

Contemporary Philosophies and Theories in Education 2

Claudia W. Ruitenberg
D.C. Phillips *Editors*

Education, Culture and Epistemological Diversity

Mapping a Disputed Terrain

 Springer

Education, Culture and Epistemological Diversity

CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHIES AND THEORIES IN EDUCATION

Volume 2

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Claudia W. Ruitenberg • D.C. Phillips
Editors

Education, Culture and Epistemological Diversity

Mapping a Disputed Terrain

With the Participation of
Lorraine Code
Jon Levisohn
Harvey Siegel
Lynda Stone

 Springer

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Each type of culture... has its own mentality; its own system of truth and knowledge; its own philosophy and Weltanschauung; its own type of religion and standards of "holiness"; its own system of right and wrong; its own forms of art and literature; its own mores, laws, code of conduct; its own predominant forms of social relationships...

(Pitirim Sorokin, as cited in
Sills & Merton, 2000, p. 220)

That ripe and unripe raspberries differ in color, that trash is collected on Tuesdays, that Venice is sinking, that water is H₂O—these beliefs are tenable because they belong to tenable cognitive systems in reflective equilibrium. The beliefs in question are mine, but the commitments to sustain them need not be. The cognitive systems that underwrite my commitments are community property. Like a medieval tapestry, they are the work of many hands. It follows that the locus of tenability is the community, not the individual. Understanding and knowledge are collective accomplishments.... That members of the community harbor a commitment makes that commitment initially tenable. But initial tenability is not full-fledged tenability. Neither is popularity.... Tenability is not a function of the number of people who share a commitment or the strength of their confidence in it; tenability depends entirely on the commitment's place in a maximally tenable system in reflective equilibrium. Many widely shared commitments lack such a place.

(Catherine Elgin, 1996, pp. 116–118)

Foreword

This book began in a taxi in Kyoto. Denis and I both attended the biennial conference of the International Network of Philosophers of Education in Kyoto, Japan, in August 2008, and like several other attendees, we stayed in a Japanese guesthouse or *ryokan* a short taxi ride from campus. After one of the conference receptions, we shared a taxi back to the *ryokan*, and I mentioned to Denis that I had written something I thought “he might actually be interested in.”

Although we had met at philosophy of education conferences a few times, we had never had a conversation, and I knew Denis mostly by reputation. My comment was somewhat tongue-in-cheek as, based on his reputation, I assumed he would not ordinarily be interested in the work of a philosopher of education who had focused mostly on continental philosophy.

Denis was unable to attend the session in which I presented the work I had referred to, but asked for a copy of the paper, which he read promptly upon returning to California. He wrote me an email saying he had enjoyed the paper, and commented on the many points of connection between my paper and a paper he had co-authored with Jon Levisohn but which had remained, thus far, unpublished. He added that he wondered if we should pursue joint publication of these two pieces, partially because, he said, returning the jest, it would be quite amusing to see both our names on the spine of the same book. The initial concerns that we shared are summarized in the two passages we used as our frontispiece – do different cultures or cultural groups have their own epistemologies (and what precisely does such a claim mean), and do such systems (if they exist) produce commitments that are tenable? Or, perhaps, has the term “epistemology” acquired a new and important meaning in the literature on multiculturalism?

I do not intend to provide a full account of the emails, telephone conversations, and meetings that have been involved in producing this book, but wanted to sketch its inception because it illustrates that scholars with different perspectives on philosophy (never mind different levels of experience!) can fruitfully collaborate. Too often, reputations get in the way of actual engagement with our colleagues’ work, and the differences between analytic and continental approaches can be exaggerated in ways that, while they are entertaining as folklore, hinder scholarly

conversation. The point of the arguments and discussions in this book is not to “legislate” the use of the word “epistemology” but to suggest that scholarly conversations can carry on only if the interlocutors relate their contributions – even if they do so in the most critical manner – to what has been said before.

Conversation, then, has been the aim of this book, and it has been made visible in its form as well. Rather than creating a single editorial voice, Denis’s and my individual voices have, in most chapters, been preserved, thus revealing both agreements and disagreements. The conversational approach was central also to the roundtable discussion that we held in April 2010 in San Francisco, and that served as the basis for Chap. 7. We were fortunate that Harvey Siegel and Lynda Stone had planned to attend the Philosophy of Education Society conference and that Lorraine Code, a keynote speaker at the event, was willing to participate in the discussion. We are grateful to all of them for their efforts, both in the discussion and the subsequent editing of the transcript. In addition, we thank Lynda, one of the editors of the series in which this volume is published, for her encouragement and guidance in the proposal process. To Harvey and Lorraine, further thanks are due for their flexibility and cooperation in securing the rights to reprint their work.

Finally, we thank our respective partners, Ann Chinnery and Valerie Phillips, for their forbearance and encouragement during a journey that has taken us from Japan, to our homes in British Columbia and California, by way of meetings in San Francisco and elsewhere. It is not only the authors who suffer during the process of composing a book, and we are grateful to the companions who undertook the journey with us.

Claudia W. Ruitenberg

Contents

1 Introduction	1
Claudia W. Ruitenberg and D.C. Phillips	
2 A Critical Review of Representative Sources on Multicultural Epistemology	11
D.C. Phillips	
3 Charting the Reefs: A Map of Multicultural Epistemology	39
Jon A. Levisohn and D.C. Phillips	
4 Epistemological Diversity and Education Research: Much Ado About Nothing Much?	65
Harvey Siegel	
5 Taking Subjectivity into Account	85
Lorraine Code	
6 Epistemology as Trope: Uses and Effects of Claims About “Ways of Knowing”	101
Claudia W. Ruitenberg	
7 Epistemological Diversity: A Roundtable	121
Lorraine Code, D.C. Phillips, Claudia W. Ruitenberg, Harvey Siegel, and Lynda Stone	
8 Second Thoughts	145
Claudia W. Ruitenberg and D.C. Phillips	
About the Authors	157
Index	159

Chapter 1

Introduction

Claudia W. Ruitenberg and D.C. Phillips

At the outset we need to address an issue that leaps out from even a cursory perusal of our book's "contents" page: This book has an unusual format, one that to jaundiced eyes might suggest it is a rather disorganized collection of loosely related pieces. But appearances can be deceiving! The editors, who are also the main contributors to the volume, have had a clear plan in mind as they constructed it; the book has taken this particular form because we believe it enables the important but controversial topic that is summarized in the title to be explored in depth and from different perspectives. For the crucial point is, the issues here have not been settled, and have been the subject of lively debate in the philosophical and educational literature for a considerable period of time; we wanted this book to convey the liveliness, openness, and even confusion that exists when a *live issue* is being explored. To this end, rather than merely expressing our own views (views that overlap but which nevertheless differ) and leaving it at that, we have taken the opportunity to marshal a variety of intellectual resources – contributors who have thoughtful things to say that open up quite different perspectives on the core issues. We also provide detailed critical but sympathetic summaries of some of the key literature that is referred to in a number of the chapters, and at various places in the volume there are exchanges between the editors that reveal some of their differences. We hope that this format will engage the reader and also successfully convey that fruitful debate can shed light on the various matters that are at stake.

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So, what is this important topic, and in what ways is it controversial? In recent years we have observed that claims about “epistemology” – and claims that use epistemic terms such as “truth”, “knowledge” and even “ways of knowing” – abound in the educational literature. As both of us are philosophers, we have felt flattered that a key area of our discipline that deals with “theory of knowledge” should have generated such widespread interest among our colleagues across a range of areas of educational scholarship, but our sense of pride has been tempered somewhat by the realization that “epistemology” and cognate expressions seem to be being used in ways that do not always fit comfortably with the standard philosophical usage. Thus, educational researchers who operate within different broad traditions or so-called paradigms, such as the quantitative/experimental or the qualitative/interpretive methodological frames, are often said to be adherents of different epistemologies; classroom teachers are reported to have epistemologies about their subjects that influence how they teach these, and students in their classrooms also have epistemologies that might – or might not – differ and which might adversely influence what they understand; some advocates of the educational importance of the arts make the claim that these embody or are based upon an alternative epistemology; and it is often claimed that the many cultural or ethnic groups that are represented in modern pluralistic societies such as the UK or the USA each also have their “own system of truth and knowledge” (as the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin put it in the passage we use as Frontispiece), together with their own “ways of knowing”. We have been puzzled by the fact that the term “epistemology” as it is used in these various contexts appears to refer to different things, and we have been concerned about the confusion this might cause and the barriers to communication that might thereby arise. As signaled by the title of this book, our focus is on the issue referred to by Sorokin: The claim that cultural groups have their own specific epistemologies, and our task is to clarify what might be meant by this claim, and to examine sympathetically but critically how it or they – for the looseness in usage of the key term here masks a variety of uses and thus of claims – are justified by key figures in the multicultural literature. Of course, we also are interested in the related issue raised by Catherine Elgin in the second quotation in the Frontispiece, namely, whether the knowledge claims that flow from these alternative epistemologies are “tenable.” Finally, and importantly, we have been worried that the claims that are being made in epistemological terms – claims that we judge to be of vital social and especially educational importance – might be suffering a disservice when expressed in this way. In short, our focus is this: In a multicultural society, what do claims about “epistemological diversity” amount to, and what is gained and what is lost when these claims are made using epistemological language?

Thus far we have been referring to the educational literature, and the claims about “alternative epistemologies” made by multiculturalists and others (such as science and art educators) who are not philosophers. Although it adds another complexity, it is important to note that the philosophical literature of the past two decades or more contains lively discussions of the notion of alternative epistemologies, and many of the issues raised by the multiculturalists who are our particular focus of attention in this book have been aired in this intellectual context. This debate

within the domain of philosophy has centered on the issue of whether “feminist epistemology” is possible (or, what amounts to the same thing, whether an alternative, feminist “successor science” – one improving upon or replacing traditional science – is possible). For example, as far back as 1994, there was a special issue of the philosophy journal *The Monist* with the title “Feminist Epistemology: For and Against.” The opening lines of an essay in that collection, by the noted philosopher of science, Mary Hesse, could well have served as a lively Frontispiece to our current volume:

“Feminist epistemology”: on the face of it this is a contradiction in terms. “Feminism” has its origins in a social subgroup... “epistemology” is the study of the conditions of knowledge, or more modestly of justified belief, which are common to human beings as such... In this whole spectrum of views no one, I think, has suggested that gender as such could be the overriding factor in claims to knowledge... So there cannot in this sense be a “feminist epistemology”, any more than a black or gay or senior citizens’ or trade union or football club or media epistemology. Mercifully only one or two of the above have ever been suggested, and they have not shown great powers of survival within the intellectual debate. If this discussion is to continue at all, something different must be meant by the phrase “feminist epistemology.” (p. 445)

Hesse was wrong, of course, about the “powers of survival” of the claims for alternative epistemologies pegged to specific social or cultural subgroups – if she were right, our book would hardly be necessary! The present book, as has been indicated, primarily focuses on analyzing the positions advocated by multiculturalists and giving philosophically oriented commentaries upon these, but, in doing so, it also makes use of the highly relevant arguments of feminist epistemologists like Sandra Harding (see Chap. 3), Helen Longino (see later in this Chapter and also Chaps. 2, 3, and 5), and Lorraine Code (see Chaps. 5 and 7).

Another, different issue becomes relevant here. Some skeptical colleagues who have heard us outline the theme of this book in the way we have presented it above, have asked whether or not this is “merely” a verbal issue (as if verbal issues are, by definition, unimportant!). The issue we are tackling, however, is not “merely” whether or not a word (“epistemology”) is being misused, but rather whether or not the issues dealt with in a complex field – the field of epistemology – that has evolved over a long period of time, are being given short shrift, or no shrift at all. For this field deals with matters of vital importance, such as the nature of the criteria by which our hypotheses or beliefs are judged to be well founded or not, that is, to be tenable or not. This is important because, in general, it is not a counsel of wisdom to hold, and to act upon, beliefs that are *untenable*. Issues such as this get swept aside when the word that names this field of inquiry is used to refer to other matters – no matter how important these may be. We all lose out if we attempt to shortchange Peter in order to pay Paul!

In our next chapter, we provide a summary of, together with interpretive comments about, some of the key contributions to the educational (rather than philosophical) literature. The work we focus upon here was written by well-regarded advocates of the position that we call “multicultural epistemology”, and it is work that serves as grounding for the discussions in the following chapters. One of these, Chap. 3 by Levisohn and Phillips, specifically focuses upon clarifying the different ways the term

“epistemology” is used in this primary literature and thereby exposes some of the confusions that can arise when these different usages are conflated. Important related issues, and indeed some rival perspectives, are pursued in other chapters.

Analysis reveals that many of the claims about epistemological diversity made in the educational literature use “epistemology” not in the traditional sense stemming from the long-standing branch of philosophy dealing with “theory of knowledge” but to refer to such matters as the sets of beliefs that cultural groups accept (and therefore regard as being knowledge), and how these beliefs are learned and promulgated and the role they play in their lives. All of these are matters of importance but they have not, traditionally, come under the rubric of epistemology.

We do not wish to pre-empt the discussion given by Levisohn and Phillips in their chapter, but a few points can be made here to frame what comes later. Over the centuries, epistemologists have reached a general agreement about a basic distinction, namely between knowledge and belief. The things that a person believes, of course, are the things that this individual *thinks* that he or she knows; but for epistemologists, to be regarded as *knowledge* the belief must actually be true, and furthermore it must be warranted or supported by relevant evidence or an appropriate supporting argument. (The insights here – honed over several centuries – are that a person cannot *know* something that is not true, something that is not the case; and neither does this person have *knowledge* if the belief that is held happens to be true by a lucky guess!) There is a great deal of philosophical disagreement about what constitutes relevant evidence or warrants, but the distinction itself stands rock solid. All of us harbor many beliefs, but only a subset of these are actually well warranted and true (and unfortunately we do not know the actual status of many of them); the general human predicament is that many of the items that we believe – and therefore think that we know – will later turn out to be false.

However the issues here are complex. To borrow an example used by Levisohn and Phillips, a person might believe – and claim to know – that Elvis is still alive. No matter how strongly she holds this belief, it remains a belief, and is not knowledge, unless she can warrant or justify it (and unless it is actually true that he is alive). Suppose she claims to know this because she dreamt that Elvis lives; most of us would not regard this as an acceptable justification (because, of course, people can dream all sorts of fanciful things), but – and this is one of the issues that makes the topic of our book philosophically fascinating – there are some cultures in which dreams (that have occurred under appropriate conditions or to an appropriate person in that culture) *do* count as reliable evidence for knowledge claims. (And here – to add another complexity – arises the issue of the epistemic status of experts or authority figures; are some people so trusted, or have such a good track record, that their claims to have dreamt something can be taken as solid evidence?) Or suppose instead that the person thinks that she knows that Elvis is alive because she saw him in the distance at a shopping mall. Again, most if not all epistemologists (together with researchers, and many lay people including those in the music industry!) would say this is not solid enough evidence that the belief that Elvis is alive is actually true. Observation, of course, under certain conditions can serve as very good evidence – but the observer needs to have taken steps to safeguard against what researchers call “threats to validity”; mere fleeting

observation at a distance would only be considered to be good evidence by an exceptionally credulous individual. (Although, again, there sometimes are individuals who have such a spectacular record of success as observers that their claims to have seen something might be regarded as authoritative.)

Several of the chapters that follow claim that, by and large, the literature pertinent to multicultural epistemology is not concerned with discussing (or even taking account of) the literature in the field of philosophical epistemology that deals with issues such as the ones used here as illustrations, and therefore these chapters of our volume reach the conclusion that “multicultural epistemology” is not epistemology in the usual sense; something else, perhaps something of importance, is going on, but whatever it is, it is not epistemology. Some of the multicultural literature, however, is not so clear-cut that an unequivocal assessment can be made; different cultures do, sometimes, have their “own systems of truth”, and count some types of warrants for beliefs as valid that traditional epistemologists are dubious about (such as, in our example above, the use of dreams, or of authority figures), and some of the literature might be alluding to such things although not in such an explicit way that this is immediately obvious. Clearly, the issues about warrant that have been raised in the examples and discussion above are legitimate epistemological ones, and insofar as the multicultural literature is discussing these, it is making an important epistemological contribution. But the question also remains: If the multicultural literature is not discussing such matters, what are the concerns that are being raised in epistemological language, and would these concerns be more clearly raised if other, non-philosophical terminology, was used?

There is a final point about epistemology that needs to be made before the discussion moves on: philosophers get into vigorous exchanges, in print and verbally at conferences, because all of them accept that (apart from exceptional circumstances) only one of the rival positions in contention can be right. If the epistemology of Descartes is right, then that of John Locke is wrong; and if either of these is right, then Karl Popper’s “non-foundationalist epistemology” is wrong! But the situation with regard to multicultural epistemology is different: different cultural groups, it is claimed, have their distinctive epistemologies – but it is *not* being claimed that there is one group whose epistemology is superior to all others (it is not being claimed, for example, that Maori epistemology is superior and that Chicana epistemology is defective, or vice versa). Each epistemology seems to be the correct one for the group that originated it – a form of relativism. So another question arises: how well do advocates of multicultural epistemology grapple with the serious complexities that arise here?

Ethno-Philosophy and Professional Philosophy

As is apparent from the review of the literature in Chap. 2, contemporary claims about new or different epistemologies are typically made by or on behalf of groups that have traditionally been marginalized; examples of such different epistemologies include African epistemology, feminist epistemology, and Indigenous epistemology.

The proposed epistemologies are, therefore, not merely *different from* the dominant epistemologies that were developed in what they identify as European and patriarchal contexts, but in fact are attempting to *counter their hegemonic status*. But here the crucially important issue arises: what does it mean to associate an epistemology with an ethnic group, geographic region, or gender?

An interesting perspective here emerges from the work of the Kenyan philosopher Henry Odera Oruka (1978/2002). He distinguishes four approaches to African philosophy, of which the two most common are African philosophy as “ethno-philosophy” and African philosophy as “professional philosophy”. In the former approach, African philosophy is presented as everything that European (or Euro-descended) philosophy is not: “To the extent that European philosophy is known to manifest critical and rigorous analysis, and logical explanations and synthesis, African philosophy is considered to be ... basically intuitive, mystical, and counter or extra rationalistic” (p. 120). The latter approach, by contrast, considers African philosophy as the work that “has been produced or can be produced by African thinkers or in the African intellectual context in any branch of philosophical thought in the strict sense” (p. 123). Although the ethno-philosophical approach has the advantage of liberating African philosophers from the limitations that European and Euro-descended philosophy places on the selection of themes and problems considered worthy of philosophical thought (a problem about which we will say more below), Oruka makes the very strong statements that “one great shortcoming of ethno-philosophy is that it is derived not from the critical but from the uncritical part of African tradition,” and that “philosophy proper is always found in the critical, not uncritical, aspects of a people’s tradition” (p. 121). In other words, according to Oruka, the ethno-philosophical approach – among which ethno-epistemological claims figure prominently – cannot be considered “philosophy proper”. On the other hand, the disadvantage of African philosophy in the sense of “professional philosophy” is that it risks remaining so bound up with its European heritage that it fails to recognize specifically African problems or ideas as being philosophically relevant.

This issue of the selection of themes and problems considered philosophically relevant is discussed not from the African but from a feminist point of view by American philosopher of science Helen Longino. She observes (1993) that

a theory of scientific inquiry that focuses solely on the logic of justification neglects the selection processes occurring in the context of discovery that limit what we get to know about. Methods of discovery, or heuristics, are, in effect, selection processes that present for our consideration certain sorts of hypotheses and not other sorts. (p. 101)

If epistemology in science is taken to concern itself only with the logic of justification of truth claims, it cannot examine the cultural biases of its own heuristics. However, Longino is quick to point out that this does not mean that epistemology should abandon its scrutiny of the logic of justification and turn its attention fully to methods of discovery, for

a theory of scientific inquiry that focuses solely on the methods of discovery presents its own difficulties. In particular, a given heuristic method that puts certain hitherto suppressed, or invisible hypotheses into play is not ipso facto ratifiable as a producer of *knowledge*, as distinct from interesting or even plausible *ideas*. (p. 102, emphasis added)

It emerges, then, that one of the challenges in analyzing and responding to claims of epistemological diversity in educational research is distinguishing when these claims address the logic of justification, when they address the selection of topics and theories for investigation, and when they address something altogether different.

One aspect of claims of epistemological diversity – and one that seems to address the logic of justification – is the question of *where* ideas that are candidates for “knowledge” are believed to originate and where they reside. In traditional European epistemology, the “epistemic agent” has been the individual conscious mind:

The paradigmatic knower in Western epistemology is an individual.... Explicitly or implicitly, in modern epistemology, whether rationalist or empiricist, the individual consciousness that is the subject of knowledge is transparent to itself, operates according to principles that are independent of embodied experience, and generates knowledge in a value-neutral way. (Longino 1993, pp. 104–105)

So, traditionally only individual subjects can be “knowers”, and the processes involved in probing and testing – that determine whether a belief or idea can be considered knowledge – occur in an individual conscious mind that is self-aware and detached from its object of inquiry. These assumptions have been critiqued from many angles, and one recurrent alternative has been the idea that the attainment of knowledge is a *collective* rather than an *individual* endeavor. Writes Longino,

Applying what I take to be a feminist insight—that we are all in relations of interdependence—I have suggested that scientific knowledge is constructed not by individuals applying a method to the material to be known but by individuals in interaction with one another in ways that modify their observations, theories and hypotheses, and patterns of reasoning. (p. 111)

What Longino and others (see the contributions in Alcoff and Potter 1993) identify as a “feminist insight” has been claimed by others to be a North American indigenous insight or an African insight (see, for example, Ramose 2002 on *ubuntu*). Moreover, it would seem that not only knowledge in the natural sciences is constructed by individuals in interaction with each other, but this is true of knowledge in other disciplines as well. In the social sciences and humanities (in which most educational researchers operate) the idea of the individual, unconnected epistemic agent – the individual subject of knowledge – is as contentious as it is in the natural sciences. Qualitative researchers with disciplinary and interdisciplinary backgrounds in, for example, sociology and anthropology, as well as historical and philosophical researchers, construct knowledge in interaction.

