FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY AS A LOCAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Helen E. Longino and Kathleen Lennon

I—Helen E. Longino

I

Introductory remarks. The very idea of feminist epistemology throws some philosophers into near apoplexy. Partly this is social and psychological: an aversion to the revisionist challenges of feminism abetted by a healthy if residual misogyny. Partly this is intellectual: how could a politically and intellectually partial form of inquiry have anything to say about epistemology, which is or ought to be about very general questions concerning the nature of knowledge? The former is worth noting, but not discussing; the second, however, goes to the heart of what feminist epistemology is. This essay pursues one line of thought in feminist epistemology with a view to sorting out the relation between it and general epistemology, and between it and other approaches in feminist theory of knowledge.

First I should note what feminist epistemology is not. It is not the study or defence of feminine intuition, of 'women's ways of knowing', of subjectivism; it is not an embrace of irrationality or of Protagorean relativism. Although feminist philosophers have celebrated the female subject, have argued for the constructive role of emotion in knowledge, and have criticized standard accounts of objectivity and rationality, attacks on feminist epistemology tend to ignore the arguments feminists offer and instead go after straw women. As they misrepresent the feminist work they purport to criticize, they do not deserve any kind of detailed response, but do impose on feminists a burden yet again to say what we mean. Also, contrary to the apparent view of many of its detractors, feminist epistemology encompasses a number of different directions of analysis some of which are, others of which are not, mutually compatible. In addition, themes and positions in feminist epistemology

overlap with themes and positions in philosophy generally. Thus some of the tensions within feminist epistemological thought are mirrored by tensions in other areas of philosophy, while some are peculiar to it. For example, many commentators take feminist epistemology to be a species of naturalized and social epistemology, but just as there are ways of naturalizing and ways of socializing epistemology, so there are ways of doing feminist epistemology.

Feminist epistemology has both critical and constructive dimensions. Critical dimensions include the demonstration of forms of masculine bias at the heart of philosophical analyses of such topics as objectivity, reason, knowledge, and rationality. Constructive dimensions include carving out a space for specifically feminist programs of inquiry, identifying or defending epistemic guidelines of feminist inquiry. Among constructive programs feminist standpoint theory and feminist empiricism have been the most visible, but feminist forms of pragmatism are also finding favour. (See Lloyd 1984, Code 1991, 1995, Harding 1986, 1991, Rooney 1994, 1995, Anderson 1995, Solomon 1995, also Alcoff and Potter 1993, Lennon and Whitford 1994.)

Most feminist epistemologies (those named above) have been feminist adaptations of extant philosophical orientations. Another way to start thinking about feminist epistemology is to consider what feminists engaged in inquiry, in the production of knowledge, have to say about knowledge, to investigate whether and how they think feminist practices of inquiry might differ from standard practices. Feminists standing back from and reflecting on their practices have had quite a bit to say about moral dimensions of practices of inquiry; about the development of mutual respect among researchers, about the desirability of cooperation as opposed to competition among researchers, about the desirability of respect for, even love of, the objects of one's research, be these social or natural, about issues of responsibility. (See Hubbard 1990, Martin 1988, Birke 1984, Stanley 1990) Feminists in the course of working through particular research programs, whether empirical or analytical, have also defended, elaborated, or invoked a variety of cognitive or theoretical values, desirable characteristics of the outcomes of inquiry. Thinking about these values and the roles they do or might play in inquiry, can initiate a chain of reflections leading

to a somewhat unorthodox, but ultimately, I believe, quite fruitful, characterization of epistemology. I will discuss some of the values that have been endorsed by feminist thinkers and their relation to traditional epistemic values and move from this discussion to a consideration of the relation between an epistemology focused on feminist cognitive values and general philosophical epistemology and between this form of feminist reflection on knowledge and other, perhaps more familiar, directions in feminist epistemology.

II

Feminist Values in Inquiry. In a series of earlier papers, I have explored a set of values individually and severally invoked by feminist researchers (Longino 1994, 1996). They probably do not exhaust the values that feminist researchers do or could endorse but they do exhibit a suitable range. To simplify matters, I treat these as theoretical virtues, i.e. as characteristics of theories, models, or hypotheses, that are taken as counting *prima facie* and *ceteris paribus* in favour of their acceptance. The virtues I have discussed in this capacity include empirical adequacy, novelty, ontological heterogeneity, complexity or mutuality of interaction, applicability to human needs, and decentralization of power or universal empowerment. While empirical adequacy is held in common by feminist and non-feminist researchers, the remaining five contrast intriguingly with more commonly touted values of consistency with theories in other domains, simplicity, explanatory power and generality, fruitfulness or refutability. I shall briefly say something about each of the feminist virtues, excluding empirical adequacy.

Feminists endorse the novelty of theoretical or explanatory principle as protection against unconscious perpetuation of the sexism and androcentrism of traditional theorizing or of theorizing constrained by a desire for consistency with accepted explanatory models. The novelty envisioned is not the novelty of discovery of new entities (like the top quark) predicted by theory but rather of frameworks of understanding. For example, some feminist scholars have criticized the articulation of female centred models of evolution by feminist primatologists as remaining too much within the framework of sociobiology, and thus, perpetuating other noxious values of that theoretical approach. Novelty, thus

understood, is contrary to the value of conservatism as propounded by Quine or of consistency with theories in other domains as described by Kuhn. The embrace of novelty may be conjoined with a hope of ultimately seeing or engineering an overturning of the theories with which a new view is inconsistent, or with merely making salient aspects of experience or reality hidden or marginalized by presently accepted theory.

Feminists who endorse heterogeneity as a virtue indicate a preference for theories and models that preserve the heterogeneity in the domain under investigation, or that, at least, do not eliminate it on principle. An approach to inquiry that requires uniform specimens may facilitate generalization, but it runs the risk of missing important differences—so the male of a species comes to be taken as paradigmatic for the species (as in 'Gorillas are solitary animals; a typical individual travels only with a female and her/ their young'). Or, via the concept of male dominance, males are treated as the only causally effective agents in a population. The embrace of heterogeneity extends beyond human and animal behaviour, however, and is also invoked in the context of genetic and biochemical processes. Feminist researchers have resisted unicausal accounts of development in favour of accounts in which quite different factors play causal roles. Heterogeneity is thus opposed to ontological simplicity and to the associated explanatory virtue of unification. Under the guidance of these latter virtues, similarities between, rather than differences in, the phenomena would be stressed.

Mutuality or reciprocity of interaction, sometimes more generally complexity of interaction, is something of a processual companion to the virtue of ontological heterogeneity. While heterogeneity of ontology tolerates the existence of different kinds of thing, complexity, mutuality, reciprocity characterize their interactions. Feminists endorsing this virtue express a preference for theories representing interactions as complex and involving not just joint, but also mutual and reciprocal relationships among factors. They explicitly reject theories or explanatory models that attempt to identify one causal factor in a process, whether that be a dominant animal or a 'master molecule' like DNA. This virtue favours accounts of fertilization, or gametic fusion, for example,

which treat the process as an interaction between egg and sperm, rather than the active sperm acting on the passive egg.

