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Dilemmas of objectivity

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Objectivity is a virtue in most circles. As we evaluate our students (even those we don't like) we try to be objective. As we deliberate on juries, we try to be objective about the accused and the victim, the prosecutor and the defence. As we tote up the evidence for and against a certain position or theory, we try to separate our personal preferences from the argument, or we try to separate the arguer (and our evaluation of him/her) from the case presented. Sometimes we do well at this, sometimes we do less well at it, but we recognize something valuable in the effort.

Consider the following cases in which objectivity or its failure is at issue:

(1) A professor gives his favourite student an A in a class in which the student has done only mediocre work.
(2) A scientist overlooks evidence that would call into question a theory that she has gone out on a limb to defend, and has invested much time and energy in pursuing.
(3) A scientist skews data in order to bolster support for a favourite political cause.
(4) A particular philosophy journal, which does not use a blind review process, only publishes articles written by men.
(5) A member of a trial jury questions evidence presented in a trial because it conflicts with racist stereotypes.

Some of these invocations of objectivity imply that a separation should exist between the source or origin of the theory or argument and the argument itself. Some imply that our deliberations should be answerable only to 'the evidence' or 'the facts' and not simply to our own preferences and idiosyncrasies. Some imply that our emotions or biases (broadly understood to include emotions) should not interfere with our reasoning.

In its ontological guise, the appeal to objectivity is a way of appealing to the way things are, or to the world as it is independently of our desires about how we want it to be. So, while it might seem reasonable to think of objectivity as an epistemic virtue, the term also carries metaphysical overtones. It would seem to be an uncontroversial epistemic virtue premised on a fairly common-sense realism: there is a way the world is, and the way the world *is* is in principle distinguishable from the way we *wish* it were.

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The connection between objectivity and truth has been an important tool for feminist and other libratory projects, but failures of objectivity are not always or only epistemic failures. The claim that there is still sexism in the world can only be denied by someone who fails to be objective. This is a failure that has two different and separable aspects to it. It is an epistemic failure, in so far as it seems to involve a wilful avoidance of evidence that is all too clear (that women of all races still suffer the greater burden of social ills like poverty, spousal abuse, discriminatory pay practices and discriminatory hiring practices, for example, and enjoy fewer of the social goods like freedom of self-determination, respect, etc. than do men). It is also an instance of a theory or claim that fails to correspond to the facts. That is, this case involves both bad reasoning and falsehood. Would sound reasoning (we'll call this objectivity$_r$) have guaranteed correspondence to reality (call this objectivity$_c$)? Not necessarily, but had our claimant been objective$_r$ she might have been more likely to be objective$_c$. Yet, as we all know, objectivity$_c$ does not require objectivity$_r$—people can get the facts right accidentally (i.e. by guessing) or through faulty reasoning. Objectivity$_c$ is not secured by objectivity$_r$, and objectivity$_r$ is neither necessary nor sufficient for objectivity$_c$.

Compare this situation, however, to the situation described in (4) above. Of course, it is possible that no women write articles that are as good as those written by men, and so the lack of published articles by women is due to the inferior quality of articles written by women, but the fact that the review process is not blind leads one to suspect that the quality of the manuscript is not the only factor being used in the evaluations. We think that it seems unlikely that all the manuscripts submitted by women would be unacceptable by the journal's standards, unless, of course, the author's sex enters into the evaluation either implicitly or explicitly. Let's say that the author's sex is explicitly considered in the evaluation process, that in fact the journal is dedicated to publishing articles written only by men. Would this be a failure of objectivity? Not necessarily; it might be fairly explicit sexism, but not necessarily a failure of objectivity, since the reviewers do not claim to be impartial; in this instance they simply do not want to publish articles by women. Were we to question their motivation for this stance, we might eventually encounter a failure of objectivity—that is, the justification for this practice might ultimately lead us back to a failure of objectivity on the part of the publishers. The beliefs upon which the practice is based might be subject to the same criticisms detailed in the case of the sexism-denier described above. But the simple fact that a journal does not publish articles by women does not lead to the conclusion that the journal is not objective.

Yet, if the reviewers claim not to be using sex as a criterion of evaluation, yet are implicitly doing so, then I think we have something more like a failure of objectivity. If, that is, the reviewers claim that they will publish all and only those articles they judge to be well-argued, for instance, and measure up to certain standards of scholarship (e.g. carefully researched, well-written, etc.) then the implicit operation of sex as a way of evaluating quality seems to be a significant failure of objectivity. But is it the same kind of failure as that described in the case of the sexism-denier? There seems to be a certain 'family resemblance' but no shared characteristics here. Case 4 seems to be a case in which a certain tenet of informal reasoning has been violated: namely that an argument is valid independently of who offers it. While this seems to be a canon of good reasoning generally, it is different from the canon of good reasoning that would have us look at all the evidence available for a certain claim. Objectivity in this sense is something more like impartiality with respect to the source

of an argument or position, and it is a tenet we learn (or teach) in informal logic classes. Yet, the demand that we look for all the evidence for or against a given position is a much more general and unreflective epistemic practice—one in which, in fact, the reliability or credibility of a claimant might enter as an important piece of evidence.[1]