Furthermore, although ideas such as intersubjectivity and the importance of disagreement and debate among diverse scholars are now a commonplace in many disciplines, schools may still operate as if knowledge is an individual attainment, and the knower an individual subject. What would it mean for teaching and assessment practices to take the insight – whomever we should attribute it to – that knowledge is attained or constructed in human collectivity rather than individuality?

The central question this raises is whether the insight about the epistemic role of the community should be seen as part of a truly new and counter-hegemonic epistemology, or whether it is more accurate to regard it as a modification or improvement of existing epistemology.

Paradigms – Incommensurable or Translatable?

A different way of conceptualizing epistemological diversity – one that also throws light on why it is difficult to reach agreement about the purport of claims about “multicultural epistemology” – emerges if Thomas Kuhn’s notion (1970) of paradigms, and paradigm clash, is borrowed. During a period of scientific revolution, rival paradigms differ in a number of dimensions, all at once, and their languages differ; even when apparently the same word is used, it has a different meaning in the different paradigms (Kuhn’s favorite example was “mass,” which in Einstein relativistic physics means something different than it does within classical Newtonian physics). In fact, all key terms differ in meaning across paradigms, and this is why the paradigms are, in Kuhn’s view, *incommensurable*. Adherents of the different paradigms fail to understand each other, because they “live in different worlds” or have been “transported to other planets”, as Kuhn famously puts it; and this, according to Kuhn’s original hard-line position, makes cross-paradigm dialogue impossible. Inhabitants of such completely different worlds must always talk at “cross-purposes”; and choice between their respective positions is a choice between “incompatible modes of community life.”

Rather than adopt Kuhn’s hard-line position that paradigms are incommensurable and dialogue between them impossible, we take here a “softer” interpretation (one offered by Kuhn himself in the “Postscript” to his famous book) that there is a cross-paradigm “communication breakdown” that makes discussion and translation of viewpoints very difficult but not impossible. As we have said, rival paradigms will use different terminology, but this is only one of the aspects that make cross-paradigm communication difficult. Different paradigms also have a different focus, which is to say, the problems they each regard as important are different. Thirdly, distinctions that are important to make within one paradigm are not necessarily important – or even sensible – within another framework (there are so-called “Kuhn gains” and “Kuhn losses” when the focus shifts from one paradigm to another).

Wittgenstein, in a work that Kuhn was familiar with, offered a somewhat similar analysis that also is applicable to the groups offering rival views of epistemology: Wittgenstein (1953/1968) referred to the numerous, different social activities or “forms of life” that exist within our society; he also called these things “language games”, and he said that a game “has not only rules but also a point” (p. 564). While there is no sense in asking which is the “right game” – science is not more “correct” than poetry or religion or humanistic psychology – one can ask what the point is of each of these “games” or social activities, and you can say that you do not choose to play *that* game because you don’t appreciate its point (although often the point is not fully understood until you actually participate in the game); or perhaps you don’t play it because you prefer the point of a different game. (Similarly, one can decide that a community’s mode of life is attractive, while that of another is not appealing.) It also follows that *if* you are playing game (G1) you have to play it by the rules of (G1) and not attempt to play (G1) by the rules of (G2). (As Wittgenstein pointed out, “the game is supposed to be defined by the rules” (p. 567).) So, are the

speakers clear about the game or endeavor that they are engaged in; and are they being consistent and not claiming to be engaged in game (G1) when they are actually engaged in game (G2)?

These ideas apply to the theme of our book in the following ways: First, the difficulty that adherents of traditional epistemology have in understanding the claims made about or on behalf of “multicultural epistemology” – and the difficulty that supporters of multicultural epistemology have in the other direction – might be the result of a clash of incommensurable paradigms. One key question when it comes to claims about different epistemologies, then, is whether these epistemologies are indeed integral aspects of different but coherent paradigms. Another issue that immediately arises is whether or not there are “Kuhn gains” and “Kuhn losses”; traditional epistemologists might well argue that the multiculturalists often completely lose sight of the key distinction between knowledge and belief, while the multiculturalists charge that the traditionalists do not comprehend the diverse ways knowledge production is influenced by culturally situated practices and beliefs. Yet another issue is whether those who appear to be operating from paradigm 1 in some respects of their work appeal to paradigm 2 in other aspects. It is important to stress that it cannot be said that one paradigm is right and others are wrong, but rather we are appealing here to intra-paradigm consistency as a criterion for evaluation. (As an illustrative case, consider that it is part of the multicultural epistemology paradigm that the epistemologies of *all* cultural groups be tolerated as equally viable – none are “wrong”, no one view is superior – and yet some adherents of this relativistic paradigm are quite intolerant of the epistemology produced by white males. Is this consistent?)

The Authority of “Epistemology”

The political issues that the authors who argue for epistemological diversity address are serious indeed: Racism, sexism, and other forms of exclusion and marginalization are not trivial matters. Every author in this volume who expresses skepticism about claims of epistemological diversity or alternative epistemologies is unequivocal in her or his political support for the struggle against racism, sexism, and other such indefensible forms of oppression. For example, Siegel (Chap. 4) writes,

I agree, of course, that the hegemonic abuse of power, in the guise of allegedly neutral criticism of alternative perspectives, must be rejected. This danger is real, and must be avoided. Cases in which critique is indeed an abuse of power must be exposed and seen for what they are. (pp. 79–80)

And Levisohn and Phillips underscore (in Chap. 3) that their purpose “is *not* to critique the variety of multiculturalist educational reforms, many of which we would, in fact, endorse”. The question raised in this volume, however, is why these political issues are frequently couched in epistemological language, and what is gained and what may be lost by doing so. It appears that the discourse of

“epistemology” has academic authority, whereas explicitly political discourse may be considered suspect or out of place in the academy. If the term “epistemology” is being used in ways that stretch the conventional meanings of the concept, perhaps questions should be raised not only about the range of *meanings* the concept can sustain without losing its coherence and intelligibility, but also about the *effects* of these new uses of the term. Is it the case, as Levisohn and Phillips argue, that the “real nature” of the sociopolitical concerns of marginalized groups “is obscured by dressing them up in loosely used philosophical terminology”, or is it the case that epistemological-sounding discourse lends academic legitimacy to these sociopolitical concerns, or perhaps both? And if epistemological-sounding discourse lends academic legitimacy to non-epistemological concerns, what epistemological concerns – in the established sense of “epistemological” – become obscured in the educational discussion?

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Chapter 2

A Critical Review of Representative Sources on Multicultural Epistemology

D.C. Phillips

The sources that are summarized and commented upon in this chapter were not written by professional epistemologists; the important and careful philosophical arguments of Lorraine Code, Sandra Harding, and Helen Longino – among others – are taken into account in other chapters. (In fact a large portion of an influential essay by Code is reprinted as Chap. 5; and Code also makes contributions later in this volume.) The focus at present is the work of what might crudely be thought of as “frontline” advocates for “multicultural epistemology” – members of the broad educational research community, curriculum experts, sociologists, and the like – who believe that different cultural or ethnic groups have different epistemologies. The point of this chapter, then, is to discern what these quite widely read and broadly representative sources actually mean when they refer to epistemologies and link them explicitly to ethnic or cultural groups; these sources, then, define the territory that we plan to explore in this volume. Each source has been summarized, and commented upon, by Denis Phillips; Claudia Ruitenberg has added her reflections on the issues raised by both the sources and the comments at the end of the chapter.

As will quickly become apparent, the pieces summarized and commented upon here were all products of U.S. scholars in the 1990s. This seems to have been the decade, especially but not exclusively in the U.S., in which authors with concerns about the educational and other social rights of cultural minority groups started to use, with more frequency, the terminology of epistemology. Although quite frequently cited, these writings have only rarely drawn responses. As a result, in the subsequent decade or more, many scholars in the areas of education where the issues and ideas that were raised are relevant have assumed that consensus has been reached and the controversial epistemological matters have been settled. But as we

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indicated in the opening lines of the first chapter, this is an illusion: The key epistemological issues have not been resolved – and neither, alas, have the broader issues surrounding the educational rights of cultural minority groups. The reviews in this present chapter of some of this key literature from the 1990s represent the next steps in the complex intellectual journey we are undertaking. (In these reviews, I shall follow the lead of the specific authors in either using lower case or capitals, as in their use of “White” or “Black”.)

Scheurich, J. J., & Young, M. D. (1997, May). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased? *Educational Researcher*. 26(4), 4–16.

This paper opens by suggesting that a new category of racism needs to be recognized – epistemological racism – for the very epistemologies that are the basis of educational research (and not simply the way these are made use of) may actually be “racially biased ways of knowing.” The authors also note that educational methodologists frequently have discussed other epistemological issues (such as objectivity versus subjectivity), but this “race-oriented” issue has been met with a “provocative lack of response.” They attribute this lack of response to a lack of understanding of “how race is a critically significant epistemological problem in educational research” (p. 4). The stated purpose of this paper, then, is to show how various epistemologies – such as positivism, postpositivism, neorealism, interpretivisms, constructivisms, the critical tradition, and postmodernisms or poststructuralisms – “can be understood as racially biased” (p. 4). This is a strong and important program, but it becomes evident in the remainder of the paper that there actually is no discussion of the epistemological theses of positivism, constructivism, and the rest – of the arguments in their favor, of their defects, or of the ways in which these epistemic theses harm specific ethnic groups; rather, the argument takes place at a sociological rather than epistemological level.

The paper proceeds by distinguishing between individual, institutional, societal, and civilizational racism, but the authors stress that none of these are actually cases of “epistemological racism.” Scheurich and Young go on to argue that when any privileged subset of a large and complex civilization – such as White males – “significantly dominates other groups” for extended periods of time,

the ways of the dominant group (its epistemologies, its ontologies, its axiologies) not only become the dominant ways of that civilization, but also these ways become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as “natural” or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions.... Thus, the dominant group creates or constructs “the world” or “the Real” and does so in its own image.... (p. 7)

The last part of this passage skates over important complexities; for example, given that there are a number of rival epistemologies in the “dominant culture” with opposing assumptions (rationalism, empiricism, constructivisms, and so forth, as Scheurich and Young themselves pointed out), it is not apparent how the “world” and the “Real” have been constructed in that culture’s own image. Furthermore, it is not clear without further discussion how empiricism, rationalism, and the rest further the needs of White culture and are discordant with the interests of other ethnic/cultural groups.

Following the passage quoted above, Scheurich and Young turn explicitly to their thesis about epistemological racism: Epistemologies and ontologies emerge from the

social history of social groups, and thus different groups evolve different epistemologies (although again it is noteworthy that the authors are not specific about what principles or practices these epistemologies actually endorse). However,

All of the epistemologies currently legitimated in education arise exclusively out of the social history of the dominant White race. They do not arise out of the social history of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, or other racial/cultural groups It is, then, in this sense that scholars of color contend that the dominant research epistemologies are racially biased. (p. 8)

The important thesis here seems worthy of further discussion but is passed over in silence. Is the fact that a position has been produced by or with a certain cultural group (of course, *all* positions must have been so produced) sufficient for it to be considered racist? If so, the consequence follows that *all* positions must be considered racist (in which case the important label “racist” loses its value).

After stressing that researchers who use the dominant (racist) epistemologies are not being charged with being racist as individuals, Scheurich and Young go on to argue that epistemological racism, as they understand it, has several negative consequences (p. 9). The first of these is that epistemologies and research that arise from other “social histories” are not appreciated by, are not judged as legitimate by, and cannot be validly evaluated by members of the mainstream research community. In support, they cite a number of sources including Sarris who, they say, asked “Can Apache stories, songs, and so forth be read (or heard) and thus understood in terms of Euroamerican-specific expectations of language and narrative [i.e., Euro-American epistemologies]?” It is to be noted here that the identification by Sarris of “expectations of language and narrative” as constituting *epistemology* is itself an aberrant usage of this label, and without a deeper argument, it does not follow from the fact (assuming it is a fact) that a member of one culture cannot fully appreciate the stories and music of another that the research knowledge and epistemological theses of the first culture cannot be assessed by members of the second. (Some of the sources discussed later in this chapter illustrate that members of minority cultural or ethnic groups seem perfectly willing and able to assess the theses of the “dominant culture” of which they are not a part.) Second, the dominant epistemologies and methods tend to distort the lives of other social groups, and as a result, these distortions tend to be absorbed into the dominant culture as truths. Third, the dominant epistemologies implicitly fit White people because they are products of White social history; scholars of color have had to wear these ill-fitting “epistemological clothes” (p. 9). Exactly how and why empiricism, rationalism, constructivism, and the other epistemologies from the “dominant culture” distort the lives of any social group or are “ill fitting” for scholars of color is never explained.

In the following section, Scheurich and Young provide a brief survey of several new or emerging “race-based epistemologies” (p. 10), including those developed by Patricia Hill Collins, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Molefi Kete Asante. The last wrote that “Afrocentricity is a perspective which allows Africans to be subjects of [their own] historical experiences rather than objects on the fringes of Europe [i.e., western modernism]” (as cited in Scheurich & Young, p. 10, emphasis omitted from

the quotation). Scheurich and Young also make mention of the emerging perspective of Critical Race Theory. Much work on these and other new epistemologies has appeared in “race-oriented academic journals” that are unfamiliar to White scholars – publishing decisions that have been forced upon minority scholars because of the difficulties they face in getting access to mainstream journals (pp. 11–12). The authors write that:

In a very important sense, we White researchers are unconsciously promulgating racism on an epistemological level. As we teach and promote epistemologies like positivism and post-modernism, we are, at least implicitly, teaching and promoting the social history of the dominant race at the exclusion of people of color, scholars of color, and the possibility for research based on other race/culture epistemologies. (p.11)

A point made earlier is applicable again here: All theories and positions, about any matter at all, must have been produced by individuals who belonged to a particular cultural group, and so – according to the principle Scheurich and Young espouse here (which also, it should be noted, was produced by members of a particular cultural group) – all theories and positions must be regarded as “promoting the social history” of the race of the originators. But if this is the case, then all theories are equal in this respect, and so it would appear that their acceptance or rejection must take place on some other grounds – such as an assessment of how well these positions have been warranted by evidence and argument. Scheurich and Young, unfortunately, do not discuss important complexities such as these.

Near the end of their paper the authors invite the participation in dialogue of the many scholars who oppose the contention that epistemologies arise from the social history of racial/cultural groups and who hold instead that epistemology “reaches above history toward a context-free kind of truth.” Scheurich and Young do not notice that this is a false dichotomy – a position can arise from within a social or ethnic group (indeed it must do so) and yet “reach” above it in scope. However, their paper closes on an important note: “One of the worst racisms, though, for any generation or group is the one that we do not see, that is invisible to our lens – the one we participate in without consciously knowing or intending it” (p. 12).

Banks, J. A. (1993, June–July). The canon debate, knowledge construction, and multicultural education, *Educational Researcher*, 22(5), 4–14.

Banks opens this paper with a sketch of the “heated and divisive national debate” currently raging about “what knowledge related to ethnic and cultural diversity” should be presented in the curricula of schools and universities (p. 4). He identifies three broad groups that are participating in this “canon debate” – the Western traditionalists, the multiculturalists, and the Afrocentrists – but he stresses that the beliefs of each of the groups are complex and that there are commonalities as well as differences. The first group believes that Western history, literature, and culture are under threat in the curriculum, whereas the second group feels that the experiences of women and people of color are marginalized; Afrocentrists believe that African culture and history “should be placed at the ‘center’ of the curriculum in order to motivate African-American students to learn and to help all students to understand the important role that Africa has played in the development of Western culture” (p. 4).

Following these introductory remarks, Banks says he plans to provide “evidence for the claim that the positions of both the Western traditionalists and the multiculturalists reflect values, ideologies, political positions, and human interests” (p. 5). He also proposes to put forward a typology of five types of knowledge, and he will argue that students should study all of these.

In the section that follows, “The Nature of Knowledge,” the author makes his working definition of “knowledge” clear:

I am using knowledge in this article to mean the way a person explains or interprets reality.... My conceptualization of knowledge is broad and is used the way in which it is usually used in the sociology of knowledge literature to include ideas, values and interpretations... As postmodern theorists have pointed out, knowledge is socially constructed and reflects human interests, values, and action..... (p. 5)

The “postmodernists” Banks cites here are Lorraine Code, Michel Foucault, Sandra Harding, and Richard Rorty. He goes on to argue that in the Western empirical tradition, the ideal is to formulate knowledge “without the influence of the researcher’s personal or cultural characteristics,” but often these researchers are unaware of “how their personal experiences and positions within society influence the knowledge they produce” (p. 5). It is clear from this remark, and from the passage cited above, that Banks is, indeed, thinking of knowledge in sociological terms – and, taken in this way, what he says is undoubtedly true. An epistemologist, however, would argue that Banks is really discussing *beliefs*, not *knowledge*, for all of us, of whatever culture or social position, “explain or interpret reality” via our beliefs (only some of which are knowledge – for not all of our beliefs turn out to be true, although of course we *believe* them to be true). There does not seem to be any reason – except for purposes of rhetorical force (the cachet that the term “knowledge” bears) – that Banks could not use “belief,” for this would be quite compatible with his sociological orientation.

At this point Banks introduces the notion of “positionality,” and he argues that scholars need to identify their own ideological and normative positions. However, and in contrast, the assumption within the “Western empirical paradigm is that the knowledge produced within it is neutral and objective and that its principles are universal” (p. 5). It would have been helpful for Banks to go into more detail here; his tone is negative, but why – for example – the principles of empiricism (which of course he does not enumerate) are not universal is an issue that is not addressed. Banks moves on – referring to Jürgen Habermas, Henry Giroux, Code and Harding, and others – to make the point that modern science is not value-free, and its assumptions need to be identified and discussed. Again, this is a complex issue, and the sense or senses in which science is (or is not) value-free are not specified. However Banks does go on to discuss favorably some ideas presented by Lorraine Code, and he writes:

Code raises the question, “Is the sex of the knower epistemologically significant?”. She answers this question in the affirmative because of the ways in which gender influences how knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and institutionalized within U.S. society. (p. 6: “internal references omitted from this passage”)

Lack of recognition of the fact that all research has assumptions built into it has led to people of color being “frequently victimized” because of the “stereotypes and

misconceptions” that have been perpetuated about them (p. 6). Certainly Banks is right that there has been plenty of stereotyping, but he does not address the issue of whether this is due entirely to assumptions being built into research, or to the poor quality of the research itself, or to (perhaps willful) misinterpretation or misuse of the research findings.

Banks then moves on to present (and discuss in some detail) his helpful typology of five types of knowledge (pp. 6–11): Personal/cultural knowledge is that which students acquire from their homes and local culture; popular knowledge is that which is promulgated by the mass media and other venues of popular culture; mainstream academic knowledge, which is the traditional “Western-centric knowledge” in history and other academic subjects; transformative academic knowledge, which challenges mainstream knowledge and expands and revises established canons and paradigms (examples would be the books *History of the Negro Race in America* and *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750–1925*); and school knowledge, which is the content of textbooks, teachers’ guides, and classroom presentations by teachers. Elaborating on the category of “transformative academic knowledge,” Banks writes that it:

consists of concepts, paradigms, themes, and explanations that challenge mainstream academic knowledge and that expand the historical and literary canon. Transformative academic knowledge challenges some of the key assumptions that mainstream scholars make about the nature of knowledge.... Transformative academic scholars assume that knowledge is not neutral but is influenced by human interests, that all knowledge reflects power and social relationships within society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society. (p. 9)

Here again Banks cites Foucault, Rorty, Code, Harding, and others. He also cites a number of historical works that have transformed understanding of the history and contributions of several minority groups in American society (p. 10). It is not clear if Banks recognizes the conundrum here – either transformative knowledge (like all knowledge) is not neutral but is reflective of the cultural/ethnic group in which it originated, or it is neutral and thus is deserving of the respect of *all* groups (which would indicate that some knowledge at least transcends cultural or ethnic boundaries, in contradiction to his thesis).

The article ends with a short section discussing “Teaching Implications,” in which Banks offers the illustrative example of how the curriculum unit “The Westward Movement” could be taught from a multicultural perspective.

Banks, J. A. (1998, October). The lives and values of researchers: Implications for educating citizens in a multicultural society, *Educational Researcher*, 27(7), 4–17.

This article was the 1998 Presidential Address at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Banks opens with recollections of his early education, in particular the way in which his elementary school textbooks of the 1950s depicted slaves in the American south as being “happy and loyal” – a picture that was inconsistent with what he knew at firsthand the experience of their descendants to be.

Following this introduction, there is a short section titled (or, as will be argued below, mistitled): “An Epistemological Journey.” Banks reports that in graduate school he studied with various social scientists (an anthropologist, a sociologist, and

a psychologist) to gain insight into the “institutionalized representations of African Americans in American culture” (p. 4). He comments that, since then, “My epistemological quest to find out why the slaves were represented as happy became a life-long journey...” (p. 4). But new questions have been added, such as why are questions still being raised about the intelligence of African-Americans? And whose questions are these, who benefits, and whose values do these questions reflect? He reports that he has come to the conclusion that “the biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct” (p. 4). It seems that Banks’ “journey” was indeed biographical (and personally fruitful) rather than epistemological, for he was not pursuing epistemological questions in the sense of questions about what the difference is between knowledge and belief, and what warrants this distinction. As he made clear in his earlier paper, his concerns were sociological rather than epistemological in the traditional sense.

In the following section, “The Values of Researchers,” Banks points out that the value dimensions of research were largely muted until the “postmodern, women’s studies, and ethnic studies movements...” (p. 5). However, the values of social scientists are complex, and their research has both reinforced inequality and supported betterment. Banks then moves on to state the aim of his article, which is to provide evidence for five claims: The cultural communities in which researchers are socialized are also “epistemological communities that have shared beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge”; research is influenced by the life experiences, values, and biographies of the researchers; the values and knowledge of the researchers spring not from their experiences but from their interpretation of these experiences; the process of interpretation is mediated by status variables such as gender, social class, age, religion, political affiliation, and region; finally, an individual researcher’s ideological and other commitments are not a simple function of his or her “ethnic socialization,” as matters are more complex than this (p. 5). Banks shows all of these important claims to be valid, and I agree with him that novice educational researchers ought to be mentored to understand them, but I would like to point out that none of these claims has bearing on the *epistemologies* researchers use.

