his beliefs through a reasoned engagement. On the contrary, the initial video acts as *detrimental epistemic friction* as it disallows specific doubts or lines of inquiries that contradict its claims. If Fred sends a message to his uncle stating his hesitancy or

doubts about some of the claims being made in the video, his uncle would most likely respond by shutting down these doubts by highlighting that they stem from beliefs that the mainstream media wants Fred to believe (which is one of the major claims made in the video); essentially responding to Fred's doubts as if they are not genuinely his. In this sense, the video's claims and his uncle's external cognitive forces disallow the formation of contradictory beliefs.

With this example in hand, Medina's normative principles will come in handy to further articulate the difference between bad and good resistance and also once we start to articulate how the lack of good resistance creates epistemic vices. Medina's first normative principle is the *principle of acknowledgment and engagement*. Medina defines this principle in the following way:

> All the cognitive forces we encounter must be acknowledged and, insofar as it becomes possible, they must be in some way engaged (even if in some cases only a negative mode of engagement is possible or epistemically beneficial).[141]

The second principle, very much connected to the first, is *the principle of epistemic equilibrium*. Medina articulates it in the following manner:

> The [principle of epistemic equilibrium] lays out the desideratum of searching for equilibrium in the interplay of cognitive forces, without some forces overpowering others, without some cognitive influences becoming unchecked and unbalanced.[142]

Given Fred's case, we can see that beneficial interactions between external and internal cognitive forces achieve to some degree the principles laid out by Medina. For instance, Fred's

[141] Medina, 50.
[142] Medina, 50.

acknowledgment of the video and his internal resistance directed him to look for external evidence online to explain the logic behind the claims being made. Epistemic equilibrium is maintained because Fred takes the initiative to find external cognitive forces that balance the video's claims. In this way, he diffuses the outside force's dominance with additional information, helping him understand why he resisted the video's claims in the first place. It is vital to notice that this state of equilibrium is achieved only through the *initial* acknowledgment of the video's claims. If he had dismissed the video's claims and went on with his day, then a beneficial internal resistance would not occur. Fred would not have achieved the lucidity that came from acknowledging the video's claims and epistemically living through the beneficial resistance just outlined (learning about one of the frameworks that conspiracy theories use and where these frameworks originate). In other words, if Fred constantly ignores other people's claims as nonsense or as stupidity, only trusting his preconceived beliefs, then this "will lead to epistemic disequilibria and, over time, to bad epistemic habits and attitudes, that is to epistemic vices."[143] It is evident then that an absence of critical engagement with other perspectives and viewpoints plays a crucial role in Medina's model of resistance. As we will come to understand in the next subsection, the consequent cognitive habits that lead to the formation of epistemic vices and virtues come as a result of these epistemic engagements with different perspectives.

[143] Medina, 51.

§2.3.2 Epistemic Vices of the Privileged (Epistemic Arrogance, Epistemic Laziness, and Closed-mindedness)

As we gathered from Dotson's explication of Jane Crow dynamics, the epistemological landscape is defined by oppressive epistemic forces. By oppressive epistemic forces, I mean active cognitive forces that disallow, ignore, and discourage engagement with epistemic others and the meaningful aspects of their lives. This can take both an internal modality and an external modality, as outlined in the last section. The external modalities, in this case, are instances where there are "different kinds of censorship, taboos, and cognitive prohibitions."[144] The internal modality is a type of resistance to know by an epistemic subject that seeks to destroy, hide, or disassociate "against any epistemic powers or authorities that do not conform with"[145] their perspective. Even though the external cognitive aspects play a prominent role in suppressing epistemic resources, our investigation into epistemic vices, along with Medina's, will focus on the *internal* modality of this type of harmful resistance to know.

One of the running themes throughout this chapter has been the phenomenon of insensitivity. This phenomenon has been instantiated in two ways: insensitivity to problematic racial and gendered ideological power structures and a meta-insensitivity, which is the agent's inability to be cognizant of their initial insensitivity. In Dotson's investigation, this initial insensitivity was due to a lack of socio-epistemic resources and the creation of a problematic amount of negative socio-epistemic space that Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people inhabited. The meta-insensitivity took the form of a disappearing of the initial disappearing through the lack of epistemic confidence conferred to Black women and the

[144] Medina, 56.
[145] Medina, 56.

tendency to use their lives as an epistemic background in order to make sense of the experience of other marginalized subjects like Black men. Unlike Dotson's framework, which is a work of theoretical archaeology and has a broader story to tell, Medina's conceptual machinery up to this point can direct our attention to a possible socio-political genesis of this ongoing problem in our epistemic communities. It is important to remember that even though we are focusing on the internal cognitive development of epistemic vices and virtues, these results are the culmination of various interactive forces between the self and the social realm. In this sense, Medina, Dotson, and I are not presupposing an ideal self free from any outside influence or a collective structure free from the influence of the individuals that shape it.

Before we get into specific virtues and vices of differently situated subjects in our society, let us take stock of how Medina defines epistemic virtue and epistemic vice:

> An epistemic vice [is] a set of corrupted attitudes and dispositions that get in the way of knowledge. On the other hand, an epistemic virtue is a character trait that constitutes an epistemic advantage for the individual who possesses it and for those who interact with him or her: roughly, a set of attitudes and dispositions that facilitate the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge.[146]

So, how exactly do we come to have certain attitudes and dispositions? As we saw in Dotson's work, the epistemological landscape is far from equal. Some epistemic agents are granted more epistemic confidence and command more cognitive authority over others. However, can agents who hold this privileged epistemic position (being taken seriously, constantly thought to be correct, and so on) somehow be harmed from an overindulgence of epistemic credibility?

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[146] Medina, 30.

