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Contents

1. [NOTES](#)

Full Text

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I

Many questions may be asked about the efforts to construct feminist epistemologies. One such question is whether epistemologies really imply values and practices in any significant way. Another is whether the values and practices most epistemologies are taken to be immersed in are indeed masculine (and whether there really are such things as "masculine values" at all). Yet another is what precisely are the feminist values and practices that feminist epistemologies should involve. A fourth is whether women and men really do think so differently from each other. And a fifth possible question is whether feminist epistemologies should be separatist, i.e., such that only women can use and construct them, or whether they should be universal human epistemologies. Although all these questions merit serious discussion, I shall here deal only with the last, assuming, at least for the sake of argument, that the first, second and fourth questions receive positive answers, and that there is a satisfying answer for the third.

Writers who oppose the idea of a feminist epistemology a fortiori also reject that of a separatist feminist epistemology. Likewise, those who accept the notion of a feminist epistemology frequently tend, even if not always explicitly, to support cognitive separatism. It is asserted or clearly implied in writers such as Irigaray,[1] Dinnerstein,[2] Covina,[3] Hartsock,[4] Cixous,[5] MacMillan,[6] and Wilshire,[7] but can also be sensed in many others. Even some of the non-separatist feminist epistemologists, such as Harding,[8] Jaggar,[9] Code,[10] Ruddick,[11] Chodorow,[12] and Fox Keller,[13] have reservations about their non-separatism. Harding, for example, says that ". . . it needs to be stressed that it is women who should be expected to be able to reveal for the first time what women's experiences are" (emphasis in text).[14] A few pages later, she says that

. . . women's and men's experiences are not equally reliable guides to the production of complete and undistorted social research. Feminist inquirers are never saying that sexist and antisexist claims are equally plausible....[15]

from which it can be understood that men's experiences are sexist. Note also that, like so many others, she uses the universal "men" and "women" rather than "most women," "some men," or "a higher percentage of men." [16] Moreover, as she envisages it, one of the functions of men in a feminist epistemology is to help describe

. . . areas of masculine behaviour and thought to which male researchers have easier and perhaps better access than do women researchers: primarily male settings and ones from which women are systematically excluded, such as board rooms, military settings, or locker rooms.... I am thinking here of the "phallic critique" men could provide of friendships between men, or of relationships between fathers and sons, or between male lovers. How do these feel lacking to their participants? How do they contrast with the characteristics of friendships between women, and so forth?[17]

Similarly, Jaggar says that

Since women cannot transform reality alone, they must also find ways to work politically with men without being dominated by them and men may even be able to contribute to women's theoretical work. To do so, however, men will have to learn women's "text," a process that will require at least as much humility and commitment as that needed by white/Anglo women to understand the experience of women of color. Even when men contribute to the construction of a systematic alternative to the dominant world view, it is still accurate to describe this alternative as a representation of reality from the standpoint of women.[18]

Men can take part in the construction and use of a feminist epistemology, then, not because of the nature of the epistemology, but because of an almost external necessity ("women cannot transform reality alone"). Moreover, the epistemology would never be theirs as it is women's, and they should stay humble. For Jaggar, too, the feminist epistemology is not human and universal in the full sense of the words. Like Harding's and some other non-separatist writers' vision of men's place in feminist epistemologies, Jaggar's view can be adequately described by substituting "men" for "women" in Code's characterization of women's place in non-feminist epistemologies:

Women who seek inclusion [within the non-feminist epistemology] will at best achieve the status of aliens, immigrants, whose presence is tolerated not on their own terms, but on the natives' terms.[19]

Another characteristic of works which support the idea of feminist epistemologies is that, by and large, they avoid a thematic, detailed consideration of the separatism question. There are many focused and elaborate discussions of how epistemologies have been sexist; of how feminist epistemologies accord with a better future, free from many present faults; and of the differences between men's and women's ways of seeing the world. But thematic, detailed discussions of the question of epistemological separatism are brief and few.[20] It is true, some writers--such as

