

Models of Face-to-Face Interaction and the Epistemic Significance of Other Minds
Richard W. Moodey, Gannon University

Steve Fuller attacked ‘analytic social epistemology’ in 2012, and in 2013 Sanford Goldberg counter-attacked. Goldberg also prescribes a way of moving beyond the kind of conflicts exemplified by his exchange with Fuller. He says that social epistemologists should study the epistemic significance of other minds. I argue that constructing models of face-to-face interaction, specifically, models of cooperation, competition, and conflict, can be useful in implementing Goldberg’s prescription. Such models can help generate the propositions that must be the result of systematic study of a topic. I modify Goldberg’s image of epistemic communities as a result of including competition and conflict, as well as cooperation among the members.

In “‘Analytic Social Epistemology’ and the Epistemic Significance of Other Minds’ (2013), Sanford Goldberg responds to Steve Fuller’s (2012) attack on ‘analytic social epistemology’ (ASE), and writes a prescription for greater cooperation between different kinds of social epistemologists. He responds in detail to three of Fuller’s specific criticisms of ASE (2013, 37-40). In this essay, I focus on Goldberg’s prescription: he argues that social epistemologists ought to engage in the systematic study of the epistemic significance of other minds. At the core of his defense against Fuller’s criticisms (37-40) is his contention that there is an emerging tradition of studying the epistemic significance of other minds within ASE. Although Goldberg responds to Fuller’s attack with a counter-attack, he believes that his prescription, which is also a description of the emerging tradition, can reduce the frequency and intensity of the kind of conflicts illustrated by Fuller’s attack and his counter-attack. He concludes his essay by expressing this hope:

It is my fervent hope that this message can be accepted in the spirit in which it is offered: as a way for moving beyond any turf battles, so that the sort of contemporary social epistemology deriving from the work of Alvin Goldman can be seen as contributing to, and complementing, the sort of social epistemology deriving from the social sciences (2013, 46).

In this essay, I argue that constructing explicit models of three different kinds of face-to-face interactions — cooperation, competition, and conflict — can be useful in following Goldberg’s prescription, and perhaps in realising his hope.

I construct models of social interaction because I believe that it is only in the context of face-to-face interactions that one person is able to attend most fully to the mind of another person. To attend to the mind of another person is not to engage in the systematic study of the epistemic significance of other minds. It is one thing actually to be attending to the mind of another, quite something else to formulate and test *propositions* about the epistemic significance of attending to other minds. I argue that attending to the mind of another person in face-to-face interaction is the necessary experiential basis for the kind of systematic study Goldberg prescribes. That kind of study must result in propositions

about the topic of inquiry. My central claim is that explicit models of face-to-face interaction can be useful in moving back and forth between experiences of attending to other minds and constructing testable propositions.

It is a commonplace in the sociological tradition that the three main forms of social interaction are cooperation, competition, and conflict. I work within that tradition by constructing three distinct models of face-to-face interaction, corresponding to these three forms.

In *A Theory of Social Interaction* (1988), Jonathan Turner also argues that models of interaction are useful for generating testable propositions. My models differ from Turner's because, unlike him, my objective is not to develop a comprehensive sociological theory of social interaction. Turner explicitly says that he ignores the philosophical problems his approach raises (1988, 13). I do not ignore philosophical problems, and seek to develop models that will be useful philosophically, as well as sociologically. Turner constructs his models by reviewing the history of sociological descriptions and explanations of interaction. Although I draw upon that history, and upon the way he has used it, I put more emphasis on personal reflection and introspection. I draw upon my experiences of attending to the mind of my partners in face-to-face interactions, and ask what was going on when I was cooperating, competing, or fighting with my partner.

The Three Basic Models

Models are useful because they providing images *from* which I can move *to* descriptive and explanatory propositions. I put it this way because I agree with Michael Polanyi's proposition that all acts of knowing have a *from-to* structure. This was a central argument in his major philosophical work, *Personal Knowledge* (1958), and he continued to develop the implications of this proposition in his later writings. I construct models of cooperation, competition, and conflict because I agree with most other sociologists that these are distinct forms of face-to-face interaction.