Medina believes that subjects who hold this epistemic privilege are more susceptible to a type of "cognitive self-indulgence or cognitive superiority complex."[147] In other words, privileged subjects who develop in a world where their ideas and perspectives are not challenged sufficiently by outside cognitive forces can develop *epistemic arrogance*. This central epistemic vice is not a transient state of periodic wrongful belief, but rather it depicts "attitudes [that are] deeply rooted in one's personality and cognitive functioning." [148] So, in this sense, they permeate one's cognitive attitudes toward oneself and others. Epistemic arrogance deteriorates our ability to self-correct and be corrected by others making it extremely difficult to learn and attain knowledge. Subjects who hold this vice will not only harm their own epistemic abilities but also harm collective practices of knowing by imposing their beliefs onto others and diverting investigations to what they deem as "safe" epistemic spaces. In relation to sexist and racist biases, subjects that are epistemically arrogant are already full of a "mundane accumulation of oversights, errors, biased stereotypes, and distortions."[149] This comes as a result of their inability to take into account differing viewpoints that contradict or create tension with inherited racist and sexist biases.

The second epistemic vice associated with privileged positionalities is *epistemic laziness*. This epistemic vice comes about by "letting oneself go epistemically."[150] Privileged subjects can not only suffer from inflation of their epistemic abilities but also have the privilege of not needing to know certain epistemic domains. For example, up until recent times, men had the idea that domestic duties and the knowledge that came with them were unnecessary for their everyday existence. I still remember when my dad, an upper-class Colombian man, had to do laundry for

[147] Medina, 31.
[148] Medina, 31.
[149] Medina, 32.
[150] Medina, 34.

the first time when we first arrived in Canada. He struggled to understand how the laundry machine worked and the many steps that had to be taken so that our clothes would not get ruined. This privilege of not needing to know can also be seen on a larger scale regarding subjects in the Global North's neglect or lack of curiosity towards genocidal regimes like China and their current treatment of the Uighur population. The point is that as epistemic agents in the world, we must balance our internal epistemic forces with critical and factual accounts of oppressive practices in order to create beneficial epistemic friction. The danger of not doing this practice is that "a habitual lack of epistemic curiosity atrophies one's cognitive attitudes and dispositions."[151] The resulting epistemic consequence is a distorted image of the world and the inability to break out of this position because of an atrophied critical capacity. It is important to remember that we are not subjects in a vacuum under Medina's model, and subsequently, our relationally embedded condition means that epistemic laziness has the potential of not only harming the epistemic subject and but also the many epistemic relations and through them the other members of their knowledge communities.

The last major epistemic vice that can be found among privileged positionalities is *closed-mindedness*.[152] There is a difference between "*not needing to know* and…*needing not to know*." The first condition (not needing to know), outlined in the previous vice, is a condition that comes out of the luxury of specific ways of living. The second condition (*needing not to know*) is a defense mechanism that privileged subjects employ when confronted with the knowledge that could jeopardize their privileged position. As epistemic agents, we are not

[151] Medina, 33.
[152] Medina, 34.

always open-minded. There are aspects of our epistemic life that we would rather not know. This kind of closed-mindedness becomes a vice when:

> One's mental processing remains systematically closed to certain phenomena, experiences, and perspectives, come what may, and that closed-mindedness erodes reliability, epistemic trust, and one's general capacity to learn, closed-mindedness has become an epistemic vice, that is, a structural and systematic flaw of one's epistemic character.[153]

This type of closed-mindedness can be seen in both a narrow and broader modality. For example, a white supremacist will not take an epistemic subject seriously unless they are white. This blanket disavowal of different subjects will actively disengage from the facts and accounts made by a whole range of people. In a narrower sense, privileged subjects can dismiss specific factual events because it benefits their social standing. An example in the Colombian context would be upper-class Colombian's who deny that Colombian President Alvaro Uribe was implicated in the Colombian military's systematic killing of civilians. Instead, they dismiss the overwhelming evidence of the army's implication at President Uribe's order in so-called "falsos-positivos" (civilians killed and dressed up as FARC insurgents) because, under Uribe's mandate, it allowed them to return to their lavish villas in the countryside. This active disregard and disavowal of oppressed others suffering in exchange for one's cognitive tranquility and comfort is what keeps certain oppressed positionalities from being known, creating an unhealthy amount of negative socio-epistemic space.

[153] Medina, 34.

When these three epistemic vices converge in a subject, they create a certain condition of ignorance: active ignorance. Active ignorance is to be understood as ignorance that is present because of the "active participation of the subject."[154] In this sense, there are defense mechanisms that keep the subject from breaking out of their insensitivity. Active ignorance is not "easy to undo and correct" as it is a result of established cognitive-affective habits. Medina suggests that the only way to ameliorate this condition would be through "the reconfiguration of epistemic attitudes and habits."[155] An example of active ignorance can be found in white subjects' and other privileged positionalities' first and second-order attitudes about gender and race. What I am referring to specifically is the naïve position that is normally called "gender and colour blindness." The main thought behind this ideology of gender and colour blindness is that one does not see colour or gender. In other words, one is able to remove one's racial and gender bias through an act of will. Medina articulates it in the following manner:

> Color- and gender-blindness often function as naïve disavowals of sexism and racism. Their naiveté consists in assuming that racism and sexism are ideologies that can be simply rejected by choosing what we see, as if our genderized and racialized habits of seeing gender and racial markers could simply be rejected by a volitional act that goes against personal training histories and cultural tendencies.[156]

Before we look at the way that active ignorance can be meliorated in chapter three, let us return to our initial example of Robert Pasnau's Eurocentric investigation of Descartes's idealized epistemology. The aim here is to finish this chapter by outlining how Pasnau's failure to include

[154] Medina, 39.
[155] Medina, 39.
[156] Medina, 37.

critical aspects of Descartes's philosophical influences is an example of active ignorance (gender and colour blindness) and how this manifests as a transcendentalist delusion.