O'Brien, Irigaray, Cixous, Dinnerstein, MacMillan, Ruddick and Chodorow--discuss related issues in such a way that their views on the matter are obvious. But these are exceptions to the rule. In most works the authors' views on this matter can be extrapolated only with difficulty and uncertainty, or not at all. Of course, it may be claimed that discussing men and their place in the feminist epistemology is not one of the priorities of the feminist movement. However, the question is relevant for discussions on the nature of feminist epistemologies, on the nature of the differences between women and men, and on the hoped-for future relations between men and women. Moreover, even if the separatism question is less important than many others, its almost complete avoidance is disproportionate. This avoidance of the question may reflect some unease felt on the matter by feminist epistemologists.

This article aims to contribute to the development of more elaborate discussions of the question of feminist epistemological separatism. I take the arguments presented in it to apply (with the necessary changes) also to the question of epistemological separatism in general, and thus to be relevant also for Black epistemological separatism, Hispanic epistemological separatism, etc. I shall argue here for a strong non-separatist position, stronger than that of all non-separatist feminist epistemologists I am aware of. I claim that feminist epistemologies do not have to be women's epistemologies. Feminist epistemologies should be seen as completely human and universal, and there are no good reasons for accepting even weak forms of epistemological discrimination.

II

The project of constructing feminist epistemologies, like that of constructing pragmatist, postmodern or Cartesian epistemologies, presupposes that prevalent epistemologies could be improved on. I agree with this presupposition. The project of constructing separatist feminist epistemologies, however, presupposes that these improved epistemologies can be constructed and used only by women. It is this view that I shall question.

As feminist, the new suggested epistemologies will suit women better than present epistemologies do. Women will be more successful in using them than they would in using present ones; they will empower women to a greater extent than other prevalent epistemologies; women will feel less alienated in using them than they would in using other epistemologies; etc. However, in order to argue for separatist feminist epistemologies it should be shown that they will not do so for men as well. If men, too, will be more successful, more empowered and feel less alienated in using them, then the feminist epistemologies will be merely better human feminist epistemologies, and not separatist ones, just as there could be better human pragmatist epistemologies. Calling for separatist feminist epistemologies, then, rests on the assumption that they will not suit men. Let us now examine the arguments for and against this view.

III

The view that feminist epistemologies will not suit men may rest on the belief that the differences between women's and men's ways of thinking are natural. They can be linked to differences in the size or structure of women's and men's brains, to hormones, or--most popularly--to women's and men's sex organs and to the fact that women can have babies and men

cannot. Thus Mary O'Brien, for example, asserts that "[M]ale reproduction consciousness is a consciousness of discontinuity . . . the alienation of his seed separates him from natural genetic constituency," but female reproduction makes "feminist philosophy . . . a philosophy of birth and regeneration." [21] It should be noted, however, that seeing mental differences between men and women as natural is prevalent both among some feminists and some male-chauvinists. They differ in that feminists tend to see only positive qualities as natural to women, while male-chauvinists tend to associate negative characteristics with them. As we shall see below, any method used by one of the sides to prove its view on the matter could be used with equal success by the other side to prove the opposite.

However, it is--to say the least--very hard to verify that differences between women and men are due to nature rather than acculturation. Distinguishing the differences between women and men that are influenced by environment from those that are not is next to impossible. One reason for this is that dissimilarities between girls' and boys' acculturation appear at a very early age, and only increase as they grow up.