Banks then turns his attention to a “litany of mainstream paradigms and perspectives that ... justify the disempowerment of low-income groups and groups of color” (p. 5), and he discusses examples that illustrate the proposition that the value-laden and cultural perspectives of mainstream researchers often became institutionalized because they “were regarded as objective, universal, and neutral” (p. 5). The researchers whose work is presented as examples “described cultures and peoples with whom they had little insider knowledge, respect, or compassion.” However, some work that supports educational equity is also cited.

In the section “Values and the Quest for Objectivity,” Banks cites Lorraine Code and Sandra Harding (among others) in support of his point that although values are embedded in social science and educational research, objectivity still remains an important desideratum, and he also affirms his commitment to the ideal of educational research being made a science. Researchers should:

acknowledge how the subjective and objective components of knowledge are interconnected and interactive. Acknowledging the subjective components of knowledge does not mean we

abandon the quest for objectivity. Making the value premises of research explicit can help social scientists become more objective. (p. 6)

Banks quotes a passage from the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal supporting this general viewpoint.

In the section “The Quest for Authentic Voices,” Banks again (mis)uses the language of epistemology when he is making a valid sociological/historical point. He refers to the “epistemological battles” that took place when, in the wake of the civil rights movement, schools and colleges had students from very diverse ethnic and social class backgrounds. These students felt that “the knowledge embedded within the curriculum privileged mainstream cultures and groups and marginalized their voices and experiences.” Banks continues, in a passage that labels a political/sociological crisis as an epistemological one:

The epistemological crisis during the 1960s and 1970s was characterized by heated discussions and debates of questions such as: Who should speak for whom? Whose voice is legitimate?... Can the outsider ever understand the cultures and experiences of insiders or speak with moral authority about them? (p. 6)

Merton is then cited in support of the view that neither insiders or outsiders have privileged access to “social truth” – both have something to contribute; Merton also makes the point that individuals do not have one, but rather multiple, social statuses and group affiliations (pp. 6–7). Banks argues that Merton underestimates the “power of race” in affecting cross-ethnic and cross-cultural interactions, and he points out that race and gender interact in complex ways (p. 7). Here Banks cites Patricia Hill Collins’ work on Black feminist thought with some approval.

The following section of the paper (pp. 7–8) offers a “typology of crosscultural researchers” that “problematizes the types of knowers within a pluralistic democratic society” (p. 7). Banks stresses the important point that, depending on the context, we are all both insiders and outsiders, and our status may change over a lifetime, either “because the institutionalized knowledge and paradigms within the studied community change or because the researcher’s value commitments are significantly modified” (p. 7). The typology of cross-cultural researchers helpfully distinguishes four types “of knowers or researchers”: the indigenous-insider, who endorses the values and beliefs of the indigenous group and is regarded as a person who can speak with authority about it; the indigenous-outsider, who, although having initially been socialized within the indigenous community, has experienced “high levels of cultural assimilation” into an “oppositional” culture; the external-insider, who was socialized in another culture but who has endorsed many of the values and so forth of the indigenous community and has been recognized as an “adopted insider”; and the external-outsider, who is socialized within an outside community and has little appreciation for the indigenous community and consequently often “misunderstands and misinterprets” behaviors within the indigenous community being studied (p. 8).

Banks then moves on – in the lengthiest section of the article (pp. 8–14) – to several “case studies of the lives of researchers,” in which he examines the lives and values of several researchers who “have done race relations research” with important

educational implications; in each case he describes “critical incidents in their biographical journeys that are related to their values....” The individuals discussed are Kenneth Clark, John Hope Franklin, Franz Boas, Otto Klineberg, Ruth Benedict, and Thomas Pettigrew. Finally, in a section “Implications for citizenship education in a multicultural society,” Banks stresses that

our challenge is to create an education that will help foster a just and inclusive pluralistic national society that all students and groups will perceive as legitimate.... Teachers should help students examine and uncover the community and culture knowledge they bring to school and understand how it is similar to and different from school knowledge and the cultural knowledge of other students. (p. 14)

In this passage Banks does not distinguish between the content that is taught to children as knowledge and the epistemological issue of whether this content has been well-enough justified to count as knowledge rather than belief.

Collins, P. H. (1990). *Toward an Afrocentric feminist epistemology. In Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. New York: Routledge.*

The opening paragraph of this chapter – the one in the book that focuses on “epistemology” – introduces the themes to be pursued:

Black feminist thought, like all specialized thought, reflects the interests and standpoint of its creators. Tracing the origin and diffusion of any body of specialized thought reveals its affinity to the power of the group that created it (Mannheim 1936). Because elite white men and their representatives control structures of knowledge validation, white male interests pervade the thematic content of traditional scholarship. As a result, Black women’s experiences with work, family, motherhood, political activism, and sexual politics have been routinely distorted in or excluded from traditional academic discourse. (p. 201)

Apart from the implicit but dubious suggestion that there is a homogeneity of interests within cultural or ethnic groups and the related assertion that the “thematic content” of knowledge basically serves “white male interests” (much research in the past century and a half surely has gone against the “interests” of rich and powerful white males – for example by showing the abysmal conditions of the working class), Collins makes a valid and important point here. The interest and experiences of less powerful groups in society are far from adequately represented in the research that is done and the knowledge that is produced. Whether this is because “elite white men control the structures of validation,” rather than control the setting of research priorities and funding, is perhaps debatable. (Validation by external individuals or “structures,” after all, generally takes place after the research has been done – and yet part of the problem, at least, is that the research Collins advocates is not being done at all.)

Black women’s thought, Collins goes on to suggest, can be viewed as “subjugated knowledge,” and as Black Female scholars are excluded from traditional knowledge-producing sites, they move to alternative locations such as “music, literature, daily conversations, and everyday behavior...” (p. 202). African-American women have developed a distinctive standpoint and have “done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge” (p. 202). Here, it would have been helpful for Collins to go into more detail; it is clear that music, daily

conversations, and the rest could be fruitful foci (alternative locations) for relevant research, but the suggestion that these are alternative *ways of producing and validating knowledge* is somewhat mysterious unless explicated further. Certainly, conversation is an important medium, but by itself it does not produce knowledge – it depends on what the conversation is about, what rules and criteria are invoked to assess the claims that are being discussed, and so forth. The case for music being a producer and validator of knowledge is even more difficult to comprehend.

When Collins turns to define “epistemology,” she more or less gives the traditional account: It is the study of philosophical problems relating to knowledge and truth. She points out that in her own work she makes some nonstandard “epistemological choices” – she searched her own experiences and those of African-American women she knows, and her use of “our” instead of “their” signals she is embedded in – rather than being distanced from – the group she is studying. She states that a basic question facing Black women intellectuals is:

what constitutes adequate justifications that a given knowledge claim, such as a fact or theory, is true. In producing the specialized knowledge of Black feminist thought, Black women intellectuals often encounter two distinct epistemologies: one representing elite white male interests and the other expressing Afrocentric feminist concerns. Epistemological choices about who to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign academic issues. (pp. 202–203)

Epistemologists will be happy with her clear reference to justification of knowledge claims, but the account gets muddled with the suggestion that what counts as an adequate epistemological justification depends upon whether one is an elite white male or an Afrocentric feminist – further explication seems called for, and this is what appears to be in the offing in the following section.

Thus, at this point in the chapter, a new and pivotal three-page section begins – “The Eurocentric masculinist knowledge validation process.” Collins posits that the institutions and paradigms of the validation process, controlled by elite white men, have the purpose “to represent a white male standpoint”; and the scholarly community of (validating) experts must maintain credibility with the “larger group” in which they are situated (p. 203). It is interesting to note the rhetorical force of the term “represent” that Collins has chosen to use here. One relatively benign reading is that, given that the members of the knowledge-validating community overwhelmingly are white males, the position that will be decided upon will – as it were by definition – be the one held by white males. But this does not necessarily mean that the position that is reached “represents” the white male perspective. It is here that the second, more troubling reading enters the picture. The not-so-veiled suggestion implicit in the language – reinforced by the claim that the “purpose” of the validating community is to “represent” – is that somehow the members of the knowledge-validating community were selected *in order* to “represent” the position of elite white males (whatever this is, and however and wherever the representatives learned what it was and received a briefing about their responsibilities). Unless this tough viewpoint is given support, it would have been less contentious to point out straightforwardly that the knowledge-validating community consists mainly of white males and that therefore the life experiences, interests,

and understandings of other groups may not receive an adequate hearing – a point that probably is right on target.

However, given the structure of the validating community, Collins makes the point that the efforts of Black and female scholars to produce knowledge that challenges notions of their inferiority are “likely to be viewed as anomalies” as the white male community “does not grant that Black women scholars have competing knowledge claims based in another knowledge validation process” (pp. 203–204). Sometimes the dominant group (in a ploy to foster its own legitimacy) allows a few Black women to acquire positions of power in knowledge-legitimizing institutions and encourages them to work within the taken-for-granted assumptions about Black inferiority that are shared by the culture at large (p. 204).

Black women also face a difficult epistemological challenge – because each group within society has distinctive epistemologies and standpoints,

Black women scholars may know that something is true but be unwilling or unable to legitimate our claims using Eurocentric masculinist criteria for consistency with substantiated knowledge and criteria for methodological adequacy.... The methods used to validate knowledge claims must also be acceptable to the group controlling the knowledge validation process. (p. 204)

The issue of knowledge validation raised here is at the crux of the debates over “multicultural epistemology,” and it is a pity that Collins does not go into detail about what the specific criteria are according to which Black women scholars *know* that “something is true.” It also would have been extremely helpful if she had elucidated how these epistemological criteria are incompatible with Eurocentric criteria and, given the existence of multiple Western epistemologies (rationalism, empiricism, etc.), with *which* set of epistemological criteria the knowledge validation processes of Black women would be more or less compatible. Some insights into this, however, emerge in the next few paragraphs of this important section of her chapter.

As an example of the kind of Eurocentric epistemological standards that Black women scholars are expected to meet in validating their work, Collins discusses positivism (although she comments that not all aspects of this epistemology are “inherently problematic” for them). She writes:

Positivist approaches aim to create scientific descriptions of reality by producing objective generalizations. Because researchers have widely differing values, experiences, and emotions, genuine science is thought to be unattainable unless all human characteristics except rationality are eliminated from the research process. By following strict methodological rules, scientists aim to distance themselves from the values, vested interests, and emotions generated by their class, race, sex, or unique situation.... Moreover, this researcher decontextualization is paralleled by comparable efforts to remove the objects of study from their contexts.... Ethics and values are deemed inappropriate in the research process, either as the reason for scientific inquiry or as part of the research process itself. Finally, adversarial debates, whether written or oral, become the preferred method of ascertaining truth: the arguments that can withstand the greatest assault and survive intact become the strongest truths. (p. 205; internal references omitted from the passage)

There is a lot going on here, but first it is noteworthy that Collins only refers to secondary sources – no positivist is cited, which is a matter of some significance given that so many misapprehensions exist and are promulgated by secondary

commentators – and furthermore she does not distinguish between positivism and logical positivism (see Phillips 2000). Putting this aside, and focusing on the passage itself, the first comment is that it is not only positivists who hold that science aims to produce objective generalizations – the vast majority of scientists themselves hold this view. It is rare, if not impossible, to find a practicing scientist who holds that he or she aims to produce nonobjective findings. In the following sentence, Collins states that to attain objectivity, positivists believe that all human characteristics (except rationality) have to be “eliminated from the research process.” There is an important ambiguity here. If “research process” means the day-to-day conduct of the actual research, including the time spent trying to formulate the answer to a scientific problem – the time pondering in an armchair or browsing in the library or pacing to-and-fro in the lab – then the statement is incorrect. Positivists, rightly or wrongly, distinguished between the “context of discovery” and the “context of justification” (or “validation,” as Collins refers to it). The first of these “contexts,” which housed the processes by which scientific hypotheses were discovered or came to be formulated, obviously involves human interests, values, preferences, and so forth; the positivists, by and large, felt their expertise did not allow them to say anything fruitful about this context. The fact of the matter, then, was that the attention of the positivists was focused almost entirely upon the second stage, the context of validation or justification, i.e., the context in which the hypotheses were tested and critiqued in order to discover if they were likely to be true. In this context, the social, religious, and political values of the researcher were to be excluded, for these were regarded as not being epistemologically relevant. (That is, to put it crudely, a hypothesis is true or not quite independently of how the researcher personally happens to feel about it.) Even many non-positivists support this latter position, but of course there are many who oppose it (see Phillips 2000). Collins nowhere discusses the complex issues here. Regarding her claim about the exclusion of ethics, the point needs to be made that it is widely agreed by positivists and non-positivists alike that ethics is important in the processes of science, for it *is* epistemologically relevant for researchers to be honest, accurate, and so forth. Finally, Collins treats “adversarial debates” as being content-less; positivists (as well as many others) believe that hypotheses in science should be accepted as true or not based on the evidence and arguments that are marshaled in their support, and it is the community of scientists themselves – operating in a spirit of openness to scrutiny and criticism (with mechanisms such as having respondents at conference presentations, rebuttals to journal articles being encouraged, the adoption of blind refereeing, and the like) – which is best equipped to judge whether the evidence is compelling or not. This aspect of the validation process is much more benign than the way the “adversarial debates” are characterized by Collins, with her use of the militaristic expression “withstand the greatest assault” – which is nowhere to be found in the epistemological strictures of the positivists.

Given the way that Collins has (mis)characterized positivism, it is small wonder that she reaches the conclusion that African-American women researchers cannot be comfortable with this epistemology:

Such criteria ask African-American women to objectify ourselves, devalue our emotional life, displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about Black women, and confront

in an adversarial relationship those with more social, economic and professional power. It therefore seems unlikely that Black women would use a positivist epistemological stance in rearticulating a Black women's standpoint. (pp. 205–206)

As a consequence, Collins argues, Black women are “more likely to use an alternative epistemology,” and she proceeds to discuss its “contours” in the next, potentially very important section “The Contours of an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology.” She begins her discussion by pointing out that, “as a result of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid, and other systems of racial domination, Black people share a common experience of oppression” (p. 206). Furthermore, she states, this “Afrocentric consciousness permeates the shared history of people of African descent through the framework of a distinctive Afrocentric epistemology.” Black women, however, have access to both the Afrocentric and feminist standpoints, and the alternative epistemology that emerges has elements of both of these traditions (p. 206). The subsequent discussion enlarges upon this and related points, but strikingly absent are any specific details of the contents of this alternative epistemology (p. 207). The closest she comes is when, in the following section, she adumbrates on the point that:

For most African-American women those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus concrete experience as a criterion for credibility frequently is invoked by Black women when making knowledge claims. (p. 209)

She adds, a little later, that “experience as a criterion of meaning with practical images as its symbolic vehicles is a fundamental epistemological tenet in African-American thought systems” (p. 209). Here, Collins seems to be referring to, in the main, what philosophers sometimes refer to as “knowledge by acquaintance” (see the Chap. 6 by Ruitenberg in the present volume for a relevant discussion). There is ample room here for a genuinely epistemological discussion, but Collins misses the opportunity. A simple example is useful in highlighting a key epistemological issue that is at stake. If I have never experienced a toothache, it certainly is true that I do not personally know what the experience of a toothache is like, but it does not follow that I know nothing about toothaches (in the sense of having knowledge about toothaches) or that I can have nothing of importance to say about this condition. Indeed, I might know more about toothaches than a person who has experienced them (in the sense of knowing many important propositions about them, including knowing how to cure them or to prevent them from occurring). Without belittling the importance of firsthand knowledge “by acquaintance,” it is an overstatement to claim that having had this type of experience makes one's knowledge claims about the relevant domain more reliable or more likely to be true. As an epistemological criterion, personal experience simply is deficient.

In the subsequent pages, Collins offers examples to illustrate the somewhat different position that “using concrete knowledge” or “concrete experience” in “assessing knowledge claims” is important and is more likely to be done by women (p. 210) – a thesis wherein the first part, at least, is difficult to dispute.

Collins introduces another important theme in the section with the promising title “The Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims” (p. 212). She writes:

For Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community. A primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process. (p. 212)

Over the next few pages (pp. 212–214), Collins discusses a number of examples to illustrate the importance of dialogue to African-Americans, such as the “widespread use of the call-and-response discourse mode” (p. 213). Collins is no doubt right in pointing to the importance of dialogue, but it is important to note that all of her discussion takes place at what can be called the sociological or “sociology of knowledge” level, and none of it at the philosophical epistemological level: she is describing the important interpersonal *processes* by which knowledge is produced, but does not mention the *criteria* (let alone the adequacy of the criteria) that the participants in the dialogues actually use to assess knowledge claims. (And, after all, these dialogues must be *about* something, if they are producing knowledge!) There is a substantial body of opinion that sociological considerations are a vital supplement or even partner to the kinds of philosophical assessment found in mainstream epistemology but are not a *substitute* for the latter (an issue that is discussed later in this present volume; see the Chap. 3 by Levisohn and Phillips).

The following two sections of the chapter by Collins deal with the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability, but again the discussion does not grapple with the complexities relating to the key epistemological issue, namely, the validity of the criteria that are used to assess knowledge claims. Thus, Collins writes: “An ethic of personal accountability is the final dimension of an alternative epistemology. Not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims” (pp. 217–218). Collins also makes the interesting observation that “knowledge claims made by individuals respected for their moral and ethical connections to their ideas will carry more weight than those offered by less respected figures” (p. 218). At a descriptive or “sociological” level this is probably true, but the epistemological question remains: Are the knowledge claims made by, or the beliefs held by, these trusted individuals likely to be true simply on the basis of their ethical and moral connections? Are there not examples, from many cultures, that show that such individuals are as likely as the rest of us to hold erroneous beliefs? Perhaps it depends upon the domain of knowledge that is under consideration – scientific, medical, mathematical, geographical, cultural, esthetic, and religious. Unfortunately, Collins does not venture into these difficult waters.

Bernal, D. D. (1998, Winter). Using a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. *Harvard Educational Review*. 68(4), 555–582.

Bernal opens her discussion by drawing upon the essay by Scheurich and Young discussed earlier in the present chapter:

Epistemological concerns in schools are inseparable from cultural hegemonic domination in educational research. The way educational research is conducted contributes

significantly to what happens (or does not happen) in schools.... Employing a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research thus becomes a means to resist epistemological racism (Scheurich and Young 1997) and to recover untold histories. (p. 556)

She states that her paper will illustrate this epistemological perspective by discussing a piece of her own research. Wanting to frame her work in a way that reflects her own history as well as that of the women she writes about, and recognizing that “gender, race, class, and sexual orientation – not gender alone – determine the allocation of power and the nature of any individual’s identity,” Bernal believes that

‘endarkened’ feminist epistemologies are crucial, as they speak to the failures of traditional patriarchal and liberal educational scholarship and examine the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality. (p. 556)

Bernal goes on to review “traditional mainstream” and “liberal feminist” scholarship in order to show that they fail to “provide a useful paradigm to examine the realities of working-class Chicana students” (p. 556).

It appears, then, that in these opening few paragraphs of her paper Bernal is using the terms “epistemology” and “paradigm” not to refer to philosophical theories about the justification or warranting of knowledge claims, but rather to refer to the theories that provide the substantive background for research – theories that she claims (probably with some justice) are inadequate because they do not give appropriate weight to race, class, sexuality, and so on. It seems less confusing to refer to these consistently as the “guiding theories for research” rather than as “epistemologies,” for otherwise the traditional meaning of this latter term is being stretched if not entirely misappropriated. However, here again the cachet of the term “epistemology” has probably proven to be irresistible.

In fact, on the very next page, p. 557, where she is documenting the failure of liberal educational scholarship, Bernal again uses “paradigm” and “epistemology” as synonyms, but usage of these terms is also interspersed with multiple uses of “theory” which the context makes clear is being used as a synonym for the other two. Technically, of course, the three are *not* synonyms. However, this particular usage of “epistemology” will be found throughout the whole paper.

After pointing out that traditional feminist research has focused on the commonalities in women’s experience and on the domination of patriarchy, without paying sufficient attention to differences due to such things as gender, class, and ethnicity (pp. 557–558), Bernal turns to the specific discussion of “A Chicana Feminist Epistemology” (pp. 558–563). She begins by drawing upon Sandra Harding and others to make a distinction between epistemology and methodology. Arguing that the latter “provides both theory and analysis of the research process, how research questions are framed, and the criteria used to evaluate research findings” (p. 558), Bernal again makes the point that feminists (as well as mainstream scholars and also Chicano male scholars) have failed to ask the research questions about racism, classism, and sexism that address the lives of Chicanas (pp. 558–559). She then turns to Chicana epistemology and writes as follows:

Epistemology involves the nature, status, and production of knowledge (Harding 1987). Therefore, a Chicana epistemology must be concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas – about who generates an understanding of their experiences, and how this knowledge is

legitimized or not legitimized. It questions objectivity, a universal foundation of knowledge, and the Western dichotomies of mind versus body, subject versus object, objective truth versus subjective emotion, and male versus female. In this sense, a Chicana epistemology maintains connections to indigenous roots by embracing dualities that are necessary and complementary qualities, and by challenging dichotomies that offer opposition without reconciliation.... Thus, adopting a Chicana feminist epistemology will expose human relationships and experiences that are probably not visible from a traditional patriarchal position or a liberal feminist standpoint. Within this framework, Chicanas become agents of knowledge who participate in intellectual discourse that links experience, research, community, and social change. (p. 560)

This passage is revealing. The words Bernal uses to describe epistemology in the first sentence – whether they are taken directly from Harding or not – are open to several interpretations. The “nature, status, and production” of knowledge could be referring to the traditional epistemological matters pertaining to the justification or warranting of knowledge claims, such as the role of sense-experience versus reason (empiricism versus rationalism), whether knowledge claims are ever proven to be true by the evidence marshaled in their support or always retain the status of hypotheses that have been made to some degree probable, and so forth. It seems much more likely however, given the remainder of the quoted passage, that these terms are being understood in a sociopolitical way to refer to the content (nature) and degree of political legitimacy (status) of knowledge claims and the makeup of the community empowered to produce them. The use of the term “legitimized” – a term that refers to political or social authorization – rather than the use of either of the epistemological terms “justified” or “warranted” (which, put crudely, refer to the “truth status” of a claim) supports the view that Bernal is not using “epistemology” in its traditional philosophical sense. Her assertions later in the passage that Chicana epistemology questions the dichotomy between male and female, and that it reveals human relationships that are not visible from a traditional patriarchal perspective and the like, only make sense if “epistemology” is being used to mean something like “a theory that underlies and guides research” – and furthermore, it is clear that Bernal’s own guiding theory is geared toward sociopolitical action.

