Epistemic coercion

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Recent developments in social epistemology have applied a radically expansive notion of harm which encompasses beliefs and kinds of scientific knowledge. The implied or explicit implication of these notions is that these harms need to be suppressed. The notion of disinformation has turned this into institutional practice. The Covid pandemic saw the development and widespread use of actual means of knowledge suppression and epistemic engineering, both within science and with respect to expert claims, within nominally free societies. Paul Feyerabend's Science in a Free Society addressed these issues by critiquing the erasure of coercion from the past history of science and the practice of ignoring the coercive elements of expertise. Here I take this seriously, and turn the problem upside down by treating coercion and resistance to coercion as inherent parts of science and the public role and place in science and in discourse generally. Regardless of one's views on these questions it is evident that the rise of digital technologies, such as social media, has created novel opportunities for control, distinctive forms of epistemic control, and a need for rethinking the possibility of resistance to the coercive powers of the new technologies. This is a preliminary formulation of some of the issues.

Keywords: politics of science, expertise, Feyerabend, coercion, agnotology, democracy

Эпистемическое принуждение

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Недавние разработки в социальной эпистемологии радикально расширяют понятие вреда, которое охватывает убеждения и научное знание. Подразумеваемое или явное следствие этих понятий заключается в том, что этот вред необходимо подавлять. Понятие дезинформации превратило это в институциональную практику. Пандемия COVID-19 привела к широкому использованию средств подавления знаний как внутри науки, так и в отношении экспертных утверждений в номинально свободных обществах. Пол Фейерабенд в работе «Наука в свободном обществе» критикует исключение принуждения из истории науки и игнорирование его в экспертном знании. Учитывая эту точку зрения, я рассматриваю принуждение и сопротивление принуждению как неотъемлемые части науки и дискурса в целом. Независимо от взглядов на эти вещи, очевидно, что рост цифровых технологий, таких как социальные сети, создал новые возможности и особые формы эпистемического контроля, что приводит к необходимости переосмыслить возможность сопротивления принудительным силам новых технологий. В статье предлагается предварительная формулировка некоторых вопросов.

Ключевые слова: политика науки, экспертиза, Фейерабенд, принуждение, агнотология, демократия

Domination will rest upon some mixture of "force," in the narrow sense of a threat of violence, with "psychological technique," "propaganda," or, in plainer language, deception, fraud, "humbug." In this connection, the modem developments of technology in the field of social communication and of the "science" (a quasi-natural science) of psychology, have together created a new basis for tyranny on the part of a group which once gets in a position to monopolize and control the press, radio, etc. Under these conditions a consensus may be consciously voluntary, and yet forced or manipulated; assent may be enthusiastic and yet not intelligent and hence not really free; men may be "made" to act in a prescribed way and also "made" to like it. The concepts of tyranny, despotism, and exploitation have received an entirely new content, and the notion of liberty, at best more or less an intellectual "surd," has become enormously more difficult still to define. [Knight, (1934) 1935, p. 344]

The tyranny exercised unconsciously on men's minds is the only real tyranny, because it cannot be fought against. [LeBon, 1895, p. 146]

Words such as state, republic, society, class, as well as sovereignty, constitutional state, absolutism, dictatorship, economic planning, neutral or total state, and so on are incomprehensible if one does not exactly who is to be affected, combatted, refuted, or negated by such a term. Above all the polemical character determines the use of the word political regardless of whether the adversary is designated as non-political (in the sense of harmless), or vice versa if one wants to disqualify or denounce him as political in order to portray oneself as non-political (in the sense of the purely scientific, purely moral, purely aesthetic, purely economic, or on the basis of similar purities) and therefore superior [Schmitt, (1932) 1996, pp. 31–32].

The problem of epistemic coercion is not new. Neither is the problem of politicization, or if one prefers, the problem of the inherently political character of concepts. One can see the twentieth century as a long meditation on these issues, from Marxism and the sociology of knowledge to Schmitt, Foucault, Popper, and Bourdieu and Latour, and to feminist epistemology. And one can trace their nineteenth-century origins in Nietzsche and Hegel to their successors in the Frankfurt School, and

to the attempt to restore an earlier relation of philosophy and politics in the thought of Leo Strauss. And one can go much farther back, to the attempt to impose, and the resistance to, various religious orthodoxies throughout history Interesting as this history is, it will not be my concern here.

