

# Epistemic Wrongs and Epistemic Reparations Workshop

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Abstract Book



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## **Epistemic Reparations**

**Jennifer Lackey**

(Northwestern University)

In this talk, I provide the first extended discussion in the philosophical literature of the epistemic significance of the phenomenon of “being known” and the relationship it has to reparations that I argue are distinctively epistemic. Drawing on a framework provided by the United Nations of the “right to know,” I argue that victims of gross violations and injustices not only have the right to know what happened, but also the right to be known—to be a giver of knowledge to others about their own experiences. I conclude by sketching an epistemological picture to underwrite this notion of epistemic reparations, one that significantly expands the traditional picture by including epistemic duties that are imperfect in nature and concern actions in addition to beliefs.

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## **The Sociality of Epistemic Wrongs**

**Bernard Matolino**

(University of Pretoria)

The historical fact of violation of African people at the hands of white adventurers is well-established. Attempts have been made to understand the intentions and effects of these adventurers on African people. These attempts have yielded varying results and debates. To the best of my knowledge what has not been attempted, by African scholars, is the use of resources from social epistemology to understand possibilities in redressing epistemic wrongs. Social epistemology’s emergence as a counter to standard analytical epistemological concerns, goes beyond being a mere alternative. Significantly, by removing the individual from the agency of knowing through effectively transferring such agency to society, we can develop a better apprehension of the agency and goals of adventurers. If it can be shown that the adventurers were only expressing a socially bound agency of discrimination and suppression, we can begin to understand what the context of the suppressive episteme was and how it shaped the agency of individuals. If we are also able to understand the social context of epistemic standing in Africa, we could devise effective collective counter ways to the violence the continent has endured. My intention, therefore, is to evaluate the suitability of social epistemology for this role.

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## **Epistemic Blame and Social Power**

### **Cameron Boulton**

(Brandon University of Canada)

In this talk, I examine our practice of epistemic blame from a normative point of view. I explore whether, and for what reasons, we might think it is a good practice, and what the alternatives might be. To this end, I develop a taxonomy of “epistemic responses”, characterized at the broadest level in terms of negative, positive, and neutrally valenced responses. With my taxonomy on hand, I articulate constraints on how we ought to respond to one another for epistemic failings. Three dimensions of evaluation are: fittingness, instrumental value, and the avoidance of objectionable features. Exploring these dimensions, my primary focus is the intersection of epistemic blame and social power. Can unjust balances in social power generate obligations on groups to reflect on their (epistemic) blaming practices? In what ways can social power problematically exclude groups from our (epistemic) blaming practices? As a case study, I examine how epistemic blame interacts with reconciliation and reparations in a post-colonial context.

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## **Revolution as a Means of Restoration in the Hands of the People.**

### **Mongane Serate**

(ACEPS, University of Johannesburg)

“Emanating from the human spirit, Indigenous Knowledge Systems ( IKS) are gained and derived from life experiences of peoples, communities, societies and nations, as they are organized and ordered to accumulate knowledge with the objective to utilize it to achieve quality of life and to create a liveable world and environment for both human and other forms of life.” This is a definition of IKS which was derived from research which was done about 20 years ago in the nine Provinces of our country. The research was prompted by the arts, culture, languages, science and technology portfolio committee of parliament, (the pc) which formed a research conglomeration consisting of the department of arts, culture, languages, science and technology, (the department), science councils, (sc) historically disadvantaged universities, (hdus) and IKS practitioners and holders (IKSPH).

This research was prompted by a debate in the pc. The debate sort to answer the question: if by law a people are denied science education, as black people were by law by the apartheid system, and if we know that from time immemorial human life is not only steeped in but exists

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because of science and that it is not a matter of choice to be or not to be scientific but a matter of life and death, how were the black oppressed engaged in scientific research in their existence and context?

Sooner rather than later in this abstract I must also acknowledge the fact that there is no IKS without the interaction between human beings and nature in its diversity. The human spirit which emulates

nature is an integral part of nature and creation and affirms it.

If we agree about the possibility and potential of IKS as defined, how must we use it? How must we explore its content and context with the objective to harness its historical, cultural and scientific potential for the benefit of all? This so that a two- pronged reparation system is formulated and implemented viz reparation and reconciliation.

A political reparation process cannot be for its sake. It must not result in it being a form or forms of hand- outs. There is no form of reparation which can replace the impact of a historical oppression and exploitation of human beings by other human beings. However, multiple principled processes based on a constitution, a political, economic and social contract, whose objective is to achieve the total and fundamental national transformation through the total empowerment of the whole nation which itself will have defined the meaning of that transformation and reconciliation.