Later portions of the same section of Bernal’s paper reinforce this interpretation. Thus, in one of several passages that could be quoted, she states that:

A unique characteristic of a Chicana feminist epistemology is that it also validates and addresses experiences that are intertwined with issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism.... (A) Chicana feminist epistemology ... is grounded in the unique life experiences of Chicanas. For example, in educational research it is important to remember that Chicana students experience school from multiple dimensions, including their skin color, gender, class, and English-language proficiency. (p. 561)

All of these may be valid claims about a guiding theory for research that is sensitive to the needs of Chicanas, but nevertheless they do not constitute epistemology. (Epistemology does not address immigration, bilingualism, or Catholicism!) More is at stake here than mere carping about the correct usage of a word. Bernal’s concerns are important, but her use of epistemological language to express them

unwittingly diverts attention away from, or entirely masks, the traditional philosophical concerns of epistemologists – *which also are important!*

The next two sections of Bernal's paper are distanced even further from traditional epistemological issues. The first of these discusses four sources of cultural intuition – the possession of which allows the researcher to give meaning to data (pp. 563–568); the second, which bears the title “Resistance and Recovery Through an Oral History Project,” presents a case study drawn from Bernal's own research that uses a focus group strategy and that enlists participants as equals (eliciting their help, for example, in bringing “meaning to the data”) (pp. 568–572). After offering further thoughts on lessons to be learned from using the focus group strategy, Bernal draws the paper to an end by summarizing her conclusions. She writes, in a passage that continues her use of the term “epistemology” to refer to important but non-epistemic issues, that:

one of the major contributions of this article is an emerging articulation of a new epistemology in educational research. This epistemology gives license to both Chicana and Chicano education scholars to uncover and reclaim their own subjugated knowledge. It also allows them to place some trust in their own cultural intuition so that they move beyond traditional areas of research situated in existing paradigms that overlook the particular educational experiences of Chicanas or Chicanos. (p. 574)

Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N., & Tarule, J. (1986/1997). *Women's ways of knowing*. (Tenth Anniversary ed.). New York: Basic Books.

The following discussion does not attempt to summarize the whole of this book – the material is too complex to be done justice in the space of a few pages. Instead, the focus shall be on several sections that address – or that at first sight have promise of addressing – the issue of culturally or gender-based epistemology. And, at first sight, the whole book seems to be relevant, for the expression used in the title, “ways of knowing,” often can be found in the literature as a locution referring to epistemological matters (although it also can be used to mean something like “learning styles,” which of course is quite different).

The “Introduction” to the volume starts out well:

We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. (p. 3)

The authors go on to state that the book will describe five different perspectives from which women view reality and “draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority,” and they also promise to demonstrate how “women's self-concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined” (p. 3). Being psychologists interested in human development, the authors carried out in-depth interviews with 135 women from diverse backgrounds who told their life stories and described the people and events that were important in “shaping the ways they viewed themselves and their minds” (p. 4). And, indeed, the whole book is enriched by stories and quotations from these interviews; the authors' analyses and comments, interspersed throughout, contain

some philosophical content but are largely reflective of their empirical psychological background. Given this background, and the constraints provided by the nature of the interview material they were using as sources, it is not surprising that the authors' discussion did not usually penetrate to great philosophical depth – the terms “epistemology,” “justification,” “warrant,” “belief versus knowledge,” “truth,” and the like do not appear in the index, nor do the names of epistemological positions such as “empiricism” and “post-positivism.” “Positivism” appears once in a brief footnote, but “rationalism” and “constructed knowledge” appear a number of times but usually turn out to have been used in a descriptive or “sociological” sense rather than an epistemological one (as will be discussed subsequently).

However, in the concluding paragraph of the brief section discussing the background to their study, the authors make this important statement:

Along with other academic feminists, we believe that conceptions of knowledge and truth that are accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by male-dominated majority culture. Drawing on their own perspectives and visions, men have constructed the prevailing theories, written history, and set values that have become the guiding principles for men and women alike.... Relatively little attention has been given to modes of learning, knowing, and valuing that may be specific to, or at least common in, women. It is likely that the commonly accepted stereotype of women's thinking as emotional, intuitive, and personalized has contributed to the devaluation of women's minds and contributions.... It is generally assumed that intuitive knowledge is more primitive, therefore less valuable, than so-called objective modes of knowing. (pp. 5–6)

Some of the points made in the discussion of the previous sources are relevant here. First, the fact that certain conceptions were produced by men does not seem to be sufficient grounds for questioning the validity of these conceptions. (These might indeed be questionable, but the point needs to be demonstrated.) The fact that many “conceptions” in the physical and natural sciences were produced by men, but nevertheless are acknowledged to have claims on the assent of all of us, should surely make us hesitant about endorsing (without further reason) the position stated by these authors. Second, the expression “modes of learning, knowing, and valuing” can be read as a psychological statement (and it is to be remembered that the authors are psychologists); certainly, “modes of learning” is a psychological reference, not an epistemological one (although admittedly, the proper reading for “modes of knowing and valuing” is less clear; see the chapter by Ruitenberg in this volume for further discussion of this point). The next point made in the passage, concerning the stereotype commonly held about women's thinking, is an empirical one – and is almost certainly correct. So too is the statement about intuitive knowledge, which is often devalued. But there is an important epistemological issue here, which the authors do not pursue. Karl Popper often made the point that the source of a putative item of knowledge is not epistemologically important; what counts is the way this item has been tested after its formulation. (Not all epistemologists agree with him on this.) From this perspective it can be argued that whether the item springs from intuition, or experience, or from reflection, it cannot be identified as being *knowledge* simply on the basis of its origin. There are very many cases where something that was claimed to be known “intuitively” turned out to be quite wrong – as not being

knowledge at all, but false belief. People have known intuitively that the Earth is flat, that a particular folk remedy would cure their cancer, that their spouse was being unfaithful, that their financial advisor was honest,... only to turn out to be wrong. A knowledge claim, the epistemologist would insist, needs to have a sound justification or warrant in order to be acceptable *as* knowledge. The authors do not discuss such matters; they simply seem to endorse “knowledge by intuition” and move on. The final sentence of this section appears to be their summary, and it is cast as a statement about the *content* of bodies of knowledge rather than as an epistemological statement: “Feminists are beginning to articulate the values of the female world and to reshape the disciplines to include the woman’s voice...” (p. 6).

The remainder of the book is divided into two parts: the first of these is titled “The ways of knowing,” and the second, “Development in context: Families and schools.” The first part describes what is essentially a developmental theory (hardly surprising given the authors’ disciplinary backgrounds); this account is based on the self-reports of their interviewees and concerns women’s acquisition of attitudes and beliefs about knowledge, their views of their own capacity and their intellectual confidence, their attitudes towards authority regarding what they should believe, and so forth. The authors identify the number of stages that merge into each other, ranging from “silence,” through received, subjective, and procedural knowledge, to “constructed knowledge: integrating the voices”; they summarize this stage theory with these words: “We have been describing frameworks for meaning-making that evolve and change rather than personality types that are relatively permanent” (p. 155). The authors also make the interesting empirical observation that “it is curious that people who share an epistemological position would have so much family history in common” (pp. 155–156).

The problem in all this – which does not detract from the interest of their work – is that in developing their stage theory, they have not been discussing *epistemological positions* at all, but as mentioned above, something along the lines of “women’s beliefs and attitudes towards knowledge.” The following two extracts convey the flavor of the discussion:

Many women ... experience giving birth to their children as a major turning point in their lives. Often, parenthood initiates an epistemological revolution. In response to our question, “What was the most important learning experience you have ever had?” many mothers selected childbirth.... Being responsible for a dependent infant can easily bring into question a world view that assumes one is “deaf and dumb” and dependent on others for care. (p. 35)

For women at the positions [stages] of silence and received knowledge, there is absolute truth that is true for everyone; at the position of subjective knowing, truth is absolute only for the individual. The subjective knower takes a huge step: She sees truth as subjectified and personal. The subjectivist discovers that each person’s life experience gives a different view of reality from that of any other person. (pp. 69–70)

Finally, this commentary should return to an issue raised earlier, namely, the fact that the index of the book contains a number of references to the potentially epistemologically relevant term “rationalism.” But once again, this topic is not discussed in epistemological terms (there is no assessment of the “pros” and “cons” of this position, which is not even described at any length), rather – and unsurprisingly in

light of the discussion above – the authors are recounting the attitudes of women towards, and often their rejection of, unduly abstract, logical, impersonal modes of thought. Thus,

It is not that these women have become familiar with logic and theory as tools for knowing and have chosen to reject them; they have only vague and untested prejudices against a mode of thought that they sense is unfeminine and inhuman and may be detrimental to their capacity for feeling. (p. 71)

It appears, then, that the book is aptly titled “Women’s Ways of Knowing,” provided that this is given a psychological and not an epistemological reading.

Asante, M. K. (1990). *Kemet, Afrocentricity and knowledge*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

The author, an academic of prominence in the Afrocentrism movement, has produced a work of some complexity and of great scope, making it – like the previous book by Belenky et al. – impossible to summarize in a limited space. So again the strategy will be to focus upon those aspects that have promise for elucidating the notion of culturally based epistemologies.

The author’s style throughout is to run complex ideas together in what can be described as a “stream of consciousness” mode; the difficulties that this poses for interpretation emerge as early as the first page of the Preface:

Scientificism may or may not be based on originality but the idea of an Afrocentric method is to demonstrate its capability and flexibility with a range of possible questions in an original manner. By science, however, I do not mean merely the steps of the so-called scientific method but rather the proper attitude toward imagination and creation.... The Afrocentric method seeks to transform human reality by ushering in a human openness to cultural pluralism which cannot exist without the unlocking of the minds for acceptance of an expansion of consciousness. I seek to overthrow parochialism, provincialism, and narrow Wotanic visions of the world by demonstrating the usefulness of an Afrocentric approach to questions of knowledge. (pp. v-vi)

One sentence later he adds:

The major problem with existentialism, phenomenology, and structuralism, for example, is that they have hedged their bets in a European worldview that is moribund when it comes to looking at the outside world. *They cannot truly grasp the significance of a revolutionary idea that would change the European method itself.* (p. vi, emphasis in original.)

The book is divided into three parts, titled “Interiors,” “Anteriors,” and “Exteriors.” The idea, Asante states, is to examine in the first of these “what constitutes the discipline of Africalogy,” in the second to discuss “the origins and issues related to historical developments in the writing of Africa,” while the third focuses upon “approaches to fields other than Africalogy with particular emphasis on critique” (pp. vi–vii). The following discussion will focus upon passages in Part 1.

A few pages into “Interiors,” there is a short section bearing the promising title “Epistemological Issue,” which opens with this important statement:

What constitutes the quest for truth in the Afrocentric enterprise? In Africalogy, language, myth, ancestral memory, dance-music-art, and science provide the *sources of knowledge, the canons of proof, and the structures of truth.* (p. 10, emphasis added.)

The difficulty here – to take one example – is that it is not immediately apparent how music and dance can provide canons of proof or structures of truth (both of which are epistemological notions). Proof is conveyed via discourse, and a proof contains arguments or logical or mathematical derivations that support some contention, or else it puts forward empirical evidence for the veracity of this contention; and “truth” is (to use a nonphilosophical source, the dictionary) “accordance with fact or actuality,” while “structure” refers to something like “logical form” or the relationship between elements. These things seem well beyond the capacities of music and dance to convey; these have other quite different virtues, to be sure, and are rightly treasured – but they are not epistemological media.

A few lines later, however, Asante offers a few sentences by way of elucidation – but it is noteworthy that these sentences contain no reference at all to anything that could reasonably be called epistemology, and they pass over in silence “canons of proof” and “structures of truth”:

Dance-Music-Art. Performing and representational art forms are central to any Afrocentric interpretation of cultural or social reality. Indeed, the fact that dance is a way of life in traditional African life and not a leisure activity to be done when one is finished with “real work” as in the West informs any Afrocentric analysis. In the diaspora the ubiquity of the dance finds its expression in the Africanization of the walkman and the radio. (pp. 10–11)

Whatever else they may be, the walkman and the radio are not tools of epistemological analysis.

A little later in the book there is a major section – running to 17 pages – on “The Problems of Method” (pp. 23–40). Asante points out the Africanist’s frame of reference for research has too often been Eurocentric, and thus too much swayed by Hegel’s conception of history (p. 23). Much of the section is in fact devoted to a critical discussion of aspects of this Hegelian conception. But there are some passages of epistemological relevance, such as the following one on the important issue of objectivity:

Critics may assume that “objectivity” is compromised when the investigator uses the descriptive mode for Afrocentric research. The Afrocentrist does not accept the European concept of objectivity because it is invalid operationally. Dona Richards is correct to evaluate the concept of “objectivity” negatively in her brilliant essay. I have argued that what often passes for objectivity is a sort of collective European subjectivity. Therefore, it may not serve any useful purpose to speak of objectivity and subjectivity as this division is artificial in and of itself. The Afrocentrist speaks of research that is ultimately verifiable in the experiences of human beings, the final, empirical authority. Of course, the methods of proof are founded upon the principles of fairness and openness... What is unconscionable is the idea that when a person makes any decision that the decision is “objective”; every decision, even one’s choice of software for her or his word processor, is human and consequently “subjective”. (pp. 24–25)

It would have been helpful for Asante to develop more fully his line of argument here; for example, his reference to objectivity being a “sort of collective European subjectivity” is tantalizing and can certainly stimulate a reader to fruitful reflection, but by itself it does not clearly convey Asante’s meaning – and the same can be said about the assertion that objectivity is “invalid operationally.” However, there are claims made in this passage that are dubious. The claim that the Afrocentrist

(evidently in contrast to the European) desires research that is ultimately verifiable in terms of human experience ignores the fact that a major Western epistemological position, empiricism, holds precisely the same view – but within this epistemological tradition, discussion pushes deeper to examine such matters as under-determination (experience is compatible with more than one hypothesis or interpretation, which poses a serious problem for validation of knowledge claims by means of experience) and the theory-laden nature of experience (which is an insight that comes from Western epistemology that Asante could have used to good advantage). Finally, although the assertion that all human decisions are subjective robs the term “objective” of its meaning (a consequence that Asante clearly intended); nevertheless, the underlying distinction does not disappear, namely, the distinction between decisions that are made on grounds that can be shown to be appropriate and which can be publicly defended and those decisions that hinge on personal matters such as tastes and idiosyncratic beliefs. Asante eventually would be forced to introduce two types of “subjectivity,” perhaps labeled “strong” and “weak,” to cover these cases. Consider: If you were to list your word-processing needs, consulted “Consumer’s Digest” for reviews of relevant software packages and then selected their most highly rated package that would meet the needs you listed, you probably have made a very good decision – one Asante would have to label as a case of “strong subjectivity” or somesuch – but which many of us would call “objective.” By contrast, if you selected a word-processing software package because the color of the box cheered you up, your decision could be considered a case of “weak subjectivity.”

Another relevant passage in this section on methodology focuses upon the experiment as a knowledge-producing or verifying tool; it reveals quite clearly the difficulty in interpreting Asante’s free-flowing prose:

The nomothetic model of experimental laboratory research that insists that variable control and manipulation are able to assist in universal laws is highly questionable. “Universal” is again one of those Eurocentric terms that has little meaning in the real world. People live in societies and operate within cultures. The aim of the descriptive researcher has to be in-depth knowledge of a social/human context in order to be able to make some sense out of it, to appreciate it, to live in peace with it. In actuality, this is counter to the experimental framework that is based on the logic of prediction, war, and the market.... The Afrocentric method must have a different goal; it must find its reason to be in the harmonizing mission. This is an interactive model rather than a distant, sterile, abstract, isolated, and non-contact model. (p. 26)

Apart from the gross misrepresentation of experimentation (which, based on J. S. Mill’s “methods of logic,” is a means to determine whether a factor actually caused or produced a result or effect), this passage sets up an untenable dualism between experimentation and naturalistic research. Both of these have their place, and it is to be noted that the European tradition, in addition to producing the experimental method, also gave rise to ethnographic research methods that, as their *raison d’être*, take into account the local meanings – the acquisition of “in-depth knowledge of a social/human context.”

Finally, several pages later Asante (mis)uses “epistemology” to mean something like “methodology” or perhaps “the attitude of the researcher”: “Our methodology

must be wholistic and integrative; our epistemology, participatory and committed” (p. 28). Commitment, however commendable it may be in a researcher, is not an analytical epistemological tool.

Epistemologists and Educational Researchers in Word and Deed: A Commentary

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In the process of our collaboration in putting together this book, Denis Phillips and I have discussed more than once how our work tends to have a different emphasis: his on the clarity of the meaning of words, mine on the effects of their use. While I tend not to disagree with Phillips’ claims about knowledge and its warrants, I am frequently concerned about the claims’ singular focus on *clarity*. It will not be surprising, then, if in my commentary on his literature review I focus on the *effects* of the language used by epistemologists and educational researchers – i.e., on what this language *does*. In addition, I will address practices of knowledge production, again with an eye to what epistemologists and educational researchers *do*. Since Phillips’ discussion of Patricia Hill Collins’ chapter on Afrocentric feminist epistemology is the most detailed, I will focus my efforts there, but the issues I raise will also be relevant to other claims about epistemological diversity, whether discussed in this volume or not.

Conceptions of Representation

In his critique of Collins’ chapter, Phillips is right to home in on Collins’ discussion of knowledge validation. By using the phrase “toward an Afrocentric feminist epistemology,” Collins suggests that she conceives of a separate epistemology that is distinct from what she calls Eurocentric masculinist epistemology. It appears “epistemology” is used here in the sense of a particular set of ideas about knowledge and inquiry (category B in Levisohn and Phillips’ chapter in this volume). In order for these two epistemologies to be distinct, surely there must be – among other differences – differences between the criteria and processes by which each epistemology validates knowledge claims as knowledge.

Phillips takes issue with the following paragraph in Collins’ chapter:

Institutions, paradigms and other elements of the knowledge validation procedure controlled by white elite men constitute the Eurocentric masculinist knowledge validation process. The purpose of this process is to represent a white male standpoint. ... Two political criteria influence the knowledge validation process. First, knowledge claims are evaluated by a community of experts whose members represent the standpoints of the groups from

which they originate. ... Second, each community of experts must maintain its credibility as defined by the larger group in which it is situated and from which it draws its basic, taken-for-granted knowledge. (p. 203)

Phillips notes that he will comment on “the rhetorical force of the term ‘represent’” and he does so by discerning

the not-so-veiled suggestion implicit in the language ... that somehow the members of the validating community were selected *in order* to ‘represent’ the position of elite white males (whatever this is, and however and wherever the representatives learned what it was and received a briefing about their responsibilities). (p. 21, emphasis in original)

I agree with Phillips that Collins’ use of the word “purpose” is troubling, as it suggests that the “institutions, paradigms and other elements of the knowledge validation procedure” to which Collins refers were *deliberately and consciously designed* to represent a white male standpoint. I would suggest, rather, that the “institutions, paradigms and other elements of the knowledge validation procedure” *have the effect of* representing a white male standpoint, but I would add to this that those who benefit from the repeated representation of this standpoint share a responsibility for it even if they did not, as individuals, deliberately and consciously create such structures. The latter – individuals are responsible for the effects of their actions beyond their intentions – is, of course, an ethical point, not an epistemological one.

However, by introducing the word “representatives,” Phillips makes a connection between the representation of a standpoint by “institutions, paradigms and other elements of the knowledge validation procedure” – clearly collective and discursive entities – and representation of a standpoint by (s)electd *individuals*. Equating “representation” in the first sense with “representation” in the second is somewhat facetious, and, as a result, Collins’ claim is not analyzed as well as it might be.

The tension here seems to be between the representational conception of language employed by Phillips and the discursive conception of language employed by Collins. As I have explained elsewhere (Ruitenberg 2005), the representational conception of language sees language as “a neutral medium and mirror, conveying and reflecting reality as it is” (p. 39). The discursive conception of language, by contrast, sees language as “not merely reflective but constitutive of reality” (p. 40). This discursive conception of language – or the view of language as discourse rather than representation – heeds Michel Foucault’s (1969/1972) suggestion that the task at hand “consists of not – of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Lest I be accused of supporting the simplistic notion that I can, by decree, turn objects in the real world into what I say they are, let me emphasize that the “discursive formation of objects” to which Foucault refers is a process of multiple iterations over time that create and change the concepts and categories through which we make sense of the world.

When Collins speaks of “representation,” the point is not whether the particular individuals that make up the “community of experts” are *representative of* a larger

elite, white male culture but rather how the repeated representation of elite, white male standpoints produces and sustains the domination of such standpoints in what is considered common sense, normal, and the default. I agree with Phillips that this is a sociological point, but it is a serious one that deserves to be analyzed. Moreover, I would raise the question to what extent the sociology of knowledge can be kept separate from the philosophy of knowledge.

A set of approaches that has been called “social epistemology” seems to bridge the perceived gap between the sociology and philosophy of knowledge. Helen Longino, an epistemologist well respected by Phillips, gives a detailed social-epistemological account of knowledge in *The Fate of Knowledge* (2002). Longino argues that the main obstacle that stands in the way of reconciling accounts of knowledge that emphasize its philosophical norms and accounts of knowledge that emphasize the social conditions of its production is a conceptual conflation of central ideas in the debate. One area of such conceptual conflation is in the definition of knowledge itself, which “can be used to mean sets of knowledge productive practices; knowing, that is, the relation of a cognizer to some content; and the outcome of knowledge-productive practices” (p. 77). The second area of conceptual conflation is in the perceived dichotomy between the cognitive or rational and the social. This dichotomy, Longino argues, involves three components that each can be interpreted in several different ways.