Many feminists also endorse the idea that science should be 'for the people,' that research that alleviates human needs, especially those traditionally attended by women, such as care of the young, weak, and infirm or feeding the hungry, should be preferred over research for military purposes or for knowledge's sake. While not rejecting curiosity altogether as an appropriate aim of research, these feminists place a greater emphasis on the pragmatic dimension of knowledge, but only in connection with the final virtue in this collection—decentralization of power. Thus forms of knowledge and its application in technologies which empower beneficiaries are preferred to those which produce or reproduce dependence relations. Both the feminist pragmatic virtues and their traditional contraries, fruitfulness and refutability, have to do with the expansion of a theoretical approach in an empirical direction. But the relevance of the empirical in the traditional view is within a self-enclosed research context. Applicability and empowerment, by contrast, are directed to the social and practical milieu outside the research context.

III

Feminist and traditional cognitive values. One might ask why the virtues I've just sketched should be given equal status with the more traditional epistemic virtues with which they contrast. But this question begs another—what is the status of the traditional epistemic virtues? While these are quite frequently invoked as factors closing the gap between evidence and hypotheses revealed by underdetermination arguments, it's not at all evident that they are capable of discriminating between the more and less probable, let alone between the true and the false. Consistency with theories in other domains, for example, only has epistemic value if we suppose these other theories to be true. While they presumably are empirically adequate, additional considerations in favour of their truth will have to consist of other assumptions or theoretical virtues. The probative value of consistency, then, is relative to the truth of the theories with which consistency is recommended.

Simplicity and explanatory power fare no better. While there is an understandable preference for simpler theories when contrasted

with theories or models loaded with entities and processes and relationships that do not add to the predictive capacities of the theory, it is not clear that simplicity generally can carry epistemic weight. As is well known, simplicity can be interpreted in different ways. The interpretation contrasting with the alternative virtue of heterogeneity is ontological—the fewer entities the better, or no more entities than are required to explain the phenomena. As a caution of prudence this has much to recommend it, and it may even be a useful heuristic. But for simplicity as an epistemic standard there are at least three problems:

i. This formulation begs the question what counts as an adequate explanation. Is an adequate explanation an account sufficient to generate predictions or an account of underlying processes, and, if explanation is just retrospective prediction, then must it be successful at individual or population levels? Either the meaning of simplicity will be relative to one's account of explanation, thus undermining the capacity of simplicity to function as an independent epistemic value, or the insistence on simplicity will dictate what gets explained and how.

ii. We have no a priori reason to think the universe simple, i.e. composed of very few kinds of thing (as few as the kinds of elementary particles, for example) rather than of many different kinds of thing. Nor is there or could there be empirical evidence for such a view.

iii. The degree of simplicity or variety in one's theoretical ontology may be dependent on the degree of variety one admits into one's description of the phenomena. If one imposes uniformity on the data by rejecting anomalies, then one is making a choice for a certain kind of account. If the view that the boundaries of our descriptive categories are conventional is correct, then there is no epistemological fault in this, but neither is there virtue.

Explanatory power and generality also lose their epistemic allure under close examination. Indeed the greater the explanatory power and generality of a theory, i.e., the greater the variety of phenomena brought under its explanatory umbrella, the less likely it is to be (literally) true. Its explanatory strength is purchased at the cost of truth, which lies in the details and may be captured through the

filling in of an indefinite series of *ceteris paribus* clauses. (Cartwright 1983) Explanatory power and generality may constitute good reasons for accepting a model or theory if one places value on unifying theoretical frameworks, but this is a value distinct from truth and has to be defended on other grounds. Mutuality or reciprocity of influence in an explanatory model is less likely to be generalizable than a linear or unicausal model which permits the incorporation of the explanation of an effect into an explanation of its cause. The explanations of multiple interacting causal factors branch out rather than coalescing. Rather than a vertically ordered hierarchy culminating in a master theory or master science, one is confronted with a horizontally ordered network of models.

Finally, what Kuhn called fruitfulness and the feminist pragmatic virtues are not really contraries in their epistemic relevance. Fruitfulness of a theory is its ability to generate problems for research. This can be given a somewhat narrower interpretation as refutability, that is, having (falsifiable) empirical consequences. This does not argue for the truth of a theory, but for its tractability, that is for its capacity to have empirical data brought to bear on it. Both refutability and fruitfulness may be less intrinsic features of a theory, than a matter of the instruments available for producing relevant data, as well as other theoretical and empirical developments in associated fields that make articulation of the theory possible. The feminist pragmatic virtues do not reject the importance of empirical consequences but seek them in certain areas: in the world of human life as well as in the laboratory. The most politically loaded of the feminist virtues requires in addition that the mode of applicability involve empowerment of the many rather than the concentration of power among the few. Some thinkers about the sciences have rejected altogether the distinction between pure and applied science that lies behind the treatment of refutability or fruitfulness as a virtue, i.e. as a criterion of theory evaluation or selection. (Cf. Latour 1989) Contemporary science, on this view, is better understood as technoscience, inquiry into nature that is inseparable from its technological infrastructures and outcomes. Within this framework, the feminist pragmatic virtues could be understood not as a rejection of 'pure science' but as a recognition of the technologically driven nature of science and a

call for certain technological infrastructures and outcomes over others. Rejecting the conventional distinction between pure and applied science facilitates the rejection of the idea that scientists bear no responsibility for how their work is used. Thus the feminist pragmatic virtues can be a vehicle for bringing considerations of social responsibility back into the centre of scientific inquiry.

While all of these points could be further developed, I have, for each of the more mainstream epistemic values, indicated why their epistemic status is no greater than that of the alternatives advocated by feminist researchers and philosophers. This raises the question why, in spite of repeated demonstrations of the weakness of their probative value, philosophers persist in invoking them. Although I have elsewhere argued that the standard virtues have in certain contexts of their use both material and ideological socio-political consequences, I am inclined to think that these are (for the most part) unintended by most advocates of the traditional virtues and that their attraction lies elsewhere. One might start by noting that the traditional virtues do characterize classical Newtonian mechanics. They may have acquired their normative status by association in a framework that took physics as the model of science. I don't think, however, that this, even if on the right track, can be the whole of the story.

One might well ask of the alternative virtues I have described what makes them feminist. I think this is the wrong question. They are, after all, not advocated exclusively by feminists, but also by other oppositional scientists. They serve as alternatives for a larger (or different) scientific community than the feminist one. The question ought to be: what recommends the alternative virtues to feminists? As I have suggested elsewhere, what *ought* to recommend these virtues to feminists is that they (do or could) serve feminist cognitive goals. What makes feminists feminist is the desire to dismantle the oppression and subordination of women. This requires identification of the mechanisms and institutions of female oppression and subordination, that is, the mechanisms and institutions of gender. The cognitive goal of feminist researchers therefore, is to reveal the operation of gender, by making visible both the activities of those gendered female and the processes whereby they are made invisible, and by identifying the mechanisms whereby female gendered agents are subordinated.