But another argument may be used (again, both by feminists and male-chauvinists): it may be claimed that the fact that men's and women's behaviours and self-perceptions differ not only today but consistently through history and across cultures, proves that these differences are inherent, and not merely a matter of convention. The constancy in women's and men's behaviours and self-perceptions, it may be argued, cannot be attributed to mere coincidence or to the rearing patterns of a specific society. Thus feminists who want to argue that women's intellect is different by nature from men's may claim that in almost all societies it is men who have hunted, fought, passed laws, made distinctions, subjugated women and tried to dominate the environment. Women, on the other hand, have had a more caring, undominating and co-operative relation to their human and physical environment. These differences can be seen as not only emotional but also intellectual. Thus, women's intellectual tendencies are more holistic, less dichotomic and less universalistic. Male-chauvinists, using a similar sort of argument, claim that the recurrent domination of women by men shows that women's subjugation is natural. Again, then, both feminists and male-chauvinists face the same difficulty: they have to explain why they use this argument to prove only what they want it to prove. Their arguments are equally strong, or equally weak.

But the main problem with this argument is in the presupposition that constancy or prevalence attest naturalness. There is no need to accept this presupposition and indeed, in many cases, we do not. Tyranny, theism, slavery and social control have also been extremely prevalent throughout history (except for slavery, they still are). Nevertheless, few would take this as a proof that tyranny is more natural than democracy, theism than atheism, slavery than non-slavery, and social control than autonomy. Alternative explanations may be suggested for the persistence of these phenomena. Some may hold that they remained constant for many generations since for a long time humanity was simply morally backward in many respects and recently there has been an improvement in some of them. Others may point out recurrent economic and technological conditions that may have influenced custom, law, and religion, and which have changed only recently. Still others may seek different explanations, or even claim that they have no satisfying explanation, but that does not commit them to accept another unsatisfying proposition.

But even if it were shown that women's intellects are naturally different from men's, this would be an insufficient basis for arguing that women and men should have different epistemologies. Naturalness does not entail universality. Men are naturally taller than women. But they are so only on average; not all men are taller than all women. There may be more men than women fit for jobs requiring tall people, but this would not make these occupations into men's occupations in any essential way; they would be tall people's occupations. Similarly, even if it were shown that many women have a natural tendency to think in a certain way and many men in another, the epistemologies constructed for this way of thinking would be for people who think in it, not for women. It would have to be shown that all or almost all women think in a certain way while all or almost all men think in another to make the call for separatist epistemologies plausible.

Moreover, it is not clear that naturalness should always be followed. Even if it were shown that a certain epistemology is natural to one of the genders but not to the other, it could still be claimed that if the epistemology is better than others, it should be adopted by everybody, even those to whom it does not come naturally. For example, some of us may agree that being unfaithful to one's spouse is more natural than being faithful, but still advocate faithfulness because we see it as mandatory for meaningful relationship. Likewise, resolving conflicts by physical violence may be seen as more natural than settling them by negotiation, but the latter alternative may still be preferred. Or we may think that keeping promises and observing agreements is not natural, but still advisable. Following nature is not the only consideration we take into account when deciding between alternatives, nor is it necessarily an overriding one.

If the view that feminist epistemologies will not suit men cannot rely on nature, a fortiori it cannot rely on acculturation. Cultural conditions influence the population in various ways and to different degrees, thus not including all women in a certain way and all men in another, but only certain percentages of women and men. Hence, even if more women than men would be able, or even wish, to construct or use feminist epistemologies, it would not be the case that only women could construct and use them. There might be a small or large number of men influenced by the same social and cultural conditions that influence women (or by others that induce the same effects) and thus have the "right" mentality for feminist epistemologies. For example, assume that because of social and cultural factors, a higher percentage of women have developed a mentality typified by compassion, empathy, and holism. Thus, a higher percentage of women will want and be able to construct and use epistemologies typified by these characteristics. But the social conditions that have presumably developed this mentality among women may also affect a certain percentage of men. Thus they, too, will be able to construct and use the new epistemologies. Feminist epistemologies will not be essentially women's epistemologies, but compassionate, empathetic, and holistic people's epistemologies.