Advocates (victims?) of the dichotomizing way frequently identify only one possible interpretation, whose unpalatability reinforces their commitment to the rational-social dichotomy. There is, however, a set of positive interpretations that constitutes a constructive alternative to either path of the dichotomizing way. (p. 90)

The three components of the rational-social dichotomy are individualism/non-individualism, monism/nonmonism, and relativism/nonrelativism. Once each component is analyzed carefully and a constructive interpretation is used, it is possible to produce a social-epistemological “account of scientific knowledge that features contextuality of justification, interdependence of cognitive agents, and (possible) plurality of content” (p. 96). To address the distinction elaborated by Levisohn and Phillips in their Chap. 3 in this volume, this social-epistemological view does not become descriptive (sociological) but remains normative (epistemological).

The central normative notions are epistemic acceptability and conformation (of content to its intended object to a degree sufficient to enable the realization of projects with respect to that object). These involve both traditional evidential norms and the community norms of effective critical interaction.... (p. 143)

Conceptions of Respect

Collins writes that “adversarial debates, whether written or oral, become the preferred method of ascertaining truth: the arguments that can withstand the greatest assault and survive intact become the strongest truths.” Phillips comments,

This aspect of the validation process is much more benign than the way the “adversarial debates” are characterized by Collins, with her use of the militaristic expression “withstand the greatest assault” – which is nowhere to be found in the epistemological strictures of the positivists.

However, Phillips himself adopts the same militaristic language when he speaks of evidence and arguments being “marshaled” and of “rebuttals” to articles. Whether or not one can find reference to adversarial debates in the Official Positivist Doctrine that Phillips hints at with his “strictures” is, in my view, beside the point. The fact of the matter is that the back-and-forth of scholarly argument is perceived negatively by Collins as a hostile culture of attack and defense and positively by Phillips as “a spirit of openness to scrutiny and criticism.” In his chapter in this volume, Harvey Siegel shares Phillips’ perspective on scholarly debate when he writes, “Epistemologies are not all born equal; those that deserve to count as legitimate epistemological alternatives must prove their mettle in the give-and-take of scholarly disputation. Some proposals will survive such disputation; others not” (p. 75). While Phillips would probably be happier to relegate a discussion about the culture of knowledge validation to the “anthropology of knowledge,” I do want to address this culture in some more depth here, as it may get us closer to epistemology than appears at first blush.

Like Phillips and Siegel, I am culturally accustomed to debate and greatly value its role in the justification of knowledge claims. However, the quality of the arguments and counterarguments used in scholarly debate cannot be separated from the scholarly community in which they are brought forward. For that reason, Longino (2002), who emphasizes the role of “critical discursive interactions” in knowledge production, includes a measure of *inclusivity* in the criteria for effective discursive interactions. Let me explain this in more detail.

As I have outlined above, Longino argues that the dichotomy between the rational and the social is false, and that “scientific knowledge is produced by cognitive processes that are fundamentally social” (pp. 128–129). One of the most important social cognitive processes is the process of criticism by which it is established, “what gets to remain in the public pool of information that counts as knowledge” (p. 129). Longino reiterates that while she is interested in socializing knowledge, she is not interested in sociologizing it:

Criticism must be epistemologically effective—by helping a community avoid falsehood and by helping to bring its accepted content into alignment with its cognitive goals and its cognitive standards. Effective critical interactions transform the subjective into the objective, not by canonizing one subjectivity over another, but by assuring that what is ratified as knowledge has survived criticism from multiple points of view. (p. 129)

Longino uses the same language of “survival” of knowledge that leads Collins and others (e.g., Moulton 1983) to perceive criticism as hostile. However, among the criteria governing effective critical interactions – publicly recognized venues, publicly recognized standards, and uptake and not just toleration of dissent – Longino mentions “tempered equality” (p. 131). “Tempered equality” is the recognition of people’s equality of intellectual authority, tempered by the recognition that there are some innate differences in people’s intellectual endowments, as well as by other three criteria (public venues, public standards, and uptake).

For example, “reiterating the same old complaint no matter what response is offered eventually disqualifies one as a member of a discursive community of equals” (p. 133).

The recognition of equality of intellectual authority means that “the exclusion of women and certain racial minorities from scientific education and the scientific professions constitutes not only a social injustice but a *cognitive failing*,” because it limits the “exposure of hypotheses to the broadest range of criticism” (p. 132, emphasis added). Moreover, it will not do to observe that women and members of racial minorities would have had just as much of a chance to participate in scholarly debate, if only they had pursued the right kind of education: “Not only must dissenting voices not be discounted; they must be cultivated” (p. 132).

I imagine that Collins, Moulton, and others would find Longino’s criterion of tempered equality insufficient for addressing the perceived hostility and aggression of the process of scholarly debate and criticism. They might be more taken with Peter Elbow’s (1973/1998) argument for the “believing game” and his critique of the monopoly of the “doubting game,” especially in literary theory and other fields focused more on the production of meaning than on truth.

In addition, I have been told by indigenous students that scholarly criticism, even in a form and with a tone that would be considered respectful in many scholarly venues, can be perceived as disrespectful to one’s interlocutor in indigenous communities. In a culture that values the individual’s rationality, offering criticism is a sign of respect for one’s interlocutor’s rational ability to revise her or his views, or to offer better arguments for the original view. In other cultures, however, that place less emphasis on the individual’s rational ability and more on harmonious relations with the community, criticism may be perceived quite differently. While I believe these differences are ethical and ontological rather than epistemological, I also believe that more work needs to be done to make the different conceptions of respect and the different conceptions of the person that may be operating in diverse classrooms and academic departments more explicit.

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Chapter 3

Charting the Reefs: A Map of Multicultural Epistemology

Jon A. Levisohn and D.C. Phillips

“Avoid a strange and unfamiliar word as you would a dangerous reef”

—Julius Caesar

Introduction

Multiculturalism has been high on the agenda of many teachers, teacher-educators, educational researchers, educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and parents and students themselves for many years now – as well it should be. Multiculturalism involves important and fundamental issues about such matters as the respect that ought to be given to the beliefs and practices of the numerous ethnic and cultural groups that together make up modern pluralistic societies, and the ways that those cultures are or should be represented in school curricula. Furthermore, multiculturalism raises questions about society’s commitment to equity and the possibility of all children attaining fulfillment through education.

Typically, the intersection of multiculturalism and philosophy of education has been characterized by questions about autonomy, identity, and rights. For example, under what conditions do the interests and achievements and special talents of a minority cultural group have a claim to be recognized in the curriculum of a society’s elementary and secondary schools, or to be recognized in research funding opportunities? Do considerations of the good of a society as a whole justify enacting

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policies that might conflict with the good of a particular cultural or ethnic group within that society? To what degree is equality of educational opportunity to be judged in individual or communitarian terms? What is to be done when what is good for the group, *qua* group, conflicts with what is good for some individuals who are members of that group? What, indeed, constitutes a cultural group?

These are important questions, and there is much in this broad domain to which philosophers of education can contribute. It might seem strange, then, that two philosophers of education who are sympathetic towards the social and political agenda of the multiculturalism movement are setting sail in a different direction – namely, into the murky waters of so-called multicultural epistemology. As will become quite clear, our purpose in the following discussion is *not* to critique the multiculturalist educational reforms, many of which we would, in fact, endorse. On the whole, in our unsystematic assessment of the state of the field, educational systems are far more open to examining monocultural assumptions than they once were, and far more likely to seek guidance from a broad range of cultural representatives when challenges arise, and this is all to the good.

Instead, our present purpose as philosophers of education is to call attention to a trend among prominent contributors to the educational literature to argue on behalf of these reforms using the language of epistemology. This is not universal, of course; we have not attempted any statistical surveys, and this chapter makes no general claims about the field. But we will introduce and analyze a set of examples in which advocates indulge in a kind of rhetorical inflation that tends to obscure important issues rather than clarify them. When that happens – when the language of epistemology is used in an effort to advance political or curricular arguments – we believe that supporters of multiculturalism are doing their cause some disservice. Thus, our discussion is an effort to document this trend and provide a framework for its analysis.

Historically the term “epistemology” has referred to the branch of philosophy that investigates the “theory of knowledge,” with special focus upon the validation of knowledge claims. Past usage need not determine future usage, of course, but we believe that the now-popular way of talking that we wish to analyze has the effect of blurring a distinction that lies at the heart of this field of philosophy – one that should be of as much concern to those working in the broad field of multiculturalism as it is to educational researchers and philosophers. This is the traditional distinction between the set of beliefs which individuals actually hold and the subset of those beliefs that are well justified on the basis of sound and critical inquiry. This is just another way of saying that not all of a person’s beliefs or opinions are warranted enough to be labeled as “knowledge,” and that preserving the conceptual distinction is essential to inquiry.

All of us believe many things to be the case, more than we can enumerate. Some we can articulate in propositional form, and other beliefs are broader and more basic. Some we believe very strongly, and some are held less firmly. But what things do we know? Firmness of conviction cannot be the sole criterion of knowledge; we are all familiar with firm convictions that turned out to be unwarranted. To know something, to possess knowledge, we want this “something” to be warranted, to be accurate

or correct about the world, to not be misguided or based on a misinterpretation, to be true. Of course, truth itself is a notoriously complicated criterion for distinguishing knowledge from belief, and we have no intention of offering a comprehensive theory of truth in these pages. But we maintain that the distinction between knowledge and belief is essential: We have to admit that we actually know only some of what we believe to be the case. To use a trite example, one of us happens to believe quite strongly that some of our present US federal politicians are (as Woody Allen famously put it) “incompetent or corrupt – sometimes on the same day,” but he cannot be said to *know* the latter part of this double-barreled belief to be true. It might indeed be true that some present politicians are corrupt, but our coauthor cannot warrant or justify this belief enough for him to be able to claim that he actually *knows* this to be the case.

As we proceed, we will also call attention to a related distinction between (i) what we will label as *descriptive* inquiries (although it is important to note that these may analyze and study in various ways, as well as describe), which focus on those things that individuals believe (irrespective of whether these beliefs are well founded or not), and on the other hand (ii) what we will call *normative* inquiries, which focus on issues concerning the types of warrants or justifications that are offered to support claims that individuals actually know certain things (that is, that support claims that the beliefs in question can count as knowledge).

Those things that we believe and which are well justified, and hence are things that we can correctly say are known by us,¹ are in an important sense things that we *ought* to believe (because they are justified). And of course this highlights the fact that there are many other things that we *ought* to believe (because they also are well warranted) but which nevertheless we do not believe. Some individuals do not believe that Elvis is dead or that humans have walked on the moon. Some do not believe that the Earth is about five billion years old. But if the evidence for these beliefs is decisive, then the point is that they *ought* to believe these things.

¹ In fact, the traditional epistemological analysis has three conditions for claiming that an item is *known*: The item must be believed, there must be a justification or warrant for it that stands up to scrutiny, and it must actually be true. Mere mortals, of course, cannot actually determine if an item is actually true; instead, we make judgments based on our assessment of the justification or warrant. This is worth emphasizing. The project of normative epistemology is one in which we seek to understand what knowledge is and what it is not, what makes some inquiries successful and some inquiries unsuccessful, and what we even mean by these terms. It does not seek to be the final arbiter of truths. Another way of putting the point is this. Even if all the philosophers of science in the world came to consensus on a theory of scientific knowledge, that epistemological theory would not tell us which scientific theory is warranted and which is not. It would not advance scientific knowledge one iota. That’s what the scientists are for. The same can be said for any field of inquiry. Even if all the philosophers of literature in the world came to consensus on a theory of literary interpretation, that epistemological theory would not tell us which interpretation of a work is warranted and which is not. It would not advance our knowledge or understanding of literature one iota. This is the task of the literary critics and interpreters.

The most basic argument in what follows is that if the distinctions we have mentioned above are blurred, then all rational argument is potentially undermined, including the very arguments that the supporters of multiculturalism wish to employ in order to advance their cause. To accomplish our goals, we start by offering a mapping of the dangerous philosophical reefs surrounding “multicultural epistemology”; then we shall attempt to identify the most promising route through these reefs, one that may lead those interested in multiculturalism into more tranquil philosophical waters beyond. In light of the previous statements, it should be clear that it is not part of our agenda to engage in a sweeping discussion of the issues involved in research on multiculturalism. Instead, we will attempt to maintain focus on matters which are epistemological.

Three Preliminary Examples

Some of our readers may be skeptical that such a navigational assignment is worthwhile. Perhaps no sailor is foolhardy enough to venture into such challenging waters; perhaps no map is required! Others may wonder whether modifying “epistemology” with any kind of adjective (“multicultural,” “feminist,” “Chicana,” and so forth) makes sense. But some might take the other tack and regard the modifying of “epistemology” as unproblematic and as a commonsense thing to do. At the outset, then, three examples will help us define key points of the compass. These examples are not outliers; they are selected from widely cited and influential works in the field of multicultural education. Naturally, the passages we quote are not to be taken as being a complete summary of the positions of the individuals we cite.²

1. In a 1997 article in *Educational Researcher*, James Scheurich and Michelle Young began by wondering whether our “research epistemologies [are] racially biased,” and proceeded to argue that they are.

Respected scholars of color have suggested ... that the epistemologies we typically use in educational research may be racially biased. They have argued that our epistemologies – *not our use of them, but the epistemologies themselves* – are racially biased ways of knowing, implicitly proposing, thus, a new category of racism that could be labeled *epistemological racism*. (p. 4; the first emphasis is ours.)

It hardly needs to be said that these allegations are serious. Scheurich and Young carefully explain that they do not believe that educational researchers are, themselves, racially biased. Instead, the claim is that the dominant “epistemologies” might be racist.

2. The work of Patricia Hill Collins, which is cited by Scheurich and Young, illustrates the main point they make. In her book *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), she argues that groups in society have distinctive standpoints and epistemologies, but

² Fuller discussions of these and other important sources are contained in Chap. 2 of this volume.

that the perspectives of Black women and others are suppressed by the dominant epistemology “representing elite white male interests.” She goes on to state that

Black women scholars may know that something is true but be unwilling or unable to legitimate our claims using Eurocentric masculinist criteria for methodological adequacy.... (p. 204)

3. From a very different part of the reef, consider the controversial claims of Molefi Kete Asante. In a brief section of his book *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (1990) that takes up the issue of epistemology, he discusses the “quest for truth in the Afrocentric enterprise.” He argues that “language, myth, ancestral memory, dance-music-art, and science provide the sources of knowledge, the canons of proof and the structures of truth” (p. 10). It may not be clear exactly how each of the listed phenomena is supposed to contribute to the quest for truth; what *is* clear, however, is that Asante believes that he is making a claim about the relationship between culture and knowledge, culture and truth. And in a later passage, he makes an interesting remark that is similar in tenor to the claims made by Scheurich and Young, and Collins, about the dominance of Eurocentric epistemology: “The Afrocentrist does not accept the European concept of objectivity because it is invalid operationally.... I have argued that what often passes for objectivity is a sort of collective European subjectivity” (p. 24).

In each of these examples, a connection is sketched between “epistemology,” knowledge, and social and cultural environments. Each, therefore, represents an instance of the trend that we wish to examine here. What is being postulated in these instances, and in other cases we shall explore in more depth later, is that there is a deep connection between some aspect of personal identity – culture, ethnicity, race, class or social status, sexual orientation, gender – and what counts as knowledge. One important consequence is that there must be *multiple* rival or alternative epistemologies, since there are *many* cultural and ethnic groups.

Questions About Knowledge: A Preliminary Mapping

These introductory examples should be sufficient to indicate the overall dimensions of the reef of multicultural epistemology. In what follows, we provide a more careful mapping, in which we point out that the meaning of the term “epistemology” has been extended beyond the standard two usages that are to be found in philosophy. This is not, itself, problematic. After all, words take on new meaning all the time, and woe to the philosopher who claims to determine (much less enforce) the official meaning or meanings of a term! In practice, however, the broadening of the usages of a term can represent a source of confusion, especially when the term in its traditional meanings has played a significant role over a considerable historical period in the philosophical literature.

There are some interesting possibilities here. The extension or broadening of the usage of the term “epistemology” might have been done deliberately – perhaps on the grounds that the traditional usage was too narrow and had ridden roughshod

over important issues. (If this can be established, then obviously the case for the broadening is substantial). But it also is possible that some, at least, of the individuals who have used the term in this new, broader way are not aware that they have extended its meaning, and may think that they are using the term in its traditional philosophical sense or senses. To try and make sense of the situation, we will proceed descriptively, running through the various extended usages of “epistemology” that we have detected in the relevant literature of the past few decades. In each case – in each distinct usage we identify – we will blend in some analysis by considering what it might mean for there to be multiple or alternative or socioculturally based epistemologies in that particular usage.

(A) Epistemology as a Normative Field of Inquiry

In the *first* sense, “epistemology” is the name for a field of inquiry, namely, the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge and inquiry. This is the sense that is most directly derived from the word’s etymological origin: the “logos” of “episteme” (traditionally translated as “the logic of knowledge”). Within this usage, the word is only applied in the singular (“the logic” rather than “the logics”). But it is certainly the case that the broader expression, “the study of knowledge,” includes a range of important questions. When is a belief so well warranted that it deserves to be called knowledge? What are the “good-making” logical features of successful warrants or justifications? What can be known by humans, and on what is this knowledge based? What is the nature of evidence, and what is its role in “the fixation of belief” (to borrow the phrase of Charles Sanders Peirce)?

Thus, an introductory textbook by the epistemologist Robert Audi (1998) points out that the field of epistemology includes not only questions about knowledge but also questions about *justification* of knowledge: “Historically, justification—sometimes under such names as ‘reason to believe’, ‘evidence’, and ‘warrant’—has been as important in epistemology as knowledge itself” (p. viii). It is noteworthy that the same author includes no references to anything called “multicultural epistemology,” and makes only two brief references (in 340 pages) to “feminist epistemology.” What this suggests is that, rightly or wrongly, there is little intermingling of the balmy waters of mainstream epistemology with the currents around the reef we are attempting to chart in the educational literature.

Traditional epistemology has seen itself as a “meta-discipline” that is concerned with elucidating and evaluating the principles that apply to judging *all* knowledge claims, regardless of the power and influence of the claimant – or, for that matter, his or her marginality. Another way to put this crucial point is that traditional epistemology is a *normative field*, in the sense that we have already articulated. It requires that we distinguish between two sorts of beliefs: “mere” beliefs, those beliefs that we (or any individual or group) actually have come to hold; and those beliefs that we are justified in claiming as *knowledge* because they meet some set of epistemological standards or are arrived at in some particularly legitimate way.

(Of course, there are other questions – political or psychological questions – about why a person believes a certain thing, but those are not the focus of our attention here.) Epistemology is a vibrant field, which means there is lively debate about the precise nature of such standards and even about whether precision is *possible* when it comes to articulating such standards. But the point of the quote from Audi, above, is that there is little debate about the necessity of preserving the theoretical distinction between those beliefs that are justified and those that are not.³

Thus, epistemologists are prone to point out that each of us believes countless things to be true, although the sad fact of the matter is that many of these beliefs are not well warranted and indeed many of them are not true at all. Even some of the beliefs for which we *do* have strong warrants – such as our beliefs in the current findings and assertions of science – will eventually turn out to be false. It is standard in philosophy to insist that therefore we cannot have had knowledge of these things. For example, while scholars in the past might have believed that the Earth was flat (and had some evidence that they could offer in support of this judgment), nevertheless we are extremely reluctant to say that they *knew* this, for the simple reason that the Earth is not in fact flat and therefore cannot be known to be flat! This reluctance is strengthened by the fact that there is a perfectly reasonable, respectful, and unproblematic way to describe the view of these scholars in the past: They *believed* something and even had some good *reasons* for holding that belief about the shape of the Earth, but that belief turned out to be incorrect. This means that, because they believed and had some evidence (that turned out to be wanting), they wrongly identified their erroneous opinion as being something they *knew*. From the perspective of the epistemologist, there is nothing derogatory about all this. After all, it will certainly turn out that we are in the same position.

That note of humility should be emphasized and expanded. There is no good reason to believe that a simple answer to the questions of epistemology – an answer that would provide a fail-safe test at a given moment in time of the correctness of a particular knowledge claim or a particular inquiry – is lurking just around the philosophical corner. This is just to say, with most contemporary philosophers, that there is no reasonable hope of finding a method of achieving *certainty* regarding our knowledge.⁴ Nevertheless, the job of this kind of epistemology is to gain insight into the (better and worse) ways that we attempt to justify or provide warrant for our beliefs and thus bestow upon them the status of knowledge. Since we have already mentioned Peirce in passing, it is worth remembering that his paper on the “Fixation of Belief,” published in 1877, was among the earliest formulations of this view. And

³ In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) and later work, Richard Rorty may be taken to be debating exactly this point; he certainly had little patience for the efforts of traditional epistemologists to generate significant insight in these matters. We will return to Rorty below.

⁴ To simplify matters, we exclude from our discussion here knowledge of mathematical and logical propositions.

one of his intellectual successors, John Dewey, put the matter well, in terms of the norms or standards of inquiry:

We know that some methods of inquiry are better than others in just the same way in which we know that some methods of surgery, farming, road-making, navigating, or what-not are better than others. It does not follow in any of these cases that the “better” methods are ideally perfect We ascertain *how and why* certain means and agencies have provided warrantably assertible conclusions, while others have not and *cannot* do so. (Dewey 1966, p. 104)

For philosophical epistemology, then, the distinction between beliefs and knowledge (warranted or justified belief) is fundamental.

However, some writers on multiculturalism and education do not draw this normative, epistemological distinction and often use the term “knowledge” where the philosopher would insist that “belief” ought to be used. A passage written by James Banks in 1993 is quite explicit about this:

I am using knowledge in this article to mean the way a person explains or interprets reality.... My conceptualization of knowledge is broad and is used the way in which it is usually used in the sociology of knowledge literature to include ideas, values, and interpretations.... Although many complex factors influence the knowledge that is created by an individual or group, including the actuality of what occurred, the knowledge that people create is heavily influenced by their interpretations of their experiences and their positions within particular social, economic, and political systems and structures of a society. (p. 5)

Everything he says here is true of a person’s beliefs – what a person claims to know. And to the sociologist, observing and describing the function of those beliefs in the lives of people and groups, it may well seem reasonable to call those beliefs “knowledge.” To the epistemologist, however, what would turn these beliefs into knowledge are not the facts about the cultural or political or economic “position” of the individual whose beliefs they were, but whether or not those beliefs had been justified or warranted in an epistemically compelling manner.

