CHAPTER 2.

AI KNOWS EVERYTHING

✨ *AI CAN PERPETUATE IGNORANCE, PREJUDICES, AND EPISTEMIC-RHETORICAL HARMS GLOBALLY*

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More than two millennia ago, Greek philosopher Plato explained how imperfect human understanding of reality is by using an analogy of a cave. In his allegorical cave, inhabitants chained to a lower wall can only see the shadows of objects and movements behind them, projected on a taller wall in front of them. After two plus millennia of enormous advancements in human knowledge, a new knowledge system called generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) projects knowledge of "everything" onto screens in front of us. With its vast datasets and powerful algorithms supporting its ability to generate impressive responses quickly and authoritatively, GenAI tools create the impression of omniscience. Unfortunately, those responses are often not just plausible patterns of words; their underlying datasets are also extremely limited in global epistemic diversity. The vast majority of GenAI training data is drawn from the Global North, reflecting the North's bodies of knowledge, traditions of thought, and cultural perspectives. AI's algorithms also represent extremely limited discourse patterns relative to the world's diverse rhetorical traditions and practices. Most consequentially, GenAI systems are deeply enmeshed in the global politics of knowledge, perpetuating centuries of colonial exploitation, inequalities, and harms. So, GenAI is characterized by a crisis of knowledge diversity, rhetorical deficits, and epistemic harms.

This chapter debunks the belief that GenAI knows everything by exploring its deficits on the side of its global/cross-cultural knowledge and rhetorical foundations. I argue that educators must go beyond a general critique of GenAI to expose how the epistemic and rhetorical flaws of GenAI not only undermine education but also exacerbate global knowledge politics that perpetuates geopolitical injustices. We must show students that, while current GenAI systems boast about advancing the global knowledge economy and benefiting all of humanity, they have limited knowledge about the Global South, instead vastly

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magnifying the Global-North nations' ability to exploit the Global-South counterparts. That is, if the epistemic-rhetorical poverty of GenAI is one side of the coin, its dependence on and perpetuation of global exploitation and injustice is the other. A sound education in writing and in the humanities at large requires an ability to grapple with both, as this chapter seeks to show.

For illustration, I asked the most popular GenAI tool ChatGPT: "How would you organize a discussion about climate justice using the Nyayasutra rhetorical method? What terms, methods, and norms would you ask the discussants to adopt?" It started with a seemingly impressive understanding of the South Asian "rules of justice" rhetorical strategies, defining it as a method for "rational inquiry, structured debate, and the pursuit of truth." Beyond that odd focus on "debate" even in its definition, which the Nyaya system does not encourage, as it went on to define "relevant" Nyaya terms and suggested Nyaya rhetorical strategies, ChatGPT dived deep into Aristotelian rhetoric, suggesting that all discussants "state their thesis at the outset," adding, "this clarity helps structure the debate." In reality, participants in a Nyaya deliberation start with a hypothesis-like proposition, which is not a thesis (Lloyd, 2012). In fact, Nyaya's exploratory, collaborative truth-seeking process is not an "argument" or "dialog" at all. Due to a fundamental learner's paradox that GenAI use entails, its harms increase with those who are less able to judge its responses like this. Yet, the confidence, ease, and speed of response is persuading millions of people around the world that it knows everything.

There are two reasons why GenAI tools give us the impression that they know everything: one, they are sold as being based on "massive" datasets, and, two, they are designed to generate "plausible" responses—typically with the confidence of a drunk uncle who is ignorant about many issues and prejudiced about many groups. GenAI data draw on and reproduce biases rooted in centuries of colonialism-aligned knowledge systems (Gestoso, 2023) and its algorithms are framed within what Damián Baca (2009) called Greco-Roman-Anglo-American rhetoric and modes of knowledge. So, students deserve to learn about how much GenAI tools "know": they can do so by learning about the knowledge politics of GenAI, especially its sketchy claims of omniscience and its socioeconomic harms to vulnerable communities around the world. And they must learn to counter GenAI's potential to narrow their minds as global citizens.

Regarding GenAI systems' knowledge deficits, news media have widely reported on their use of problematic internet contents, as well as violations of various basic norms (e.g., Schaul et al., 2024). What is seldom discussed publicly and in academia is that AI systems exclude most of the world's knowledge. First, they are based on a small fraction of the internet: they have no access to most academic databases (which may not be financially viable for GenAI companies), most books, government records, industry publications, and so on—or, simply,

most written knowledge that societies have produced in the past few millennia. Second, within and outside the internet, thousands of languages facilitate the world's knowledge ecology, but GenAI systems depend on just a few, far fewer than languages of the internet. Third, and most significantly, beyond the internet, most knowledge is embodied in practice and professions, rituals and relationships, oral and artistic traditions, cultures and values, communities and unwritten rules behind them—far beyond 's reach of written and digitized texts found on the internet. When we place these issues on a global scale, they become far worse. For example, "no more than 1% of most industry machine-learning data sets" are from or about the entire continent of Africa (Crowell, 2023), which is home to 18% of world population in 54 countries in 20% of landmass—not to mention the cradle of human civilization where hundreds of languages embody thousands of cultural/epistemic traditions. With more than half of the human population in 48 more countries, Asia—with the exception of China—is not represented much better. The diverse cultures and epistemologies of Latin and South America are similarly excluded, underrepresented, or reduced to shadows and distortions.