What ought to recommend these virtues to feminists, then, is that inquiry regulated by these values and theories characterized by these virtues are more likely to reveal gender than inquiry guided by the mainstream virtues. (For account of how this might work in particular contexts, see Longino (1994, 1996).) There is undoubtedly more to be said here as well, including consideration of other possible theoretical virtues, other cognitive aims, and the relations of these virtues to other (non-cognitive) values endorsed by feminists and to values endorsed by other communities of inquiry.

<div align="center">IV</div>

Epistemological Reflections. What can these virtues tell us about the prospects for a normative feminist epistemology based on them? First of all, although the virtues have been endorsed by feminists (although not by all feminists) and can be discerned at work in feminist appraisal, their subordination to a broader cognitive goal means that they are not in and of themselves feminist theoretical virtues, or to put it another way, such subordination means that these alternative virtues will not necessarily be a part of a feminist epistemological kit. They have no intrinsic standing as feminist theoretical virtues or virtues for feminists, but only a provisional one. For as long as and to the extent that their regulative role can promote the goal of revealing gender, and as long as revealing gender remains the primary goal of feminist inquiry, they can serve as norms or standards of feminist inquiry. It is possible, however, that in different contexts they would not promote feminist cognitive goals, or that those goals themselves might change in such a way that other cognitively regulative norms would be called for. Indeed, to the extent that feminists dissent from the virtues, they may either be urging a change of feminist cognitive goals or claiming that the goals are not served by the virtues discussed here. There could be multiple sets of feminist cognitive virtues corresponding to different conceptions of what feminist cognitive goals are or should be. The concept of gender has itself changed as a consequence of feminist inquiry. Recognizing the disunity both of gender and of forms of gender subordination might require either a change in cognitive aim or a change in the virtues.

Secondly, the normative claim of these values/virtues is limited to the community sharing the primary goal. On those who do not share it these virtues have no claim. To generalize this point, the alternative virtues are only binding in those communities sharing a cognitive goal that is advanced by those virtues. Their normative reach is, thus, local. In emphasizing the provisionality and locality of alternative virtues, this account contrasts quite sharply with accounts offered or implied by advocates of the traditional virtues which, as (purely) epistemic are represented as universally binding. I've indicated above the sorts of arguments that would cast doubt on such a claim. What is missing is the articulation of a cognitive goal that would ground the traditional virtues. If the structure of justification is the same as that for the alternative virtues, then the traditional virtues, no less than the alternative ones, are only provisional and locally binding. Both feminist and nonfeminist critics of mainstream science have argued that its goal is domination and control. This constitutes an interpretation of the practices of mainstream science. If it is a correct interpretation, then the traditional virtues would need to be evaluated relative to that cognitive aim. If it is not the goal of scientific practice, but is promoted by the traditional virtues, this would suggest a reexamination of the latter's status relative to the (real) goal of mainstream practice.

I've argued elsewhere (as have others) that the underdetermination argument necessitates a move away from individualism in philosophy of science and epistemology. To summarize my own version of such arguments: in light of the semantic gap between hypotheses and the statements describing data, the latter acquire evidential relevance for hypotheses only in light of background assumptions. Justificatory practices must therefore include not only the testing of hypotheses against data, but the subjection of background assumptions (and reasoning and data) to criticism from a variety of perspectives. Thus, intersubjective discursive interaction is added to interaction with the material world under investigation as components of methodology. From a normative point of view this means articulating conditions for effective criticism, typically specifying structural features of a discursive community that ensure the effectiveness of the critical discourse taking place within it. I have suggested four such conditions: a) the

provision of venues for the articulation of criticism, b) uptake (rather than mere toleration) of criticism, c) public standards to which discursive interactions are referenced, d) equality of intellectual authority for all (qualified) members of the community.

Within this scheme the traditional and alternative virtues constitute partially overlapping, but distinctive sets of public community standards. That is, they serve to regulate discourse in their respective communities. They can be criticized or challenged relative to the cognitive aims they are taken to advance or to other values assigned higher priority and they can in turn serve as grounds for critique. Nor is criticism limited to intra-community discourse. The areas of overlap or intersection make possible critical interaction among as well as within communities. Generalizing from what I've earlier argued, the public standards that I argue must be a component feature of an objective or reliable scientific community will be binding only on those who share the overall cognitive goal that grounds those standards and who agree that the standards do indeed advance that cognitive goal. Such agreement must itself be the outcome of critical discursive interactions in a context satisfying conditions of effective criticism. As the virtues understood as public standards are subordinated to the advancement of a specific cognitive aim which may change, they must be understood as provisional. As they are binding only on those who share that aim, they must be understood as partial. This way of thinking about knowledge and inquiry involves a shift in attention away from the outcomes or products of inquiry, whether these are theories or beliefs, to the processes or dynamics of knowledge production. The ideal state is not the having of a single best account, but the existence of a plurality of theoretical orientations that both make possible the elaboration of particular models of the phenomenal world and serve as resources for criticism of each other.

I've already indicated why the feminist or any set of alternative theoretical virtues could not be superseded by the traditional virtues. Two further objections must be addressed. One might ask whether there is not a set of cognitive values different from both the set identified as traditional and that identified as alternative which would constitute universal norms. Perhaps the verdicts of provisionality and partiality are the consequence of looking at the

wrong values. But this objection must provide examples of values that could be universally binding. The only characteristics of theories or hypotheses that might qualify are truth or empirical adequacy. But truth in the context of theory adjudication reduces to empirical adequacy—truth of the observational statements of a theory. And empirical adequacy is not sufficient to eliminate all but one of a set of contesting theories. It is because the purely epistemic is not rich enough to guide inquiry and theory appraisal that the values discussed earlier come into play. (For arguments about the insufficiency of truth simpliciter, see Anderson (1995) and Grandy (1987).) One might, alternatively, specify qualities of inquirers that count as virtues, for example, open-mindedness and sensory or logical acuity, but these are not theoretical, but personal virtues, not public standards of critical discourse but qualities required to participate constructively in such discourse. Secondly, one might resist the identification of competing sets of virtues and suggest the integration of the two sets of virtues. There are two difficulties with this suggestion. In particular contexts of inquiry virtues from the two sets recommend non-reconcilable theories. (Cf. Longino 1996) Moreover, integration can be understood in at least two ways, each involving quite different presuppositions. It might be proposed as fulfilling a commitment to unified science, but that commitment needs support. It might, on the other hand, be proposed as a way of realizing theoretical pluralism within a single community. This presupposes the value of the (particular) diversity of models that inclusion of both sets of values in a community's standards might produce. If so, what is called for is not integration of the virtues by one research community, but the tolerance of and interaction with research guided by different theoretical virtues, the construction of larger or meta-communities characterized by mutual respect for divergent points of view, i.e. by pluralism.