I call the actors in my models 'Jack' and 'Jill' because I have never been satisfied with calling the actors 'A' and 'B' or 'person' and 'other' (Homans 1961). This is my practise, not the practise of any of those whose writings I quote, paraphrase, and twist to serve my purposes. I do not deliberately twist texts written by others, but, as Walter Freeman (2008, 211) says of his use of texts written by Thomas Aquinas, I cannot know exactly what another writer meant by his words, at the time he wrote them. Texts written by others are heuristically useful to me, because they provide clues to my learning more about my own experiencing and thinking, and consequently about the ways human beings similar to me experience and think.

Going back to the primary source for my names, Jack and Jill, I can use variations on the nursery rhyme to create images for the three different kinds of interaction. If they are cooperating when they go up the hill, each wants water, each intends to help the other, and each intends to share the water when they bring it back down. To create an image of competition, I imagine that there is just one pail of water up there, and that they race up

the hill to see who will get it, and each intends for the winner to get it all, and, perhaps, to be able to decide how much of the water to give to the other. The last part, the ability to decide how to distribute consumable goods is a major source of interpersonal power. For an image of conflict, I imagine that Jack and Jill intend to hurt one another. Getting control of all the water might or might not be the *motive* one or the other has for trying to hurt the other. A person can intend to hurt another as a means to another end, but hurting the other might be an end in itself. We often call people to whom we attribute this kind of motivation ‘sadists’, ‘psychopaths’, and ‘sociopaths’. It is not clear from the available texts whether or not Jack’s fall and broken crown was purely accidental, or was the result of a malicious push by Jill.

This initial distinction between the three forms of interaction is in terms of the *intentions* of the actors. What they do with, or to, one another is the result of their intentions. This is teleological thinking. I find it impossible to distinguish between cooperation, competition, and conflict without thinking about the teleological implications of the intentions of the actors.

Describing the differences only in terms Jack and Jill’s intentions, however, is too individualistic. There is, I argue, a dialectical relationship between their individual intentions and their joint *framing* of an interaction. To illustrate what I mean by ‘framing’, I temporarily leave the adventures of Jack and Jill, and turn to Gregory Bateson’s account of a visit he made to a zoo in 1952. His intention was to look for non-human metacommunication. He found an instance of it when he saw two young monkeys engaged in mock combat. It was evident to him that it both monkeys knew that they were playing. Bateson (1972 [1955], 179) comments, ‘Now, this phenomenon, play, could only occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of metacommunication, i.e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message “this is play”’. The monkeys’ signals were tacit because they were non-verbal. They were overt because each had to be able to ‘read’ the signals sent by the other. Because they had successfully framed the event as play, ‘the playful nip’, even though it stood for a bite, did not ‘denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands’. In play, their acts did not mean what those same acts would have meant had they framed the event as a fight. The playing monkeys did ‘not quite mean’ what they were communicating, and were communicating about a fight that did not exist. ‘At the human level’, Bateson says, ‘this leads to a vast variety of complications and inversions in the fields of play, fantasy, and art’ (1972, 182).

Bateson’s account resonates with my boyhood memories. My friends and I often played at fighting, but sometimes I got into real fistfights. Like the monkeys, we knew the difference between fighting and playing. Unlike the monkeys, we could, and sometimes did explicitly ask and answer questions about just what we thought we were doing. But more often, our metacommunication was, like that of the monkeys, non-verbal. Erving Goffman builds on Bateson’s notion of framing, and says that it is in situations of doubt or uncertainty that people are more likely to ask explicitly, ‘What is it that’s going on here?’ Even then, the answer is usually at least partially tacit, ‘presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand’ (Goffman 1974, 8).

There is a dialectical relationship between the intentions of the individuals and the way they jointly frame their interaction. Suppose that when Jack and Jill start up the hill they both act as if they are cooperating, but Jack is being deceitful. He secretly intends to hurt Jill. In the beginning, Jill innocently intends to cooperate with Jack. But on the way up, Jack begins to attack her verbally, and when Jill responds angrily, Jack hits her. Jill comes to believe that Jack wants to hurt her, and says to herself, ‘So he wants to play that kind of game, does he’! She then gives him the push that results in Jack’s broken crown. The way they proceeded to get on with the affairs at hand resulted in their framing the interaction as a conflict, and in the process of reframing the interaction, Jill changed her intention from cooperating with Jack to intending to hurt him.