Given the above reality, fostering critical AI literacy means explicitly teaching students how AI-based knowledge politics is aggravating or creating new kinds of economic, political, and environmental harms around the world. To meaningfully advance critical AI literacy, we can turn to scholars who study the intersections of racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and now digital divide (e.g., Artopoulos, 2024; Coleman, 2018; Muldoon & Wu, 2023). We should teach about data colonialism of the Global South, which takes the form of cheap labor (e.g., underpaid image annotators and content moderators) and the extraction of natural resources under harmful conditions (Arora et al., 2023). Taiuru, a Maori ethicist, compares data to natural resources, warning that generative technologies unfairly extract and distort Indigenous histories and perpetuate biases, undermining Indigenous sovereignty (Chandran, 2023). The imbalance of power extends to language barriers; as Mbayo (2020) points out, over half of the world's population lacks access to knowledge in primary languages.

Even as GenAI companies seek to gather data from everywhere, while extracting both natural and human resources from the most defenseless parts of the world, they are not advancing an equitable global knowledge economy (in spite of grandiose claims for audiences at home). For instance, under the question "Is ChatGPT biased?" OpenAI openly admits in its FAQ for educators that "the model is skewed towards Western views" and that the "model's dialogic nature can reinforce a user's biases over the course of interaction" (n.d.). But OpenAI shows no practical interest to unskew the world's knowledge maps that are based on journal articles in databases dominated by the Global North (Czerniewicz, 2014). Such maps used

to represent only a tiny fragment of the world's vastly richer knowledge ecology. Today, if we look at what societies' knowledge systems AI systems depend on, or where AI companies are located across the world (Berger, 2018), even fewer countries are shaping the new AI-driven global knowledge map today.

It may seem that mere college professors can do nothing to address massive challenges like global knowledge politics; some of us might find the issue irrelevant. But as Tiera Tanksley (2024) recommends, education can counter these inequities by raising awareness, conducting equity audits before adopting GenAI platforms, and preparing students to advocate for algorithmic equity. We must teach them that systems are built on centuries of colonization, including the destruction or suppression, dismissal or denigration, and disregard or ignorance about knowledge systems beyond those of the colonizers and other powerful groups within and across national/imperial borders.

To use GenAI tools in meaningful ways, in college and beyond, students must learn how they impact the world.

- Epistemically: GenAI tools are constrained by culturally limited training data and algorithms.
- Socially: They exacerbate gaps in class and privilege, especially widening global digital divides.
- Politically: They intensify geopolitical imbalances, perpetuating inequalities through powerful transnational corporations and abuses of power by corrupt local governments.
- Economically: They aggravate existing inequities by financially exploiting marginalizing disadvantaged groups within and across borders.
- Linguistically: They are limited in their ability to comprehend, translate, and facilitate knowledge flow in most of the world's languages.
- Culturally: They tend to devalue non-dominant communities, erasing their embodied and lived knowledge, misrepresenting certain groups, and failing to grasp diverse ways of thinking and value systems.

We can help our students avoid being ignorant citizens and unwitting reproducers of injustices in the world by actively countering these problems with education. Students need politically informed rhetorical skills to navigate careers and communities in an increasingly diverse, globalized world. Even to answer "whether" GenAI's knowledge is complete or accurate, valid or reliable, nuanced or useful, they must learn "how" that knowledge is created and how its creation and use impacts people and societies globally. So, universities must further use faculty training, curriculum development, and institutional policy making to practically address the epistemic-rhetorical deficits of GenAI and its potential harms to education and society.

A common approach to addressing GenAI's epistemic and rhetorical pitfalls is teaching students better prompting skills—probing, pushing back, and seeking new perspectives. However, for education to meet broader social goals, students must further learn to question GenAI tools with truth-seeking, justice-driven mindsets. Recognizing GenAI tools as proxies for dominant social systems—while they lack intentionality and take no ethical responsibility—can help students understand the power dynamics that undermine knowledge flow and social justice.

Just as Plato's prisoners needed to turn away from the shadows and come out of the cave to understand fuller realities of the world, we, too, must critically examine all claims of GenAI toward seeking fuller knowledge and greater justice. The convenience and efficiency of access to information with which our screens/walls deliver renderings of reality in front of us should not make us too similar to the confidently ignorant people in the allegorical cave.

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