V

Feminist theoretical virtues and feminist epistemologies. Studying professedly feminist work in order to determine what cognitive ideals and standards serve a regulative or normative function for feminist inquiry (or at least some feminist inquiry) represents an approach to feminist epistemology that differs from some of the

more iconic views in feminist theory of knowledge such as feminist standpoint theory or feminist empiricism.

Feminist standpoint theory has been one of the most visible and most discussed of feminist approaches to knowledge. Standpoint theory has been well-received among feminist thinkers, because it insists on the ineluctable situatedness of knowers. Beliefs endorsed, theories produced by individuals bear the stamp of their situations, which are what provide standpoints. Feminist standpoint theorists have emphasized the difference in the situations of and knowledge/beliefs consequently produced by men and women or by individuals occupying gendered positions, such as factory foreman, managerial bureaucrat, housewife or secretary. Some versions of standpoint theory articulate the contrast in more explicitly political terms as one between masculinist or androcentric and feminist standpoints, where androcentrism would be the default or unreflective standpoint in a male dominant society and a feminist standpoint would be the achievement of critical reflection. The notion that (broadly speaking) social factors might play a role in the production and acceptance of theories is not unique to standpoint theory. What distinguishes standpoint theory from other forms of contextualism is its normative dimension—its interest in identifying a better or more objective standpoint. As a Marxist standpoint theory privileges the standpoint of the proletariat over that of the bourgeoisie, so a feminist standpoint theory privileges the standpoint of women (or of feminists) over that of men (or of androcentrists or masculinists).

One repeated criticism of feminist standpoint theory is that there are many systematic differences among women (race, class, nationality,...) that generate different standpoints. There cannot be one women's standpoint, or even one feminist standpoint, but many. Another is that the theory ends up in something of a vicious circle, since the identification of standpoints, let alone epistemologically superior ones, requires theory which in turn requires justification, which implicates a standpoint. Sandra Harding, one of the strongest philosophical defenders of standpoint theory has turned the first objection into a virtue by urging what she calls 'strong objectivity'. This is achieved by systematic reflexivity and by 'starting thought' from all marginalized or socially subordinated positions, i.e. the positions of women and men in postcolonial societies, the positions

of working class women and men in industrialized or in post-industrialized societies, of gay men and lesbians in industrialized societies, of the same in non-industrialized societies, etc. Maximal objectivity accrues to the body of inquiry most inclusive of heretofore marginalized standpoints. This proposal is somewhat hard to interpret (what, for instance, does 'starting thought' mean?) and is still subject to charges of circularity as just sketched. But what is of more interest is the kind of theory of knowledge standpoint theory, even revised as Harding proposes, is. It has been called a form of naturalized epistemology because it proceeds from some empirical premises (Thalos 1994). But it shares with traditional epistemology a commitment to a singularly correct theory or set of theories as well as to a singularly correct methodology. Even though it locates those in particular social configurations, rather than in a set of context-free universally applicable rules (such as Bayesian inference rules), in sharing epistemic ideals with traditional normative epistemology, standpoint theory is closer to traditional epistemology than the contextualism outlined above. In the latter, 1) no single position or set of positions is granted authority it does not earn as a consequence of empirical application and critical interaction with other perspectives, 2) any epistemological orientation is seen as both provisional and partial, and 3) rather than some single theory providing a best or definitive account of reality, the availability of multiple theoretical approaches each illuminating different facets of a phenomenon constitutes the best epistemo-logical outcome.

What might be called naive feminist empiricism shares with standpoint theory the goal of a single best account and supposes that androcentric science is a matter of failing to keep personal biases out of inquiry. Better science will be bias-free science. Naive empiricism shares with contextual empiricism the emphasis given to observational data, but supposes observational data and logic are sufficient to generate and justify theories. Contextualism, on the other hand, argues in light of underdetermination arguments for the necessity of assumptions establishing the evidential relevance of data to hypotheses and theories.

VI

Feminist theoretical virtues and philosophical epistemology. Both standpoint theory and feminist empiricism are normative theories. They prescribe conditions for producing knowledge. Study of the theoretical virtues as engaged in here is not normative but descriptive/analytic. It offers an interpretation of normative claims rather than itself prescribing. I have indicated how the virtues could be integrated into the minimally prescriptive contextual empiricism, but this integration does not privilege the feminist or any other set of theoretical virtues.

The complete set of regulative standards, inclusive of theoretical virtues, guiding a community's epistemic practices could be called its epistemology. This is the way the term 'epistemology' is used outside of philosophy. Given that communities will be distinguished from each other by those non-overlapping elements of community regulative standards, such epistemologies are local epistemologies. If general epistemic norms like empirical adequacy require supplementation by the more specific and distinctive norms, then normative epistemology will be local epistemology, i.e. epistemic norms (apart from general prescriptions like 'establish evidential relevance') will be only locally and provisionally binding. Feminist epistemology does turn out to be partial, but not viciously so. In one sense, it is as partial as any local epistemology, in that inquiry conducted under its auspices will not reveal a total, but an incomplete, picture of reality. In a second sense, it is partial, not in being distorted by, but in being directed to the aim of providing knowledge useful or necessary to a community identified by its political goals.

What then of the general inquiry we in philosophy call epistemology? I propose that general epistemology is not a normative, but an interpretive inquiry. General epistemology inquires into what is meant by distinctively epistemic language: what is the meaning of the distinctions between knowledge and belief, truth and falsity, objectivity and subjectivity and what is the relation between the values embedded in those distinctions and the epistemic practices of communities employing those distinctions. This inquiry is not just into what *is* meant, but what *could be* meant given both particular cognitive resources and particular cognitive aims. Philosophical epistemology, I propose, makes sense of our

epistemically evaluative behaviour, but does not prescribe for it.
Normative or prescriptive epistemology that can make contact with
actual inquiry is the task of those communities engaged in inquiry.
Philosophers who engage in normative epistemology should be
understood as doing so not as members of a class having special
insight into knowledge, but as members of particular communities
of inquiry characterized by partiality and provisionality, con-
tributing to what from both a human's and a God's eye view is a
plurality of models and theories, rather than a single account that
captures all facets of reality.

VII

Conclusion. I have argued that a set of theoretical virtues can be
extracted from the normative reflections of feminists engaged in
inquiry. This set constitutes an alternative and a challenge to the
traditional epistemic virtues, as well as a set of virtues that could
guide inquiry directed to feminist cognitive aims. To the extent that
feminist epistemology is work for feminist philosophers, it is work
for us as members of a feminist community of inquiry. Our task,
as I see it, is not to prescribe to but to participate with other
members of that community in developing the criteria that will
advance our cognitive aims. General philosophical epistemology,
by contrast, makes sense of our most general epistemically
evaluative norms and behaviour, norms and behaviour that we
share with others who share concepts such as 'know' and 'believe'.
As philosophers we may be able to achieve some critical distance
that facilitates our offering interpretations of our community's
practices to it, but changes in those practices must be recommended
from a position that is embedded in the community, not one that
stands apart from it.