In a similar, yet slightly different case, if one of our colleagues were to give the students he liked grades that failed to reflect the quality of their actual work, we would think that his objectivity as a judge was compromised. Under these circumstances, we would want to say that his personal attachments had interfered with his professional judgment, and while he might not be epistemically culpable, we would probably think that he was morally culpable. Take, for instance, the case in which the professor in question gives inflated grades to work he knows to be inferior. This seems to be a moral failing, rather than an epistemic failing. Does the analysis change if we tweak the story a bit? Consider the more likely scenario in which the professor's evaluation of the student's work is influenced by his personal attachments. Does this constitute a different kind of failure of objectivity? It does seem to be different from the scenario in which the professor knowingly gives his favourite students better grades than they deserve. But in the case in which the professor filters his evaluations through his personal attachments, the areas of moral and epistemic culpability become murkier. We might be tempted to say that in this case the failure is more epistemic than moral, yet it seems that in ascribing epistemic culpability we would need to assume that the professor could reasonably have disentangled his personal preferences from his belief-forming processes. And it's not clear that our beliefs and the processes by which we go about forming them can be so easily separated into the 'true' and the 'subjectively enhanced'.

Consider a variation on this scenario: instead of giving his favourite students better grades than their work warrants, he perversely gives them worse grades. He might do this because, he reasons, he knows these students so well, he likes them so much and he knows that receiving a bad grade on a paper will compel them to work much harder than they would have if they'd gotten a mediocre grade. He might think that they will respond to a lower grade by re-doubling their efforts, and will vastly improve their papers as a result. He might also judge their work more harshly because he knows what they are capable of at their best—that is, his beliefs about the quality of his favourite students' work would, in this case, also be filtered through his personal attachments. The point I wish to make here is that it is not just that the evaluation is filtered through personal attachments that makes it a failure of objectivity, but rather that the consequences of such attachments is a certain kind of evaluation. The case in which the professor gives his favourite students better grades than they seem to merit is morally discriminable from the case in which the professor gives his favourite students worse grades than they deserve, but they do not seem to be epistemically discriminable—in each case the beliefs the professor has are filtered through his personal attachments. If we think that the real epistemic crime is allowing personal preference to influence the ways in which we go about forming beliefs about student work, then these cases are not at all different in epistemic terms. But they do seem to be different morally. I think the ways in which these cases 'part ways' morally but not epistemically shows that it is not simply that one's beliefs are filtered through one's attachments, but that such attachments might lead to a certain kind of favouritism.

Cases of evaluation seem to be different in important ways from cases in which matters of fact are at stake. Evaluations do not seem to involve a simple correspondence to the facts of the matter, and yet we do think that such evaluations admit of more or less objectivity. But the objectivity of evaluations does not seem to depend so much on getting it right, or taking the perspective of the 'ideal' disinterested observer. Rather, judgments about the relative objectivity of evaluations seem to depend on a notion of appropriateness. In this respect, the case of the professor who gives his favourite students better grades than they deserve overlaps with the case of the journal reviewers. The failure of objectivity in these cases is due to the use of inappropriate and 'secret' criteria of evaluation, which enter the process of evaluation as hidden factors.

The scenario in which the professor gives his favourite students worse grades than they deserve to motivate them seems to be a different matter—unlike the case in which he gives his favourite students better grades than they deserve, which is a fairly uncontroversial example of a failure of objectivity, the case in which he gives them worse grades is more puzzling. Should this, too, be characterized as a failure of objectivity? While both cases involve a situation in which the professor's beliefs about the quality of the work is filtered through his personal attachments, the case in which he gives them worse grades than they deserve is less clearly characterized as a failure of objectivity. The difference might be in the fact that we expect emotions and emotional attachments to track in some predictable way: classic failures of objectivity are those in which we treat those we dislike badly (a professor who gives students he dislikes worse grades than they deserve, for instance), and we treat those we like better than we probably ought to. We expect failures of objectivity to follow this kind of predictable pattern.

The other difference might be this: the scenario in which the professor gives students worse grades than they deserve in order to motivate them seems to be a case in which he appears to be using grades not really as evaluations, but as motivators. Evaluations can be more or less objective but strategic choices about how to motivate students seem to be a different matter. Undeniably, such strategic choices are related to 'matters of fact'—it is either true of false that giving students lower grades than they deserve will motivate them to work harder and do better work. But the professor who gets it wrong—who chooses the wrong strategy—does not fail to be objective; he just turns out to be wrong.

However, again, notice that how (or why) one ends up getting it wrong makes a great deal of difference in some cases. In fact, in such cases how one gets to a conclusion is more important than whether or not one's conclusion turns out to be true. A jury member who failed to be convinced by the evidence in a case, but rather insisted on the truth of racist stereotypes (case 5) seems to be both epistemically irresponsible and immoral. Racist stereotypes are not 'private'—they are all too public—but in a case in which one is asked to determine guilt or innocence, we tend to think that such stereotypes should not be taken into account. Not only that, we think that anyone who actually believes them to be appropriate bases for such determinations is immoral. Indeed, even if such a jury member were right in her determinations of guilt or innocence, we would still think her both epistemically irresponsible and immoral.