As Medina pointed out, active ignorance is a conjoining of the three epistemic vices that were just outlined. So, we will need to identify these vices in Pasnau's work in order to conclude that he is, in fact, actively ignorant. The first, epistemic arrogance, points to an attitude where "the subject presumes to know all there is to know from his own racial and gender perspective (often without realizing that she or he has one)."[157] The second, epistemic laziness, describes the way that Pasnau shows a "lack of effort and motivation to find out more about how racial or gender differences might have an impact,"[158] in this case on the epistemic ideal and its predominantly white and male influences. The third, epistemic closedmindedness, refers to Pasnau's "lack of cognitive openness to the relevance and importance of racialized or genderized experience and perspectives."[159] Pasnau's response to Charles Mills's concern about ideal theory showcases the three epistemic vices just noted. In an endnote of his first lecture, Pasnau calls for a return to the method of idealized epistemology and cites the following objection wherein Mills critiques idealized theories of justice:

> What was originally supposed to have been merely a tool has become an end in itself; the presumed antechamber to the real hall of debate is now its main site. Effectively, then, within the geography of the normative, ideal theory functions as a form of white flight. You don't want to deal with the problems of race and the legacy of white supremacy, so, metaphorically, within the discourse of justice, you retreat from any spaces worryingly close to the inner cities and move instead to the safe and comfortable white spaces, the

[157] Medina, 39.
[158] Medina, 39.
[159] Medina, 39.

> gated moral communities, of the segregated suburbs, from which they become normatively invisible. ("Lost in Rawlsand")[160]

Pasnau responds in the following way:

> This last sort of objection can be somewhat eased, I hope, by stressing the way an idealized epistemology has to be calibrated to the world we actually live in, which in turn opens the door to attending to the many nonideal aspects of the human epistemic predicament.[161]

Pasnau is not listening to Mills's objection. The problem throughout our Western philosophical history has been the retreat of white theorists into ideal theory, and they are *staying there*. Pasnau's epistemic laziness is shown by his response that this could somehow change if we kept the same theoretical methodology while stressing that we should eventually come back to rough ground. There are deeply entrenched cognitive-affective habits that are at play that Pasnau has not even considered, let alone begun to address in his own historical investigation. Next, Pasnau's epistemic arrogance is shown by his statement that one could simply calibrate idealized epistemology in order to include the voices of the oppressed. No, we cannot simply calibrate an epistemic ideal that presupposes that there is an epistemic ideal for all positionalities! This is exactly the transcendentalist delusion that Alcoff highlighted, and that has led to the "conceal[ment] of the particularity, embodiment, and materiality of [Western] philosophical projects."[162] So, rather than starting with an idealized conception of epistemology, let us look at the actual interactions of oppressed epistemic agents.

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[160] Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 147.
[161] Pasnau, 147.
[162] Alcoff, "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance," 399.

Chapter Three: Epistemic Virtues of the Oppressed and Kaleidoscopic Consciousness

After outlining the effects of these epistemic vices on marginalized populations, we will see that as a consequence of this harm, some epistemic virtues are able to flourish. This is not to say that the harm done to marginalized subjects is not actually harmful or, even as ludicrous as it would sound, that epistemic vices should be regarded as "good" because subjects under oppression are "rewarded" with epistemic virtues. It is important to acknowledge that the harm done by epistemic vices can "erode the epistemic character"[163] of even the most resilient subject. What we are after is to describe what has already been theorized in feminist and critical race theory to take account for further epistemological inquiries of how subjects can surpass (momentarily) vast waves of insensitivity and meta-insensitivity.[164] The three epistemic virtues are: humility, curiosity/diligence, and open-mindedness. We ended chapter two by highlighting the combined effect of the three epistemic vices found in privileged positionalities, this being a specific *active ignorance*. This last chapter aimed to explain why the study of this active ignorance has been missed in the philosophical discipline and to illuminate the philosophical influences that are neglected in the history of philosophy. This initial aim was followed by delving into the work done by contemporary philosophers who have pierced through this veil of ignorance. This was accomplished in three steps. First, we situated this active ignorance in both the history of philosophy (Descartes) and in contemporary philosophical investigations (Pasnau) and related it to the tendency to develop an idealized epistemology (Descartes) or a dismissal of crucial historical context (Pasnau). Secondly, with the help of Dotson's epistemological

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[163] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 42.

[164] As a reminder, Medina defines insensitivity as: “being cognitively and affectively numbed to the lives of others; being inattentive to and unconcerned by the experiences, problems, and aspirations; and being unable to connect with them and to understand their speech.” And meta-sensitivity as: “a cognitive and affective numbing that can be described as *insensitivity to insensitivity*.
Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, xi and 24.

investigation into Pauli Murray's account of Jane Crow dynamics, we witnessed the uncovering of a functioning oppressive epistemic engine in the contemporary United States. Thirdly, Jose Medina provided us with additional hermeneutical tools to make sense of the intersubjective epistemic vices found in privileged positionalities. Up to this point, we have come very far from the original crystalline and idealized epistemic landscape that was critiqued in the first chapter and found to be dominant in the history of philosophy in the second chapter. I hope that this journey has caused to some degree one or both of the following mental states: Either a realization of the biased racial and gender background that idealized epistemology presumes and the active ignorance that is needed for this background to be kept hidden or a new understanding of a vast array of critical hermeneutical tools that *already exists* in the literature to denounce active ignorance. Either way, the question that now seems most pressing is: How do we heal from this? How can we reconstruct our epistemic selves? Or, how can we change our epistemic habits so that they do not cause harm in the communities that we are part of? In her book *All About Love: New Visions,* bell hooks gives us a guiding insight as we begin to tackle these questions:

> Love heals. When we are wounded in the place where we would know love, it is difficult to imagine that love really has the power to change everything. No matter what has happened in our past, when we open our hearts to love we can live as if born again, not forgetting the past but seeing it in a new way, letting it live inside us in a new way. We go forward with the fresh insight that the past can no longer hurt us. Or if our past was one in which we were loved, we know that no matter the occasional presence of suffering in our lives we will return always to remember calm and bliss. Mindful remembering lets

> us put the broken bits and pieces of our hearts together again. This is the way healing begins.[165]

This chapter will aim to *mindfully remember* our epistemic interactions to pinpoint how we can ameliorate our future ones. Medina will help us in this task by giving us another vocabulary to explain how oppressed subjects can turn experiences of epistemic oppressions into cognitive habits that turn into epistemic virtues. We will also learn from these oppressive experiences how privileged subjects can foster their lucidity and meta-lucidity (these terms will be explained later in the chapter).