Feyerabend's *Science in a Free Society* addressed the precursors to these issues by critiquing the erasure of coercion from the past history of science and the practice of ignoring the coercive elements of expertise [Feyerabend, 1978, pp. 73–91]. Regardless of one's views on these questions, his critique represents a recognition that the regimes of science and expertise are ineradicably political and coercive. But if regimes of science and expertise are ineradicably political and coercive, what remains is the problem of our choice of regimes, and how to accommodate them in a democratic order. We must come to a reckoning with the disillusion from the idea of the purity of science and the neutrality of expertise. We cannot simultaneously valorize "the science" as a real institutional fact and insist on "following the science," and ignore the practical meaning of the imperfect institutional processes that make it up, and the value choices that are made within science, which may diverge from the values that derive from democratic processes.

Feyerabend's point is similar, in some respects, to recent discussions of testimonial injustice, genuine consensus, implicit bias, standpoints, and interests. But there is a significant difference. These more recent discussions operate with what political philosophers call an "ideal theory" in the background. This hidden ideal theory that is rarely articulated fully, may not be able to be consistently articulated, and is problematically applied to science. But it has some standard elements: equality and universality of participants, a process of consensus akin to Habermas's ideal speech situation leading to truth, elimination of bias (especially implicit), no coercion, no role for interests, with cognitive uniformity and common collective goals as the outcome. Deviation from these elements is taken be a source of error.

The attraction of this implicit ideal theory is this: it can never conflict with truth in the final, metaphysical sense, because any deviation from final truth is explainable by the failure to fulfill one or more of its conditions. Feyerabend, one suspects, would have simply rejected this theory. For him the role of epistemic coercion in science and in society in general was intrinsic and ineliminable. The "solution" was not a new method, or new metaphysical goal, or even a new metaphysical picture, but a recognition of the inevitability and ineliminability of what I will call the ongoing struggle between the imposition of orthodoxies by epistemic coercion and the resistance to this imposition. The focus of the paper will be on identifying forms of coercion and forms of resistance.

My special concern will be with what Frank H. Knight called the "entirely new content" of the traditional problems of tyranny and

liberty. Knight was concerned with the psychological manipulation that could come from the monopolization of the press and what were then new media, such as radio. We need to be concerned with the epistemic situation of pervasive digitalization and social media. These problems have nevertheless taken on a new edge, or new edges, because of the confluence of recent events and ideas that have developed in the long run of post-truth thinking over the last forty years [Fuller, 2018] and the new concern with, and technological response to, "disinformation."

The Covid pandemic saw the development and widespread use of actual means of knowledge suppression and epistemic engineering, both within science and with respect to expert claims, within nominally free societies. This comes closer to Knight's concerns, which will also be mine in what follows. What is the practical epistemic significance of new technologies, in which respects are they coercive, and to what extent are they legitimate? The rationale for the use of these means was that malinformation, misinformation, and disinformation were sufficiently pervasive in the digital world that they produced harms that justified not merely correction or disagreement but intervention to alter the cognitive climate. The reasoning produced a novel concept, "cognitive security," as well as a plethora of new jargon terms, many of which were designed to conceal the partisan nature of the technical interventions under such bland terms as "curation" and treating interventions as forms of cybersecurity.

New revelations about the role of governments and drug companies in these interventions, and their extent, occur almost daily. And in each case they show that the interventions cross whatever line still exists between partisanship and scholarship, fact and value, and claims warranted by sufficient evidence as distinct from plausible assumptions that might warrant policy preferences, and any line between coercion and persuasion. And under Covid, in medicine, we have seen unambiguously direct coercion: taking the licenses of doctors for failing to abide by problematic guidelines, or censorship based on definitions of misinformation which were themselves based on policy agendas with little evidence behind them. What is especially important in the presence of novel technologies of persuasion is the question of whether these are novel instruments of epistemic control or coercion, and whether they require new forms of control, and new forms of resistance, in order to serve the purposes we expect discourse, either in science or the public sphere, to achieve.

Is Epistemic Coercion Possible?

We can begin with some basic concepts, and muddles. Affirmations of explicit beliefs, such as professions of faith, can be coerced. Repeated affirmations doubtless have some psychological effect that approximates

epistemic coercion: they are an almost universal part of the technology of religious observance, and typically mimic the form of ordinary commitments and promises. These also, however, can be sincere or insincere, formulaic or a matter of conviction and true understanding. It is nevertheless a fair question as to whether belief in this sense can be coerced: Galileo resisted.

Tacit knowledge, prejudice, and implicit belief, and *implizites Wissen*, work in a different way. Implicit knowledge is acquired (and can plausibly be called knowledge) because it is produced through some process of learning or recognition. To ride a bicycle, to take the standard example, one must learn to do so, but one can't articulate this knowledge: we know more than we can say, in the classic phrase. This kind of knowledge can be manifested not only in skilled performances, but in gut feelings [Gigerenzer, 2007], an unarticulated practical intuitive sense, local heuristics, and biases.