A scientist who interpreted all the evidence in a way that supported her preferred theory while ignoring disconfirming evidence would clearly be epistemically irresponsible but might or might not be morally irresponsible. Would our evaluation

of her epistemic virtue change if her theory turned out to be right? I think it is altogether possible that, were she to turn out to be right, we would think her less epistemically irresponsible, although we might not revise our judgment about her lack of objectivity. That is, were she to get it right, even though she had ignored disconfirming evidence, we might think that while she still failed to be objective, nevertheless the truth of her conclusion mitigates her epistemic irresponsibility. In such a case, objectivity cannot be simply identified with epistemic virtue, since judgments of epistemic virtue are sometimes made in light of the truth of one's conclusion. We can imagine a story about the scientist who just knows she is right, even though her colleagues disagree with her and the evidence seems to be piling up that her intuition in this case is wrong—and yet she perseveres, driven by her commitment to an idea. If the idea turns out to be true in spite of the countervailing evidence, she is an epistemic hero; if it turns out to be false, she is an epistemic goat. In the case in which she is a hero, objectivity is irrelevant and, in fact, would have been a detriment; in the case in which she is a goat, we attribute her failure to a lack of objectivity or an overweening ambition, or both.

However, note the fine distinctions between this case (case 2) and case 3, where a scientist intentionally skews data to support a favoured political cause. Intentionally skewing data seems to be a more egregious failing than the failure described in case 2. Giving the available evidence the best possible spin or ignoring disconfirming evidence (as the scientist in 2 does) seems to admit of an interpretation in which the epistemic agent is just sloppy, perhaps, but not vicious, whereas the case in which someone knowingly deceives others requires a wilful act of epistemic vice. Case 3 would surely provoke greater censure than would case 2, and it is not clear that we would revise our judgment even if the scientist in case 3 were to turn out to be right—either about the legitimacy of the political cause or the truth of the theory. Therefore, in this case (unlike case 2), truth would not rehabilitate her epistemic status.

While the cases I sketched in thumbnail form at the beginning of the paper seemed to be clear-cut cases of a failure of objectivity, the devil, as they say, is in the details. Most of us do not encounter situations in the pat form in which I presented them in my list; most of our grapplings with objectivity in everyday life are much messier. Decisions about how to be objective, whether and when we have failed to be objective, whether and when others have failed to be objective (and whether it matters if we or they have not been objective) are often fraught. So while it seems as if, on the face of it, everyone knows what it means to be objective and how to go about being so, at the same time we often find it difficult to determine what counts as objectivity and what counts as a failure of objectivity. What seems to be unquestioned is the value of the ideal.

Yet, in spite of both the ubiquitous nature of dilemmas of objectivity in ordinary experience and the centrality of appeals to objectivity in different libratory projects, feminists have nevertheless engaged in an animated critique of that ideal. The ideal of objectivity is variously accused of: codifying a certain kind of masculine psychological approach to the world (Bordo 1987, 1999); not really safeguarding the truth and integrity of scientific inquiry (Harding 1993); of resting on an old and unphilosophical emotion/reason dualism (Lloyd 1994); and of being a mischaracterization of the ways in which good science is practiced (Keller 1983, 1985). As a result, much of the feminist project has taken the form of re-defining or re-envisioning objectivity. Despite their differences, Longino (1990), Harding (1993), Nelson (1990), and Heldke and Hellert (1995) have all worked, more or less, within

the terms set by this problematic. They have variously tried to establish procedures that would enhance objectivity, strengthen it, or actualize the epistemic ideals it embodies but fails to meet.

The feminist theoretical engagement with the concept of objectivity in both epistemology and philosophy of science has also made feminist work a target for criticism. Nussbaum argues that the feminist attempt to critique 'objectivity' is wrong-headed and that it in fact undermines feminist efforts. Nussbaum points out that appeals to objectivity and reason have been essential to feminist challenges to sexist hiring practices, sexist evaluations of female faculty and unreasonable prejudice against women's abilities (Nussbaum 1994, pp. 59–60). Haack sees the recent explosion of work in feminist epistemology as intellectually questionable, arguing that feminist political philosophy seems appropriate, but that 'feminist' epistemology and 'feminist' philosophy of science are examples of a kind of 'imperialist' version of feminism that has wandered far from its rightful place as a movement based on an emphasis on the ways in which women and men are alike, rather than different, and that emphasized the value of equal opportunity (Haack 1998, p. 124). Thus, she claims that criticisms of objectivity that invoke masculine cognitive style and experience, or which appeal to accounts of identity formation that emphasize gender differentiation undermine the egalitarian grounds that seem to be essential to countering claims that women are less responsible epistemic agents than are men.