This chapter will be broken into two sections. The first section will introduce the three main epistemic virtues found in oppressed subjects and how they are related. The second section will define the convergence point of the three epistemic virtues discussed in the first section, mainly a meta-lucidity that oppressed subjects have. This second section will also look at the internal processes that can cause meta-lucidity by focusing on the epistemic consequences of problematic white subjectivity. We will come to understand the origins of what W. E. B. Du Bois calls double consciousness and how this experience of oppression is a grounding experience for oppressed subjects to acquire the epistemic virtue of open-mindedness.

§3.1 Epistemic Virtues of the Oppressed

Before an outline of the types of virtues found in marginalized positionalities can be deployed, it is essential to acknowledge some critical considerations. Much like the epistemic vices found in privileged subjects, Medina warns us that the epistemic virtues found in oppressed positionalities have the following caveats:

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[165] Bell Hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, First Perennial edition (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 209.

1) These virtues are *not exclusive* to this group (they can be found among members of other groups).

2) They are *not universal* features of the epistemic character of oppressed subjects (there are oppressed subjects that lack these virtues).

3) They are *not automatic features* (they are not had by subjects just by virtue of their membership in a social group). This point is reminiscent of Alyson Wylie's argument that oppression does not create "automatic epistemic privilege." [166]

These caveats are important to remember in order not to fall into the trap of romanticizing oppressed positionalities, underestimating the harm that is done by constantly inhabiting negative socio-epistemic space as it was outlined in chapter two, and the epistemic vices that result from the internalizing a dominant socio-epistemic position that distorts one's self-image.

In a mirror image of the most extreme form of epistemic arrogance, "where the external world has been swallowed up by the all-encompassing perspective of the arrogant subject,"[167] there are extreme versions of epistemic humility caused in an oppressed subject under the pressure of this previous, arrogant perspective. The type of skepticism that results from this is not a skepticism of the external world, as it is postulated by subjects in the dominant position, but rather a skepticism of the self. As Medina points out, in accordance with Pauli Murray's comment that living under Jane Crow dynamics robs "women of a positive self-concept"[168]:

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[166] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 43.; see also Alison Wylie, "Why Standpoint Matters," in *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, ed. Robert Figueroa and Sandra G. Harding (New York: Routledge, 2003), 28.
[167] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 32.
[168] Dotson, "Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability," 420.

> A skeptical self-questioning can go to the extreme of no longer having any certainty about one's status as a real person with a mind with full cognitive powers, that is, about one's status as a subject of knowledge, about one's humanity and mentality.[169]

With this extreme version of epistemic humility in mind and the more common epistemic obstacles endured by marginalized subjects, Medina and I are cognizant of the adverse side effects of living in an oppressive epistemic landscape. With that being said and following many feminist and race-conscious scholars' findings, we can identify salient epistemic virtues in oppressed positionalities.

When the first epistemic virtue, epistemic humility, is present in a subject without it becoming pathologized, it can indeed bring about some critical epistemic benefits. In general, epistemic humility is defined by Medina in the following manner: "having a humbl[ing] and self-questioning attitude toward one's cognitive repertoire."[170] The epistemic benefits that Medina lists are the ability to have a nuanced perspective where one can qualify "one's beliefs and [make] finer grade discriminations;"[171] the identification of "one's cognitive gaps and what it would take to fill them;"[172] and finally "being able to formulate questions and doubts for oneself and others."[173] Medina does not delve deeper into defining this virtue or explicitly showcase the connection between its appearance in marginalized subjects and the epistemic injustices that they endure.

As a result of seeing that their cognitive ability has its limits, oppressed subjects are in a likelier position to look for ways to ameliorate this acknowledged intellectual gap. However, this

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[169] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 42.
[170] Medina, 43.
[171] Medina, 43.
[172] Medina, 43.
[173] Medina, 43.

next type of virtue, virtue number two (intellectual curiosity/diligence), is not always going to appear under conditions of oppression. For example, one might know that there are legal and ethical arguments against unfair work practices that one has endured either in a manufacturing job or a food processing plant. Unfortunately, because of financial constraints, one does not have the time to seek them out. On the other hand, sometimes oppressive contexts might demand that one develop the expertise of niche domains "in order to escape punishment or stigmatization, sometimes even to survive."[174] An example of this sort of response can be seen in the life story of Bob Green, an enslaved African American who worked and lived at the Belle Meade plantation in Nashville, Tennessee, throughout the 1800s. The plantation owner, John Harding, founded Belle Meade in 1807 and brought with him his three slaves, one of whom was Bob Green. It is unclear how Green transitioned into becoming the head horse trainer of the plantation, but it was through Green's expertise in training thoroughbred horses that the Harding family achieved most of its success in the horse racing business.[175] The point of bringing up Green's story is that he is an example of the type of "cognitive disparities" caused by situations of oppression, which sometimes favours the oppressed.

Stemming from one's intellectual curiosity, as evidenced in Green's knowledge of thoroughbred horses, it is not very difficult to see the link it has with the last salient epistemic virtue (open-mindedness) that Medina attributes to oppressed positionalities. Medina notes: "the enhanced intellectual curiosity/diligence of oppressed subjects constantly takes them beyond the confines of their parochial perspective or the standpoint of their own group."[176] This is due to both the need one feels when confronted with epistemic lacunas due to epistemic humility and

[174] Medina, 44.
[175] "Biographies | Belle Meade," Belle Meade Plantation, accessed April 3, 2021, https://visitbellemeade.com/history/biographies/.
[176] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 44.

the fact that one does not have an option but to consider the dominant other's perspective to survive conditions of oppression. This process is internalized to such a point by oppressed subjects that they can "accomplish the epistemic feat of maintaining active in their minds two cognitive perspectives simultaneously as they perform various tasks."[177] The epistemic virtue that is a resultant of this type of double consciousness[178]is the virtue of open-mindedness. We will explore in the next section how this virtue of open-mindedness is grounded in the internalization of the dominant other's perspective, causing internal epistemic friction and why Medina wants to move away from a binary consciousness into what he calls a kaleidoscopic consciousness.