It may be claimed that there are some social conditions that do not affect men; for example, women are oppressed in ways men have never experienced. Hence, although men may be able to take part in feminist epistemologies in the distant future, when all conditions change, today there are in principle no men-- not even a few--who could construct or use feminist epistemologies. However, some men--even if fewer in number than women--have also suffered oppression. Men too have been degraded, objectified, discriminated against, humiliated, sexually harassed and raped. It may be claimed that very few men have been oppressed in all these ways, but neither have all women. There is a wide variety of possible combinations and degrees of oppression, and

whatever the "sufficient" combination of kinds and degrees for producing the "right" mentality would be, we could still find some men who suffered from it, and some women who did not. Of course, the higher the "threshold" of oppression is, the smaller will be the number of men who would "qualify" for taking part in feminist epistemologies, but so also the number of women.

It may be suggested that women are oppressed differently from men, since they are oppressed as women, who have a different consciousness than men. But this would be circular. Oppression is supposed to explain the differences between women's and men's consciousness, not to be explained by them. Moreover, even if there were specific social conditions that influence all women and only them, and are radically different from the social conditions that influence men, it would still be possible that the same effects could be induced also by other, different conditions, which influence men too. For example, assume that a certain kind of oppression which affects all women but not men induced holistic-oriented mentalities. It is still possible that the holistic-oriented mentality is also induced by another factor (e.g., late weaning) to which men too are exposed, thus enabling them to take part in feminist epistemologies. Indeed, we should hope that there are factors apart from those at work today which can induce the "right" kind of mind. If they do not exist, we would remain, at least according to some accounts, with no feminist epistemology in the future. For example, according to Jaggar and Hartsock, women's mentality is largely determined by their oppression.[22] But if this is the 'only factor that induces the "right" mentality, it follows that in the hoped-for future, when the repression of women will disappear, feminist epistemology will be abandoned since the mentality from which it arises will dissolve.[23]

Moreover, just as we do not always want to follow what we take to be natural, so do we not always want to follow what has become part of our psychological constitution through acculturation. For example, we may agree that submissiveness or aggressiveness have become part of our psychological makeup, but still want to change it, instead of enhancing it.

Furthermore, it seems to me that we have a moral commitment to do the best we can to bring about a state in which there is no place for separatist epistemologies. Assume, again, that we take compassion, empathy, and holism to be positive attributes. We would want to change culture, social conditions, and education so that these values will progressively become more prevalent among all people, including men. In other words, we have a reason to work for a future in which we shall not call these epistemologies "women's epistemologies" but "compassionate-empathetic-holistic epistemologies." There may be different ways of bringing about a situation where there is no place for separatist epistemologies, but since epistemologies not only reflect mental characteristics, but also change them, one way of doing so would be to encourage men to take part in developing and using feminist epistemologies even now.

Almost similar responses can be made to efforts to base feminist epistemological separatism on the view that epistemologies express and serve the interests of different groups. According to this view, women and men have conflicting interests, and hence they should have different epistemologies. However, it is not clear that women and men indeed have different interests. Many of their concerns, such as creating, loving, or living in harmony are the same. As for the others, again there may be men, even now, who have the same interests as women. The argument that there are none will again have to rely on beliefs about men's nature, the tenability of which

was already discussed above, or be based on views concerning men's nurture, also already discussed. Similar things can be said against the effort to base separatism on differences in men's and women's experiences. This attempt, too, fares no better than the others.

IV

Another argument in favour of epistemological separatism, expressed more frequently in an oral form, is that separatism should be endorsed because women need what may be called an epistemic room of their own. But this argument, too, does not seem to hold. According to it, a whole group of people should refrain or be forbidden from inspecting, investigating, and discussing a certain topic so that another group of people should not feel insecurity or discomfort. It seems to me that silencing any group of people about any subject for whatever reason is very dangerous. Moreover, I find the argument degrading for feminists and women. It portrays them as insecure or intellectually inferior, as if they were children or novices who need to be allowed to carry out some activities alone. Reading works in feminist epistemology (or sociology, or psychology, etc.) does not leave one with a feeling that their authors suffer from a feeling of insecurity or intellectual inferiority, or that they need some kind of benevolent, protective silence from the supposedly wiser men and non-feminists. Feminist scholarship is good and professional enough to stand in open discussion and debate with anyone. Asking men or non-feminists to exercise some kind of paternalistic, "mature" restraint upon hearing or reading of feminist views and practices is insulting, even when, as a residue from previous generations, it comes from feminists themselves.