It is tempting to see the differences between feminist critics of objectivity and feminist defenders of objectivity as differences between the Marxist and post-modern branches of feminism (who critique the ideal) and its liberal adherents (who defend the ideal). This is certainly part of the issue. But the deeper issue is related to the very concept of objectivity itself—or so I shall show in this paper. Section 1 lays out the terrain with respect to objectivity and the feminist engagement with the concept. Here I try to show why 'objectivity' as a concept and an ideal is such a central concern for feminists, and why it is central to the debate about the status of the feminist philosophical project. In section 2, I show that the concept of objectivity is, in fact, a hodgepodge of a variety of different ideals and that some of the attempts to redefine objectivity have obscured that point. Section 3 builds on section 2 to show how this insight into the concept of objectivity can be used to de-fuse particular challenges posed to feminist epistemology and feminist philosophy of science in particular, and feminist philosophy more generally. In this section, I also show how the debate about the value of the ideal of objectivity is not really about the differences between 'liberal' and 'postmodern' feminists, but is in fact a relic of the hodgepodge nature of the concept 'objectivity'.

1. *Feminists and objectivity: can't live with it, can't live without it?*

'Objectivity', understood as a certain kind of metaphysico-epistemic ideal, seems to present special challenges to feminists in epistemology and philosophy of science. As Antony remarks, feminists seem to be caught in the 'paradox of bias': exposing bad bias in some places while arguing, on the other hand, that bias is inevitable and some biases are better than other biases. But without the regulative ideal of an unbiased perspective, Antony (1995) remarks, the grounds for such claims seem to be undercut: which biases are acceptable and which are not? And what kind of authority attaches to feminist perspectives?

More than that, however, 'objectivity' in this sense seems to be tied in a sort of Gordian knot with philosophy. It is often thought to be synonymous with 'reason' or 'rationality' in both moral and scientific discourse. The presumed universality of the 'view from nowhere' is at the heart of philosophical and scientific authority, re-enacted and re-enforced in the ways in which philosophical and scientific articles are written. As a result, critiques of objectivity as an ideal seem to be synonymous with attacks on rationality and philosophical thought itself.

Given this, the ideal of objectivity seems to be on a collision course with the feminist project, if we understand by that a project which takes gender/sex/class/race to be not (or not simply) irrelevant and contingent facts about persons and their epistemic situations, but in some important ways constitutive and inescapable—to be is to be a gendered/raced/classed epistemic agent. From the perspective of those who take objectivity to be synonymous with philosophical thought, the term 'feminist philosophy' seems to be oxymoronic, synonymous with something like 'perspectival aperspectivalism' or the view of *some* people in particular. Part of the feminist claim, of course, is that the ideal of objectivity as it has been lionized in philosophy and science has always been something oxymoronic in this way—it is just that people whose views have passed as the view of no-one-in-particular have not been aware that there might be other views that had been excluded. So, the argument goes, the view of some-people-in-particular has in fact passed as the view of no-one-in-particular.

However, the nuances of the critiques of objectivity presented by feminists mean that this pithy statement of the feminist position is overly simplistic. Compare, for instance, the various ways in which Longino, Bordo, Harding, and Scheman have diagnosed the 'problem of objectivity'. Longino (1990) argues that it is social epistemic engagement, rather than individual epistemic practices, that does and can work to correct for the tendency of all of us to miss the 'pre-understandings' that operate in our theory construction. Bordo (1987, 1999) uses a psychoanalytic model to illuminate the contours of the shift to Cartesian rationalism. Harding (1993) argues that the way to make science more objective is to ensure that social/political positions can be made more transparent in the scientific process. Finally, Scheman (1995) argues that the identities of individual knowers are not contingent facts about knowers, but are, in fact, irreducibly involved in epistemic practices.[2]

The variety has often been lost on critics of feminist philosophy's engagement with the ideal of objectivity, however. Haack argues that, in order for the critique to make sense as a specifically *feminist* critique, it must assume that women have a unique culture, underwritten by specifically female ways of knowing (Haack 1998, p. 125, p. 138). Nussbaum claims that feminist discussions of objectivity do not show that it is, in principle, impossible, only that some instances of supposed objectivity were, in fact, instances of bias. Nussbaum argues that objectivity as a type of impartiality has been useful in helping women to win court cases and equal rights in a variety of instances where they were unfairly victimized by male bias (1994, p. 59). But it is not clear that Haack and Nussbaum have the same things in mind here: Haack seems to equate the feminist discussion of objectivity with individual ways of thinking; Nussbaum seems to have in mind an ideal of equal treatment under the law. This should not be surprising, however, given the nature of the concept being defended from attack. The fact that Haack and Nussbaum defend two different things from attack—that is, they see two different things as being jeopardized by the feminist critique of objectivity—is part and parcel of the fact that 'objectivity the ideal' is not conceptually coherent. I will defend this claim in the next section.

2. *Metaphors of objectivity: crazy-quilting our way to an ideal*

The ideal put forward as the ideal of objectivity is, as Fine has remarked, a hodgepodge (Fine 1998, p. 14). As my examples at the beginning of the paper show, what is called 'objectivity' or what is demanded in the name of objectivity, or what seems to be missing in different failures of objectivity is variable. A recent article in a book entitled *Objectivity and Its Other* remarked that 'objectivity' doesn't have just one oppositional term, but rather it has many (Weber 1995) testifying both to its richness as a concept and its importance as an ideal. Yet, as clear as our commonsense intuitions are with respect to objectivity in the ordinary course of events, the case turns out to be much more complicated when the concept is subjected to closer scrutiny, as my discussion of the cases of failures of objectivity showed.