Would that total and fundamental change be informed by "... Mayibuye, iAfrica... AFRICA...MAYIBUYE!' What does that mean, what must it mean and for whom and how must it be executed? Is there any reference for this in IKS?

The processes of reparation against the long nightmare which was lived through by both black people(oppression and exploitation) and white people (fear of reprisals and loss of quality of life) South Africans, must be one which anchors the IKS concept of *Motho ke Motho ka batho ba bang* as a strategic foundation of the rising nation.

If we do, it must also be so that its processes of both reparation and reconciliation through the implementation of IKS projects must be strengthened, through innovation, promotion and IP protection. The objective for this must be so to produce the Damascus moment for the poor, the unemployed and the marginalised but whose contribution, which must be based on IKS must engage the imagination, commitment and actions of the people and the development of the country other words the whole nation, black and white must be the social force for this transformation.

IKS in large measure, as it is innovated, promoted and protected to yield further knowledge, will prime the imagination, creativity and development of the people who will develop

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not only their lives, and the things which result from it, the "... accumulate(d) knowledge with the objective to utilize them to achieve quality of life and to create a liveable world and environment for both human and other forms of life."

Is it that in part, the further development of skills to innovate IKS, will be derived and accumulated from not only how we can unpack the concept of reparations, but also from how, its political and economic application and implementation can be engaged within the non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa? That, so as to enhance national reconciliation.

In other words, to let emerge and live in a nation steeped and living and shaped by an economic and social science which is shaped by a people aspiring not only for the stability of the nation, as important as that is, but also to live, as IKS would define it, in a nation which seeks botho?

That is, a nation whose foundation is *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang* which will not contradict national aspirations for prosperity. That as one part of the reparation from those who were completely disadvantaged by the apartheid system whose cornerstone is reconciliation, as it will also emanate from the social compact as it is defined here.

The objective must be to anchor an economic system emanating from a social compact consisting of government, the private sector and the organs of civil society including IKS practitioners and holders... what objective must we define so as to intervene on behalf of IKS holders and practitioners who are the majority in the nation and on what basis would their quality of life? (Is it through the) "...Systems ( IKS) which are gained and derived from life experiences of peoples, communities, societies and nations, as they are organized and ordered to accumulate knowledge with the objective to utilize them to achieve quality of life and to create a liveable world and environment for both human and other forms of life."?) Which in reality is what?

Would we, by this engagement, achieve and maintain the quality of life and sustain a liveable country for the diverse lives which must emerge and exist in our country and on the continent? As with all living species, including even plants and animals, the life of the poor, the discriminated against and the unemployed does not only ensure the reproduction or/the birth of the quality of their species, but it also forever seeks and imbues to them, the power to contradict extinction and death of their being. Life and living has to be an active participant in its invention, innovation and creativity as a reference to some of the five categories of the IKS systems viz: Social, technological, biodiversity, institutions and liberatory processes attest.

If we raise these issues, we must do so with the understanding that the IKSH must participate in their own right in the building of their country, and that they must be the

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beneficiaries, as practitioners and holders. Through one of the poems in the Anthology called Yakha'inkomo, called the Actual Dialogue, I said in 1972:

Do not fear baas

It's just that I appeared

And our faces met

In this black night that's like me

Do not fear-

We will always meet

When you do not expect me

I will appear

In the night that's black like me

Do not fear- Blame your heart

When you fear me-

I will blame my mind

When I fear you

In the night that's black like me.

Do not fear Baas.

My heart is vast as the sea

And your mind as the earth.

Its awright Baas.

Do not fear.

In response to Madiba's call in 1995, for a Freedom Park to be built to remember and honour those who paid with their lives for a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa which will forever aspire for her prosperity; and President Mbeki's directive for it to emerge- there the Freedom Park stands at Salvokop Hill in our Capital city. The Freedom Park stands large now, in its tranquillity.

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It is a reality which was conceived and shaped by the IKSHPs. It will forever ask: how does, the human spirit imbue reconciliation, healing and prosperity to manifest in a nation? How does a nation which has been at war with itself transform the concept of reparation for itself so that it defines its characteristic to live and survive?