NOTES

[*] I have greatly benefitted from the criticisms and comments of Mira Reich, Tova Hartman-Halbertal, Erella Shadmi, Eitan Felner, Zev Rosenhek, and Mor Arazy. Of course, the responsibility for the opinions and conclusions expressed here rests with me.

[1.] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[2.] Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

[3.] Gina Covina, "Rosy Rightbrain's Exorcism/Invocation," in Gina Covina and Laurel Galana (eds.), *The Lesbian Reader* (Oakland, CA: Amazon Press, 1975).

[4.] Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism" in Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka (eds.), *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), pp. 283-310. However, the last two pages of Hartsock's paper may give a somewhat different impression.

[5.] Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. K. Cohen and P. Cohen, in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms* (New York: Schocken, 1981).

- [6.] Carol MacMillan, *Women, Reason and Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).
- [7.] Donna Wilshire, "The Uses of Myth, Image, and the Female Body in Re-Visioning Knowledge," in Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, *Gender/Body/Knowledge* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 92-114.
- [8.] Sandra Harding (ed.) *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987). See also *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).
- [9.] Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983).
- [10.] Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
- [11.] Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).
- [12.] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).
- [13.] Evelyn Fox Keller, "Feminism and Science," in Sandra Harding and Jean F. O'Barr (eds.), *Sex and Scientific Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 233-46.
- [14.] Harding, *Feminism and Methodology*, p. 7. It should be stressed, however, that Harding does not use "epistemology" in precisely the sense it is used here.
- [15.] Harding, p. 10.
- [16.] For an exception to this rather general practice see Merrill Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka who, in their "How Can Language Be Sexist?" in Harding and Hintikka, pp. 139-48, use phrases such as "women are generally more sensitive to, and likely to assign more importance to, relational characteristics (e.g., interdependencies) than males" (p. 146).
- [17.] Harding, *Feminism and Methodology*, pp. 11 - 12.
- [18.] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics*, p. 387.
- [19.] Code, *What Can She Know?*, p. 120.
- [20.] For some such discussions see Harding's *Feminism and Methodology* p. 10, where the question is described as "vexing"; Jaggar's *Feminist Politics* p. 387; Elzbieta Pakszys, "Feminism, Sciences, Epistemology: Three Issues," *Communication and Cognition* 21 (1988), 141-43; and Code's exceptionally elaborate discussion in *What Can She Know?*

[21.] Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 53, 200. Quoted in Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* (New York: Continuum, 1992), p. 225, n. 54.

[22.] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics*; Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint," in Harding and Hintikka.

[23.] This is problematic not only for Jaggar's theory, but also for all those who see the development of feminist epistemologies as a good phenomenon, and at the same time call for changing the conditions that give rise to them. Take as another example Chodorow's theory, according to which differences between women's and men's mentalities are due to the fact that boys, unlike girls, have to define themselves as of a different gender than their mothers--their principal nurturers--thus developing a more alienated and dichotomic mentality. Once men and women parent their children equally, these differences can be expected to disappear. But it follows that the girls who grow up in equal-parenting families will be unfit to construct and use feminist epistemology in comparison with contemporary girls parented by their mothers only, since girls in equal-parenting families will grow up with a feeling of similarity with one of their parents but difference from the other. Thus we again have the curious situation that, when the desirable future is achieved, feminist epistemology as it is constructed today will not suit most people.

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