Just what objectivity *is*, as I have indicated, is hard to say. Megill (1994) cites four different senses of the term, while Fine (1998) outlines a wide variety of conceptions of objectivity—objectivity as a style of thought, scientific method, procedural, the view from nowhere, the view of no one in particular, the fortification against relativism and irrationalism, impersonal product, unbiased product, and as the *really real*—some of which overlap with Megill's categories, some of which do not. Fine arrives at the conclusion that in spite of this apparent diversity, the issue of objectivity is, at bottom, an issue about trust. By contrast, Nozick (1998) equates objectivity with invariance, using 'objective' as a modifier for 'truth' and 'fact' (which, I take it, means that 'objective' is not synonymous with either 'truth' or 'fact'—some truths or facts, by this reckoning, are 'objective truths' or 'objective facts' while other truths or facts are not objective). Invariance, according to Nozick, is what we get when we abstract from the other qualities of objectivity, which are:

(1) accessibility from different angles;
(2) the possibility of intersubjective agreement; and
(3) the independence of a given truth or fact (*p*) from people's 'beliefs, desires, hopes and observations or measurements that *p*' (1998, p. 21).

Nagel has famously coined it 'the view from nowhere' (1986) while Williams has termed it the 'absolute conception' (1985).

Perhaps what is most striking in these discussions (with the exception of Fine's) is the invocation of the ideal of perspective to explain something that is the very antithesis of perspective. Indeed, the heavy use of metaphors in general in these philosophical discussions is what I find intriguing. While philosophers have often distrusted metaphors—suspecting that there is something smuggled in with the laundry, so to speak, or that some vagueness or ambiguity is being left in place where it should be exorcised when metaphors are invoked—the literature on objectivity seems to use metaphors to do conceptual work. More than that, however, philosophers and scientists writing on objectivity seem to abandon themselves to this 'drive to metaphorize' with nary a blink.[3]

That metaphors are essential to thought is not a new claim.[4] But that they are so openly and deliberately employed in philosophical analyses of objectivity is worthy of remark. For not only does the metaphor of perspective implicitly frame the concept of objectivity, it is also explicitly invoked to explain what is meant by the concept. Rather than being simply an heuristic device, the metaphor of perspective is doing double duty. It is both the 'cognitive frame' for the concept and the explanation of the concept. Wittgenstein gives

us some reason to think that the drive to metaphorize is a way of saying that 'my spade is turned'—that is, there is something which is unexplainable, or, at least, unexplainable in the terms set by the problem. It can also mean that we have come to the final justification upon which all other justificatory moves depend. Perhaps the seemingly irresistible urge to explain objectivity in terms of a metaphor that is, in fact, not very explanatory, just means that we have reached conceptual bedrock in this case.

However, I think the issue is more philosophically significant. A certain kind of instability seems endemic to an analysis of the concept. We use the idea of perspective to explicate the ideal of perspectivelessness. As a result, the 'frame' undermines the 'target' of the metaphor. The frame of the metaphor is the notion of perspective or view, while the target is the idea of objectivity. But insofar as the metaphor attempts to capture objectivity as a perspective or view that is *not* a perspective or view, the metaphor works against itself. Metaphors serve explanatory functions insofar as we are led to see something new in the target of the metaphor by its juxtaposition with the frame. The metaphorical definitions of objectivity depend on the frame of 'perspective' or 'view' to explain a 'view from nowhere' and a perspective that is not a perspective at all, and is not even the sum of all perspectives, but is, in fact, aperspectivalness. I think the conceptual instability created by the metaphorical definitions of objectivity are unavoidable, however. This is my sense of the issue: that metaphors are invoked to explain and capture objectivity because there are so many different meanings to the term that they can only be captured if we have recourse to a metaphor that invites itself to be understood in a variety of ways—some of them competing, some of them non-competing. Those meanings of the term that are non-competitors are so because they are, in fact, irrelevant to each other. 'Objectivity' refers to so many different things that it cannot be captured in a purely descriptive and literal form. In addition to the meanings listed by Megill, Fine and Nozick, my survey of the literature on objectivity has turned up the following uses of the term:[5]

(1) objectivity as value neutrality;
(2) objectivity as lack of bias, with bias understood as including:
 (a) personal attachment;
 (b) political aims;
 (c) ideological commitments;
 (d) preferences;
 (e) desires;
 (f) interests;
 (g) emotion.
(3) objectivity as scientific method;
(4) objectivity as rationality;
(5) objectivity as an attitude of 'psychological distance';
(6) objectivity as 'world-directedness';
(7) objectivity as impersonality;
(8) objectivity as impartiality;
(9) objectivity as having to do with facts;
(10) objectivity as having to do with things as they are in themselves; objectivity as universality;
(11) objectivity as disinterestedness;
(12) objectivity as commensurability;
(13) objectivity as intersubjective agreement.