When in combination, Medina believes that the three epistemic virtues of humility, curiosity/diligence, and open-mindedness create a subversive lucidity, much like the combinations of the three epistemic vices result in active ignorance. This subversive lucidity can be broken down into two major parts. The first is the lucidity itself which is the ability to "detect and overcome blind spots,"[179] and the subversive part, which comes as a by-product of the oppressed subject's positionality. As Medina notes: oppressed subject's lucidity has "the potential to question widely held assumptions and prejudices, to see things afresh and redirect our perceptual habits, to find a way out or an alternative to epistemic blind alleys, and so on."[180] Medina's convergent epistemic ability found in oppressed subjects, subversive lucidity, is an

[177] Medina, 44.
[178] This term comes from the work of W.E.B. Du Bois.
[179] I have tried to use the language of insensitivity and ignorance when speaking about the cognitive and affective numbness that is found in our epistemic landscape. This was done in order to move away from equating epistemic deficiencies with blindness. Unfortunately, most of the literature is steeped in this ableist language, which Medina and others have also criticized. For a thoughtful engagement on this topic and why Medina chose to keep some of the language see Medina 2013, xi-xiii.
[180] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 45.

epistemic attribute that many standpoint epistemologists have argued for.[181] However, in agreement with Charles Mills, Medina differs "from those strong positions that attribute some kind of epistemic superiority to oppressed groups."[182] We will display this difference more thoroughly in the next section and how it relates to Medina's call for us to cultivate a kaleidoscopic consciousness.

§3.2 Meta-lucidity, Boomerang Perception, and The Epistemic Virtue of Open-Mindedness

Let us regroup and clarify some of the more complex terminologies that Medina provides in his epistemic resistance model. In general, Medina points out that:

> Under conditions of oppression maintaining epistemic responsibility requires nothing less than developing a kind of lucidity that can only be attained thanks to kaleidoscopic perceptions through multiple angles and perspectives.[183]

The type of lucidity that Medina is talking about is meta-lucidity, which is the ability to be sensitive to "the limitations of dominant ways of seeing."[184] This term, meta-lucidity, is an umbrella term that encompasses both the subversive lucidity seen in oppressed subjects and a similar one found in privileged subjects. As we saw from section one, this meta-lucidity is achieved once oppressed subjects acknowledge the internal epistemic friction caused by running up against oppressive subjects' subjectivity. We will explore this process in more depth later on in this section. However, although this subversive lucidity originates from marginalized positionalities, privileged subjects can also achieve a type of meta-lucidity even if they do not

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[181] See Wylie, “Why Standpoint Matters”; Patricia Hill Collin, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Conciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).
[182] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 45. Medina, 45.
[183] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 132.
[184] Medina, 47.

confront the type of oppression that creates the epistemic virtues found in oppressed subjects. This section will first analyze the internal cognitive and effective processes endured by oppressed subjects and how some subjects can emerge with double consciousness. We will also see why this double consciousness, as Medina suggests, should be expanded to the cultivation of what he calls a kaleidoscopic consciousness. We will then turn our attention to ways that privileged subjects can meliorate their cognitive and affective sensitivity to bring about a similar type of kaleidoscopic consciousness through the case study of racial perception. This section aims to focus on the internal cognitive process of the type of invisibility that Dotson so thoroughly outlined for us in chapter two. It will also help us understand why oppressed subjects have a higher probability of gaining meta-lucidity than privileged subjects by focusing on the grounding experiences that create the epistemic virtue of open-mindedness.

Let us begin by looking closer at the subversive lucidity produced in the context of oppression and the effects of a specific type of problematic perception found in white subjects that live in the West. Medina qualifies this problematic white subjectivity with the help of Elizabeth Spelman in the following manner:

> Neo-racist and neo-colonialist ways of looking at racial others construe the subjects being perceived as reflections of the perceiver, hence the boomerang structure of perception: "I look at you and come right back to myself."[185]

This notion of a boomerang perception has a particular logic. By casting a racially insensitive internal image onto the other, it negates any relation of "reciprocity and denies independence to the seen."[186] For example, we can imagine how the process of boomerang-perception plays out

[185] Medina, 151.
[186] Medina, 152.

during an interaction between a white Canadian tourist vacationing in Cuba with a woman of colour who is currently cleaning their room. Under the logic of boomerang-perception the Canadian tourist, Bob, when gazing at the middle-aged Cuban woman, Maria, cleaning his room, will only see a woman of colour whose job it is to clean up after him and nothing else as it aligns with white-supremacist tropes found in popular culture of Latina(x) maids. This internal image gets projected onto the Cuban woman and then comes back to the white subject without it being disturbed. As Medina notes, this boomerang effect allows for the image being projected to be "wholly dependent on the perceiver's subjectivity."[187] At the same time, another critical feature of boomerang perception is that "white perceivers do not believe themselves to be an image in other people's universe (or imaginary) and do not experience themselves as a reflection of non-white people's social gaze."[188] To put this into the language of resistance, the white subject's internal epistemic force is not regulated by an external epistemic force created by the racialized other's social gaze. So, it is clear from the example that Bob's epistemic equilibrium is nonexistent as it is dominated by an internal epistemic force leading him to possess a racist perception and his inability to break free from his mistaken epistemic position. Bob's epistemic position, as we have talked about earlier, is one of meta-insensitivity. He is unable to notice and take into account his own insensitivity to racialized others. Medina points out that this condition affects Bob's capability to understand racialized others and himself.[189] At the end of this section, we will come back to outline a process that one can partake in order to meliorate one's meta-insensitivity. However, for now, let us turn to the effects of this boomerang perception on the racialized other and focus on its positive epistemic consequences.

[187] Medina, 152.
[188] Medina, 152.
[189] Medina, 189.

