



mouths quiet, you can lose out on the correcting that they would otherwise have done if they didn't feel under pressure to keep their mouths shut, assuming that they're knowledgeable in what they're going to talk about. But you're quite right about that. I hadn't thought about that implication.

There is an age-old question. Let's assume that you are happy believing in something false. Why should I dare to be impolite and take you out of your happy state, depriving you of the bliss of ignorance?

Good. In fact, you are raising an issue that I'm going to be discussing in my graduate seminar in the spring. It's a really good question. It gets to the heart of what is the value of knowledge and how should we rank that value, with respect to other values like the value of happiness.

I tend to err on the side of knowledge, at least important knowledge. Significant knowledge should be valued greatly and should get in the way of your happiness if, for example, you have a false belief. But as I get older, I recognize that there are occasions when even I stopped short of saying, "Hey, you know what? I have to tell you this belief is false. Here's how it would be better for you to think this way." These are tough issues, though. So, that's my non-answer answer to you!

This is indeed a tough issue. On the matter of politeness, there had been some really good political campaigns throughout history, which delivered justice and fairness to some extent but used some false claims to mobilize people. So, the end was actually good but not the means. Similar examples abound. What do you think of such campaigns? Again, what you're asking is a lovely question at the intersection of political philosophy, ethics, and

epistemology. The way that I would put it is: How do we consider trade-offs? If you sacrifice trade-offs in epistemology, for example, by allowing or pushing these false beliefs, can it be justified by having good political outcomes? I would hesitate to say that the answer is never Yes. I think surely there are cases where the answer is Yes.

I'm not such a proponent of "you can never, ever, ever lie". I think sometimes white lies are perfectly appropriate. I do get very worried, however, when we do this in our politics because I worry that lies in politics can have a corrosive effect on — what we call — the body politic. It can create a lack of trust. It can create all sorts of bad relationships between people that we in subsequent years are going to need to rely on if we're going to have a healthy body politic.

So, my own view is that the standards are extremely high for ever using a lie in politics in order to try to get even a very, very good end. That's a controversial view, but that's just my view.

So, is it fair to assume that between two extremes, which are Kantian ethics and Utilitarian ethics, you are much closer to the Kantian version?

It's funny that you asked that. You're asking me very tough questions. I was just having a conversation with a friend of mine, who's an ethicist. I was telling her that I don't exactly know where my sympathies are. I will say I have some Kantian sympathies. That's true.

But I also worry that any strict rule-based system or duty-based system that doesn't acknowledge the messiness of life has always struck me as inadequate. I don't want to accuse Kant of having been inadequate in that way, but I do think I see some Kantians whose views strike me as inadequate in that way. So, I couldn't be a full-on Kantian even though I have some Kantian allegiances.

I understand that these two camps of theories are two extremes, and most people fall in between. As neither purely Kantian nor purely utilitarian, but I guess some can. Anyway, let's go to Chapter 8, 'Can Asserting That p Improve the Speaker's Epistemic Position'. What did you mean by that?

So, start with the idea that if I tell you something, and you repeat it back to me having endorsed it, it seems like I can't learn much from the fact that you just accepted what I told you. That seems pretty obvious. What I wanted to argue in this paper is that that so-called obvious truth turns out to be false. And I wanted to argue that it's false for an interesting reason.

It tells us something interesting about, if you like, socio-epistemic communities. What it tells us is that we actually depend on people in our epistemic communities more than most people suspect. I've often



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correctness as a discourse as well.

That's really interesting. I had not thought about that dimension, which sounds very interesting. You're right that it has implications for that. I would want to be a little bit careful here because, strictly speaking, what we argue for is the idea that if you live in a community that's knowl-

edgeable and its people are outspoken and willing to correct people who are wrong publicly, you'll do better than living in a community where people are not outspoken or they're not knowledgeable.

So, in that sense, if you live in a community where, for example, by factors like the political correctness, they are inclined to keep their



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used this example. I call it "the justification of conference-going".

I go to a lot of conferences and feel bad because I have to leave home. When my kids were younger, it meant leaving my kids and leaving my partner. What justifies that kind of action or that kind of behavior? What I realized was it's at conferences that I can be most confident about the standing of my own theories. And the reason for that is this: If I go and present a paper of mine at a conference and I get lots of good feedback, all the objections seem like I can handle them. That fills me with a kind of confidence that there's no evidence out there that I haven't taken stock of and that I haven't made elementary errors of reasoning without realizing it.

In a way, I'm using my community to keep me honest. And I think this is one of the great things about conferences. It's also one of the great things about university life since we are in an institution that is set up to

have all of these practices and institutions — again, I'm doing the happy side of this but not the negative side — that are designed to keep scholars and researchers honest and to make sure that they're paying attention to all of the evidence they should be paying attention to. So, what I tried to argue in this paper is that even when I tell you something and you repeat it back to me, I can learn something from you even there.

You are teaching at a prestigious academic institution. You're a tenured professor, I assume. So, you're in a position of authority. Don't you think that some people might shy away from telling you the truth? Absolutely yes. And I so appreciate that you keep this discussion real by focusing on the negatives. I think you're absolutely right. I think that's pervasive. And sometimes in some sense, I think that's a good feature and in some other sense, I think it's a bad feature.

Let me first say the sense in which it's a good feature. Let's assume that if you get a tenured job at a good university, that's a good indication that you have a good track record in your research. That's an idealistic assumption, but give me that for the moment. If you have a track record of success in research, that does seem to warrant greater authority being ascribed to you, when you actually talk at least within your field of expertise. That's the reason why we trust experts, for example, more than we do non-experts. That's the positive side of it.

The negative side is exactly what you put your finger on. I often lament the fact that once you reach a certain point in your career, it's much less likely that you will get the kind of feedback that is most helpful. Because a lot of times, most junior scholars, in particular, will not feel entitled to tell you that you're wrong.

TO BE CONTINUED