Epistemic Communities

The picture Goldberg draws of epistemic community is of a community of individuals who cooperate in carrying out a single, socially distributed, ‘epistemic task’. He points out that a person often relies on what others have told him:

And when one comes to acquire knowledge through relying on results others have made manifest to one in this way, (i) one’s own knowledge depends on more than the evidence in one’s own possession; (ii) one’s reasons outstrip what one oneself can offer in defense of one’s beliefs; (iii) one’s access to the facts go beyond what is accessible merely to one own eyes (or ears or ...). In these cases the epistemic task has been socially distributed; and with only a little overstatement we might say that the distinct epistemic subjects involved constitute (part of) an epistemic community (Goldberg 2013, 28; italics omitted).

The socially distributed epistemic task is that of determining the extent to which beliefs really constitute knowledge of ‘the facts’. An epistemic community, then, consists of people who cooperate in working on this task. Goldberg admits that this picture of epistemic community is controversial, but instead of defending it, he describes ‘how social epistemology looks from the vantage point of those who take this picture seriously’.

I take his image seriously, and I believe that Fuller does also. Fuller takes it seriously enough to attack a proposition and a practice that are consistent with it. The proposition is that social epistemologists can judge the truth or falsity of socially constructed, local beliefs by using a universally valid standard of judgment. The practice is that of actually judging the truth or falsity of these local beliefs (Fuller 2012, 272-74). Unlike Fuller, I do not attack the image, the proposition, or the practice. Rather, I take Goldberg’s picture seriously enough to modify it. As a result of modifying the picture, I also modify the formulation of the proposition. *I do not, however, believe that my modification of the image and the proposition results in a change in the practice.*

To explain how I modify the picture, I go to one of Fuller’s criticisms of ASE that Goldberg agrees to be true. Fuller (2012, 274) says that ASE displays a ‘tendency to operate with a minimal understanding of actual knowledge practices, including their

histories and aspirations, a strategy that is often defended in the name of maximum abstraction and generality'. Goldberg (2013, 38) agrees and says 'there is a relative ignorance of current knowledge practices among many of us working in the ASE tradition,' but contends that, rather than being a 'particularly damning criticism', it is 'a constructive criticism that can and should be addressed in future work'.

I connect Goldman's prescription for social epistemology to his agreement with Fuller that those in the ASE tradition need to learn more about the diversity of actual knowledge practises. I argue that a systematic study of the epistemic significance of other minds must include paying attention to the epistemic significance of the minds of people in *other* epistemic communities. I think that this is an addition to Goldberg's prescription that Goldberg would accept.

I imagine a multitude of epistemic communities. In each of them, most members believe that the standard by which they judge the truth or falsity of beliefs is universally valid. Put negatively, few members of *any* epistemic community are 'absolute relativists'. An epistemic practise in *every* epistemic community is to judge the truth or falsity of propositions by a standard the judge believes to be universally valid. I argue that in his attack on ASE, Fuller judges the proposition that there is one universal standard of judgment to be false, and does so by a standard of judgment he takes to be universally valid.

Fuller might respond by saying that my last sentence amounts to playing a philosophical dirty trick. I admit that it is an example of a *tu quoque* argument — 'see, you are doing it too'. But whether or not the proposition is true or false depends upon the kind of question to which it serves as an answer. My question is whether or not there is an epistemic community in which the members do not judge propositions as being *really* true or *really* false? My answer is 'No'. This includes the epistemic community Fuller claims as his own, the epistemic community he calls 'political social epistemology'. As a spokesperson for that epistemic community, he judges a proposition explicitly asserted by spokespersons for the ASE community to be *really* false. My question is *not*, 'Is there a universally valid criterion for judging all propositions to be either true or false'?

Another way that I modify Goldberg's image of an epistemic community is that I consider all communities to be epistemic communities, but Goldberg seems to have in mind only those communities that are explicitly and primarily dedicated to the pursuit of truth. Communities of scientists and scholars are epistemic communities. When I modify 'community' with 'epistemic' I announce my intention to think, talk, and write about the ways the members of that community related to questions about knowing and learning. A for-profit corporation is dedicated to making profits for its owners, but, by my definition, it is also an epistemic community because of the many ways the members of a corporation are concerned about the knowledge that will contribute to the profitability of the business.

I also imagine communities as networks of persons who create and maintain relationships with one another by interacting with one another. I imagine that those interaction will be competitive and conflictual, as well as cooperative. An important dimension of attending

to the epistemic significance of other minds is attending to the conflicts about beliefs and practises that are present in most communities. What Alasdair MacIntyre (1988) says about the way arguments contribute to establishing and maintaining the boundaries of traditions, I say about the way arguments contribute to boundary maintenance of epistemic communities. Some arguments are internal, in the sense that the members of the community agree that those who take different positions are still members in good standing. But taking some positions can result in excommunication, usually informal rather than being a formal proclamation by a leader. Traditions and communities often split as the result of ‘reciprocal excommunication’ by the members of two factions.

