Epistemic Bubbles, Eco Chambers and the Digital Infospace

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Some structural assumptions in the long tradition of epistemology are now being challenged by the advent of the digital age. One of these assumptions is that knowledge should consist of closed transactions between a knowing subject and a world of objects to be known. Coherently, almost all traditional social epistemology that has been built for social contexts that involve merely a speaker-hearer interaction is now being challenged by the current digitalization of knowledge.

The collectively gained experience of the complexity of digital spaces disfavours the reduction of knowledge processes to subject-object transactions in many ways. In general, since the dawn of the digital age it is more and more clear that knowledge also has an *ecological* aspect. It has become apparent that knowledge is constantly interacting with the environment that frames the relationship between knowing subjects and known objects. Hence, the knowledge environment has become a recognisable third element of epistemic processes, constantly shaping knowledge at the very moment it is shaped by it. Such a process of discovery and recognition has been made possible by the focus on the digital environment as a radically different locus of knowledge transmission. Granted, the implications of this discovery do not concern only the digital space. Some of them were even anticipated by twentieth-century semiotics and sociology. Still, the ubiquitous digitization of our lives is what makes the conceptualization of the ecological aspect of knowledge a challenge that cannot be postponed any further.

How to take on such a challenge? Digital infospace is intertwined with the lives of each of us with no actual discontinuity. Its epistemic dynamics are immediately part of social discourse. This is exactly why the urgency to confront such a problem arises, today, for any epistemology that wants to contribute to a critical engagement with our shared present. The critical epistemologist is thus left with the task of investigating the architectures proper to the digital environment of knowledge while assuming their structural complexity and aiming to understand the broader ecological aspect of knowledge as such. Her investigation should deal with the agency of the digital infospace in the constitution of epistemic values, the reverberations of such an agency in extradigital spaces and the ever-moving borders between digital and extradigital spaces.

A good starting point for this inquiry is the confusion, frequent in social discourse, between epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. An epistemic bubble is a social epistemic structure that excludes other relevant epistemic sources. It can constitute itself by sheer environmental dynamics, resulting from the accidental cumulation of knowledge and its segregation from external interferences. An echo chamber is instead a social epistemic structure that actively excludes and discredits other relevant epistemic sources. It works towards this exclusion and in the interest of the epistemic agents who promote it. Both are prominent architectural features of the digital infospace that seamlessly influence the general space of knowledge. Questions regarding their structural character, their differences, the role they assign to truth and epistemic agents, and what the virtuous epistemic agent could or should do with respect to those issues are the focus of this issue of *Azimuth*.

We invite contributions focused on the following subjects and research areas:

- The role of digital environments in the development of knowledge-related processes in epistemological and sociological focus.
- The social impact of the digitalization of knowledge, with specific attention to juridical and political consequences.
- The possibility of an epistemological critique of digital knowledge-environments and their effects on the public development and negotiation of knowledge.
- The constitution and functioning of epistemic bubbles and echo chambers in digital environments, their structural features and their position within the historical and social developments of human knowledge.
- The differences and similarities between epistemic bubbles and echo chambers, in light of a possible reformulation of their relations with the digital environment of knowledge.

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