The distinction is important in relation to power, because tacit knowledge *can* be induced, for example, by repeated experiences that are manipulated or forced. Indeed, in the specific case of training in science there is typically embodied experience that is structured to produce the relevant habits, which may also include cognitive or perceptual biases and tacit strategies for addressing and defining situations. Similarly for learning to "think like a lawyer." These are cases in which one voluntarily enters into a subordinate power relation in order to acquire the knowledge or learn the skill, but the skill is personal. But the relation to power is not intrinsic. One acquires analogous forms of tacit knowledge in "the wild," without explicit goals or subordination. But this takes us back to explicit belief. Explicit belief conforms more or less to the notion of knowledge as justified true belief: justification is something that can be done only for something explicit. But justification needs to end somewhere. The "somewhere" is, however one wishes to dress it up, a matter of some kind of experience or set of experiences that one takes to warrant the justificatory move.

Power also comes in two basic forms: commands which are enforceable and hegemonic power which takes the form of pervasive conditions of constraint that are unconsciously internalized as normal and then serve as self-imposed limits on thought and behavior that are not even recognized as such. This distinction intersects with the problem of coercion in a complex way. The term liberation, used as a goal of thought, is addressed to this kind of constraint: liberation from what used to called false consciousness, but without the baggage of the Hegelian language of consciousness. The term coercion is normally used in relation to command and enforcement. But in both cases these distinctions are, as the Knight quotation suggests, meaningful only at the margins. There is an element of power in persuasion, and of persuasion in power.

The tacit and the explicit are similarly intertwined. Normally learning to ride a bicycle is accompanied by advice or commands, so it is not

purely tacit. The explicit is interwoven with the tacit. Similarly for power: command normally relies on the tacit and habitual acquiescence of the person commanded. Hegemonic power has outward and explicit forms and components but mostly operates tacitly. And we can find examples of explicitly coerced personal experiences that generate largely inarticulable knowledge: a paradigm case would be Eisenhower's decision at the end of the Second World War to force Germans to watch films of the concentration camps by making it a condition of getting stamps to obtain food.

Power and the Dual Basis of Testimony

A basic distinction derived from social epistemology can be understood in terms of its paradigmatic concept of testimony, which in turn applies to expertise. Most of our explicit knowledge comes from others. We judge what we are told by a combination of two variables: our assessment of their trustworthiness (and motives) and our assessment of their competence to speak and their access to the subject. These are not separable, in the sense that we cannot ignore either in judging their testimony. Terms like disinformation, malinformation, disinformation about supposed disinformation, involve both elements of this dual judgement: the motives of the source and the validity of the information as determined by the joint facts of competence and honesty.

In the cases of science and journalism, for example, as well as in ordinary political discussion, we deal with this dual problem in complex and stylized forms. Judgements about the credibility of the expert are ubiquitous in science and grounded in institutional practices: past success, together with various kinds of endorsement, assures the speaker of trust [Turner, 2002]. The Matthew effect [Merton, 1968], which can be understood epistemically as a form of reliabilism in which the past successes of the speaker, the *mana* of the positions the speaker has ascended to, and the status of the journals published in and grants received, produces hierarchies of credibility and worthiness of attention which "cascade" [Sunstein and Kuran, 1999]. Needless to say, these hierarchies are intertwined with power as well.

Exclusion and inclusion, together with favoritism for preferred persons or groups, are indirectly relevant to epistemic coercion without themselves being direct forms of coercion. Nevertheless, they may be highly significant, and their significance concealed because the knowledge of the excluded persons may be largely tacit, consisting of experiences and practical knowledge that an exclusive group may lack access to. Groups, of associations, have purposes: for Polanyi the purpose of science was discovery, so his concern was to calibrate the inclusions and

exclusions for effectiveness. Excluding unreasonable objections and incompetent persons may be a requirement of progress. Peer review may be an appropriate instrument of coercion through silencing in closed forums in these cases. But there may be many other goals for different associations, and there are epistemic implications for the knowledge sharing and developing processes that are part of the work of these associations. The issue in these cases is not whether exclusion or inclusion as such is a form of coercion: it is. And it has epistemic consequences. For our purposes, then, these are forms of epistemic coercion.

Means of Coercion

With these distinctions in mind, what can be said about the means of coercion or quasi-coercion themselves? The mechanisms of power in science are familiar: they include exclusion, article rejection, failure to endorse, to fund, to employ, to allocate scarce resources to, failure to attend to, and so forth. There are also many rewards for cognitive conformity and conforming to standards of achievement. All of these are forms of censorship, in the sense that they are, like overt censorship, means of controlling and manipulating the cognitive environment. They have, and are expected to have, an impact on beliefs, through controlling the inputs that are unconsciously processed in the course of tacit learning, and through controlling what scientists are aware of. Censorship of criticism, and self-censorship out of fear of the consequences of failing to conform, the individual dependent on the authority of the controller of the cognitive environment [Clark et al., 2023].

