Response to readers of *Knowing Otherwise*

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First, I want to thank all the commentators for their incisive and generous engagements with my book. The experience of talking and writing about any published book is odd, because the writing and thinking it involved are necessarily temporally distant, and the book can become a bit stiff and closed—so it is a real gift to have comments that open *Knowing Otherwise* to me again as a fluid and present entity, as these do. Indeed, they offer me a version of my own book that really I can only aspire to, and in their enactment of thinking about implicit understanding give me the kinds of gorgeous theoretical work on the implicit I have longed for. So, thank you.

I am grateful to the scholarly associations that hosted the Author-Meets-Critics sessions that were the original venue for responses to the book, some of which are collected here: The Radical Philosophy Association (2011), the Pacific Society For Women in Philosophy (2012), the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture (2012), and the Canadian Philosophical Association (2012). It was a great honour to have these engagements with the book in the first year of its life out in the world; thanks also to the people who came to those sessions and offered thoughts and questions. I'd like to especially thank *PhaenEx* for publishing this discussion, Chloë Taylor and Bronwyn Singleton for all their work, and Ami Harbin for beautifully organizing a book panel and then this collection.

I took the stance while writing this book that my two main tasks should be first to defend a concept of implicit understanding—that it exists at all as a philosophically relevant category—

and second to defend the idea that it is politically important. The kinds of engagements offered by these responses affirm both these points for me, and I am happy to have the space to think further about these questions. I will for the most part respond thematically to several overarching strands of engagement rather than to each commentator in turn. Let me first say something general about the taxonomy I offer, and particularly the fact of differentiating among these four sorts of implicit understanding in particular.

When I make the distinctions among these forms of understanding—skill-based, affective, socially-situated embodiment, and potentially propositional but currently inarticulate—I mean for them to be both heuristic and open-ended: I’m perfectly happy with the proposition that there are more sorts of knowledge, and more sorts of implicit (or inexplicit or nonpropositional) understanding than I discuss. My classificatory impulses do not aim toward exhaustion for the purposes of classificatory completeness, but rather toward usefulness. The taxonomy I suggest arose out of a dissatisfaction with, on the one hand, the very hand-wavey ways that philosophers gesture toward things-not-in-words, sometimes conflating that category with nonpropositionality *simpliciter* (or rendering the implicit the same as propositionality), and on the other the ways that philosophers treat one relatively small area of the implicit as the whole story, not taking into account salient other kinds of understandings. The categories I suggest are ones that seem to me, in the specifically political space in which I’m thinking, to be most salient to individual and collective change.

So, in thinking about Ann Garry’s point that knowledge by acquaintance could be a good candidate for inclusion in the realm of implicit understanding, I would be comfortable with and interested in how thinking about knowledge by acquaintance might help us better understand politically salient practices. I appreciate Ann’s articulation of the differences between skill-

based, somatic, and emotional knowing and potentially propositional knowledge via the discussion of two scales of explicitness and rationality. She says: “What will, in fact, move people to take up and succeed in antiracist activities or join in movements to end violence against gay and trans people will depend not only on their nonpropositional knowledge, but also on the degree to which it is explicit and the degree to which it encompasses something rational.” This seems very right to me—one of the other critiques of the book, which Ann doesn’t make, but which I think comes into play in relation to her claims, is that I make lots of claims that don’t as yet have quantitative data backing them up. In reading more qualitative studies, and memoirs of personal and collective political transformation, it seems that one thing that “moves” ordinary people to take extraordinary action is a heightening of disjunctions between their different sorts of knowledge. For example, someone’s love for their queer child may conflict with their somatic disgust responses toward queers generally or their religion’s (conceptual, claim-making) views of homosexuality. But it would be useful to have more work in this area so that we can get a better sense of what’s going on than we currently have—in the work I’m doing now on implicit bias, I’m finding some resources for this.