Why does this distinction between belief and knowledge matter? It must be admitted that for some purposes it doesn’t. In those situations where researchers want to describe what individuals, or social or cultural groups, actually believe – i.e., when the issue is what they *take* to be true, as in Banks, above – the distinction is irrelevant. When, however, the discussion turns to *normative* matters – what beliefs are trustworthy enough to be successfully acted upon, for example, or how researchers are to validate their findings – the distinction is inescapable. For in these latter cases, one vital consideration that needs to be taken into consideration is whether or not the belief or finding is well warranted.

The same issue arises when the school curriculum is being planned. In the elementary schools of today, we would not want to teach, as *knowledge*, that the Earth actually is flat, regardless of whether some people (whether historically or contemporaneously) believe it to be flat. Likewise, we would not want to teach that the Earth is anything other than five billion years old, regardless of whether some cultural groups believe that to be true. It is not helpful to say things like, “The world was flat for them but spherical for us,” or, “There is a scientific theory that the world is five billion years old but it is true for some religious individuals that it is five thousand years old.” These formulations are well meaning but ultimately misguided.

It is often important, of course, to describe – and treat sympathetically – the beliefs of different cultural groups, but on those occasions it is intellectually honest for these to be reported as beliefs, not as knowledge.

It might appear to some that this distinction lying at the heart of the traditional field of epistemology – the distinction between knowledge and belief – merely serves as an excuse for the more traditional branches of epistemology to ignore the more radical branches. But this is not the case, for some philosophers sharply critical of those traditional branches uphold precisely this distinction. For example, Charles Mills (1988), in his Marxist analysis of alternative epistemologies, argues that “those who are expressly challenging traditional belief-systems would seem to have a good reason for wanting to retain [the distinction between belief and knowledge]” (p. 240). Without it, he holds, the possibility of critique – in which one argues against a set of standard claims, or questions the justifications of those claims – is lost. And similarly, the feminist epistemologist Sally Haslanger (1999) explains that “a purely ‘descriptive’ approach to the analysis of knowledge ... either ignores the normative question of what epistemic concepts we ought to employ, or assumes implausibly that the epistemic concepts we do employ are the ones we ought to” (p. 467). Feminist philosopher of science Helen Longino (1993), for her part, writes as follows:

[Even] if we abandon the idea that knowledge is one, and ... absolute, [even] if we assume the location of knowledge in sociohistorical contexts and become pluralists, *we are still faced with the ancient problem of distinguishing knowledge from opinion* and what the distinction amounts to. (p. 212, emphasis added)

(B) An Epistemology as a Normative Theory of Knowledge

There is a *second* and closely related philosophical sense of the term “epistemology” that applies to the theories that epistemologists produce – those particular sets of ideas about knowledge and inquiry whose labels make up the professional jargon of philosophy. For example, epistemology in the West was dominated for several hundred years by the contending *empiricist* and *rationalist* epistemologies, and for part of the twentieth century by *positivism* (all of which are sometimes grouped together as “foundationalist epistemologies”). Similarly, those theories about knowledge inspired by Peirce, James, and Dewey are *pragmatist epistemologies*, and those inspired by Popper and others are *non-foundationalist epistemologies*. Epistemology, in this sense, is not the name of the field but the name of the theory that the inquirers in the field produce.

The term “*multicultural epistemologies*” is often used in this way; it is a theory or more accurately a set of linked theories that have been produced by a group of inquirers in the field of epistemology. Note, however, that the plural form of the term does not merely signal the existence of competing theories within the general camp of multicultural epistemology, the existence of intra-family disputes. Rather, it signals that a multicultural epistemological stance will recognize the validity of multiple epistemologies among the multiple cultural or ethnic groups in society or

in the world – not just their existence, as an empirical fact, but their validity. It seems fair to say that, for multicultural epistemologies, all of these rivals need to be respected, for each group’s epistemology is right, in some sense, for that group. The situation is different with the various rival classical epistemological theories we listed above. Empiricism, rationalism, and the rest coexist because philosophers still disagree about them, but all the disputants agree that only one position can be right (and each disputant claims that his own position is that one correct position). That is, each of these traditional epistemological theories is actually (and explicitly) making a mutually exclusive claim about the nature of human knowledge and justification, namely, that it is the only correct position. Multicultural epistemologies tend not to make such claims.

The Special Case of “Standpoint Epistemologies”

To probe this idea, it will be helpful at this point to introduce an alternative epistemology known as “standpoint epistemology.” Derived from insights in Hegel (regarding the master–slave dialectic) and Marx (regarding the standpoint of the proletariat; see Mills 1988), borrowing Lyotard’s skepticism about justificatory meta-narratives (Lyotard 1984), and building on commonly held critiques of foundationalist epistemologies (see Phillips and Burbules 2000), standpoint epistemology holds – in its simplest form – that one’s social positioning or standpoint (including especially one’s race and gender) determines what is accepted as knowledge, what beliefs can be justified, and – crucially – *how* they can be justified. We shall return to a more detailed discussion of standpoint epistemology below, but for now, we intend to focus on the claim that multiple cultural/social epistemologies can coexist at the normative level. That is, this theory holds that a variety of different and competing sets of normative epistemological views about what makes for better beliefs, and how beliefs should be warranted, can all be correct at the same time.

It should be clear that the work of the standpoint epistemologists differs from the descriptive standpointism espoused by James Banks in the passage quoted earlier, for it was explicit that it was *not* part of his agenda to discuss or assess the warrants or justifications for beliefs. He made it clear that he was not engaged in a normative endeavor but rather sought to explore the sociopolitical forces and processes that shape how groups construct the things they consider to be knowledge. But the standpoint epistemologist insists that, in contrast to an abstract knower of some hypothetical proposition (as in the endlessly repeated formula, “S knows that P if and only if...”), *real* knowers and *real* inquirers are always located in a sociocultural and historical setting and have their own specific identities,⁵ and it is from such sources that their epistemological tools are acquired. Therefore, for example, it is suggested that what counts as knowledge and justification for Black

⁵ This position is developed by Lorraine Code in her classic essay, part of which is reprinted as Chap. 5 in this volume.

females is not necessarily the same as what counts as knowledge for Asian males, and vice versa.

We believe that there are a number of weaknesses in this view, but at present we merely want to point out that, as an epistemological theory, standpointism too makes a *normative* claim about the nature of knowledge and inquiry, just as the other traditional epistemological theories do. In other words, the standpoint epistemologist believes that this theory is *correct* and is not merely one alternative among many; and furthermore it tells us something about the difference between knowledge and beliefs. At the same time, standpointism does allow for the possibility that the knowledge produced and accepted by one culture (or race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) is fundamentally different from the knowledge produced and accepted by other cultures – a strong sense of the term “multicultural epistemologies” that leads in the direction of relativism.

It appears, then, that feminist or Black or Chicano epistemologies (for example) might be classified as sub-theories under the standpoint epistemology metatheory, for they describe the knowledge practices of these particular communities; but it should be remembered that they face a significant philosophical hurdle in achieving normative status *beyond* their specific group of origin. For as we pointed out earlier, there are multiple cultural groups, and to be consistent, they cannot claim that only their own culturally based epistemology is valid – they have to extend this privilege to all cultural groups. This charitable (relativistic) position is reinforced by standpoint epistemology. For example, if the version of standpointism described above is accepted, then Chicana epistemology, say, has no greater external or universal validity than Native American epistemology. Or more controversially, feminist epistemologies – understood now as that knowledge produced by women, or as the knowledge-justifying practices of women – have no greater universal validity than masculinist epistemologies. In other words, if standpointism is correct, the epistemology of a group (and the products of its epistemological activities) will have normative status *for that group* but will not have such status for those with another group affiliation – a position that would seem to be something of a pyrrhic victory for the supporters of “multicultural epistemology.” (In our discussion, we are putting aside the vexed question of what actually constitutes a group, but see Kwame Anthony Appiah’s thoughtful inquiry into the sources of group identity in Appiah 1990.)

(C) An Epistemology as a Descriptive Account of How People Acquire Beliefs

The preceding discussion has already introduced a *third* distinct usage of the term “epistemology,” as an empirical or descriptive term rather than as a philosophical and normative one. As discussed several times already, this distinction between normative and descriptive usages is crucial. Simply put, a descriptive epistemology is one that merely describes (and perhaps analyzes or studies) a set of beliefs or belief strategies without evaluating them, without regard for the normative distinction

between belief and knowledge. In contrast, a normative epistemology is one that upholds that distinction and attempts to gain insight into it.

We need to make clear that in calling attention to the difference between descriptive and normative usages, we are not denying the potential *relevance* of descriptive studies to normative inquiry. Many serious philosophers today, perhaps even all, believe that normative epistemology must seek to analyze actual knowledge practices. To take just one example, the recognition that knowledge is often generated by communities (for example, research groups or peer groups of researchers working in the same general field) rather than by isolated individuals has had far-reaching implications for normative theories of knowledge. (See Haslanger 1999, for a contemporary development of this general point, in the service of the argument that “feminist inquiry into social and cognitive lives is essential to normative epistemology.” And, see our discussion below, in the section entitled “Cultures and Knowledge: A Closer Look.”) As a second example, we might note that the paradigm-shifting work of Thomas Kuhn (1962/1970) in philosophy of science – universally cited and sometimes understood – is grounded in the empirical study of actual scientific revolutions.

An Example: An Argument from Scheurich and Young

To offer an illustration of how many of the issues we have touched upon in our discussion thus far can become entangled, consider the following passage from Scheurich and Young (1997) in which they argue that what they call the “critical tradition” (by which evidently they mean the traditional philosophical tradition) is in some way defective or limited. (We have added numbering to the sentences for ease of reference in our subsequent discussion.)

(1) The critical tradition’s ontology, epistemology, and axiology are predominantly the creation of White scholars and their social context.... (2) Consequently ... it is not necessarily the appropriate epistemological frame for all race-oriented emancipatory work. (3) Advocates for the critical tradition, therefore, need to support the emergence and acceptance of other epistemologies. (pp. 9–10)

A close reading of these three sentences yields the following. The first sentence offers a correct descriptive historical statement, for indeed, traditional philosophical epistemology was developed mainly by a succession of White males. But note that it remains at the descriptive level; there is no normative analysis of the validity of the epistemology that was produced by these men. Indeed, the sentence tells us nothing about the content of the theories at all. The second sentence, however, beginning as it does with “Consequently,” contains an unarticulated argument. That argument is something like this: Because the tradition was created by a particular ethnic group (White males), its epistemology is only suited for or only meets the needs of that group (White males). The authors temper this argument by their circumlocution, claiming that the White-male-created epistemology is “not necessarily ... appropriate.” But the basic argument is unavoidable. And the third sentence then follows: If a traditional epistemology is inappropriate for

“emancipatory work,” and if (we might add) people of good will are in favor of such work, then those within the tradition ought to support alternative epistemologies. They ought to acknowledge and accept the fact that what worked for them (as it were) does not work for others. (Interestingly, the authors deny that the alternative epistemologies are to be preferred over traditional ones: “It is not our intention ... to privilege some of the race-based epistemologies over others” (Scheurich and Young 1997, p. 11).)

What are we to make of this claim? If we consider fields other than epistemology, we quickly run into trouble. The current physical science “theory of matter” – matter is composed of atoms, which have nuclei and electron shells, and at the subatomic level there are quarks of various types, etc. – was built up overwhelmingly by White males, but does this mean it only “meets the needs of” this group? Are Hispanic males, or Black females, or White females, also not obliged to accept this as the best theory that is currently available? We might ask similar questions about any other field, in the social sciences and the humanities no less than the physical sciences. This second sentence makes the assumption that what is required for successful “emancipatory work” is an appropriate epistemology, whereas one might have supposed that what was required was substantive knowledge produced by rigorous and disciplined inquiry into political and economic systems and how one might influence those systems in forwarding the emancipatory agenda.

It seems clear that here the authors are using the term “epistemology” not in either of the two philosophical senses we discussed earlier. The need for other epistemologies is not supported here by any normative analysis of the defects of the principles of traditional epistemology. Instead, the argument is entirely nonnormative; a descriptive account of the particular ethnic or cultural origin of the theory is sufficient to show that it is inappropriate in the new setting.

In their rejoinder to two responses to their original article, Scheurich and Young ask that their critics consider more sensitively “the issues of racism in research, including the recognition that research has an atrocious history of reproducing White racism” (Scheurich and Young 1998, p. 29). It surely is true that the history of social inquiry is littered with examples of racial bias, and it surely is true that the products of those inquiries have preserved and even promoted racist social arrangements. But those examples all serve to confirm the descriptive thesis that research has been biased with sometimes disastrous consequences. In order to construct the normative category of epistemological racism, as Scheurich and Young hope to do, it is necessary to offer an account of the relationship between the “race” or culture of inquirers and the validity or satisfactoriness of the criteria or normative standards that these inquirers operate with in producing their knowledge claims, and to show that the normative standards of traditional epistemology actually endorse the biased work that has been produced. People do bad things to other people, and sometimes they do bad things using bad research, unconsciously or even intentionally. But it is hard to understand how the bad things that people do can undermine the norms of inquiry. If inquirers falsify their research, we can blame the inquirers and perhaps the system that produced them, but we can hardly blame the norms of inquiry that they have failed to honor.

Sociology of Knowledge: The Descriptive Orientation Reigns Supreme

The idea of an epistemology as a descriptive account of how people acquire beliefs suggests a branch of sociology known as “sociology of knowledge,” and in particular, that subbranch known as “sociology of science,” which inquires into the knowledge practices of particular communities – in this case, communities of scientists.

Sociologists of science ask fascinating descriptive questions. For example, in the course of their knowledge-making activities in their laboratories, what are the chief practices in which scientists engage? Do all members of the lab – from the humblest to the most famous – have freedom of input, or are some relatively disenfranchised? Do women and members of minority groups in the lab participate as frequently in discussions and in decision-making as men? In pursuing such questions – in constructing a descriptive account of knowledge production – sociologists may also be considered by some to be providing an “epistemology” of science in this empirical, descriptive, nonphilosophical, and nonnormative sense of the term. (Latour and Woolgar 1986, is a controversial classic in this general genre.)

It should be clear that insightful sociology of science has raised important issues, in particular, regarding the relationships between power structures in communities of inquiry and the knowledge claims that are put forward by those communities. For example, writing in the “Introduction” to their edited volume on *Feminist Epistemologies*, Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (1993) write as follows:

Growing awareness of the many ways in which political relationships (that is, disparate power relations) are implicated in theories of knowledge has led to the conclusion that gender hierarchies are not the only ones that influence the production of knowledge. Cognitive authority is usually associated with a cluster of markings that involve not only gender but also race, class, sexuality, culture, and age.... Research has revealed a plethora of oppressions at work in productions of knowledge.... (p. 3)

Alcoff and Potter here point to the fact that, while gender is the primary issue of concern to them, the question of the relationship between political power and the production of knowledge is similar for all marginalized groups.

At the same time, however, one radical trend within sociology of knowledge – the so-called strong program – would not be satisfied with the analysis offered to this point. (For further discussion of sociology of science, see the chapters by Phillips, Matthews, and Slezak, in Phillips 2000a; also see Phillips 2000b.) Adherents of this approach would *acknowledge* that their work is descriptive, rather than normative (that is, it follows the third usage of “epistemology” rather than the first or second). But they would argue further that decisions about what to count as knowledge are *never* made using epistemic criteria (the sorts of criteria Audi discusses under the rubric of “justification”). Instead, what gets called “knowledge” is *entirely* determined by sociopolitical processes, of the sort that sociology and anthropology of science can elucidate. This is strikingly illustrated in the following passage, written by the prominent “strong programmer” Steve Woolgar (1993):

It should be clear from these tenets [of the strong program] that mathematical statements such as “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” are as much a legitimate target of sociological questioning as any other item of knowledge What kinds of historical conditions give this expression its currency

and, in particular, what established (and now sustains) it as a belief? This kind of question is posed without regard for the (actual) truth status of the statement. (p. 43)

But surely it is bizarre to exclude the “truth status” of this mathematical statement from being among the factors giving it the wide currency it holds among educated people. (That is, surely most of us accept the statement because we have strong reason to believe that it is true!)

To followers of the strong program, then, issues of warrant or justification in the philosophical sense are mere window dressing, and traditional normative epistemology is an utterly futile endeavor. On this view, then, the distinction between the normative and descriptive senses is crystal clear. The “strong programmers” are not *denying* the theoretical distinction; rather, the claim is that we should just stop doing this vacuous normative epistemology altogether – as a field, it is now defunct. It is worth noting here that perhaps the most prominent proponent of the end-of-epistemology view – though he was postmodern rather than an adherent of the strong program – was Richard Rorty (e.g., Rorty 1979), who argued that there is simply nothing (or, nothing “interesting”) to be said about what makes some kinds of inquiry or some kinds of belief better than others.

The Idea of “Ways of Knowing”

A further example of this third usage of “epistemology” in the literature we are surveying emerges when the question of “how do we know?” is interpreted in a rather natural manner, especially for educators and educational researchers. Everything that we actually do know can be construed as a product of *learning*, either on the collective or individual level, and scholars have done important work on such matters as the mechanisms of learning and diverse learning styles. One example here is Lyttle and Cochran-Smith’s (1992) article, “Teacher research as a way of knowing,” but the more prominent example is Belenky et al. (1986), *Women’s Ways of Knowing*. Clearly, this usage of “epistemology” also is descriptive rather than normative; research in this category is not concerned with the normative justification of particular propositions or ideas, but rather with describing *the psychology or social psychology of knowledge*. How do individuals come to know (learn) something? How do members of a culture come to do so? Do different ethnic groups or genders learn or acquire knowledge (or insight, or wisdom) in different ways? Are there different ways of learning or of “coming to know”? Particularly when these empirical issues are addressed on a fundamental level, writers sometimes consider them to be “epistemological.” Those who are familiar with traditional *normative* epistemology, on the other hand, believe that such a label is confusing for precisely the reasons that we have been discussing. Indeed, this is why Helen Longino (1994) concludes her (generally positive) review of Belenky et al. as follows: “But it is not yet epistemology” (p. 474).

Some of Asante’s remarks are best understood within this framework as well, for example, when he asks about the role of myth and ancestral memory. One assumes that he is not debating the degree of warrant for traditional cultural myths, or for

ancestral memory. Rather, he is suggesting that they are the psychological or social sources of the beliefs that some cultural groups value and teach to their younger members (teach, that is, as “knowledge”). And this same sense of “epistemology” seems to be relevant to Collins (1990), when, in her discussion of “an Afrocentric feminist epistemology,” she discusses the importance of such things as dialogue and a “call-and-response discourse mode,” the use of empathy, and the use of metaphors (Chap. 10). A metaphor surely does not make a knowledge claim valid; a metaphor does not provide warrant. But a metaphor certainly may help individuals learn or understand that claim.

In some of these cases, there seems to be an unnecessary source of confusion. Nothing much is gained from the rhetorical inflation of using the term “epistemology.” Conversely, nothing is lost if the use of “epistemology” is avoided, and instead these phenomena are referred to in terms of diverse learning styles, different modes of learning and engagement, different patterns of discourse and rhetorical and cultural production, and so on, across various cultural groups.

(D) An Epistemology as a Description of a Set of Beliefs

To this point, we have noted two normative senses of “epistemology,” one in which it refers to the specific field of normative inquiry as a whole and a second in which it refers to particular normative theories within that field. We have also argued that there is a third sense of the term, which has become prevalent in the educational research literature, which is descriptive rather than normative. And in adapting the term to a descriptive usage, the notion of “multiple epistemologies” becomes unproblematic. But in addition to the description of knowledge *practices* of particular communities, the term “epistemology” is sometimes extended even further to encompass description of the specific *content* of beliefs that are held, or are accorded the status of being knowledge, by ethnic or cultural groups. In this *fourth* usage, then, multicultural epistemologies are simply *those differing sets of beliefs held by different communities*. This need not take the form of an individuated list of propositions, of course; we might think instead of a worldview or even a horizon of meaning. Here it is worth pausing to note that multicultural epistemology, in this sense, indeed can be an extremely important area for educational research to explore. One only has to consider the potentially miseducational consequences of assuming that all students share the beliefs of the dominant culture to see why this is so.

Thus, it is sometimes claimed in the literature that Chicanas or Blacks have different, rival epistemologies (typically, in opposition to a dominant White epistemology, rather than in opposition to each other). But the substance of the argument involves pointing to, at least in part, the different beliefs that the groups in question actually hold, and which they respectively believe to be important to their experience of the world. This is part of the argument of Bernal (1998), who claims that “a unique characteristic of a Chicana feminist epistemology is that it also validates ... experiences that are intertwined with issues of immigration, migration, generational

status, bilingualism, [etc.]” (p. 561). These issues are certainly important and worthy of the attention of educators and educational researchers, but they are “epistemological” only in this fourth sense; they are aspects of the experiences of a certain community and may certainly shape the way members of the community act or behave (for everyone acts at least in part on the basis of their past experiences, and what is believed to be the case). But again we stress that epistemology in this fourth sense makes no appeal at all to any evaluation of the things that are claimed to be items of knowledge.