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II—Kathleen Lennon

I

The flight from Transcendence. I was delighted to be asked to reply to Helen Longino's paper. I have been reading her work with great interest for several years. What I would like to do in this reply is to place her contextualism in relation to other possible responses to the current flight from transcendence. Feminist epistemologists, in common with many other strands of contemporary thought, no longer regard knowledge as a neutral transparent reflection of an independently ordered reality, with truth and falsity established by transcendent procedures of rational assessment. Rather most accept that all knowledge is situated knowledge, reflecting the position of the knowledge producer at a certain historical moment in a given material and cultural context. (Lennon and Whitford, 1994, introduction)

Longino refers to both critical and constructive dimensions of feminist engagement in academic disciplines. I would like to briefly review some different strands of this work as they bear on what I have to say later. Early and ongoing feminist engagement in academic disciplines has been concerned to make evident the masculinist character of areas of knowledge which have been a product of apparently neutral procedures of rational assessment. There are different ways in which such work has been shown to be 'masculine'. (Lennon, 1995) Firstly there has been an insistence on the empirical inadequacy of theories which, by ignoring distinctive experiences, histories, writings, work and practices of women have produced putatively general accounts which could not comfortably accommodate them. Only male subjects were researched in relation to heart disease. Sociological accounts of the family ignored conflicts of interests within it. Historical narratives

failed to accommodate the position of women. Secondly there has been broadly deconstructive work, which attends to the texts within which knowledge is articulated, interrogating the structures of narrative, images and metaphors. This work uncovers the hierarchical oppositions which underpin apparently rational transitions and highlights their interdependence with gender hierarchies. The texts addressed include, in addition to literary, historical and philosophical ones, scientific theories and science's account of its own activities. By means of such a process 'gender norms come to be seen as silent organisers of the mental and discursive maps of the natural worlds we simultaneously inhabit and construct, even of those worlds that women never enter' (Fox-Keller 1992, p. 13).

Thirdly there is archeological work, in the Foucauldian sense. Here, by means of careful historical excavations of the emergence of particular theories attention is paid, not only to patterns of conceptualisations and rationalisation employed in particular texts, but also to concrete material practices and negotiation between different sites of power, out of which what gets counted as 'facts' emerge. An example is Nelly Oudshoorn's *Beyond the Natural Body* (Oudshoorn 1994) which explores the emergence of theories of sex hormones, out of which came classification of hormones as male and female and a conception of the female body as being at the mercy of its hormonal balance. The emergence of theories of sex hormones rested not only on gendered cultural assumptions but also on contingencies such as the availability of urine from gynaecological clinics or mares' urine from stables, enabling the production and investigation of the so called female sex hormone.

What becomes most philosophically salient from both the deconstructionist and archeological work is the recognition of the contingency of the scientific narratives and the possibility of alternative ways of dealing with the data which might better suit our epistemological objectives. Here feminist work shared moments of thought with post positivist philosophers of science who, in recognising the underdetermination of theory by data, highlighted the role of epistemological virtues in addition to empirical adequacy as playing a role in theory choice. But, as Longino's discussion makes clear, the two approaches did not necessarily

share their views of what these additional virtues might be. Nelly Oudshoorn discusses a period when, despite previous classification into male and female hormones, it became clear that neither set was found in bodies without the other. What had been regarded as male sex organs did not develop without so called female hormones. It was also the case that attention to hormone presence, increasingly seen as a marker of sex difference, didn't dictate a division into just two sexes There was rather a patchwork of similarities and differences. Gender divisions within culture told against the creation of a theoretical narrative here which did away with the division into just two sexes. Contemplating this moment now with altered sensibilities might however open the possibility of alternative accounts. However the unifying assumptions of evolutionary biology might dictate quite a different account from that attentive to the complexities of lived sexual difference. (Fausto Sterling 1993).

Most feminist epistemologists reject as unrealisable a project of producing knowledge that does not bear the marks of its material and cultural conditions of production. However, once we recognise that it is not just in the production of ideologically distorted theories that our account of nature is mediated by culture, we are confronted by epistemological dilemmas. Theories cannot be assessed by reference to universal norms. For some writers this has led to the abandonment of traditional questions of justification which were the benchmark of epistemology. Yet for many feminists such justificatory questions remain firmly in play. Feminist writers have wished to displace certain scientific theories. They have moreover been seeking narratives about the world which will facilitate effective interventions or enable certain practical forms of life. Recognition of the textuality and locatedness of scientific knowledge has not therefore led to the abandonment of epistemological questions but rather highlighted their complexity. The question becomes, how is normative epistemology possible given the flight from transcendence? Longino's response is that normative epistemology becomes local epistemology. I want to consider whether normative epistemologies are necessarily local.

II

Epistemological Standpoints. Traditional epistemology
approaches the issue of justification via the application of criteria
to the product of knowledge, separating off, as it is normally
expressed, the context of discovery from the context of justi-
fication. In much contemporary epistemology, however, attention
to the material and social position of knowledge producers has
been invoked as part of the assessment procedures for the
legitimacy of the knowledge produced. The critiques of areas of
knowledge as being 'masculine' in these varieties of ways were
mounted primarily, though not exclusively, by women. In the
earliest accounts the masculinity was seen as reflective of a
homogeneous male psyche(explained by object relations theory as
a product of certain family arrangements). (Harding and Hintikka
1983) The feminist project was seen as producing knowledge
which reflected female subject positions. Knowledge produced
from such a position was then seen as privileged. (Hartsock 1983).
Such a move owes a clear intellectual debt to Hegel's master/slave
dialectic and to a Marxist epistemology where privilege is
accorded to the position of the proletariat. There are a number of
problems with this approach, some of which Longino signals in
her discussion of standpoint theory. The masculinity involved is
variable and contradictory and in many cases critiqued from gay
and post colonial sources as well as feminist ones. There is no
homogeneous female subject position to serve as the basis for
critique and reconstruction. After all 'the margin is not a shared
space'. (Griffiths 1995, p. 16) Moreover the 'Standpoints of the
subjugated are not innocent positions. They are not exempt from
critical reexamination, decoding, deconstruction and inter-
pretation' (Haraway 1991, p. 191) This is in part because we all
have to make sense of our world in terms of the discourses which
are available to us. At its most fixed the symbolic order which we
need if we are to think at all is viewed as resolutely patriarchal, and
the marginality the price we have to pay to avoid psychosis. (Lacan
1977) However even if we resist this picture by insisting on the
multiplicity and fluidity of discourse there appears no necessary
link between material position and the discourses adopted, by
means of which our world and our sense of self are produced.