However, there is some work to be done precisely in the realm of thinking about what has been taken up very widely lately as “implicit bias.” I love Shannon Dea’s exploration of some of the dangers of retaining and entrenching a propositional/nonpropositional binary, where that which is beneath or beside words is a danger to the rational, propositional, “real” knowledge. As Shannon says: “While this broad approach is ultimately meant to problematize the naiveté of the so-called ideal language project of the last century, it actually serves to reinforce and reify that approach by presenting implicit knowledge as a threat to the explicit knowledge that would otherwise be unimpeachable.” She asks me to reflect on what it is about explicit knowledge that

causes even feminist scholars to revert to explicit-implicit dualisms. Bringing in José Mendoza's comments here will help me also respond to this question.

José's worry is that epistemologists might be quite right to view with suspicion appeals to implicit knowledge as superseding assessable knowledge proper (in either its most square "true and justified belief" formulations or in more expansive contemporary work)—that the kinds of emotional, commonsense, and somatic understandings we have should not come in to our reasoned political decision-making. To this I would respond with a now-standard feminist epistemologist line: These understandings are inherently and inextricably involved in our epistemic work as much as they are involved in our political reasoning—the idols are always here with us, and instead of plugging our ears and pretending that they do not shape our knowing practices, we ought to reason with them in mind. When we say that the situated position of the knower shifts the quality of knowledge available, and that we'll have stronger objectivity through understanding all forms of knowing as knowing, we're addressing this point. Appeals to implicit knowledge are no more inherently reactionary than are appeals to propositional knowledge—but including accounts of the implicit in our epistemic reasoning may well produce better epistemology.

On related objections, that I may be conceiving of propositional knowledge as inherently oppressive and arguing for a substituted attention to implicit knowledge as inherently awesome, or, conversely that I do not bring a strong enough critique of explicit knowledge: I'm a big fan of propositional knowledge. I love a gorgeous argument as much as the next guy, and I agree absolutely that people engaging in struggles for liberation often have the better logic than oppressors. I don't agree that it is ever possible to present only propositional content to someone who does not share one's views, and I don't think—based on personal and anecdotal

experience—that merely making a great argument changes most people’s behaviours and understandings. For that, we need to transform political subjectivities also in the realm of the implicit.

This leads to the question of how and when such transformation happens, and the complex relationship between conceptual, propositional knowledge and implicit understanding. I wholeheartedly agree with most of José’s second (and related) point, that social transformations produce transformations in implicit understanding—and the sixth chapter of the book is an attempt to cash out that claim in thinking about trans social movements. Both movement spaces themselves and the political shifts they incite change people’s implicit understandings (and there’s very interesting work in sociology on how, for example, just having non-segregated spaces produces better understandings of race in white people). Where we disagree is in the roots of propositional change. To take the example of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, which desegregated schools: I would argue that the people who fought for that victory had not merely different propositional knowledge than Americans who wanted to maintain segregation—they had different emotional responses, different commonsense understandings, different somatic responses, and more. These implicit ingredients are differentially expressed in things like legal decisions, but in my view they are inextricably involved. The best account of these kinds of personal and political transformations will be able to trace the co-production of implicit and explicit contents in people’s understanding of the world we find ourselves in as we try to change it. I remain convinced that we benefit from holding in mind the mutual involvement of many forms of understanding.

One way we see this kind of involvement is in the experience of bad feelings. Ann productively suggests working with and from whatever negative affect we feel—rather than

prioritizing shame as a kind of ruling affect of, for example, white people feeling bad about our own and other's racism: I'm sympathetic to the move to recognize that different people have different patterns of feeling, and that we ought not disregard guilt as a marker for specific past wrongdoings. Perhaps for me, now more than when I wrote the book, the more interesting question is less about what specific form feeling-bad takes and more about how people might—and do!—respond to various bad feelings (including shame, guilt, anger, despair, horror, disgust) with a kind of political responsibility to make a world in which the situations and actions that provoke those feeling are no longer the case. So how does feeling transform into a kind of responsibility toward the future, particularly in cases in which we were not actors in the past? And how might we craft more competent, resilient modes for shifting our responses to bad feeling? As I try to emphasize in the chapters on the aesthetic and on solidarity as a political formation based on difference rather than sameness, shame (and bad feeling more generally) is never going to all by itself motivate political action.