There are also many features of the information distribution system that occur "naturally" or though non-coercive processes that facilitate particular results. These, however, are not coercion-free, because the production and distribution of information involves systems which are coercive. The science granting system is a good example of this: what appears as "science" is the result of a complex series of coercive decisions, such as the decision to fund, which have an indirect but nevertheless powerful effect on outcomes. Scientists are well-aware of who they are dependent on, and the risks of non-conformity. The level of fear is evident in the efforts of scientists to censor their own colleagues for taking positions that the government opposes, out of fear for their own grants. Similarly, the status system of science has a pervasive influence on the choices scientists make, which are another indirect form of coercion. This system itself has biases and other flaws that bear on outcomes. These considerations point to larger questions that cannot be taken up here, but should be acknowledged.

The focus of overt coercion in science, and as we will see elsewhere, is typically transmission rather than the minds of the people being

coerced. Changing minds is difficult. Silencing and excluding is not. The easiest point of coercive entry into the epistemic environment is at the moment of transmission. Preventing publication, delegitimating the sources, threatening the speakers, are all common means of exercising this kind of coercion. They were lavishly employed during the Covid pandemic. But the effect is not merely on transmission. Intersubjective validation is a large part of coming to accept an idea. Seeing what others attend to, take seriously, accept, and affirm is essential to this process. Censorship and exclusion serve to control this process. Changing minds is thus not necessary for suppressing ideas: creating the appearance of consensus is itself epistemically coercive. It creates an epistemic atmosphere which misrepresents what people actually are thinking. If all the data one has on what others are thinking is what they say, it is a false picture. It normalizes what is only normal as expression rather than thinking.

Epistemic coercion is of course characteristic of science in other ways, which we have already alluded to. They are familiar from Kuhn: the initiation into a paradigm requires blind acceptance of a great deal, often in the form of rote learning and memorization, in order to master the intricacies of a scientific discipline. And to a certain extent this is true of education in general. The neophyte scientist lacks the relevant experience and background to understand, much less criticize, what is being learned. Mastery comes slowly, unlike the mere receipt of information. Similarly for the schoolchild. In both cases this is because of the intertwining of the tacit and the explicit: merely repeating the formulas is not enough either in science or education generally to enable one to think and act using them.

These are cases of conscious, intended coercion. As with the routines of religious affirmation, the aim is to produce a homogeneity of response. They are forms of discipline. But most knowledge does not come from these processes. It is acquired through experience, social interaction, observation, and trial and error in the course of trying to accomplish goals. So it may seem that this "wild" cognition is free from coercion. This is precisely what Knight, writing with a concern for the effects of new technologies, new means of propaganda, and new monopolies of media, challenges. If there are analogues to coercion here, they will not take exactly the same form as those found in science. But what forms do they take?

Three Types of Coercion

We can begin with a rough typology, subject to various provisos. One key proviso is this: the means in question are closely linked to technology. It is not an accident that the printed book was originally, in the west,

subject to a great deal of anxiety and fear on the part of the rulers, and subject to licensing, censorship, and control, which it eventually evaded. The emergence of social media, the internet, and digital environments and tools generally have produced similar anxieties and means of suppression. A great deal of attention has been paid to the algorithms used to control social media, and these do serve as a paradigm of the new form of the problem of epistemic coercion. And they do resemble, loosely, the kinds of controls used in science: like them, they are anonymous and are treated as unrelated to the exercise of power or with self-serving motivations. The justifications for them are typically related to the harm principle or the idea of the common good, or to the good of the person whose knowledge, or more broadly their mental processes, is being controlled. A sufficiently broad typology would include these means, and take up the questions of power and legitimacy only after the means themselves are understood.

We can distinguish three basic forms of epistemic coercion:

Information deprivation: the model for this is censorship, but "curating," particularly through algorithm-based blocking of postings or other kinds of content is a variant form of suppression. The practices of article rejection in journals through peer review and other forms of exclusion from media count as well. The practice of administrative secrecy, or other forms of non-transparency, also count as information deprivation.

Normalizing and stigmatizing: these are methods of intervening to create a climate of opinion, or a sense of what the consensus is, by providing greater access to means of communicating information or opinion to particular viewpoints. Simply by flooding the public sphere or the media space with similar opinions or claims suffices to create the impression that the claims are normal, and counter-claims are suspect in some sense. The negative version of this is to de-normalize claims by making it appear that they are the views of a small and perhaps problematic – stigmatized – group. The goal is to make the preferred opinion the default and to raise the cognitive cost of challenging it by making it appear normal, standard, what everyone thinks, and so forth.