These points, though raising legitimate difficulties for justificatory procedures which attend only to the material position of the knowledge producers, suggest too disembodied a conception of knowledge. As has been frequently pointed out in discussions of Foucault (McNay 1992 p. 59) we are not simply docile bodies, able to produce ourselves and our world with whatever discourses come our way. It is rather the case that the possibility of participating in knowledge-sharing communities and adopting shared discursive forms rests on shared activities anchored in our material and social embodiment. Gadamer refers to the 'throwness' of our situation in the world and points to the 'prejudices', prejudgments and biases without which knowledge would not be possible. 'It is our prejudices that constitute our being... Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous [but]... constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. They are simply conditions... whereby what we encounter says something to us.' (Gadamer 1976 p. 9) There are clear parallels here with the recognition in post positivist philosophy of the role of background assumptions in conditioning our observations. These prejudices inform our standpoint onto the world. As I understand it such a standpoint is constituted by the transparency with which certain descriptions are applied to situations, certain judgments called for, certain intentional acts required and certain patterns of reflective reasoning recognised as legitimate. Crucially such transparency is not a matter of a brute causal response but is marked by normative recognition. What is being recognised is the appropriate application of concepts etc. In this sense a standpoint marks a position in the domain of reason.

For Gadamer our prejudices are a result of the tradition we inherit, but we need to pay attention here not only to the tradition but to the conditions which make it teachable. The standpoints which we occupy are marked by shared practices, intentionally directed activities transforming our environment. The possibility of such practices are restricted by the material and social environments we are in and our relations to them, as well as by the characteristics of our bodies. Only certain kinds of body can adjust their angle to walk up hills, breathe appropriately in labour. In our social milieu only certain kinds of body (white ones), have available to them the thought that 'colour doesn't matter'.

(Williams 1997) Such material and social environments and modes of embodiment condition the standpoints we can occupy. The concept of a standpoint needs further enriching once we recognise the Imaginary dimension of our knowledge. In a recent work Moira Gatens uses the term Imaginary to 'refer to those images, symbols metaphors and representations which help construct various forms of subjectivity... those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine in part their value, their status and what will be deemed their appropriate treatment'. (Gatens 1996, p. viii) The Imaginary is the domain of affect and reflects the affecting and affected interactions of human bodies. The affective dimension of the Imaginary makes it resistant to change simply by ordered patterns of argument. This resilience is reinforced by its often unconscious dimension. It informs 'embodied habits' which become 'second nature'. (Gatens 1996, passim) Wittgenstein pointed out that communicable meaning rests on agreement in judgments and the possibility of this rests on something like a shared 'natural history'. (Wittgenstein 1958, §415) This shared history is not to be understood in simply a biological sense. It can incorporate all the elements signalled above: social and material embodiment and affective interactions. The crucial point, however, is that the applicability of certain discursive forms, the appropriateness of practices and the force of certain reflective patterns of reasons is not available from 'anywhere', but is anchored in epistemological standpoints marked by such shared 'natural histories'.

While recognising the role of standpoints we must be wary of seeing them as closed and self contained boxes. Unlike spatial positions standpoints can be multiple and not exclusive. Between people there will be a patchwork of shared and overlapping standpoints. Moreover our 'natural histories' are constantly changing (often by encounters with others, see below), yielding the possibility of agreements in new types of judgments. Gadamer characterised the situation in the following way: 'We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence an essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of "horizon". The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.... The closed horizon that is supposed to

surround a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us.' (Gadamer 1975 p. 271)

The prejudices, background assumptions, and metaphoric associations informing particular standpoints are frequently unavailable to those occupying them. This was what I was trying to convey with the suggestion that concept application and rationalising links appear transparent from certain perspectives. This can provide an impression of the naturalness and inevitability of patterns of thought which are contingent and situated. It requires the intervention of differently situated viewers to unsettle the transparency and reveal the contingency of the production. Their positionality not only provides different horizons but can provide the context from which background assumptions, alternative empirical constraints and hierarchical oppositions informing trans- itions in thought become visible. Engagement with differently situated knowers is therefore necessary if our knowledge is to be subjected to critique and we are to reach new types of judgment.

Epistemological progress[1] appears to involve both contexts of relative stability within which research strategies can be formulated and periods of destabilisation (the parallels with Kuhn here are deliberate). (Kuhn 1962) But knowledge can be neither produced nor transformed from nowhere. All this requires attention to standpoints as part of our process of evaluation. Nonetheless the multiplicity of oppositional voices, and the lack of homogeneity within any category, together with the lack of innocence of subjugated voices, make the awarding of epistemic privilege to a specific standpoint problematic.

III

Justificatory Strategies 1. Longino. Longino, along with many traditional epistemologists, sees the need for public and nonarbitrary criteria for the assessment of theories, while also recognising that objectivity cannot be achieved by any simple process of empirical checking or by the application of context

1. The notion of epistemological progress here is not presupposing a telos. It is exhausted by the idea that knowledge is being subject to critique and new judgments made possible.

independent criteria of rationality. She starts from the position of
post-positivist philosophy of science, recognising the under-
determination of theory by data, and the need to supplement criteria
of empirical adequacy with additional epistemological virtues.
However, in place of the list suggested by, e.g., Kuhn, she puts
forward those which have recommended themselves to feminist
scientists. In addition to empirical adequacy she lists novelty,
ontological heterogeneity, complexity or mutuality of interaction,
applicability to human needs, broadly distributed empowerment.
Such a list combines political and ethical values with what appear
to be more conventional epistemic ones, forming a holistic
framework of assessment.

Longino does not claim any transcendent status for her list. Its
legitimacy is anchored in the community from which it is drawn.
Criteria of assessment should be those agreed by a community of
knowledge seekers who share some common objectives. It is only
with reference to such a community that the criteria can play a
justificatory role. This is why for her normative epistemology
remains local. In the case of the criteria she cites she refers back to
the community of feminist scientists engaged in a project of
rendering gender visible and ending hierarchical power relations
between men and women. Other communities may have different
constitutive objectives and evaluate theories differently. There will
therefore be a 'plurality of models and theories, rather than a single
account that captures all facets of reality'. (Longino, this volume p.
34) To go back to our earlier example we might have one theory of
sex differences to suit the needs of a unifying evolutionary biology
and another to address the lived complexities of gender.

Thus far it looks as if Longino has simply contextualised
traditional epistemological procedures. However her overall
picture is more complex than this and involves elements of what
might be called material as well as criterial modes of justification.
The legitimacy of the criteria employed depends on the constitution
of the community from which they are derived. Crucially this
community must be diverse. This attention to the constitution of the
community is a consequence of the kind of considerations outlined
in the previous section. It is needed so that a variety of viewpoints
are represented and assumptions invisible from some standpoints
become visible. Even though all participants need to agree on

objectives, they have to reach agreement on criteria and, as there is nothing mechanical about the application of criteria, they have to discuss their applicability. It is at this point that attention to the situatedness of the knowledge producers enters into the justificatory procedure. But, unlike standpoint theory, no perspective is given epistemic privilege. Such a community must have structural features that 'ensure the effectiveness of the critical discourse taking place within it'. (Longino, this volume p. 28) These include 'the provision of venues for the articulation of criticism... uptake (rather than mere toleration) of criticism... public standards to which discursive interactions are referenced... equality of intellectual authority for all (qualified) members of the community'. Within this framework knowledge can be assessed directly with reference to agreed public criteria and indirectly by reference to the constitution of the community from which the criteria derive. The overall position combines recognition of the need for orderly procedures of rational assessment with attention to the situatedness of knowers. All that appears sacrificed is a single unified view of the world.