While some of these meanings seem to be related, there are slight differences in shades of meaning, and one use does not necessarily equate with any of the other uses of the term. 'Universality', for instance, is not necessarily equivalent with 'value neutrality' nor is it equivalent with 'having to do with the world of facts' because what is universal might be value-laden, and so on. And one should not be misled into thinking that the uses of the term within a particular domain (e.g. scientific discourse) are at least internally consistent; the fact of the matter is that these meanings all circulate fairly promiscuously over the whole range of domains. The discussion of objectivity in the sciences invokes all 14 of these meanings, and discussions of bias (or lack thereof) in the sciences invoke each of the categories listed under meaning 2. The terms that seem to draw on legal or political ideals of objectivity pop up just as often in scientific discourses as do the epistemic ideals.

But there is a tendency to run all these terms together, ignoring the fact that some of these are epistemic ideals, some are moral ideals, some are related to the political realm, some to the legal realm, some reflect a preference for a certain kind of 'coolness' and judiciousness, some encapsulate ontological commitments, and some are psychological attitudes. The metaphorical nature of 'objectivity' and its reasonably commonsense and everyday applications, disguises the fact that, if we try to figure out what is really meant by 'objectivity' we find a dizzying array of different kinds of virtues, ideals, metaphysical positions and psychological states. The philosophical tendency, though, seems to push for some unifying virtue under which all these different meanings might be grouped, one virtue or ideal that underwrites them all or captures most or all of them.

Philosophers—feminist and non-feminist alike—have rushed to provide 'successor virtues' or have tried to show that, in spite of the diversity of meanings, what all uses of the term 'objectivity' have in common is some other moral-epistemic virtue. The ideal of objectivity has been translated or re-configured variously as epistemic responsibility, reflexivity, dialectical responsiveness, democratic openness, thinking from the lives of the marginalized, intersubjective agreement, and trustworthiness. The job is, in a way, a reclamation. Philosophers who have tackled this issue have tried to identify what it is about objectivity that we think is so valuable, without taking on or assuming those meanings of the term that seem troublesome. It is an attempt to reclaim the term as useful, in spite of some of its drawbacks—one of which would seem to be its amorphous nature.

But what is it about the notion of 'objectivity' that makes it both so 'commonsensical' and yet so hard to explain, theorize or analyse? To paraphrase Oliver Wendell Holmes, we may not be able to define it, but we think we know it (or, rather, we recognize its failure) when we see it. 'Objectivity' seems to be a collection of a variety of different kinds of ideals, captured by varying terms, whose outlines seem to come into focus the more they are absent in a particular inquiry, decision or theory. Furthermore, we seem most able to see what is missing from a particular failure of objectivity only in comparison with other similar cases; when we think of objectivity and its failures, it becomes strikingly easier to talk about what kinds of things we value in action and judgment by comparing different kinds of scenarios. There does not seem to be any particular virtue or cluster of related virtues absent from cases in which we determine that someone has failed to be objective. Rather, we make our judgments on the basis of comparisons, and the collection of things that are identified as lacking in particular failures of objectivity seems to evade the philosophical attempt to reduce them to a

single ideal. Any ideal that can be made to fit is in danger of being true only in virtue of its over-generality.

Ideals that evade formalization, analysis or definition might nonetheless serve different kinds of purposes; indeed, it is often their very flexibility that makes them so useful, since they can readily be adapted to the needs at hand. But feminist and non-feminist attempts to replace objectivity with other kinds of epistemic virtues (e.g. trust, responsibility, etc.) both show the flexibility and protean nature of 'objectivity' while, at the same time, covering it over. In fact, it seems that rather than having 'objectivity' we have 'objectivities', and the attempt to reduce 'objectivity' to some other political, moral, or epistemic virtue disguises that fact.

Does this mean that the attempts to re-define objectivity by philosophers of science and epistemologists (both feminist and non-feminist) have been in vain? The answer here is 'no'. The attempt to re-define objectivity has been important work. Indeed, it has been essential work, and I myself have been working on it both in my research and in the seminars I have taught on the problem. However, I do not think it can continue to serve as an end in itself, nor should it continue in isolation from the attempt to exacerbate and call forth the ways in which the ideal has been cobbled together out of a variety of disciplinary discourses and boundary disputes, political movements, and philosophical worries, leaving us with an ideal that is a variegated motley.[6] The project of re-defining objectivity has had the unfortunate secondary effect of disguising and papering over the fault lines that exist between the variety of different uses of the term. Even within a particular domain (e.g. science), the senses of the term vary considerably. For Nozick, the term means 'invariance' and for Fine it means 'trust'; Scheffler uses it to mean, variously, 'scientific method', 'rationality', 'impersonality' and 'intersubjective agreement'. Clearly, rationality is not synonymous with scientific method, nor does scientific method yield intersubjective agreement in any interesting or reliable way; there might be said to be more intersubjective agreement about astrology or psychic healing than there is about, for example, any particular theory of high-density physics. Had it not been for various attempts to re-define 'objectivity', the hodgepodge would not have been revealed. Nevertheless, the fact that hope springs eternal that the successor virtue for 'objectivity' will be found means that such attempts have also served to avert our eyes from the hodgepodge nature of the ideal.