Another important dimension of communities is their internal ranking. In any two-person interaction within a community, the epistemic significance Jack attributes to Jill depends upon their relative ranking within the community. If Jill is ‘higher’ than Jack, that does not necessarily mean that she can give orders to Jack with the expectation that Jack will obey, but it does mean that in a disagreement between Jack and Jill, the other members of the community are more likely to defer to Jill’s opinion than to Jack’s. There are few communities, again, including communities of scientists and scholars, in which there is complete equality of influence and power. This extends to disagreements about the standards by which to judge propositions to be true or false. There are opinion leaders in communities, and their opinions carry greater weight in the judgments of other members of the community than do the opinions of lower-ranking members. Goldberg (2013, 29) says that ‘epistemic dependency relations’ are important constitutive aspects of epistemic communities. I modify that by adding that these relations are not symmetrical. Lower-ranked members are more dependent upon higher-ranked members, as well as being subordinate to the higher-ranked members.

There is also the phenomenon James Aho (1994) has studied in his ‘sociology of the enemy’ and Lewis Coser (1956) has called one of the ‘functions’ of social conflict. When two groups, communities, or nations are in a state of conflict, this increases internal social solidarity within each collectivity. This is, I contend, very important for thinking about the epistemic significance of other minds. Members of a community that is fighting are more likely to believe their leaders than are members of a community that is at peace. Even in times of peace, the members of a community tend to agree more with one another than they do with outsiders.

Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading

What Polanyi calls ‘sense-giving’ and ‘sense-reading’ takes place in face-to-face interactions, but it is easier to explain what he means through an example of writing a letter. Polanyi (1969, 186) tells the story of a traveller describing a scene in a letter. Early in the day, Jack (as I call him) sees distant ‘trees, fields, rivers and peaks, and nearer to his position, he hears church-bells ringing and sees villagers walking to attend service’. He is experiencing ‘particular instances of the classes’ denoted by the words ‘trees’, ‘villagers’, etc. In the evening, while writing a letter to Jill describing the scene, he is no longer actually seeing the trees or hearing the bells, but drawing upon memories. His knowledge of his language combines with his memories of recent perceptions as the set of subsidiaries *from* which he gives sense *to* the words he writes. After Jill receives and

opens the letter, she engages in sense-reading. She does not, however, attribute meanings to Jack's words and sentences *from* the same set of subsidiaries as did Jack. She must draw upon her knowledge of the language, and upon her memories of experiencing things that she understands as instances of the classes denoted by 'trees', 'villagers', 'church-bells', etc. She reads sense *into* Jack's words *from* a set of subsidiaries that differs from the set Jack had used in giving sense to the words he wrote. John Searle's (1995) term 'background' is useful here. Jack and Jill attribute sense to the same words, but from different backgrounds.

I apply this to face-to-face interaction by imagining that instead of writing to Jill, Jack meets with her and describes the scene in a face-to-face conversation. Because he is socially intelligent, Jack does not deliver a monologue, but engages in a dialogue, following the conversational rule of taking turns. This results in considerable temporal overlap between sense-giving and sense-reading. When Jack first begins to speak, he is giving sense to his words, in a way that is very similar to his sense-giving when writing a letter. But Jill begins sense-reading before Jack is finished with his first turn at speaking. And even as she is still actively attributing meanings to Jack's utterances, she is beginning to think about what she will say in reply. When it is Jill's turn to speak, Jack begins to attribute meanings to her words, and while still doing this, he begins his process of giving sense to the words he intends to say when it is again his turn to speak.

In face-to-face conversation, sense-giving and sense-reading by the speaker and the listener draw upon much larger sets of subsidiaries than does the sense-giving and sense-reading by the writer and the reader in written communication. Jack and Jill take turns at speaking and listening, and attribute meanings, not just to the words, but to their bodily-based perceptions of one another's bodies.