Consider the following example. In her chapter entitled “Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology,” prominent Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) blends standpointist assumptions with a call for the expansion of scholarship to encompass broader areas of experience:

Black feminist thought, like all specialized thought, reflects the interests and standpoint of its creators.... Because elite white men and their representatives control structures of knowledge and validation, white male interests pervade the thematic content of traditional scholarship. As a result, Black women’s experiences with work, family, motherhood, political activism, and sexual politics have been routinely distorted in or excluded from traditional academic discourse. (p. 201)

Collins does not present a philosophical argument, here, for standpointism as an epistemological theory. Rather, she is rejecting the disciplinary limitations on scholarship and offering a sketch of a sociopolitical argument that those limitations inevitably bring about a scholarly distortion and undervaluing of the real lives, and real concerns, of Black women. Clearly, if this argument were to be developed, it should be a matter of great concern that the body of knowledge accorded a canonical status within a society does not include the “thematic content” that is of importance to subgroups within that society. Just as clearly, however, Collins’ usage of the term “epistemology” in this chapter avoids the kind of normative considerations that characterize the philosophical usages of the term. She is not saying that there is something about the experience with work or family that generates knowledge of a particularly logically well-warranted kind. Rather, she is saying that the topics or issues that are of central concern to Black women are not sufficiently addressed by current scholarly inquiry.

Using the Map: An Example

Our map of the broad field of multicultural epistemology should have made clear that there are – in addition to the two standard philosophical usages of the term – two other different and counterposed senses in which a scholar might be using the term “epistemology.” The four were as follows: (a) epistemology as a normative field of study, (b) an epistemology as a particular normative theory of knowledge and justification, (c) an epistemology as a descriptive account of the belief-acquiring practices of individuals or communities, and (d) an epistemology as a descriptive account of the actual contents of a set of beliefs or a worldview. In the latter two

descriptive senses, the notion of multiple culturally influenced or culturally based epistemologies is unproblematic; within the first two normative senses, on the other hand, the notion of multicultural epistemology represents a conceptual challenge. But we will take up this discussion later. For the present, the important point is that when the different senses of the term are run together within an argument, unnecessary confusion may result.

In the course of our cartographical efforts, we have illustrated the map with several examples from the literature. But before moving on, it might be useful to display the fruitfulness of our map by applying it to a relatively recent prominent example of discourse on epistemology in a multiculturalism framework. In the course of his presidential address at the 1998 AERA Annual Meeting, the influential multiculturalism educator James Banks opened with a brief section titled “An Epistemological Journey” (Banks 1998, p. 5). This discussion was set within the context of an emotionally moving account of his impressions, when he was an elementary school student in the American south in the 1950s, of the “images of the happy and loyal slaves in my social studies textbooks.” His “epistemological” discussion ran as follows:

When I entered graduate school... I studied with professors who understood my nagging questions about the institutionalized representations of African Americans in American culture and facilitated my quest for answers. The anthropologist Charles C. Hughes taught me about the relationship between culture and knowledge production. The sociologist James B. McKee introduced me to the sociology of knowledge... and Thomas F. Kuhn’s (sic) (1962/1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. I read John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* in an independent reading with the educational psychologist Robert L. Green.... My epistemological quest to find out why the slaves were represented as happy became a lifelong journey that continues.... I have lived with these questions all of my professional life. I will describe my most recent thinking about them. *I now believe that the biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct.* (p. 5; emphasis in original)

What Banks describes here is his attempt to understand how the saccharine depiction of slavery was ever accepted and promulgated. Since it is clear that this is a false depiction, Banks is not primarily interested in debating its merits, examining the evidence, considering the justifications. These would involve the kind of normative epistemological issues categorized within senses (a) and (b) above. Instead, Banks describes the social science studies (anthropology, sociology of knowledge, and social psychology) that he undertook in his quest for understanding. These studies all fit comfortably under categories (c) and perhaps (d) described in our map. In addition, the sentence he italicized is also a straightforward account of the views that many sociologists of knowledge would endorse; his point is an empirical one, not a philosophically epistemological one.

It might also be helpful to note that many philosophers (including both of us) would endorse Banks’ claim that the beliefs or knowledge *claims* that individuals make are shaped by their experiences and values. But, to repeat a point we made earlier, while most claims are never subjected to systematic examination, to achieve *the status of knowledge* requires the introduction of evidence, warrant, critical input,

and so forth. To the philosophical epistemologist, what is of interest is how and to what extent this kind of normative backing has been provided. Of course, no knowledge claim is ever actually stamped with an epistemological seal of approval; the work of normative epistemology is to understand knowledge, not to endorse some knowledge claims or to reject others. But maintaining the philosophical distinction between belief and knowledge is essential. In short, the epistemic issue central in usages (a) and (b) is whether a belief or claim is justified enough (in terms of one or another theory of justification) to be categorized as an item of knowledge, regardless of the sociocultural or political specifics of its origin and regardless of who happens to hold it as a belief. This point serves as segue to the next section.

Cultures and Knowledge: A Closer Look

So far our discussion has attempted to show the variety of issues that are encompassed by the field of multicultural epistemology, by calling attention to the different senses of the term “epistemology.” But at this point, we need to tackle some of the complexities we have been postponing, regarding multicultural epistemology in the specifically normative sense. If we want to understand what an epistemology might be that is *both* normative *and* multicultural, we need to delve more deeply into the central philosophical issue, namely, the nature of the relationship between the culture of epistemic agents and the knowledge those agents generate. As noted above, standpoint epistemology views this relationship in clear and unequivocal terms, and this position is assumed or implied by some of the theorists we have been discussing. But not all philosophers are satisfied with standpointism as a theory about the nature of knowledge, especially the strong version of it that we have outlined thus far.

One way to argue against standpoint epistemology – perhaps the standard reaction to it – would be to accuse the position of embodying the “genetic fallacy.” (This is the logical fallacy of suggesting that information about the source or genesis of an idea or a proposition has relevance to the validity or justification of that idea or proposition.) According to this standard way of thinking, an idea is judged as warranted (or not) solely by virtue of the evidence and arguments that are put forward in its support. Its *origin*, on the other hand – for example the social or cultural positioning of the person who (or group that) initially formulated it – is, according to traditional philosophical epistemology, quite irrelevant to the issue of warrant or validity of the proposition that has been put forward.

However, as Margaret Crouch (1993) argues, adopting this line of attack against standpointism assumes in advance that there is no possibility of origin having any such relevance, an assumption which should rightfully be open to inquiry. The situatedness of real knowers within history, and the fact that they do have cultural identities, at least opens up the possibility that cultural background may have *some* influence upon knowledge and justification – but how and in what way? Following Crouch, we believe that the wholesale accusation that standpoint epistemologies

commit the “genetic fallacy” misses the point. Particularly in light of developments in mainstream epistemology, it is unhelpful to simply reassert that knowledge is the product of universally applicable methods of inquiry and culturally independent norms of appraisal or justification. Instead, the philosophically important question to be asked about multicultural epistemology is something like this: *Precisely what does the culture (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) of inquirers contribute, epistemologically, to the knowledge possessed by, or the knowledge-generating activities of, those agents (as opposed to the beliefs they generate and accept)?*

Asking the question in this way begins to suggest some of the obstacles that a strong standpoint theory has to overcome. For example, is there something inherent in certain cultures that contributes to the modes of valid knowledge production and appraisal that are used by members of those cultures? That is, is there something about being a member of a certain culture that gives one an *epistemic* advantage that members of other cultures might not have? This would be a somewhat troubling assertion. There are, of course, generalizations that may (or may not) be true about cultures and genders, but deterministic claims that one culture is advantaged – epistemically or in other ways – over others have a long and ignominious history as tools of oppression. On the other hand, if it is being claimed that *all* cultures possess some specific (but different) features that confer an epistemic advantage, then standpointism seems to become totally relativistic, as all cultures can then produce valid knowledge – but the resulting valid “knowledges” would often, if not always, be incompatible. It is important to bear in mind here that standpoint epistemology and the multicultural epistemology it undergirds both get their bite from the suggestion that *some* standpoints are more epistemically valid than others – for some purposes or for some audiences. After all, few if any standpointist would endorse the proposition that androcentric inquiry is as legitimate as feminist inquiry, except of course for the purpose of furthering the interests of men! And moreover, if the relativistic route is taken, how are we to think about communication across cultures? There would seem to be, on this scenario, no way whatsoever to adjudicate competing knowledge claims from people in different cultural situations. The claims would be valid for the cultures that advance them, but not for others, which in turn put forward different knowledge claims.

Among contemporary feminist philosophers, Sandra Harding is perhaps the most prominent of those who claim the mantle of standpoint epistemology, but she is acutely aware of the general concerns we have sketched here, and her work represents a sophisticated and sustained effort to accommodate them. In Harding’s (1987) view, a standpoint is not simply a product of one’s gender or race; rather, a standpoint is something that *must be achieved*. For example, not all women have a feminist standpoint by virtue of birth or biology; only some do, as do some men (p. 185). This is a key point, but one that is missed by some educational researchers. In Scheurich and Young’s (1997) view, for example, *all* White men – early feminists like John Stuart Mill along with unabashed male chauvinists, leading moral philosophers like Kant and John Rawls along with the vilest bigots – are unavoidably tainted by their (often unwitting) racist standpoint (p. 8). But once one acknowledges that an epistemological standpoint is not derived, in any kind of simple and

direct way, from one's biology or the culture in which one is raised, one avoids the theoretical difficulties mentioned in the previous paragraph. Thus, Harding's position explicitly rejects any hint of essentialism, determinism, or relativism. At the same time, however, one is still left with the question of *precisely what* the standpoint contributes to knowledge or inquiry.

Harding's answer to the question may seem surprising. She argues that there is nothing about a particular standpoint that provides a person with a fundamentally different way of thinking, an alternative rationality, or knowledge that is inherently unavailable to others situated within other standpoints. However, standpoints *do* provide us with differing research interests, differing conceptual categories, differing questions. Thus, Harding (1990) writes as follows:

It cannot be that women's experiences or 'what women say' in themselves provide reliable grounds for knowledge claims about nature and social relations.... Women say all kinds of things — misogynist statements, illogical arguments, misleading statements about an only partially understood situation.... So while both 'women's experiences' and 'what women say' certainly are good places to begin generating research projects ... they would not seem to be reliable grounds for deciding just which claims to knowledge are preferable. (p. 142)

In this passage, Harding pays close attention to the need to distinguish between better and worse knowledge claims, pursuing epistemology as a *normative* endeavor. This attitude becomes explicit when she argues that cultural or gender-based standpoints, themselves, do not and cannot provide the normative criteria for adjudicating knowledge claims. Rather, a feminist standpoint presents the researcher with "good places to begin."

Why is this so? If one accepts that inquiry is guided by interests and values — while at the same time denying that all knowledge is relative to standpoints — why should one standpoint (the feminist standpoint) be privileged over another? In Harding's view, those who occupy certain social positions are so situated that they are able to see matters more clearly and are able to generate more critical questions — all of which contribute to epistemic work. She writes:

The activities of those at the bottom of such social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought — for everyone's research and scholarship — from which humans' relations with each other and the natural world can become visible. This is because the experience and lives of marginalized peoples, as they understand them, provide particularly significant *problems to be explained*... Some social situations — critically unexamined dominant ones — are more limiting than others in this respect, and what makes these situations more limiting is their inability to generate the critical questions about received belief. (Harding 1993, p. 54)

So while one's standpoint *cannot* provide one with an alternative knowledge base or form of knowing, it *can* provide an epistemically superior set of questions to be pursued.

It should be clear that Harding's view has implications beyond feminism and gender. Her point is that when we make our decisions about where to start researching social arrangements, we should consider whose perspectives are likely to *replicate* traditional hierarchies and whose perspectives are likely to be *critical* of them. When she refers to "marginalized peoples," she is obviously including not only women but also racial and cultural minorities, or any coherent subgroup within a

dominant culture. And when considering educational research, in particular – or at least, certain kinds of educational research, with particular focus on question of equity and access, for example – Harding seems to have much to offer. Educational institutions and systems, after all, are social structures, subject to the same hierarchies of dominance as all social structures. It therefore seems right to say that, if we are concerned with getting at the truth about or insight into those hierarchies, we ought to focus our research on problems that are generated from the positions of the marginalized. If we want to understand racism in a social system, we will be far better served by starting from the standpoints of the racial minorities at the bottom of the social hierarchy, than by inquiring into the views of those at the top!

Now, this discussion is hardly the proper place for a thorough engagement with Harding's theory, but we should note, in passing, some concerns. If we are thinking about our knowledge of the social and educational realms, then her arguments need to be taken quite seriously. But Harding believes that her position is a *general* one, a position that holds for the biological and physical sciences as well (for example, see Harding 1993, pp. 56–57, 64). This more general claim, however, is problematic. Simply put: Why would socially marginalized individuals or groups have more penetrating insight into the nature of quarks or the structure of the genome than do members of more advantaged social groups? Moreover, one can also reconsider the range of questions that interest us even *within* the social and educational realms. Consider the following areas of inquiry: the effectiveness of whole language instruction in reading versus phonics, the educational advantages (if any) of class size or school size reduction, and whether constructivist modes of instruction are more effective than direct instruction. Surely not all of these concern the existence of social hierarchies? And surely some – if not all – of these and similar topics are, nevertheless, legitimate? If this is so, it is not at all clear why the standpoint of the marginalized is a good place to start for *all* social research.

But let us set aside these concerns. The important point to be learned from Harding does not concern our criticisms, which after all have only been sketched here. The larger issue has been the question of the nature of the relationship between the culture of epistemic agents and the knowledge those agents generate, and whether it is possible to defend a multicultural epistemology that articulates that relationship. It is clear that Harding's theory is concerned with normative epistemological issues, as we have seen. Is this, then, at long last, a normative multicultural epistemology? Is it a view that has answered the central question of the connection between culture and knowledge?

Not surprisingly, the answer is yes and no, for we need to pay close attention to the way that Harding has *altered* the project of multicultural epistemology in the course of *pursuing* it. In the first sections of this chapter, we pointed out that the notion of multicultural epistemology is unproblematic if we take "epistemology" to entail a descriptive project. We argued, further, that within normative epistemology, a multicultural epistemology suggests a connection between culture and knowledge of the kind that is affirmed by a straightforward standpointism. But now we have explored, briefly, Harding's more sophisticated standpointist view. In her view, we do indeed have strong epistemic reasons to pay attention to culture. But at the same

time, she has drained the notion of alternative epistemologies of much of its force. She is simply not willing to countenance talk of a feminist epistemology in a normative sense. Similarly, no longer does it make sense to talk of a Black or Chicana epistemology as an alternative set of knowledge-generating practices, if what is meant goes beyond description to normative justification. Even for a self-proclaimed standpointist like Harding, the most we can say is that while different cultural standpoints play a significant role in the construction of knowledge, fundamentally *we all play by the same normative epistemic rules*.

Conclusion: A Suggestion About Safe Navigation

The four different usages of the dangerous term “epistemology” demarcate several different, and valid, avenues of inquiry. Two of these usages – the ones that we identified as (a) and (b) – are straightforwardly philosophical, and the use of the term in these contexts has a lengthy history. The latter two usages are potentially somewhat more misleading, as they may suggest the collapse of the normative and empirical/descriptive domains. We have no interest in legislating usages of the term, but we do believe that the distinctions we have identified are significant and that pointing them out may help avoid confusion. While some writers seem to enjoy the theoretical gravitas of the term, using “epistemology” to label these other types of inquiry runs the risk of obscuring rather than clarifying the important issues that are at stake. Perhaps it is for this reason that some have recently expressed impatience with the trend towards epistemological argument in educational research (Eisner 1998).

If we are correct in our arguments, consumers of the research literature in multicultural education ought to ask, in each instance of recourse to epistemological language, whether that language is used in a descriptive or normative sense. If descriptive, then the second question is whether the *nonnormative* claim that is being made actually serves the purposes of the author’s argument, whether it does the work it needs to do. If normative, on the other hand, then the question is whether that normative claim adequately confronts the philosophical complexities of the relationship between culture and knowledge (as, for example, Harding attempts to do). All too often, what one finds is a straightforward assertion of the social or cultural location of every inquirer. No one doubts this to be the case, but as an argument for a multicultural epistemology, this assertion simply will not suffice.

There is a related issue. The important concerns of Asante, Banks, Bernal, Collins, and others about such things as the devaluing of the experience of certain ethnic groups, of their modes of living and thinking and learning, and of their value priorities, are not as they stand chiefly philosophical concerns but are sociopolitical ones; their real nature is obscured by dressing them up in loosely used philosophical terminology. All views about culture and society embody philosophical assumptions, of course, but to attack social injustices is not the same as attacking the underlying philosophical mistakes, if such exist. The two types of activity should not be confused; the way to rectify the problems that are of greatest concern to most of the

authors we have considered is not to take philosophical or epistemic action but to canvass vigorously for sociopolitical reform.

It should be clear, therefore, that we do not intend to deny the complicated relationship between culture or social position and knowledge and/or beliefs. Philosophical epistemologists – including but not limited to the feminist epistemologists to whom we have referred – have pursued important work in this area and continue to do so. However, there is no coherent normative sense in which we can affirm the existence of “alternative epistemologies,” multicultural or otherwise. With Harding and others in the field, we believe that cultures or genders *do not provide different people with fundamentally different, and fundamentally inaccessible, forms of knowledge*. Instead, the most detailed and carefully argued epistemological inquiry in this area advises us that we must certainly be aware of the ways in which cultural influences have affected knowledge practices in the past, and we must be acutely sensitive to the ways that they continue to do so in the present. Thus, we would endorse the navigational wisdom of Helen Longino (1994). Longino suggests that “we think not about a feminist science, but about doing science as a feminist. This means eschewing any search for feminist first principles and instead approaching the many activities that constitute science practice with a feminist sensibility.” Likewise, she recommends not defining feminist epistemology but rather doing epistemology with a feminist sensibility. “To do epistemology as a feminist is to engage the questions of epistemology with an awareness of the ways in which participation in socially sanctioned knowledge production has been circumscribed, of the ways in which epistemological concepts like rationality and objectivity have been defined using notions of masculinity (and vice versa), of the ways in which women have been derided as knowers, and of the need for alternative theoretical approaches to satisfy feminist cognitive goals.” Extending Longino’s words from feminist concerns to the concerns of other marginalized groups, we would suggest that we think not about multicultural epistemology *but about doing epistemology with a multicultural sensibility*.

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Chapter 4

Epistemological Diversity and Education Research: Much Ado About Nothing Much?*

Harvey Siegel

Research in education, and so the training of future education researchers in graduate schools of education, is often said to require attention to *epistemological diversity*. Future researchers, it is claimed, ought to be familiar with many different ways of knowing, alternative methods of inquiry, diverse epistemological perspectives, and distinct cultural or group epistemologies.

The idea that different groups or cultures have their own distinct epistemologies is defended by an impressive range of scholars. For example, Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998), in advancing a “Chicana feminist epistemological framework,” argues that

[e]pistemological concerns in schools are inseparable from cultural hegemonic domination in educational research... Therefore, “endarkened” feminist epistemologies are crucial, as they speak to the failures of traditional patriarchal and liberal educational scholarship and examine the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality (p. 556).

Scheurich and Young (1997) report:

Respected scholars of color have suggested...that the epistemologies we typically use in educational research may be racially biased. They have argued that our epistemologies – not our use of them, but the epistemologies themselves – are racially biased ways of knowing, implicitly proposing, thus, a new category of racism that could be labeled *epistemological racism* (p. 4, emphasis in original).

Molefi Kete Asante (1990), discussing the “quest for truth in the Afrocentric enterprise,” argues that in that enterprise:

language, myth, ancestral memory, dance-music-art, and science provide the sources of knowledge, the canons of proof and the structures of truth (p. 10).

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In these passages, the clear suggestion is that cultural or group membership has epistemological consequences, that culture influences epistemology. But how epistemology might be so influenced is unclear. In this chapter, I will address some basic issues raised by this suggestion, in a way that emphasizes its relevance to education research and to the graduate education or training of future education researchers. These issues are insightfully addressed in a 2001 symposium in *Educational Researcher*,¹ which will serve as a touchstone in addressing them. What ought we to say about such diversity? Should we, as Lauren Jones Young (2001) suggests, “rethink and expand our conceptions of ways of knowing and modes of inquiry” (p. 5)? If so, in what specific ways ought we to do this?

At first glance, the call to respect (and train future researchers to interact competently with) epistemological diversity seems as innocent and obvious as a call for researchers to be open-minded, broad-minded, and tolerant when dealing with unfamiliar practices and views concerning knowledge and inquiry. So understood that call captures the antidogmatic spirit of the Enlightenment and is uncontroversial. But advocates of epistemological diversity typically have more than this in mind. What is more is not always clear. If our efforts to make such diversity central to the graduate training of education researchers are to be worthwhile, clarity is required. In what follows, then, I will explore that notion in an effort to answer the following questions: What is “epistemological diversity”? What exactly is the *epistemological* dimension and significance of such diversity? Why is it important for education researchers to be well trained with respect to it? In what specific ways ought we to “expand our conceptions of ways of knowing and modes of inquiry”? In answering them, I will suggest that the call for epistemological diversity is not, where justified, as radical or significant as it is often taken to be and that where it is radical or significant, it is, alas, not justified.

What Is “Epistemological Diversity”?

What does “epistemological diversity” mean? To what does the expression refer? What sort of diversity is at issue? The candidates for diversity include at least the following: beliefs and belief systems; research methodologies and methods of inquiry; research questions; researchers; cultures and “cultural epistemologies”; views of knowledge; ways of knowing; and “epistemologies,” “epistemological assumptions,” “epistemological premises,” and “epistemological perspectives.” Let us consider these candidates for, or versions of, epistemological diversity.

¹“Research for Doctoral Students in Education” (Metz, Pallas, Page, and Young) in *Educational Researcher*, 30(5), June/July 2001.

Beliefs and Belief Systems

Some prominent authors in the multicultural education arena use “knowledge” as a synonym for “belief,” thus rendering “epistemological diversity” as a matter of systematic differences in belief. For example, James Banks (1993) writes:

I am using knowledge in this chapter to mean the way a person explains or interprets reality.... My conceptualization of knowledge is broad and is used the way in which it is usually used in the sociology of knowledge literature to include ideas, values, and interpretations.... Although many complex factors influence the knowledge that is created by an individual or group, including the actuality of what occurred, the knowledge that people create is heavily influenced by their interpretations of their experiences and their positions within particular social, economic, and political systems and structures of a society (p. 5).