The gaping void that opens up once we put the concept of 'objectivity' to a rigorous analytical test is philosophically instructive as well as useful for feminist purposes. Rather than trying to eliminate or overlook the tensions created by the various meanings of the term, we need to emphasize them, both as a matter of philosophical correction and as a point of feminist theoretical engagement. We need to point out the ways in which philosophers have had a sort of blind spot where the concept of 'objectivity' is concerned which has led to a lack of analytical rigour. But we can also use the tensions and inconsistencies to address different challenges to feminist epistemology and philosophy of science more generally.

3. *'Is feminist philosophy really philosophy?' and other common challenges to feminist work in epistemology and philosophy of science*

The kinds of questions that feminists are asked when we propose different kinds of 'procedural' objectivities are often questions about the metaphysical senses of objectivity. So, for instance, when feminists propose more democratic and open

processes of scientific inquiry as a way of making science more objective, we are asked, 'But will that make for better science?'[7] The presumed connection between procedural objectivity (understood as scientific method) and metaphysical objectivity (understood as 'the way the world is') is the unanalysed and unannounced premise without which the question cannot operate. By focusing on the different kinds of 'objectivities', we can show better the ways in which such questions are vague and ambiguous. As Fine notes, the connection between procedural objectivity and metaphysical objectivity is 'tenuous at best' (1998, p. 16). As a result, such questions are loaded, playing upon the ambiguity between the procedural and the ontological senses of the term 'objectivity' to criticize feminist philosophical claims about science and epistemology.

Taking the concept of objectivity apart to expose the ways in which it encompasses a vast and disparate collection of epistemic goods, moral virtues, political goods, psychological attitudes, and ontological commitments has a further benefit, too. It allows feminists to respond to Antony's 'paradox of bias' and to show the ways in which charges of unfairness and bias against women are not inconsistent with claims that perspective is unavoidable. For we can say that—in bringing charges of unfairness when we say that reviewers or search committees are biased against feminist work—we are invoking the 'common' everyday notion of objectivity as fairness. When we make a point about the inescapability of perspective, we are calling attention to the fact that the metaphorical/conceptual understanding of objectivity depends upon the very thing it is trying to eliminate (i.e. perspective). To call both of these 'biases' is to miss the important differences between 'bias' as 'unfair partiality' and 'bias' as 'perspective'. Thus, it seems to me that we can make appeals to objectivity as fairness in our critiques of unfair practices, while, at the same time, invoking the inescapability of perspective. Thus, tensions between feminist approaches to the issue of objectivity are not really about the feminist epistemological project, as Antony seems to imply, nor are they about a schism between 'liberal' and 'postmodernist' feminisms, as Nussbaum and Haack seem to imply. The tensions arise because of the conflicted and protean nature of objectivity as an ideal.

However, suppose we interpret the 'paradox of bias' as a paradox about perspective—that is, as the claim that perspective is inescapable, and that there are better and worse 'perspectives'. This, however, does not seem to be a paradox at all, but rather a fairly trivial truth. In fact, philosophy invokes the idea of the superiority of some perspectives over others all the time, even within the constraints of the traditional understanding of objectivity as the 'view from nowhere'—the perspective of natural science is sometimes taken to be such a perspective, as is the perspective of the ideal observer. Feminists can simply respond that a perspective informed by feminist analysis is superior to perspectives not so informed.

Similarly, the feminist critique of objectivity as a certain kind of psychological attitude of distance does not entail anything in particular about the relative merits of objectivity as fairness. It is only if we think that taking up a certain sort of psychological attitude is necessary for any of the other kinds of objectivities that we will mistake the feminist critique of such an attitude and its value for an attack on all the different kinds of virtues—epistemic, political, moral—that sit uneasily grouped together as 'objectivity'.[8]

Feminists can respond similarly to Haack's charge that the feminist critique of objectivity must be premised on a peculiarly 'female' culture or way of knowing. Emphasizing the variety of goods and virtues that march under the banner of 'objectivity' shows that we need not assume that a critique of any particular ideal of objectivity commits us to the assumption of 'women's ways of knowing'. Haack

presupposes that objectivity is about individual reasoning, so that women would have to 'think differently' than do men in some non-trivial way that was also inherently female. But the feminist discussions that Haack singles out for criticism—particularly Harding's work—focus not on objectivity as an individual's way of thinking or psychological attitude, but on the idea of procedural objectivity. Thus, feminists need not make politically and scientifically questionable claims about individual reasoning that presume a biologically hard-wired 'female way of knowing' and that give rise to 'women's culture'. They need only emphasize the ways in which experience is (or fails to be) integrated into theory in procedural objectivity and the ways in which scientific method encourages or fails to encourage reflection on pre-theoretic commitments and socially and historically specific patterns of experience.[9]