There is an important conceptual distinction that Medina brings forward that was missing in Dotson's epistemic investigation into the invisibility endured by Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people. He notes: "social invisibility and distorted social visibility are typically not distinguished, being often addressed simultaneously and even treated as synonymous."[190] The importance of this conceptual distinction comes out in the way each phenomenon impacts the epistemically oppressed. The condition of invisibility, as it was depicted in Dotson's uncovering of Jane Crow's epistemic dynamics, and as we are retold, has some pretty devastating epistemic consequences. However, Medina and other feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins and Alison Wylie have identified some positive strategic advantages of this invisibility. The epistemic position of being an "inside outsider,"[191] as Wylie has articulated, is the situation of the epistemically marginalized, allows marginalized subjects to utilize their invisibility to create channels of communication that are undetected by white subjectivity and therefore have "access to bodies of evidence one is not assumed to know…being able to exercise forms of reasoning that are not recognized, and so on."[192] There are also deeper cognitive and affective changes that occur from being epistemically invisible. Medina differentiates these internal changes in two ways. The first being a change in one's self-regarding attitude and the second in one's other-regarding attitude. By a self-regarding attitude, Medina refers to one's acknowledgement that one is invisible in certain subjects' eyes in specific contexts. By an other-regarding attitude, Medina is saying that we have to modify the way we perceive others, as some are found to be epistemically insensitive, and one must take that into consideration when in interaction with those types of subjects. In this sense, when Maria encounters Bob's boomerang

[190] Medina, 189.
[191] Wylie, "Why Standpoint Matters," 36.
[192] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 190.

perception, she becomes to herself "the living proof that there is more to be seen than what other (some others) see."[193] Medina thinks this insight can have beneficial epistemic consequences *if* it is transformed into a "particular cognitive meta-attitude."[194] This meta-attitude, which is an attitude about our cognitive attitudes, is to "being always *on the lookout for more*, *forever more*, which is based on the *experience that there can be more than what is seen*."[195] This meta-attitude *grounds* the epistemic virtue of open-mindedness, and it is a crucial aspect of the meta-lucidity found in oppressed subjects. However, as we saw in the case of Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming people, the invisibility endured by these subjects is not only of invisibility per se but rather invisibility due to a distorted image of their lives.

§3.3 Double Consciousness, The Imperative of Epistemic Interaction, and Kaleidoscopic Consciousness

The distortion of oppressed subjects' lives while engaging with racially insensitive and meta-insensitive others creates a different epistemic benefit for the oppressed. This is due mainly to the internalization of the dominant others' perspective and the ability to switch between one's oppressed perspective and the dominant one. This ability, as it has been famously theorized, is W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of double consciousness. The concept is described by Du Bois's in the following phenomenological account:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him

[193] Medina, 192.
[194] Medina, 192.
[195] Medina, 192.

> see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[196]

Medina draws heavily on Du Bois's concept and highlights Patricia Hill Collins's reworking of the concept, mainly by focusing on her insight into the various possibilities that can play out in oppressed subjects' internal cognitive processes.[197] Collins notes that having a double consciousness does not directly entail that a subject has the *ability* to jump from one perspective to the other. Rather, this is only a possibility as the subject could easily have a bifurcated consciousness "where the cognitive perspectives are systematically isolated from each other."[198] The key aspect of Collins's point is that oppressed subjectivities have an easier time fostering a type of meta-lucidity because they are capable of knowing that there is more than one alternative way of seeing. This is why, as it has been argued in this chapter, oppressed subjects have a higher probability of gaining the epistemic virtues that come from internal epistemic friction caused by the interaction of at least two different perspectives.

However, Medina is not content with the lucidity one gains from a double consciousness. This is because we can find a multiplicity of oppressed positionalities in our complex and heterogeneous world. He is also discontent with striving towards a third, fourth, or fifth

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[196] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Brent Hayes Edwards, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford [England] ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), xiii.
[197] Patricia Hill Collin, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) as referenced in Medina 2013, 193-194.
[198] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 194.

consciousness as there might always be another perspective that one has not taken into account. This point is illustrated quite nicely by Pauli Murray's lucid insight into the Black Power movement's tendency to revert to patriarchal stereotypes to make sense of the economic success and grit that Black women have displayed throughout their history of oppression. From this example, we can see how a heightened sensitivity regarding racial oppression does not "*guarantee any special sensitivity with respect to other forms of sensitivity*."[199] To ameliorate this type of epistemic injustice found within oppressed groups and generally heterogeneous communities, Medina proposes that we cultivate a *kaleidoscopic consciousness*. The benefit of a kaleidoscopic consciousness is that it "has built into [it] a flexible and dynamic structure so that it can always adapt to the possibility of excess, that is, of there being more ways of experiencing the world than those considered."[200] In this manner, the central feature of a kaleidoscopic consciousness is that it fosters the principles of epistemic friction (*the principle of acknowledgement and engagement* and *the principle of epistemic equilibrium*). In other words, the main aspect of the type of meta-lucidity, through a kaleidoscopic consciousness, is *first* that one understands that one's perspective is only one many through a thoughtful engagement with other people, entailing that one understands the epistemic limitations of one's perspective. "And only secondarily lucidity about the specific features of those perspectives with which one's own [standpoint] is entangled."[201]

What I want to highlight at this point of the discussion is that a kaleidoscopic consciousness can *only* be achieved through social interaction! Although we can tap into our own experiences to get a sense of the world around us, these will always be limited and insufficient in

[199] Medina, 201.
[200] Medina, 200.
[201] Medina, 201.