Normalization is a "nudge" phenomenon, in the sense that it lets the recipient of the information appear to choose on their own. We are, in a sense, nudged into more convenient ways of thinking and doing by our environment and its affordances, and this is characteristic of everyday rationality [Giegernzer, 2015]. Paternalistic libertarianism, in contrast, depends on the assertion that people are largely irrational and need to be given designed experiences that lead them to act or think in the correct way without the assertion of authority.

Legitimating and delegitimating: Because information is difficult to completely suppress, a common strategy is to delegitimate the sources and character of the information to be suppressed. The term "conspiracy theory" is, for example, used to marginalize ideas and information that

cannot be disproved, or is in fact true, but which is threatening to the suppressing agencies.

Legitimation is a more direct assertion by a person or institution that a certain set of views is correct or incorrect, based on the supposed special epistemic powers or access of the person or institution. Thus, the community or institution of science, experts, public health authorities, legal authorities, and so forth, assert special powers to tell others what is correct, rational, or epistemically adequate. These assertions may be used to justify censorship, secrecy, and other kinds of information deprivation, for example on the ground that others cannot be expected to understand the activity being concealed. But they are also the basis of paternalistic libertarianism, whose paternalism is based on supposed cognitive authority or superiority. The extreme form of this is the persecution of heretics.

There are however, variants of these basic types that deserve special mention:

Gaslighting: this is a form of "exclusion by ignoring" in contexts where discussion and exchange are expected, and are the basis of the legitimacy of the process of consensus building that is itself meant to have transformative effects on the beliefs of participants.

Compelled Speech: diversity statements, oaths, formulaic speech are forms of normalization, but they are also a behavioral technology designed to produce changes in thinking, in the subject's mental processing, through involuntary adaptation, and especially the kind of ritualized speech which produces some sort of commitment to the compelled statements or language through repetition and the reduction in cognitive dissonance that comes with believing what one is saying.

Deprogramming: this is a method of using social pressure to break down belief systems that are deemed to be dangerous and unworthy by isolating the person from social support and compelling overt agreement to the deprogrammer's ideology. It depends on information deprivation, particularly the intersubjective validation one might get for the belief system that is being expunged.

Pollution: This is a term for the common idea that the correct message is cognitively overwhelmed by the need to deal with too much information that is difficult to assess or assimilate. It is a way of producing the result of information deprivation by the alternative means of attention derivation or scattering, and of raising the cognitive and time costs of assessing information.

Doubtless there are more forms: these are merely indicative. But they also indicate the normalcy and ubiquity of epistemic coercion. But one might ask why, if it is ubiquitous, it's effects are not more apparent? What is apparent is the phenomenon of group-think, and the existence of climates of opinion. And these are typically bound up with the kinds of coercion listed here. But at the same time there are people who evade this coercion. They also have means – of resistance.

Means of Resistance

Protective self-censorship, evasion of issues, and conformism are the normal responses to a coercive environment. Resistance to coercive epistemic regimes is nevertheless also possible. Not surprisingly, the familiar means are at least loosely associated with liberalism as a political tradition, and are also partly the result of the origins of liberalism in the problem of extrication from the epistemically coercive regimes of religion. Schmitt claimed that the ideas of the state and of modern politics were concealed theological concepts [Schmitt, 1985, p. 36]. The same can be said for means of epistemic coercion: most of them are modernized forms of ecclesiastical power; most of the forms of resistance have antecedents in resistance to religious dogmatism.

We can distinguish a number of forms of resistance: intellectual, procedural, and, for want of a better term, social or associational. In addition, and related to each of them, is the ground of resistance in the tacit, a topic to be explained further. The classic response to the problems that arise as a result of free speech, the problems that coercive regulation is a response to, is more free speech. The thought is that more discussion would serve to clarify what was obscure, and leave decision-making to normal democratic processes: "more speech, not enforced silence," as Justice Brandeis famously wrote [Whitney v. California, 1927]. Some versions of this thought believe it would lead to consensus or truth. Max Weber characteristically dismissed this with the comment that he did not accept this metaphysics. But no metaphysics is needed to prefer open discussion. The same considerations apply: a practice that cannot be grounded metaphysically may still be superior to alternatives. Though there are certainly arguments for such things as epistocracy, elite rule, the right to competent government (a right which apparently does not include deciding whether the rulers are competent), and so forth, which substitute simple state coercion for epistemic coercion.