This paper began with different 'dilemmas of objectivity'—that is, different puzzles about what's missing when objectivity is said to be missing from a particular action or judgment. While the thumbnail sketches seem clear-cut enough as failures of objectivity, establishing what exactly is missing when we are presented with a failure of objectivity poses its own problems, especially when we try to do so by comparing different, but similar, cases. And we all face dilemmas of objectivity on a regular basis—sorting out what is required of us if we are to be 'objective' in a given case is the stuff of agonized discussions, reflection and consultation. That the process is often arduous, and that the right approach is often not clear is partly due to the variety of ideals we juggle in our reflection on our moral, political and epistemic practices. My emphasis on the variegated motley that makes up the ideal of 'objectivity' is intended as a philosophical and feminist clarification, which I think is required to counterbalance the conventional wisdom in philosophical and feminist circles that we can isolate some one or two different virtues or meanings for the term that cover all or most of our uses of the term. The attempts to define 'objectivity' in terms of other epistemic or moral virtues has had, as I have said, the unfortunate secondary effect of masking the instability of the concept as well as disguising the philosophical significance of the fact that a vast and disparate array of virtues, goods and procedures are collected under the umbrella of the concept. That they all belong under the umbrella of the term 'objectivity' seems to have led us on a rather long route of identifying the common ground, or cluster of commonalities, that would tie them all together. Not only is this project not promising, but also I think the important philosophical and feminist work at this point is the work of taking apart the concept of objectivity, showing not what holds it together, but how great the fault lines between its different senses might be. To this end, I have tried to show how criticisms of feminist epistemology and philosophy of science can be answered by emphasizing the hodgepodge nature of the concept rather than its coherence.

Is my emphasis on taking the concept of 'objectivity' apart an attack on the concept? The answer is complicated. If 'objectivity' is taken to be a single unified concept and its philosophical value depends on it being coherent, then my claims constitute an attack. On the other hand, we can also understand this as philosophical progress. Feminist and non-feminist analyses have shown the ideal of objectivity to be a large and unwieldy collection of possibly competing, possibly non-competing ideals and metaphysical presuppositions at work in philosophical and scientific discourse, and this seems to me to constitute a clarification. As a clarification, the feminist discussion of objectivity also seems to me to exemplify one of the highest callings of philosophical discourse.

Notes

1. It is important to note, however, that many feminists and non-feminists alike have argued that the requirement that our evaluation of the arguer be separated from our evaluation of the argument presupposes a particular theory about identity and its relationship to knowledge, as well as a particular theory of what counts as knowledge. Further, it seems that in some contexts epistemic efficiency requires that we use the ethos of a particular arguer as a factor in evaluating his/her claims. Interesting discussions of this issue arise in the literature on testimony as well as in social studies of science. See, for instance, Code (1995), Shapin (1994) and Janack and Adams (1999).
2. I realize that these thumbnail sketches do not do justice to the intricacies of the positions glossed here. They are meant to be illustrations only, and not analyses, of the variety of positions held by feminists working on this problem.
3. Again, Fine is an exception here. He notices quite clearly the ways in which metaphor works in these discussions.
4. See, for instance, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999), Haack (1998, pp. 69–89) and Davidson (1984) for a small but diverse collection of discussions of metaphor.
5. In addition to the works mentioned earlier, the list comes from a survey of the following: Moser (1993), Rescher (1997), Sacks (2000), Scheffler (1982), Rorty (1991), Bordo (1987, 1999), Keller (1983, 1985), Longino (1990), Harding (1993), Nussbaum (1994) and Haack (1998). There is no one-to-one correspondence between the senses listed and the works surveyed; often two or three of the different senses of ‘objectivity’ were used in the same work. So, for instance, Scheffler shifts his meanings of the term among senses 3, 4, 7 and 14, sometimes within the same paragraph.
6. See, for instance, Daston (1992) and Shapin (1994).
7. I owe this example to Elizabeth Potter, whose reflection on such conversations, along with that of Linda Alcoff and Trish Glazebrook, helped me sort out these issues.
8. An instructive case here is that of Nicholas Rescher, who seems to both misunderstand the feminist critiques of objectivity presented by Susan Bordo and Evelyn Fox Keller, and then run together objectivity as lack of emotional attachment with objectivity as ‘the way the world is’ (see Rescher 1997).
9. Haack insists that the only sense that can be made of the claims presented as feminist epistemological claims is that they are either (a) true but not feminist or (b) feminist but false. For a detailed discussion of this argument and why it fails, see Janack and LaRocque (2001). Her argument is especially puzzling, given her claim to be the kind of feminist who emphasizes the similarities between men and women, since this would seem to imply that the convergence between feminist and non-feminist theories of ‘science as social’, as Haack terms them, should be a welcome support for her understanding of feminism as concerned with the erasure of gender as a significant category. Yet, the conclusion that she draws is that this convergence means that such theories are not ‘feminist’. If ‘feminist’ does not mean ‘coming from women’ or ‘based on women’s experience’ but rather means that men and women are essentially the same, then it seems that Haack should conclude that the convergence supports her point that gender is irrelevant, and she should embrace feminist theories of ‘science as social’. What she can mean by saying that such theories are true but not feminist is unclear.

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