bringing about the type of epistemic friction necessary to create a meta-lucidity that we hope to attain. We can now see how the discussion found in chapter one helps us understand this point. The impasse that is felt when the epistemic skeptic rejects our common notion of knowledge by imposing a new, more precise criteria for the word that is based on abstract considerations is a rejection of not *our* shared perspective (as a homogeneous universal group) as Cavell suggested, but rather of a particular social perspective that the skeptic's interlocutor possesses. This example is easier to understand if we imagine a conversation between Descartes and a social epistemologist of the variety seen in this thesis. As we came to understand in chapter three, if a discussion about where we should look for an adequate epistemic ideal, Descartes and their social epistemologist interlocutor would most likely end up at a standstill. This standstill would come from Descartes's inability to accept the ordinary criteria of knowledge that the social epistemologist would bring into the conversation. Here is the crucial point, the Cartesian philosopher removes themselves from the conversation to find an interlocutor that agrees with them in order to theorize the universal consequence of the "insights" they have acquired into "our" human epistemic limits. This course of action would ultimately disallow any type of epistemic friction and, with it, any chance for Descartes to gain insight into why his ideas might fail to capture the whole of human experience. On the other hand, the social epistemologist takes their experience with Descartes as an experience of an inability to speak about certain issues (epistemology) with *that* philosopher. The social epistemologist sees the inability to speak to that philosopher as a hermeneutical gap. It is through the thoughtful acknowledgement of the epistemic friction found between the two perspectives that allow the social epistemologist "to feel the contours of [their] social gaze and the blind spots of [their] cognitive-affective

sensibilities."[202] From this small thought experiment, we can see that a social epistemologist, when confronted with a semantic impasse, uses this experience to develop a further wider and deeper understanding of themselves and others, allowing them to be more epistemically responsible[203]. In a more personal sense, the evidence that is engaging critically with one's internally and externally clashing epistemic forces results in a more lucid epistemic position is seen throughout this very project. I would have never looked into social epistemology as outlined by Medina if not from feeling and encountering the hermeneutical gap outline in my thought experiment multiple times as a person of colour within a majority white university. The insights and vocabulary gained throughout this thesis, and my interactions with philosophical others have given me a deeper and more lucid perspective on myself and the people I interact with daily. However, the question that seems to be lingering in the background of Medina's model is: if a kaleidoscopic consciousness is only achieved through oppressive interactions with insensitive others in conjunction with a thoughtful acknowledgment and critical analysis of the resultant epistemic friction that ensues from the interactions, how can meta-insensitive subjects meliorate their epistemic capacities?

Before we get into the two-phased melioration of meta-insensitivity, we have to understand Medina's Imperative of Epistemic Interaction. Medina constructs this imperative from Elizabeth Anderson's Imperative of Integration which is based broadly on Anderson's arguments surrounding the anti-democratic consequences of "de facto segregation that survives decades after segregation was legally abolished"[204] in the U.S. As we have seen throughout this chapter and the last, epistemic interaction is a necessary condition for epistemic friction to be

[202] Medina, 204.
[203] For an in-depth discussion of epistemic responsibility see Chapter Four in Medina's *The Epistemology of Resistance*
[204] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 7.

present in one's cognitive and affective lives. This is what Medina's Imperative of Epistemic Interaction calls for. Medina articulates the imperative in the following manner:

> The imperative of Epistemic Interaction calls for the development of communicative and reactive *habits* that operationalize our responsiveness to diverse and multiple others (no matter how different from ourselves). It calls for the cultivation of *sensibilities* that open ourselves to diverse others cognitively, affectively, and communicatively and enable us to share spaces responsibility and to engage in joint activities.[205]

Medina emphasizes the connection between his imperative and the democratic sensibilities needed for the well-functioning of liberal democracy. I flag this connection because it showcases the reach and political implications of rejecting the suggestions that are put forward in Medina's model. So now that we have a better understanding of Medina's imperative let us decipher the question at hand: How can insensitive and, most importantly, meta-insensitive subjects meliorate their epistemic life? Following Medina's Imperative of Epistemic Interaction and the various examples throughout the chapter, epistemic melioration and the extent that one reaches levels of meta-lucidity is not going to happen in a subject's epistemic life through the study of rational arguments and the various ways that certain ideas have negatively impacted some and benefits others. Instead, as it has been argued for before, we need to seek a solution beyond this intellectualist account and remember that racist, sexist, and other problematic perspectives come about through a process of habituation and cognitive excess (a lack of epistemic friction) throughout one's life. So, considering the points just listed, Medina provides us with a two-phased process where meta-insensitive subjects can change and begin their journey towards a

[205] Medina, 9.

more diverse consciousness. The two phases are articulated in the context of racial insensitivity in the following way:

> 1) Diagnostic phase: a *diagnostic phase* in which we gain positive and negative insights about our cognitive-affective functioning when it comes to the judgments of racial perceptions and the judgments of the significance and relevance of race.[206]
>
> 2) Reconstructive phase: a *reconstructive phase* in which we pursue interventions and transformations aimed at instilling new attitudes and habits that can meliorate our cognitive-affective functioning in these matters.[207]

In the diagnostic phase, the subject starts to know themselves and the types of practices and habits that influence how they frame the world. This self-knowing process can be complicated as it is easy for meta-insensitive subjects to misdiagnose the problems that maintain harmful stereotypes and viewpoints. For example, Medina draws on Linda Martín Alcoff's work to highlight how white subjects misidentify the wide breadth of influential factors that come together to produce the type of racial meta-insensitivity evidenced in predominantly white communities. Alcoff highlights how some white subjects who are starting to become aware of the legacy of white supremacy in their country and the arbitrariness of their privilege begin to foster a "white awareness without sufficient racial lucidity."[208] More specifically, both Alcoff and Medina emphasize the importance of a diagnostic phase that considers the multiplicity of factors that affect our cognitive-affective faculties. Without delving too deeply, the examples that Alcoff brings up are a book by Judith Katz named *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racist*

[206] Medina, 213.
[207] Medina, 213.
[208] Medina, 217.