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### **Imperatives for Epistemic Reparation**

**Abraham Tobi**

(ACEPS, University of Johannesburg)

Epistemic colonization – the idea that there is an epistemic dimension to the harms and wrongs of colonization – is a form of epistemic injustice. Most ameliorative theories for epistemic injustice are forward-looking and focus on individual virtues and structural changes that might make the world more epistemically just. These theories are valuable for epistemic justice. However, an often-overlooked dimension of epistemic justice is a backwards-looking approach. This sort of approach can come in the form of epistemic reparation. Jenifer Lackey defines epistemic reparation as “intentionally reparative actions in the form of epistemic goods given to those epistemically wronged by parties who acknowledge these wrongs and whose reparative actions are intended to redress them” (Lackey forthcoming). What imperatives are there for this sort of reparative action? Using epistemic colonization as a central case, I argue for an epistemic imperative for reparation in two steps. First, I establish the epistemic blameworthiness of perpetrators of epistemic colonization. Second, in being blameworthy for epistemic colonization, I show that its perpetrators are in violation of some epistemic obligations.

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### **Arts of Acknowledgment: Toward Epistemic Reparation as Un-learning**

**Fiona Jenkins**

(Australian National University)

An Acknowledgment of Country at the opening of an event has become an established practice in Australia over the last decade. A formal wording will typically acknowledge the ‘traditional custodians’ of the land we meet on and pay respect to Elders.

However, the practice of Acknowledgment is in several ways a subtly conflicted space, at once powerful and disquieting in its effects and implications. Is the Acknowledgment of Country a practice of epistemic reparation, or does it normalise and multiply forms of disavowal? Should

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we pay attention to its forms and limitations, or simply be grateful that it has taken hold, supporting a necessary cultural shift to learning and accepting brutal truths about Australia's history of settlement?

I argue here that engagement with artworks can expand practices of acknowledgment as sites of 'un-learning', opening a phenomenal threshold or place of assembly that offers distinctive orientation for democratic and constitutional life.

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### **Theorizing Epistemic Decolonisation Through the Canon of Epistemic Reparation**

**Dimpho Maponya**

(ACEPS, University of Johannesburg)

In this talk, locate the project of epistemic decolonisation within the broader debate on epistemic reparations. I draw a parallel between the two, especially with regards to the right to know as well as the right to be known. My view is that the epistemic decolonisation discourse, by virtue of its objective to mend what has been destroyed by colonialism, can be conceptualized as a form of epistemic reparation. In various ways, the epistemic decolonisation discourse has been committed to identifying victims of colonialism, and to the restoration of their epistemologies. The reparative characteristics of epistemic decolonisation, I will argue, have the potential to address, primarily, the concern about who bears the responsibility for amending epistemic harms caused by colonialism and relatedly, address the concern about the appropriate forms of epistemic reparation.

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### **How a Group Can Own its Epistemic Limitations**

**Sarah Wright**

(University of Georgia)

A duty to provide epistemic reparation will require actions of us. Jennifer Lackey has argued that victims of atrocities have a right to be known, in addition to the U.N. defended right to know. These rights will place a corresponding duty on at least some to act in epistemically restorative ways. But how is this action to be properly motivated? Within a virtue-theoretic framework, we can change this to the question, what virtues are called for in the work of epistemic reparations?

Humility is a virtue that is concerned with our recognizing the harm that we have done and guarding against future errors. While there are competing accounts of the nature of humility, the dominant account is that defended by Whitcomb et. al. They argue that (epistemic) humility is

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owning your (epistemic) limitations. As an individual, we own our limitations by recognizing them with the right attitude, taking responsibility for them, and working to overcome them. But groups may have their own limitations and so the virtue of humility for groups may take a different form.

Elizabeth Anderson and José Medina have both recently argued that groups may have vices that are not reducible to the vices of the individuals that make them up. The discursive norms that govern the group conversations may limit the reasons that a group considers in its reasoning, and the epistemic norms of the group may limit what the group recognizes as a relevant consideration. As groups control and limit what is to be recognized as socially important and to be taught to the next generation, epistemic injustices, even those committed by an individual, may be the result of situated ignorance caused by group limitations, not any character trait of that individual. For limitations only possessed at the group level, epistemic humility will require a group owning its own group limitations.

But how can a group own its limitations, particularly when those limitations are not possessed by individual members of the group, but rather are manifested only by the group as a whole? I argue that a group can own its collective limitations in a way parallel to the individual -- by recognizing them in the right way, taking responsibility for them, and changing the group norms to overcome them.

Recognizing the possibility of a group owning its limitations gives us new resources to answer a traditional objection to reparations in general – that the person or group asked to provide reparations is not the same as the one who inflicted the original harm. Collective ownership of a limitation is not the same as individual ownership – in fact, group limitations cannot be properly owned by the individual. Still, individuals can be part of groups that own their limitations, and this collective owning can filter down to duties at the individual level.