There is a tension within Longino's account between the requirement of diversity within the community and the procedural need for consensus in terms both of the defining objectives and the criteria whereby the objectives are to be promoted. The very conditions promoting consensus militate against diversity. The tension however seems to reflect the two aspects of knowledge production referred to above. We need relative stability to develop our research programmes, but we need diversity to provide critique.

The aspect of Longino's picture which I find more problematic is the model of rationality which she appears to endorse, and which leads to her conclusion that normative epistemological projects are necessarily local ones. For Longino epistemological assessment requires the application of agreed public standards. In the absence of such standards there is no possibility of normative engagement across different standpoints. At a seminar where I was discussing Longino's views I was asked why a traditional scientist should be interested in whether his theories matched the criteria that Longino had suggested. There is no reason, the reply seems to be, unless they can identify an objective they both share which would require

such attention. Where it is not possible to reach the appropriate consensus on objectives, procedures and standards there is no basis for rational engagement.

Yet this doesn't seem right. The scientific community which feminists critiqued had reached consensus on epistemological criteria, but the critiques emerged from feminists who did not necessarily share them. Yet feminist criticisms aimed to challenge and discredit the masculine accounts they critiqued, not simply to add a further perspective. This requires the possibility of rational encounters between the positions. A year or so ago I was at a conference of feminist philosophy in Beijing where the patchwork and multiplicity of overlapping similarities and differences made consensus on objectives, criteria or methods of debate not possible to achieve. Anne Seller writes of a similar experience on her trip to a women's university in Southern India. (Seller 1994) However the widening of horizons which the Chinese visit produced and the transformative dialogues Anne Seller so painstakingly articulates in her account of her visit seem to exemplify the possibility of rational engagement in the absence of consensus (I'll return to this below).

Moreover when we look at the complete picture that Longino offers us it also seems to require rational negotiation in the absence of consensual criteria. She requires diversity within her communities. This would not be important if rational assessment was simply the uncontested application of public standards justified by reference to agreed objectives. But, of course, the objectives can be understood in different ways and the relevance of evidence and the applicability of standards is open to a variety of interpretations. This is why diverse voices are required. The 'critical discursive interactions in a context satisfying conditions of effective criticism' (Longino this volume, p. 29) she then recommends, as needed to resolve these differences, seems to be an example of rational engagement of a non procedural kind. It is to safeguard this process that she insists on equality of intellectual authority, and the take up of criticism, and rules out as unacceptable consensus reached by the exercise of political or economic power.

This leaves us with two questions. If such a process of rational engagement is possible within communities is it not also possible across communities? If it is possible across communities, as

Longino suggests with one remark, ('a plurality of theoretical orientations... serve as resources for criticism of each other'), then why is normative epistemology only local epistemology? Secondly given that the democratic epistemological communities to which Longino refers are, she admits, a regulative ideal, a project to be worked towards, is there any way we can rationally proceed in the non egalitarian environments we occupy?

IV

Justificatory strategies 2: Harding. A different approach to epistemological justification, with which Longino contrasts her own position, is found in the recent work of Sandra Harding (Harding 1991, 1993). Whereas in Longino's approach the procedural model of epistemic assessment is foregrounded, in Harding it is the material. Harding starts from a position in which there are dominant and subjugated knowledges and inequalities of power and provides us with a model of progressive epistemological assessment without need for consensual agreement. Harding develops a conception of strong objectivity which incorporates reflexivity concerning the positions of the subject of knowledge into our assessment of the reliability of the knowledge offered. Attention to the context of discovery allows us to question what particular knowledge seekers, given their validating practices, were in a position to know, what evidence was unlikely to come to their attention, and to consider whose interests were being served by the procedures. For Harding the achievement of strong objectivity was interdependent with the privileging of the epistemic position of marginal perspectives. She urges us to start our theorising from marginal lives, in an attempt to address the reality of the intersection between knowledge and power. These lives form a basis for critique, bringing into relief sources of evidence invisible to dominant groups, making explicit background assumptions and exposing the ideological structuring of narratives, They are also a starting point for reconstruction. In the search for explanatory narratives which incorporate perspectives which were previously marginal new theories get produced which have to be subject to critique from their own marginalities, in a progressive project without closure or finitude.

There are a number of issues arising out of this approach, not all of which I have time or space to discuss properly here. There is, for example, the question of the domains over which marginality of certain kinds might be thought to yield epistemic privilege.[2] There is also the issue that the division between margin and centre is not fixed, it is rather a fluid and contested one. (Bat-Ami Bar On 1993) I, however, want to pick up on other features from Harding's account. Harding's system requires a process of interpretation and translation across difference which militates against seeing perspectives as closed and self contained. Moreover this is a moment in her theorising where the process of epistemological assessment does not appear to be satisfactorily accommodated by a brutely materialist move. If marginal perspectives are to provide a challenge to, or discredit, dominant ones, they can do so in two ways. We might require no point of engagement between the two perspectives but chose the marginal critiques because they are marginal. This is what I would term the brutely material move. This seems unsatisfactory for many reasons, among them the fact referred to earlier that subjugated accounts are not innocent. In addition the margins is not a shared space and such a process would yield multiple and contradictory accounts. More plausibly the progress made possible by marginal perspectives requires a recognition of different perspectives as standing in relation to one another, so that the adoption of one impacts on and necessarily modifies the adoption of another.

The possibility of reaching such engagement requires a process of understanding across difference which is simultaneously a process of rational assessment. The recognition of challenge and the process of destabilisation is not simply a causal product of knowledge seekers encountering each other. It is an epistemological encounter that takes place in the space of reasons. It is not, however, a matter of lining up sets of propositions whose relationships of mutual entailment are visible from anywhere, neither is it a process of distancing oneself from either or both

2. Within Marxist epistemology, the proletariat were privileged, in part because, though marginal to the production of theory, they were central to the process whereby capital was increased. In a parallel vein we might expect, for example, privilege from those who, for hundreds of years have tended the forests, but who have had no say in their current management. However, once we recognise the force of deconstructive critique, we have no a priori way of characterising the domains over which particular marginal positions generate a transformative eye.

positions to assess the relationship between them. Consider the simplest case. Some women draw attention to aspects of their experience which they argue display the empirical inadequacy of certain theories. Of course their accounts and the links they see are not uncontested. To see their relevance requires entering sufficiently into a way of life to recognise the appropriateness of the descriptions. We can think of everyday examples here; coming to see patterns of behaviour as harassment instead of 'a bit of fun'. Similar points can be made of deconstructive criticisms of texts which are claimed to legitimate hierarchical power relations, but which need to be heard in certain contexts for this to stand out. A couple of years ago in a lecture on Heidegger the lecturer remarked 'they are even reading Heidegger in China'. I was attending the lecture with two visiting academics from China, visiting our department to work on collaborative projects in Philosophy of Mind and Feminist Theory. Listening to the remark as if through their ears made visible the hierarchical creation of otherness the lecturer appeared to miss. These are examples which require normative but not systematisable negotiation. Harding's account therefore, like Longino's, requires such normative engagement. But, unlike Longino's, this is not restricted within communities which share objectives.