Training and a web journal called *Race Traitor: A Journal of the New Abolitionism*. In her analysis of these two examples, Alcoff showcases two distinct ways that white subjects critical of white supremacy can misdiagnose the position that they are implicated in and how to cultivate an anti-racist consciousness. In the first example, Katz "offers a psychologistic account of racism devoid of social or historical context and without much attention to its structural underpinnings."[209] This rendering focuses on how white subjects can identify their internal racist thoughts and discard them wholesale by going through a type of cognitive-behavioural therapy. Although this method might help white subjects identify racial stereotypes and explicitly racist beliefs in themselves, it prevents them from understanding the "social, historical, and structural aspects"[210] that will still be in effect after going through the cognitive-behavioural therapy that Katz initially prescribes. In the second example, Alcoff identifies how many of the critical analyses of society found on the website Race traitor lacked a thorough understanding of the relationship between the "racialized social environment"[211] and how it might affect white subject's "deep cognitive-affective structures and habits."[212] This naivete is understood most clearly by their call that through acts of racial treason by white subjects, there could be a day where white privilege and the superiority of the white racial category would come to an end. This view of whiteness and its disregard of the dominant place of white forms of life also botches the first diagnostic phase that Medina had previously called for. The point here is that in the case of racialized meta-insensitivity, white subjects need to endure a diagnostic phase that includes all of the psychological, sociohistorical, and structural factors that influence problematic white subjectivity. Without this holistic account, white subjects will not be able to take notice of

[209] Medina, 218.
[210] Medina, 218.
[211] Medina, 219.
[212] Medina, 219.

most of the problematic aspects of their inherited subjectivity which is needed before moving on to phase two.

To end this chapter, and as a manner of cashing in on the intellectual work that has taken to get to this point in the thesis, let us turn to how Medina suggests we reconstruct our cognitive-affective habits and become better epistemic agents. As we have gathered, meta-lucidity or any lucidity can only be achieved through epistemic friction. In the case of oppressed subjects, this friction comes as a result of oppressive epistemic interactions with others. However, in the case of white subjects who also do not hold other types of oppressed positionalities, epistemic friction is not usually encountered, hence the epistemic vices that are then developed. So, how do these meta-insensitive subjects transform their racist and sexist viewpoints? One aspect, which was outlined previously, is to first understand the psychological and socio-historical background to one's privileged position. Through this process, white subjects can start wrestling with the duality of their white supremacist history. By this duality, I mean the way that "U.S. [and Canadian] cultural and political traditions have a dual character, containing both ways of institutionalizing oppression and inequality and ways of appreciating freedom and equality and trying to achieve them all."[213] Once a white subject begins to contemplate the inherent contradictions found in the history of their identity, this causes an internal epistemic resistance that can be used to cultivate what Alcoff has coined a "white double consciousness."[214] Alcoff defines this type of double consciousness, which differs greatly from the Du Boisean type outlined earlier, in the following way:

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[213] Medina, 221.
[214] Linda Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and The Self*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 223.

> A white double consciousness would not involve the move between white and black subjectivities or black and American perspectives, as Du Bois and Fanon developed the notion. Instead, for whites, double consciousness requires an ever-present acknowledgment of the historical legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation, as well as a newly awakened memory of the many white traitors to white privilege who have struggled to contribute to the building of an inclusive human community.[215]

However, as Medina has pointed out previously, and as we have gathered from the "truth of skepticism," the manner in which we encounter the world is not one knowing, at least not the type of knowledge that modern epistemologist first posited. Rather, the sociogenesis of epistemic vices and virtues points to the effect that our embodied experiences have on our self-formations and the type of cognitive-affective habits we develop. So, although Alcoff's white-double consciousness acquires the necessary *information* to begin a cognitive-affective transformation, it is not sufficient in bringing about the *bodily-induced* restructuring that is needed for the disruption of long-held cognitive-affective epistemic habits. Medina notes, in reference to Shannon Sullivan's work in *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege,* this second requirement in the following way:

> The kind of racial self-consciousness required by white double consciousness will be different from the racial awareness of black double consciousness in crucial respects, but both forms of double consciousness must coincide in the following: they require a kind of shattering of a bodily schema produced by the internationalization of the gaze of

[215] Alcoff, 223.

> differently racialized others toward oneself, which can only happen in *actual bodily encounters with racial others* that disrupt the normal operation of one's racialized transactional habits and produces a vivid racial awareness, a new way of seeing oneself.[216]

This second requirement is rooted in Medina's Imperative of Epistemic Interaction. Without a diverse bodily interaction with racialized others, white subjects will not have the opportunity to "internalize the gazes of racial others and learn to see [themselves] as a perceptual object for them."[217] In this sense, we can consider how the pandemic that we are currently experiencing and the lack of bodily experiences that we are allowed to have, in addition to Donald Trump's inflammatory remarks that have emboldened far-right ideologies, has aided in polarizing white subjects towards white-supremacist ideologies.

In order not to fall into a distorted understanding of the multiplicity of gazes found in the world, Medina calls for another crucial modification to double consciousness, the fostering of a *kaleidoscope consciousness*. As we have noted earlier, the world is a heterogeneous landscape of many racialized positionalities. This heterogeneity cannot be fully appreciated under the framework of double consciousness. As we saw in the case of Black women, their experience differs greatly from that of Black men. Medina suggests that in order to "take this social pluralism seriously, we need a more expansive lucidity about our positionality and relationality with respect to racial differences."[218] The beauty of Medina's kaleidoscopic consciousness is seen in the way that it is a subjectivity that is always in expansion. It is open to diverse voices

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[216] Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*, American Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) as referenced in Medina 2013, 222-223.
[217] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 223.
[218] Medina, 223.

and their different experiences without appropriating them or melting them back into one singular node as it was in the case of Descartes's idealized epistemology. A kaleidoscopic consciousness is also always in progress, meaning that it is endlessly revising and expanding "one's social sensibilities—and with it also the pluralization of one's racial consciousness."[219] This constant revising necessitates social interactions and the epistemic friction that accompanies these interactions. So, as we move forward into philosophical investigations or any other type of knowledge production, there needs to be a transformation in the way that historically problematic ideas are put forward by highlighting the way they revert to exclusivist/solitary notions of the attainment of knowledge. In addition to this intellectual transformation, there needs to be a bodily-focused/social transformation, where we take seriously the lack of diverse voices found in the room while these historically problematic ideas are being discussed.

[219] Medina, 224.

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