Précis of *Who Should We Be Online? A Social Epistemology for the Internet*

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Who Should We Be Online? provides a socially situated epistemology for the internet. There are many important epistemological questions about the internet, and in recent years concerns have grown about the internet's effect on what we believe. Epistemologists have rapidly become interested in the problems of fake news, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and the role of large social media companies in shaping our media and public spaces for debate. This book builds on this literature, but it also argues that something important has been largely missing from extant philosophical analysis of the internet. Social epistemology needs to pay attention to the role of power, oppression, and inequality in shaping what we know and what we don't know online. Racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression both influence individual users' online behavior and also structure the platforms, policies, and design features of social media spaces. Prejudice often shapes who we trust and distrust online, and structural oppression affects whether online platforms can be reasonably trusted by marginalized people. Whom we trust has immediate consequences for what we do and do not know. Unfortunately, much social epistemology of the internet abstracts away from the social context of knowledge production. This kind of epistemology analyzes generic internet 'users' interacting with other generic 'users' online, rather than talking about how users' social identities and locations in oppressive systems shape online knowledge production. This book shows the value of a socially situated approach—one that draws on feminist epistemology, anti-racist epistemology, queer epistemology and other approaches that analyze the effects of power and inequality on knowledge production and dissemination.

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Who Should We Be Online? applies several existing socially situated epistemological frameworks to the internet. Chapter one provides an introduction to feminist accounts of objectivity, veritistic social epistemology, epistemologies of ignorance, virtue epistemology, and epistemic injustice. I show how these frameworks fit together to provide mutually reinforcing evaluative tools for determining the epistemic merits and flaws of features of the internet and our actions as online agents. The rest of the book applies these frameworks to epistemic challenges raised by the internet. Each chapter focuses on one or two epistemically significant personas that populate the internet: moderators, imposters, tricksters, fakers, and lurkers. Chapter 2 investigates the epistemology of online content moderation, arguing that current corporate practices promote epistemic injustice and exploit workers in traumatizing ways. In Chapter 3, I examine internet hoaxes. I argue for a crucial distinction between internet imposters who cause epistemic damage by violating norms of authenticity and internet tricksters who violate these norms in acts of resistance that encourage epistemically beneficial trust in the oppressed. Chapter 4 addresses fake news. I show how racism shapes online disinformation and how disinformation fuels racism. I argue that feminist accounts of objectivity can provide tools for platforms to avoid what I call 'a flight to neutrality' that prevents them from accepting responsibility for their role in the fake news problem. In Chapter 5, I analyze how social media can play a powerful role in educating people about their own privileges and prejudices. I focus on the epistemic virtues and vices of lurkers, who are people who spend time in online epistemic communities without directly participating in them. I develop a virtue epistemology that helps us discern when to engage in a conversation, when to be quiet and lurk, and how to avoid hijacking online spaces for marginalized people. The research ethics appendix lays out several key ethical issues facing philosophers studying the internet, including privacy, protection of the researcher, and how to avoid epistemic exploitation of users.