<p style="text-align:center">V</p>

World travelling. Understanding across difference is not an all or nothing affair. It is experimental, often partial, sometimes unexpected, rarely impossible and rarely complete. It is a process which in recent years has been the focus of attention of a number of feminist philosophers. Harding asks us to start our theorising from marginal positions, men to start their theorising from the position of women and white women from the lives of ex colonised women. There are important advantages of such an approach. It prevents us seeing difference as yielding closed and homogeneous perspectives. We must be wary, however, of an assumption of the availability and transparency of perspectives to others which might encourage a picture of a transcendent subject who could somehow chose the most appropriate standpoint to advance their knowledge. Attending to the standpoints of women or post colonial peoples is not just making them an object of study. There has been no shortage

of men theorising about women or white people about black. Naomi Scheman has highlighted the danger of appealing to 'the experiences of people of color to provide the raw material for a more adequate theory, which it would remain the prerogative of people like me to create and authorise'. (Scheman 1993) Recognising the nature of perspectival knowledge requires acknowledging the defeasible privilege of those occupying the situations to which it is tied, in its articulation. It is for this reason that Longino insisted on diversity within the epistemological community.

Equally, however we must not see standpoints as being closed and understanding as being like box hopping. We are required to think through and interpret together standpoints which are discrepant. It is only in this way that a progression of knowledge is possible. It would be of no help to bracket our own situation and enter into another, even if that was a coherent possibility. What is being attempted is what Gadamer called a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 1975, p. 271), whereby our own position is risked, tested and modified, and consequently enlarged. The pitfalls and successes are brilliantly invoked by Anne Seller in the paper previously mentioned reflecting on her visit to Mother Teresa University in Southern India. 'What I was discovering was a way of being with others whose immediate understandings were not my own. This required a full engagement, with all my skills and values in play, helping me to feel my way.' (Seller 1994, p. 245) Susan Strickland, in a paper in the same volume, describes it like this: 'understanding can occur in encounter with others in response to the challenge their different experiences and understandings offer us, if we are prepared to question our own self understandings in the light of theirs and revise them if need be. ...The process I have in mind is generally... a product of conflict and tension, more like a argument where you go away angry and hurt and defensive of your own point of view, but can't forget theirs, so that at the next encounter it has changed in interaction with theirs, and so on.' (Strickland 1994) Margaret Whitford, in her recent inaugural lecture employed the terminology of 'world travelling' derived from the work of Maria Lugones. 'The point I want to take from the idea of world travelling is that translation across worlds is needed because our worlds are not transparent to each other... the

person like Lugones who can mediate across worlds because she inhabits more than one is a figure of our times... she is the one who makes it possible for worlds to communicate with each other rather than remaining self enclosed... world travelling emphasises that there is need for translation, and that there is a difference between world travelling and tourism and a limit to each individuals capacities.' (Whitford 1996, p. 36–7)

VI

Epistemology and Hermeneutics. Does this suggest that we should give up projects of epistemological justification and turn to hermeneutics? To ask that question is to construct a false opposition. The attention to positionality which we find in all these papers is not drawn in contrast to a normative project, but as a part of it. World travelling and the transformations which it involves requires the making of judgments. It is not a process of brute causal transformation, but one in which reason and normativity are central: 'judgment cannot be avoided... being who I was, doing things in the way I knew, meant that I judged, even when I didn't intend to... The only way to avoid judgment is to totally lose identity, and to be completely unresponsive to the world around you.' (Seller 1994, p. 245) John McDowell in his recently published John Locke lectures (McDowell 1994) insists on the mediated nature of experience. For McDowell all experience is conceptualised and such conceptualisation brings it within the domain of reason. We cannot access an experience and then raise a further question concerning what judgments it might be woven into reason-giving relations with. McDowell's account of conceptualisation and rationalisation is overly systematic from the point of view of this paper, echoing a Kantianism the rejection of which formed our initial problematic. But this much seems sound. Entering into the worlds of others is a normative affair.

The difficulty here is to recognise that such encounters are processes of rational engagement, in the absence of agreed criteria by reference to which the outcome can be evaluated. The absence of criteria does not mean the absence of constraints, however. The constraints become something like hermeneutic plausibility, rather than falling under a consensual norm. We are used to such constraints when we come to appreciate works of art or texts which

were previously opaque to us. We may be less comfortable with the
suggestion that they enter into processes of scientific validation.
Donna Haraway's work on Primatology (Haraway 1989) explores
the connections between the theoretical accounts of scientific
primatologists and the images and associations of primates in the
surrounding culture. These latter both direct scientific observation
and structure interpretation. She explores the way in which they
legitimate positions of power of both men and the European Races.
She also signals changes in such narrative structures over time, and
highlights the new stories of female activity and power and
cooperative societies produced by feminist primatologists. When
an old style primatologist encounters these critiques and
reconstructions what is at issue is hermeneutic plausibility. But this
is not something which can be assessed without the kind of
engagement with the new standpoints which the feminist writers,
referred to in the previous section, were at pains to explore.

Where does this leave us in relation to the inquirer wondering if
a scientist working with Kuhn's checklist had any reason to attend
to evaluations based on Longino's? From within an account of
rationality which requires agreed objectives in relation to which
these evaluations can be placed, there seems to be a standoff. The
approach I am advocating would say something like; if the
traditional scientist paid enough attention to the standpoints from
which the alternative evaluations emerged he might come to
appreciate their worth!

VII

Conclusions. Given the abandonment of transcendent criteria of
epistemological reflection and the recognition of the situatedness
and embodied nature of knowledge we seem to have been faced
with a variety of options: (a) a collapse into an unnegotiable
pluralism; (b) a restriction of normative assessment to contexts of
consensual agreement; (c) the allocation of epistemic privilege on
the basis of material and social position. What I have wanted to
suggest by my discussion is that there are other moves possible.
Longino's discussion of local epistemologies accommodates the
moment of relative stability of context within which research
strategies become articulated. If, as I have suggested, epistemology
also involves the destabilising of such projects and an expansion

of horizons then we need normative engagement outside of the epistemological communities she describes. The picture emerging from the work of a number of contemporary feminist philosophers allows for a progressive normative enterprise which relies, not on the possibility of consensual principles, but rather, in the words of Anne Seller, on 'learning how to travel'.[3]

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