

Epistemic Friction: An Essay on Knowledge, Truth, and Logic

By Gila Sher

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Gila Sher approaches knowledge from the perspective of the basic human epistemic situation-the situation of limited yet resourceful beings, living in a complex world and aspiring to know it in its full complexity. What principles should guide them? Two fundamental principles of knowledge are epistemic friction and freedom. Knowledge must be substantially constrained by the world (friction), but without active participation of the knower in accessing the world (freedom) theoretical knowledge is impossible. This requires a grounding of all knowledge, empirical and abstract, in both mind and world, but the fall of traditional foundationalism has led many to doubt the viability of this 'classical' project. Sher challenges this skepticism, charting a new foundational methodology, foundational holism, that differs from others in being holistic, world-oriented, and universal (i.e., applicable to all fields of knowledge). Using this methodology, Epistemic Friction develops an integrated theory of knowledge, truth, and logic. This includes (i) a dynamic model of knowledge, incorporating some of Quine's revolutionary ideas while rejecting his narrow empiricism, (ii) a substantivist, non-traditional correspondence theory of truth, and (iii) an outline of a joint grounding of logic in mind and world. The model of knowledge subjects all disciplines to demanding norms of both veridicality and conceptualization. The correspondence theory is robust and universal yet not simplistic or naive, admitting diverse forms of correspondence. Logic's grounding in the world brings it in line with other disciplines while preserving, and explaining, its strong formality, necessity, generality, and normativity.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Gila Sher received her B.A. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and her PhD from Columbia University (1989). She is a philosophy professor at the University of California San Diego. Her research centers on foundational issues in epistemology, the theory of truth, and the philosophy of logic. She advocates a substantivist approach to philosophy and is interested in new perspectives on classical philosophical problems. Her book, The Bounds of Logic (MIT, 1991) investigates the nature of logic through the nature of logical constants. She has published papers in leading academic journals, and is currently working on books on truth and epistemic freedom.

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