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## **The Reversal of Justice: The Possibility of Unjust Epistemic Reparations in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa**

**Keo Mbebe**

(University of Pretoria)

Is there a scenario where epistemic reparations may perpetuate injustice instead of justice? In my paper, I aim to argue in the affirmative, particularly with regards to the field of transitional justice. I argue that epistemic injustice can be perpetuated when epistemic reparations are used as a means to foreclose just closure. I use the philosophy of Berber Bevernage to demonstrate this point by explication of his elaboration of the politics of time, specifically the concept of reversible time.

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The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC) was a process designed to help the country “heal” from the so-called “injustice of the past”. The epistemic wrong was the dismissal of the victims’ experience of apartheid injustice, and one remedy would be justice as acknowledgement. Justice as acknowledgement can be argued to be a form of epistemic reparations for decades of the deliberate silencing and obfuscation of pain of apartheid victims. This would be purportedly achieved partly through giving the victims a chance to relate their experiences of apartheid-era injustice related to gross human rights abuses. This aspect of the process was intended to create a space and time for victims to be heard and for their pain to be acknowledged; a time and space that, it was envisioned, would lead to catharsis for the victims. Justice, in this specific location in the process, was considered to be the centring of the experience of the victims, a form of epistemic reparations of justice as acknowledgement to counter unjust epistemic dismissal.

In my paper, I aim to interpret this justice as acknowledgement through the lens of reversible time. The modern Western conception of the relationship between time and justice, according to Berber Bevernage, conceives of the present as temporally local, and the past as absent and distant. With reversible time, an offence committed in the past can be reversed through either retribution or reparation, so that the offence no longer exists in the present. Thus, the time of a crime can be “reversed, annulled, or compensated”. Justice is seen as the temporal closure of a crime, thus the crime is nullified retrospectively.

In my paper, I argue that while the employment of reversible time by the TRC appears justified on the surface by “repairing” the effects of a crime, it is actually a dangerous framework when addressing historical injustice. I argue that reversible time obfuscates the ways in which injustice may not just be an event or occurrence, but rather a structure with continuity beyond the past and the present. I then apply this insight into how, ironically, epistemic reparations for apartheid victims with the goal of catharsis and acknowledgement can foreclose the actual closure of historical injustice, particularly when the symbolism of catharsis and acknowledgment is perceived as material closure of historical injustice.

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**How Monuments of Christopher Columbus and Robert E. Lee Are Connected to Police Violence Against Black Americans.**

**Eric Bayruns Garcia**

(Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard University McMaster University)

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I will argue (C) that US society's failure to blame historical figures such as Christopher Columbus and Robert E. Lee for their racist beliefs and actions at least partly explains the moral ignorance from which US police murder Black persons in the US such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Eric Garner. Three premises support this conclusion. The first is (P1) that blaming these figures in the past can promote belief in the moral truth in the present. The second is (P2) that statues and monuments that honor these figures represent this failure to blame. The third premise is (P3) that these statues and monuments represent this failure to blame promotes the pervasiveness and persistence of the ignorance from which US society and thus police act. I will assume that ignorance involves false belief and lack of true belief.

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**Materializing Epistemic Reparations: Reclaimers, Recycling, and Rectifying Epistemic Dispossession**

**Melanie Samson**

(University of Johannesburg)

This paper engages debates on epistemic wrongs and reparations from the unlikely vantage point of Johannesburg's garbage dumps. The first section of the paper elaborates that, as reclaimers (waste pickers) in South Africa created a highly effective system to extract recyclables from the waste stream and revalue them, the establishment of the recycling sector as a site for capital accumulation required the epistemic dispossession of reclaimers, in which their knowledge of how to revalue recyclables was appropriated, while their status as epistemic agents was simultaneously erased. This erasure was essential for the states and capital's ability to dispossess reclaimers of the recyclables that they collect and the sphere of accumulation they created without any form of compensation.

The second section of the paper then analyses the centrality of epistemic reparations in ongoing processes to redress reclaimers' economic exploitation and material dispossession. It demonstrates that it was only once reclaimers' status as experts in the sector was recognised and valued that it became possible for arguments that they be compensated for their labour and not be dispossessed of their work could be advanced. The paper concludes by arguing that discussion of epistemic dispossession and reparations is inherently and necessarily intertwined with material dispossession and reparations.

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