A short list of forms and tactics of resistance might include the following:

Purification or neutralization: The epigraph quotation of Schmitt points directly to this intellectual family. Neutralization is de-politicization. Politicization is de-neutralization. It is an attempt to reinterpret all concepts as means of oppressing or combatting some group or category. The idea that all thought is ideological, that all thought is standpoint dependent, and that there is no truth other than the truth of the validity of the standpoint – classically, in Marx, the standpoint of the proletariat as the final victor in the history of class struggle.

The ideas of pure science, theory-free observation, value-free science and the like have all fallen into disrepute, or out of fashion, but it is worth revisiting them in the context of coercion. The flaws in these ideas are

largely a consequence of attempts to ground them philosophically or meta-physically: to establish an ontological distinction between facts and values, for example. The same goes for verificationism as a theory of meaning, fal-sifiability as a criterion demarcating science, and so forth. But, as a strategy for distinguishing substantially more compelling from substantially less compelling considerations they are commonplace. In the courts, for exam-ple, there are rules for the admission of evidence, a distinction between mat-ters of fact and matters of law, and special roles for the people who make judgements on each. Moreover, they are useful, as a first cut in thinking for oneself, resisting what one is being told to believe.

The point about these procedures is that they establish something that is neutral between conflicting sides. This is especially important in relation to expertise: expert judgements on policy often intentionally or unintentionally conflate what is at the core – the evidence at the base of the "science" we are exhorted to "follow," which admirers of science respect – and the policy preferences of the scientist as expert which are masquerading as science. It is these preferences which are particularly likely to be the basis of attempt to suppress other viewpoints: unpersua-siveness requires supplementation by coercion.

Distinctions such as fact-value or theory-observation may be con-tested on the margins, and in exotic cases, prone to occasional error, and so forth, but are practical guides to assessing fallible claims. In legal con-texts, there may be issues of interpretation. But these too are helped by identifying the core element common to multiple interpretations. As such, they are means of challenging coercive epistemic measures. If the go-vernment attempts to suppress criticism, for example, the critic can chal-lenge the factual basis of the attempt and the government's own claims. By basing the challenge on purified grounds, the challenger forces the government to appeal to what is available using methods that are also available, and to reveal the methods they employed. This allows the chal-lenger to distinguish concealed value preferences, ideologies, and mo-tives that are not part of the purified and thus neutralized epistemic con-tent. But it also allows for the construction of alternative interpretations.

These are methods of intellectual resistance that can also be applied to cultural differences and claims of bias: they remove the non-neutral content. It is always an open question as to what content remains. But there are also field-specific distinctions to work with to distinguish what is essentially contested from what is not. Hans Kelsen, reasoning that the law was a coercive system, settled on the idea that the actual legal content of the law was the stuff for which there were sanctions rather than, for example, the vague purposes that were sometimes written into the law but lacked specific mechanisms of enforcement. Analogous rea-soning works in fields like medicine and public health: what is properly medical – what physicians can actually do effectively using established methods – is narrower than the opinions of doctors about what is healthy,

and what can be produced in the way of public health by methods like sanitation is not the same as the opinions of a health policy maker on how people ought to live. Narrowing the subject to that which depends entirely on its specific knowledge base and the practical powers of the practitioner serves to neutralize and depoliticize. Enacting or applying these field specific distinctions in practice is a different matter. They can themselves be controversial. But if there is open discussion by experts, and a public way to assess outcomes, there is at least an opportunity to assess their arguments. But for the same reasons there is an incentive to prevent public discussion and assessment.

Transparency: administrative secrecy and obscurity is a traditional form of epistemic control. Secrecy prevents the ruled from participating in their own governance. The resistance to this kind of exclusion takes the form of, on the part of participants in the state, leaking information, which is normally done for motives that are part of internal bureaucratic struggles. Those excluded from power, in contrast, demand and enforce transparency. In the case of the methods of epistemic control discussed earlier, particularly suppression of information and the creation of an epistemic environment in the digital world through "curation," a hidden bureaucracy has developed under the guise of cybersecurity which purports to combat mis-, dis-, and mal-information, but which must be kept secret for the simple reason that to be accountable it would need to reveal what it is suppressing, which would defeat the purpose of suppression.

Information Tribalism: this is a phrase for the result of responding to information overload by limiting attention to information from one's own groups, which permits intersubjective validation from the limited group. It is not a form of coercion, as it is voluntary. It is a response to both "pollution" and "curation," which is epistemically coercive, in the sense that operates not by open persuasion but by concealed means. But it is a kind of self-curation, in which the user adopts an information community or strategy that resists the pollution and curation imposed on the user who does not choose a special community. Tribalism cuts both ways, however.