Part of the situation here is that some things that feel good, or great, shouldn't. I'm thinking for example of the fact that often those of us who are settlers, who live on stolen land as part of an ongoing colonial project of attempted destruction of indigenous lives and spaces, can feel unreflectively as though Canada is a good country. What does it take to shift that unreflective understanding toward an orientation toward an undetermined future based on collective reckoning with the past? On the other hand, many things that feel disgusting, awful, shouldn't. In one of the panel discussions I gave a somewhat explicit example of enjoying sex while fat, which I won't reproduce here. In an incisive and gorgeous video engagement with the book at one of the panels on it (not included in this collection), Lucas Crawford argued very rightly that we must be able to—we must—shift implicit understanding so that some of the very

things that have been sites for shaming, derogation, can become sites for fierce joy, flourishing—for me, like for Lucas, many of these have been around fatness and queerness. How can we theorize a recognition of the need to repudiate implicit understandings that hurt us? How can we practice that need in our bodies? Following Bettina Bergo’s beautiful investigation into the historical production of sex, reproduction, and sexuation as a *coproduction* of “race, class, ethnicity and gender,” colonialism, and the formation of new scientific norms, we might ask: if these things are co-produced, how do we justify what we attend to, politically or philosophically? And, as we make decisions about how and what to attend to—in science and in critical work—how might we set norms that intervene in these domains, thereby shifting the material conditions in which we live?

Anna Mudde’s generative work on social ontologies opens a way of thinking about the deep effects of understanding what it is to make sense of a world, where that *making sense* also involves shaping the being of the world. She argues, in the piece included in this collection, that to

move through the world, to negotiate it, is to understand it in certain ways, perhaps deep in our bones; it is to categorize the things one encounters and to understand (in contingent and acquired ways) how to deal with or treat them. [She is] suggesting that doing is inherently a kind of *poiesis*, a kind of craft or technology, that doing expresses ontologies which are inherently social by being part of the objective world through our actions, words, and ways of being.

Since knowledge is social, a co-production, it is, I think, productive to think in the way that Anna is focused on about the real effects of understanding the relational production of ontologies. For me, the possibility of people opening different worlds to one another, and in that opening transforming our very being, is tremendously inspiring. Sometimes, as Anna indicates, it is also terrifying.

On this front, I like very much Randi Nixon's interrogation of the complex dynamics of pride, and the difficulties of shaping solidarities when that shaping simultaneously produces oppressive exclusions. Just as I was leaving grad school, some of my friends were involved in starting Gay Shame, a queer political group refusing the corporatization and homogenization of formerly radical gay and lesbian spaces, and so I saw first-hand the kinds of resentment that can come from internal critique. Experiencing these kinds of reactions—in ourselves and from others!—helps us think about the co-constitution of individual and social ontologies. Randi's and Anna's commentaries together remind us to hold a nuanced and mutable lens on when we should take up and when we should refuse feelings, orientations, and ways of being; it would be dangerous to assume that the existence of, or to normatively aim for, a one-size-fits-all network of implicit understandings. People living derogated subjectivities should refuse shame, for example; people benefiting from oppression and exploitation might well turn toward our bad feelings, asking what bones we're dancing on, to reprise the song Randi quotes.

Besides being unutterably touched by Lisa Guenther's narration of one vector of our co-production as thinkers and feelers in conversation with one another, I am compelled by her own example of meeting with integrity and love some of the many unbearable, unlivable facts about the world that we somehow must bear and live with—torture, solitary confinement, more. I echo Lisa's commitment to "*doing philosophy*, not just as a solitary theoretical meditation, nor as a praxis opposed to theory, but as a practice of sensuous knowledge and action in concert with others." And I believe there are so many ways for us to build a politics of responsibility—a politics that admits our own complicity in multiple sites of oppression not as frozen inactivity but as a springboard for movement.