There is a different image of communication, whether in writing or in speaking, that I specifically reject. I do not imagine words as 'containers' of meanings. This image is evoked in the very common 'conduit metaphor' of communication. According to this metaphor, Jack, either as speaker or writer, 'puts' his meaning 'into' words and then 'sends' this 'package' of words-containing-meanings to Jill, who then 'takes out' of the 'package' meanings that are *identical* to the meanings Jack had put into it (Reddy 1979; cited by Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 10-12). Instead of putting meaning into words, Jack *attributes* meanings to his words. Instead of taking meanings out of Jack's words, Jill *attributes* meanings to them. They each attribute meanings to the same words from different positions.

In all three forms of interaction, Jack and Jill engage in sense-giving and sense-reading, and when these are face-to-face interactions, each moves *from* both the words and the bodily actions and states *to* what the other is thinking and feeling. They both engage in 'face-work'.

Face-Work

Goffman (1967) has written the classic analysis of face-work, but before getting to his account, I want to introduce Searle's (1983, 151) distinction between a 'network of

intentional states' and a 'background' consisting of pre-intentional or non-intentional dispositions. He says that the network 'shades off' into the background, and that the background 'permeates' the entire network.¹ I use 'intentional state' in this context to mean a standing commitment to do something. When I review a list of things I normally do throughout the week, I am aware of having a network of intentional states. These are standing commitments to do a great number of different things at the appropriate times and in the appropriate places. An example of a non-intentional disposition might be my skill at riding a bicycle. Having the skill is not a commitment to exercise it. But if I were to decide to ride to my office every nice day, that would put me into an intentional state. It would be a persistent, habitual state as long as I would continue to ride to my office on nice days. It would cease to be a habitual intentional state if I were to stop riding on nice days, even if I did not explicitly and consciously decide not to do this any more.

Network and background consist of learned dispositions, but the intentional states in Searle's network are special kinds of dispositions. In a face-to-face interaction, Jack and Jill tend to focus more on knowing the other's intentions in the interaction than on knowing the other's non-intentional dispositions. One standing disposition I expect both Jack and Jill to have is to maintain 'face' in all of their face-to-face interactions.

Goffman's (1967, 5-7) notion of 'face' depends on his notion of 'line'. He says that each participant in an episode of interaction will take a 'line', whether or not he intends to. A line is 'a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself'. Even the person who does not *intend* to take a line soon does so, because the other participants will assume that he has. Their assumption results in expectations for his behavior, 'so that if he is to deal with their response to him he must take into consideration the impression they have possibly formed of him'. Goffman defines 'face' as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact'. 'Face-work', then, consists of the efforts each actor makes to establish, maintain, or save face. It is emotionally charged with feelings of self-worth, pride, embarrassment, or shame.

This is another element in my models of face-to-face cooperation, competition, and conflict. Jack and Jill engage in face-work, and each has a standing intentional state to establish, maintain, or save face in all of their encounters. Interactions with different persons and in different settings vary in the degree to which they make participants consciously concerned about being able to maintain face.

The Conflict between Fuller and Goldberg

The conflict between Fuller and Goldberg raises the question as to whether social epistemology is one epistemic community or two. It is one epistemic community to the extent that its members are united in rejecting individualistic epistemology. It is two epistemic communities to the extent that different factions engage in reciprocal excommunication. When Fuller (2012, 274) says that ASE "has marched steadily

¹ Unlike Searle, I prefer not to capitalise 'network' and 'background'.

backwards” to the point where “we might currently speak of a Ptolemaic turn in social epistemology,” it sounds as if he wants to excommunicate those who practice ASE. Goldberg (2013, 46) warns that Fuller appears to suggest that social epistemologists must ‘throw away the tools’ by which we can find the ‘proper balance’ between and among conflicting beliefs and practises. ‘Insofar as this is what Fuller is suggesting, his suggestion is not merely groundless; it is likely to be detrimental to our efforts to understand the social dimensions of knowledge’. If Goldberg had stopped there, I would say that he is just as willing as Fuller to excommunicate those who practise ‘political’ or ‘anti-classical’ (Goldman 2010) social epistemology.

Goldberg concludes, however, by expressing his ‘fervent hope’ that his prescription for social epistemologists will help them to move beyond ‘turf battles’. I have discussed ways in which constructing models of face-to-face interactions might be heuristically useful in attempts to follow Goldberg’s prescription. They might also be useful in preventing social epistemology from splitting into two distinct, conflicting epistemic communities. Both analytic and political social epistemologists can recognise that it is quite possible to have arguments about intellectual disagreements without letting them turn into fights or dirty games (Rappaport 1960; Berne 1964).

Contact details: moodey001@gannon.edu

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