We are most vulnerable collectively when the collectivity is homogenous: when our sources of intersubjective validation have the same experiences and backgrounds are the same. This provides some advantages: ease in mutual understanding and the ability to build on an understanding that is not shared with others. But the price is high. What should be challenged and resisted is taken for granted. And we are vulnerable to epistemic coercion and the manipulation of our cognitive environment because of this.

Alternative narratives: Tribalism is an aide to the development and intersubjective validation of alternative narratives, which may include the sorts of narratives delegitimated as conspiracy theories. Resistance to "North American philosophy's submersion in a culture of tacit whiteness

and heteropatriarchy" [Kim, 2023], for example, involves constructing an alternative narrative which displaces the male dominated history of the discipline, and constructing a community of dialogue within which this new narrative can be assessed and creatively extended.

Diversity: One of the methods promoted by feminist epistemologies is designed to correct the kinds of bias that result from the selective inclusion of persons from dominant groups and exclusion of others: biases of social selection that result in intersubjective validation from a cognitively limited group of validators. In one sense, it is an alternative to tribalism, and a way of dissolving the tribalism of the dominant group. In another, however, it represents the inclusion of "standpoints" that are themselves the developed result of information tribalism.

More free speech: The traditional political solution to epistemic coercion, which intrinsically involves limitations on knowledge, is more knowledge or information, in the form of free speech. The objection to this solution is that the information contained in the speech is not knowledge: that allowing anything to be said is to allow false or unacceptable things to be said, and there is nothing to assure that there is a tropism toward truth as a result of free speech. Controlling speech, however, is a grant of epistemic power to the controller, with consequences to be taken up in the next section, on legitimate forms of epistemic coercion.

Disorganized Skepticism: Robert Merton included "organized skepticism" among the four norms of science he described in a famous article, "The Normative Structure of Science" [Merton, 1973]. By this he meant skepticism within the limits of the disciplining structures of science. But fundamental to the resistance to epistemic coercion is a different sort of skepticism that may come to be articulated within the limits of science, but which originates in a more fundamental and tacit place. Epistemic coercion normally takes the form of imposing something general: it is, like Church dogma, for everyone, and is homogenous. Tacit knowledge, in contrast, is, as Michael Polanyi titled his magnum opus, *Personal Knowledge* [Polanyi, 1962], and thus heterogenous. It resembles conviction, in the sense that it is similar to an expressed, explicit, personal conviction or profession of faith, but is instead a fundamental given of the person's experience. Once one knows how to ride a bicycle, one cannot suspend that skill in the way one can imagine suspending an explicit belief. Tacit knowledge is subject to revision, expansion, and improvement, but not skepticism. It is nevertheless the basis of skepticism, in the sense that it can conflict with something one is told, and encouraged to believe.

This is not a comprehensive list, but it is a start. And the means of resistance, it is apparent, are kin to the means of coercion. More generally, the differences between means of resistance and means of coercion are differences of position: the coercer is normally in power, or appeals to conventions and practices that are also supported by means of coercion.

The Tacit Ground of Resistance

Liberalism has a traditional bias against, not to say horror of, coercion. As Hayek puts it, "Coercion is evil precisely because it thus eliminates an individual as a thinking and valuing person and makes him a bare tool in the achievement of the ends of another" [Hayek, 1960, p. 21]. This places epistemic autonomy, the individual as thinking and valuing, as a central normative commitment. But liberalism also tolerates coercion, in the form of the coercive system of the law, as a necessity. And in practice, liberalism tolerates epistemic coercion, in the form of mandatory education, but attempts to make it neutral. But it rejects the idea of real epistemic authority: the individual thinker is her own final "authority."

Other traditions deny or subordinate this revulsion against coercion and insistence on epistemic autonomy, in favor of the common good, the good of the individual, or some other goal. For them, epistemic autonomy is an obstacle to be removed in the pursuit of these other goals. Correcting people's way of thinking is for them the relevant "necessity." Epistemic autonomy is for them a fiction: people are too weak, stupid, easily misled, and epistemically dependent on the wrong sources to exercise autonomy [Gigerenzer, 2015]. But the illusion of autonomy may be a useful tool, if it makes them feel ownership of the correct way of thinking as their choice, for which they are responsible.

Neither of these conceptions is quite satisfactory, and none of them fit the pattern of coercion and resistance outlined here: coercion falls on the clever as well as the stupid, and epistemic autonomy is a myth. But the examples of resistance point to a different approach, closer to Knight's observation. Epistemic coercion is not only possible, but is, in a sense, ubiquitous. Persuasion involves selection and thus withholding or suppressing – at least not revealing – everything that might be relevant. But we are equipped, for example through our gut feelings and other elements of our tacit knowledge to resist this kind of coercion, at least by having a sense that the story is incomplete or biased. This is the epistemic situation that needs to be captured.

Tacit knowledge or responses are involuntary: the unease one might feel with a claim, or with a speaker, are the potential basis of explicit objections. Similarly, the images of the concentration camps that were imposed on Germans in exchange for food rations might be rationalized away, but could not be erased. And although one's tacit acquisitions may be flawed because they are based on experiences that do not generalize, that are the product of, so to speak, sampling error, they are nevertheless learned. "Biases" may be a compound of neuro-based predispositions and learned inputs [Yu, 2022], and of social sources, but they too have an element of learning, and feedback, in addition to mere exposure.

The heterogenous nature of this kind of mental content makes it resistant to coercion intended to produce homogenous content. Whatever is assimilated is a compound of the homogenous content and the pre-existing tacit knowledge, and consequently responses will vary. Even the most comprehensive manipulation of the cognitive environment will be subject to these limitations, Persuasion itself will depend on the tacit knowledge of the recipient, knowledge which will also be heterogenous and resistant. Perhaps more important, the individual person's tacit endowment bears on the credibility of sources: in the case of the overt coercer, who has an identity and whose personal credibility can be assessed, the coercer is handicapped or benefitted by the recipient's prior experiences with the coercer.

In the more general cases of coercion listed above, there are responses – the forms of resistance in the next section. These are, like the methods of coercion themselves, imperfect. But they are more than rote skepticism. They are based on something substantial, such as the tacit knowledge that the resisters base their alternatives on, or the intersubjective validation of a group with shared experiences. And we can see both the coercion and the responses are part of the ongoing struggle to establish knowledge for oneself and others in a continuously contested epistemic environment. These are relatively familiar forms, both of coercion and resistance. And in each of these cases we have a sense of being coerced and a sense of resistance. We have a grasp, however imperfect, of something being ignored, or hidden. We have gut feelings about the credibility or motives of the coercers. And we have a degree of freedom in choosing how to respond.

The Knightian question is this: how do these considerations apply in the presence of new technologies of coercion? What are we epistemically vulnerable to that we were not vulnerable to with the technologies of the past? In the case of curation – the manipulation of the cognitive environment – we get the illusion of freedom, within a cognitive environment that is controlled in ways that are hidden from us. And this is the new form of technology that is both the most opaque and difficult to resist: we are coerced unobtrusively in the course of doing something else, such as browsing social media or searching for information where we are unaware of what is being withheld, promoted, or presented in a context designed to make it more plausible. The technology serves to normalize, to suppress, and to familiarize. Do we have commensurate means of resistance? Or are there blind spots in our defenses?

Jonathan Haidt has been developing the evidence that social media through cell phones especially affects the mental health of teen-age girls [Twenge et al., 2022]. A reasonable interpretation of these results is that teen-age girls lack the experiences that lead to the tacit endowments that enable resistance. Boys may have a greater variety of personal experiences – with sports, for example – that mediate their experience

of the social media environment and give them a better sense of life outside this cognitive environment. The variables may be hard to quantify, but the effects of social media are so large for the population of teen-age girls that some such explanation is plausible.

We are most vulnerable where we have little tacit background that enables us to resist. And the hidden character of curation creates a novel vulnerability. The manipulator of the cognitive environment – of what is displayed on social media, for example – is unknown and unseen, and there is little tacit experience to guide our response to it. We can assess the credibility of experts, politicians, and other sources of information. We have gut feelings about them, and a tacit sense of the realities they are describing. These are all fallible, but they are also learned.

When we think of coercion generally, we think also of the power to resist, and of vulnerability to coercion. Epistemic coercion, in one form or another, mild or extreme, is ubiquitous, as Feyerabend understood from the history of science. So is resistance. But where there is authority, and epistemic privilege, such as the power to exclude, there is the risk of abuse and vulnerability to error, "biases" that are implicit and explicit; and where there is resistance there is also vulnerability. There are justifications for power, and there are reasons to be suspicious of it.

This is at least a clue to how we should think of the distinctive coercive power of the new technology of digital world. The concept of disinformation and the idea that disinformation should be suppressed is itself a kind of acknowledgement of our special epistemic vulnerability in the new digital world. But it is also a novel form of coercion, based on a novel form of authority over what is treated as true. Not only does it have the potential for abuse, it has already been abused. It is a new inquisition and response to heresy with new tools of coercion, which is neither transparent nor validated from outside. To understand our new epistemic situation is to understand both sides of this relationship, and we are far from understanding either.

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