This sense of “epistemological diversity” is uncontroversial. Different people have different beliefs and systems of belief to which they appeal in explaining and interpreting reality, and particular groups of people share belief systems that often differ in systematic ways from other such systems. For example, some extant belief systems hold that some natural phenomena are best explained in spiritual or supernatural terms, while other belief systems eschew such explanations, holding rather that legitimate explanations of natural phenomena must be couched in naturalistic terms.² Insofar as “epistemological diversity” refers to diversity of beliefs and belief systems, it is uncontroversial. No one disputes the diversity of beliefs believed by the wide range of epistemic agents (i.e., believers), and Banks is surely correct that the factors that give rise to particular beliefs, and so explanations and interpretations of reality, include not just “the actuality of what occurred” but also believers’ “interpretations of their experiences and their positions within particular social, economic, and political systems and structures of a society.”

Philosophers do not typically understand “epistemology” in this way, taking it to refer rather to theories of *knowledge* (or more broadly, to that area of philosophy that takes such theories, and the issues they address, as its subject matter). There is no need to argue here about which meaning of “epistemology” – that is, as referring to beliefs or to theories of knowledge or a central area of philosophy – is more appropriate. The main point to note is that if “epistemological diversity” is taken to refer to alternative beliefs or belief systems, the phenomenon in question is uncontroversial because all are agreed that beliefs and belief systems do indeed differ.³

²For examples of discussion and references, see Siegel (2001, 2002).

³It is perhaps worth pointing out that philosophers’ emphasis on knowledge allows them to regard epistemology as a normative domain since it leaves room for consideration not only of what people, in fact, believe but also of what they should believe, of what is worthy of belief.

Research Methodologies and Methods of Inquiry

It is also widely agreed that researchers inquire in many different ways; they use a wide variety of different methods or techniques as they go about their work. Some biologists rely upon naked eye observation; others use microscopes. Some physicists use tunneling electron microscopes; others use infrared telescopes. Some sociologists and anthropologists rely upon sophisticated statistical techniques; others endeavor to gain a more qualitative understanding of their subjects. This sort of “technique diversity” characterizes natural and social scientific research generally. As is well known, education research is also diverse in this way, as scholars often conceive of themselves as either “quantitative” or “qualitative” researchers. Within these two broad categories, there is a wide variety of more specific approaches.⁴

This sort of methodological diversity is both undeniable and uncontroversial. If we (education researchers) want to discover the attitudes of a given population toward a proposed revision of school boundaries, we have to ask by way of survey, interview, or the like. If we want to predict the consequences of those attitudes for the success of the proposal, we cannot rely solely on those surveys or interviews but also have to consider (among other things) patterns of attitudes and outcomes in earlier, similar events. If we want to predict the likely effects of a proposed hot lunch program on student learning in a given student population, we have to consider a broad range of information, which will have to be gathered, processed, and manipulated in a variety of (statistical and other) ways. If we want to estimate the probability of success of a new approach to teaching reading on the development of student reading ability, we have to engage in (among other things) careful observation and data collection, and sophisticated statistical manipulation of that data. If we want to understand differences in different local communities’ understanding of the meaning and significance of a new policy concerning, e.g., admission requirements for a newly designed arts or science magnet school, we have to engage in systematic, comparative ethnographic study of the interpretations of that policy held by the various members of those communities, and so on. The general thesis that there are many legitimate ways to conduct research is unexceptionable.⁵

⁴For example, Mary Haywood Metz (2001) identifies “qualitative sociology” and “anthropologically inclined ethnography” as two sorts of qualitative approaches taken in her own department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She mentions “traditional experiments,” “quasi-experiments,” “survey research,” “ethnography,” “history,” “critical theory,” and “postmodernism” as approaches to research treated in the Research Education Program in that department (p. 12).

⁵Many philosophers of science take this sort of “technique diversity” to show that there is no such thing as scientific method; there is no one method to follow in pursuing scientific research. Understood as either an algorithmic procedure or a universal technique, there is surely no such thing. My own view is that this is the wrong way to think about scientific method. That method is

Notice that this *methodological pluralism* is, on the whole, benign. While it grants that there are many ways in which research can legitimately be conducted, it does not follow from it that all research efforts are equally (il)legitimate or that any approach to (or product of) research is as good as any other. That is, *methodological pluralism* does not entail either *methodological skepticism* or *methodological relativism*. This is a good thing for all those concerned with the education of education researchers. For such skepticism or relativism would render graduate education in education research pointless: What would we teach future researchers and how would we train them if no ways of conducting research could yield knowledge or justified belief (skepticism) or if all ways of conducting research, and so the fruits of all research, were equally legitimate or good (relativism)? Worse, what would be the point of such long and arduous graduate education if the results of all research were either worthless or equally legitimate? In these circumstances, there would be no point in conducting research because any result would either be worthless or stand on an equal epistemological footing with any alternative result.⁶

Of course, if we can distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate research, or between better and worse research, we must do so with reference to relevant *criteria*, in accordance with which such discriminations of quality or legitimacy can be made. A set of key epistemological questions concerning research involves such criteria; central among these questions are the following: What are these criteria? How are they themselves legitimated or justified? Do they apply to all instances or types of research equally? We shall return to these questions, which are among those routinely addressed by epistemologists.

Research Questions

This sort of diversity is also uncontroversial. Just as researchers in different disciplines pursue many different, worthwhile research agendas, so do researchers within the same discipline. This is especially true of education researchers, who pursue issues of many different sorts – from understanding the cognitive processes underlying learning to devising efficient and fair ways of organizing, administering, and funding schools and school systems; from innovative ways of promoting equal educational opportunities to effective ways of teaching reading and of enhancing

best understood in terms, not of a unique technique or procedure, but rather of its reflection of a systematic commitment to evidence. For the fuller story, see Siegel (1985). Interestingly, Metz (2001) posits “an underlying research process common to very different kinds of work” (p. 13), and Page (2001) refers to a common “logic of inquiry” consisting of basic “philosophical issues that inform any systematic inquiry” that different methodological approaches address in distinct ways (p. 22). In these ways, both Metz and Page acknowledge a commonality of both purpose and method (not technique) across the wide range of methodologies taught and practiced by researchers in graduate schools of education.

⁶For more on relativism, see Siegel (1987, 2004).

student self-esteem; from understanding the nature, value, and legitimate demands of multiculturalism to determining the best ways to meet those demands. There is no special new kind of epistemological diversity introduced here.

Many scholars note the importance of culture or group membership in the determination of research questions actually pursued (and funded). For example, Patricia Hill Collins writes:

Because elite white men and their representatives control structures of knowledge and validation, white male interests pervade the thematic content of traditional scholarship. As a result, Black women's experiences with work, family, motherhood, political activism, and sexual politics have routinely been distorted in or excluded from traditional academic discourse (Collins 1990, p. 201).

James Banks (1998) similarly contends that

[t]he biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct (p. 5; original emphasis deleted).

And Sandra Harding (1990) writes that

both "women's experiences" and "what women say" certainly are good places to begin generating research projects (p. 142).

Although these citations include important differences, they are agreed that the research questions one asks, deems important, and pursues are influenced by one's cultural, racial, gender, or otherwise specified location. The point is undeniable, as (for example) the history of federal funding for breast cancer research in the U.S. makes clear (Braun 2003, p. S101). But that there is a wide variety of research questions that could be pursued, and that researchers' and funding agencies' decisions concerning research pursuits are so influenced, leaves open the further question of the epistemic status of the findings produced by and conclusions drawn from the results of research actually conducted. No special new kind of epistemological diversity is introduced by these important considerations concerning cultural and other influences on decisions concerning research agendas.

Researchers and Their Cultures

There is considerable, and increasing, diversity in the community of education researchers (which is not to say that more wouldn't be better). Researchers differ in interests, education, temperament, curiosity, ambition, originality, beliefs, values, and so forth. In these respects, at least, diversity among researchers is much like diversity among people in general. Are there *epistemological* dimensions or ramifications of such diversity?

Many theorists have argued that specific sorts of diversity among researchers – in particular, diversity with respect to race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and the like – are, indeed, epistemologically significant. The inclusion in the education research community of those whose groups have traditionally been the victims of

exclusion or marginalization has brought new issues to the fore and has provided new voices, approaches, and substantive and methodological presuppositions to the conversations in which both new and more familiar issues are addressed. That inclusion – of large numbers of nontraditional (i.e., not White, male, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied) new and future researchers, who can be separated into distinct groups on the basis of such categories – has suggested to many that such groups can and should be distinguished on the basis of their respective epistemological orientations. For example, Young (2001) urges that graduate students in education research doctoral programs “bring with them their own cultural histories and ways of knowing and being in the world” (p. 4) and that

[i]n the same ways that we acknowledge epistemological diversity across practices of research, we also see a diversity of epistemology among the practitioners, the community groups, and the family members we and our students study. We need only look at our students to see how values and cultures influence the sense we make of our observations and the meanings that we give them (pp. 4–5).

Aaron M. Pallas (2001) likewise suggests that “traditionally subordinated groups” have their own “epistemologies” (p. 7).

Although I am sympathetic toward the sociological point, my own situation as a member of the traditionally dominating group – White, male, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and, more generally, privileged – leads me to doubt the idea that one’s group significantly influences (let alone determines) one’s epistemology since the “bad guys” – those in that dominating group – have a terrifically broad range of epistemological commitments and predilections. I won’t argue the case in any detail, but the thesis that groups systematically share epistemological outlooks or presuppositions seems dubious to me. There is just too much within-group difference in epistemological orientation. Within my own group, advocates and critics can be found in, more or less, every epistemological stance yet articulated – as a casual glance at *The Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Studies*, the *Philosophical Review*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, or any of the other leading philosophy journals that regularly publish important work in epistemology will reveal.⁷

But I think my dissent from the view here articulated by Young and Pallas hinges crucially on our respective understanding of the key terms of our claims. What exactly does it mean to say that the new voices in the education research community provide that community with new “ways of knowing” or “epistemologies” or “epistemological perspectives”? What exactly is an *epistemology* or *epistemological perspective* such that previously excluded individuals and groups bring these to the table?

⁷Much depends on the degree to which group membership is alleged to influence one’s epistemology. All the authors discussed suggest that one seriously influences the other. I offer my own case of within-group variation as a counter-example to any claim of significant influence; I suggest that other groups, e.g., women and people of color, also harbor extensive within-group variation, thus again undermining the claim of significant influence of group membership on epistemology. I intentionally leave “significant” and “serious” vague here.

Epistemologies and Epistemological Perspectives

The essays under discussion are, I think, obscure on just this crucial point. Young (2001), for example, seems to equate “research methodology” and “epistemology” such that every different approach to research has, or amounts to, its own epistemology:

Metz, for example, writes of the importance of researchers learning to “read each others’ work across different kinds of research” and of researchers learning “to build on work from traditions other than the one in which they find their intellectual home base.” Yet significant caveats to constructing such opportunities remain. For example, how many epistemologies should students encounter, which ones, at what point in the doctoral experience should these be introduced, and to what level of expertise should students be prepared? (p. 4)

In her article (an earlier version of which Young here cites), Metz is clearly discussing alternative research methodologies – “deductive” versus “inductive,” quantitative versus qualitative, those involving rules versus those that don’t – that Young here calls “epistemologies.” As already noted, it is uncontroversial that there is a broad range of alternative ways of conducting education research, that is, different research methodologies. If this is what it means for education research to involve different epistemologies, the existence of these differences is obvious and unproblematic. In this sense, making a fuss about “alternative epistemologies” is indeed much ado about nothing much. Here the question is not a deep philosophical one but only the practical (although nonetheless difficult) one of the desirability of education for students’ breadth versus depth: Should their graduate education be such that they should become deeply competent in one research tradition at the risk of narrowness? Or should they rather be exposed to a broad range of research methodologies at the risk of superficiality? This is the familiar “depth versus breadth” trade-off familiar to all fields. Insofar as “epistemological diversity” refers to the range of extant methodologies in use in the education research community, worrying about how to deal with it in the graduate education of future education researchers is nothing new.

Similarly, Pallas (2001) engagingly speaks of “the cacophony of diverse epistemologies” (p. 6). But his discussion makes clear that he does not mean by that phrase to refer to alternative research methodologies but rather to the key epistemological assumptions underlying those methodological approaches.⁸ He defines “epistemologies” as “beliefs about what counts as knowledge..., what is evidence for a claim, and what counts as a warrant for that evidence” (p. 6). Noting the intimidating range of these present in contemporary education research, Pallas addresses

⁸In addition to her using it as an expression equivalent in meaning to “research methodology,” Young (2001) also understands “epistemology” in this broader way when she writes of the call for faculty “to assume responsibility for explicating the assumptions, goals, and epistemologies that undergird their research, their courses, and their initiation of doctoral students into professional life in the field of education” (p. 4).

himself to “the consequences of this diversity” for education research and for the education of future researchers. These consequences are far from trivial because:

Epistemologies are central to the production and consumption of educational research. Since epistemologies undergird all phases of the research process, engaging with epistemology is integral to learning the craft of research. Moreover, epistemologies shape scholars’ abilities to apprehend and appreciate the research of others. Such an appreciation is a prerequisite for the scholarly conversations that signify a field’s collective learning (p. 6).

In light of this centrality of epistemology to the education of researchers and the conduct of research and the diversity of epistemologies among communities of researchers, how should graduate education in education research be conducted? Pallas’s answer is eloquent and clear:

If educational researchers cannot understand and engage with one another, both within and across at least some educational research communities, the enterprise is doomed to failure. Thus, to prevent a recurring pattern of epistemological single-mindedness, educational researchers will need to engage with multiple epistemological perspectives to the point that members of different communities of educational research practice can understand one another, despite, or perhaps through, their differences. Preparing novice educational researchers for such epistemological diversity is one of the most important things that the faculties of research universities can do (p. 7).

How should this preparation for epistemological diversity be accomplished? Pallas analyzes the situation in terms of Etienne Wenger’s (1998) notion of “community of practice,” thus reformulating the problem of epistemological diversity into that of enabling graduate students to interact successfully across diverse communities of practice of education research, because “the preparation of education researchers largely takes place within local communities of research practice” (Pallas 2001, p. 9). Significantly, in Pallas’s analysis, these local communities – several of which live side by side in graduate schools of education, the main sites of the education of future researchers – are united by their own epistemologies and diverge from the others, which also have their own epistemologies, thus providing a model of epistemological diversity in graduate schools of education.⁹ As Pallas puts it,

Novices who are learning educational research through participation in a particular local community are destined to negotiate *the meaning of what counts as knowledge* through interactions with others in the same community, as well as through exposure to reifications (e.g., books and articles), which are often interpreted in local terms. If there is a connection between community and epistemology, then a local community of research practice is not likely to reflect *within itself* a deep understanding of multiple epistemological perspectives. The more a newcomer is drawn toward the center of such a community, the less likely he/she is to develop a more variegated understanding of the epistemologies of educational research. This is largely because being drawn to a community’s center is at odds with the possibility of being drawn into other communities whose practices are defined in different epistemological terms. A novice who, over time, deepens his or her understandings of educational

⁹Here Pallas, like Young, equates “epistemology” with something like “research methodology.” That is, both authors use “epistemology” equivocally, using it sometimes to mean “research methodology” (or “research method”) and sometimes to refer to the epistemological assumptions or presuppositions underlying such methodologies.

research practice in the terms of a particular epistemology in a particular community – as we usually expect doctoral students to do – is unlikely to develop a first-hand feel for diverse epistemological framings of educational research (Pallas 2001, p. 9, first emphasis added).

In other words, new students apprentice and experience “intense participation” (Pallas 2001, p. 9) in a community of research practice – for example, the community of quantitative educational psychology or of qualitative anthropologically oriented educational ethnography – and embrace the epistemology of that community of practice while getting relatively little and only superficial exposure to the alternative epistemologies of other communities of practice. On the basis of this analysis of epistemological diversity in the graduate education of future education researchers, Pallas offers several promising practical recommendations for the reform of that education, including (a) elevating the consideration of epistemology by both faculty and graduate students, (b) making the discussion of epistemology the responsibility of the entire faculty, (c) linking discussions of epistemology to the practice of education research, (d) placing discussions of epistemology in historical context, (e) designing social spaces in which epistemological experimentation is safe and encouraged, and (f) acknowledging the inevitability that some doctoral students will not be deeply engaged in reflection concerning alternative epistemological perspectives (Pallas 2001, pp. 9–10). These suggestions are, I think, to be applauded.

Epistemology and Diversity: The Heart of the Matter

However, Pallas’s suggestions, and his discussion more generally (as well as those of Young, Metz, and Page), treat epistemological diversity itself somewhat uncritically, as if the critical evaluation of these diverse epistemological perspectives is impossible, undesirable, or inappropriate. The idea seems to be that many epistemologies available – those of diverse research traditions and communities of practice and those of particular, subordinated social groups – are held by actual persons and groups and therefore are not to be held up to the light of critical scrutiny. Rather, they are to be accepted at face value as legitimate and integrated into the graduate study of future researchers. To champion epistemological diversity, apparently, is to strive to enable graduate students to understand and interact meaningfully with as many alternative epistemologies as they can manage.

Why think that the epistemologies of all such groups are worthy of curricular inclusion and attention of all future researchers? Why presume that they cannot be subjected to critical scrutiny and found wanting? The possibilities here seem to be three: Criticizing the epistemology of a particular community of practice or subordinated group is either *epistemologically*, *morally*, or *pragmatically* suspect. The authors being considered here do not say this, but their discussions, I think, presume it. For consider: Why is it important that we strive “to prevent a recurring pattern of epistemological single-mindedness” (Pallas 2001, p. 7) in our students? Presumably, because such “epistemological single-mindedness” is a bad thing, something to be deplored and avoided in our graduate students. But why? Presumably, because the many alternative

epistemologies available and in use are, because in use, worthy of the serious consideration of graduate students and future researchers, whatever their own epistemological outlook might be. But why does the fact that they are in use by some relevant group render these alternatives worthy of attention or, beyond critical rejection, unworthy of the attention of future researchers? Let us consider each possibility in turn.

Is It Epistemologically Suspect to Criticize the Epistemology of a Particular Community of Practice/Approach to Research/Subordinated Group?

At first blush, it seems not, because the philosophical subjects of epistemology and philosophy of science do just this. Courses in epistemology and philosophy of science routinely subject alternative epistemological positions and theses to critical scrutiny; some survive rather well, others do not. For example, “foundationalism” and “positivism” are routinely bashed by contemporary education researchers who are theoretically and methodologically oriented. This bashing may well be justified. But it is somewhat troubling that the views being bashed are often rather badly mischaracterized by the bashers.¹⁰ Epistemological positions such as these are complex and multifaceted; one cannot address a plethora of them in a one-semester course and expect theoretical sophistication to result. More to the point, they cannot be adequately grasped without at least a bit of philosophical training. Understanding and criticizing epistemological and methodological positions takes time, effort, and expertise; the serious coming to grips with “alternative epistemologies” requires the serious inclusion of philosophy in the graduate education research curriculum.

But the more important point is this: Epistemologies are not all born equal; those that deserve to count as legitimate epistemological alternatives must prove their mettle in the give-and-take of scholarly disputation. Some proposals will survive such disputation; others not. As suggested above, the scholarly education research community should endorse *pluralism*, not relativism.

When it comes to research methodologies, this point is readily accepted. It is uncontroversial that there are legitimate forms of “qualitative” as well as “quantitative” research; of “inductive” as well as “deductive” research; of efforts aimed at nonquantitative understanding as well as those aimed at deriving significant findings from the sophisticated statistical manipulation of large sets of data. It is equally uncontroversial that some approaches to research are illegitimate or otherwise problematic, for example, those that pretend to be thoroughly value-neutral¹¹ or that fail to place adequate controls on key variables, to control for placebo, halo, and other well-known

¹⁰I particularly recommend D. C. Phillips’s (1987, 2000) documentation of the misunderstandings of “positivism” and other “epistemologies” in the educational research literature.

¹¹That is, that fail to acknowledge cognitive and/or contextual values that they presuppose and that guide their research agendas and trajectories.

effects, or to protect against experimenter bias. It is simply a mistake to think that criticism of “alternative epistemologies” – understood either as research methodologies or their basic underlying assumptions – is in any way epistemologically suspect.

My claim here is that “alternative epistemologies” themselves admit of critical evaluation. As noted above, such evaluation will itself be conducted in terms of relevant *criteria*, such criteria being the property not of any given epistemology but rather of an overarching epistemological and philosophical perspective (or “meta-perspective”) that is *neutral* with respect to them all.

I can well understand the incredulity that this boldfaced appeal to neutrality will undoubtedly provoke. How can *any* perspective be neutral? After all, contemporary research across the humanities and social sciences has unambiguously rejected any sort of “view from nowhere” or “God’s eye perspective” that is alleged to be free of the influence of the language, culture, conceptual scheme, gender, race, class of the person, or group whose perspective it is. Any such allegedly neutral perspective, it is commonly held, is nothing more than a cover for the hegemonic imposition of the perspective of the dominant group upon dominated others.

There is much in this commonly held rejection of neutrality that I endorse. I agree, of course, that any such hegemonic imposition is to be rejected. I agree as well that there is no God’s eye view, no “perspectiveless perspective,” from which we can judge. But such *global* neutrality, suggested by a God’s eye perspective, is not required for the sort of neutrality in question. All that is needed is *local* neutrality, that is, one that affords the possibility of fair-minded, non-question-begging evaluation of the issue, or epistemology, in question. Consider positivism, an epistemological orientation widely rejected by the contemporary education research community. Is that rejection warranted? Are we right to reject positivism? If so, it is because we have good reasons for thinking it defective. But these good reasons must themselves be neutral in that they do not beg the question or otherwise prejudice the case against the rejected view. That is, they must be such as to establish the deficiencies and so the rational rejection of positivism, and moreover to do so in a way that would in principle incline a fair-minded advocate of that view to agree that rejection is indeed rational and appropriate. Such neutrality is a necessary condition of any fair, effective evaluation, both of alternative epistemological presuppositions and theses in particular, and of any sort of serious scholarly inquiry more generally. Insofar as education researchers, of any epistemological orientation, actually establish any research findings, their doing so requires that those findings are in fact supported by reasons and evidence that are neutral in this sense. Any researchers who take themselves to have established any such finding – most of us, I dare say – are committed to the possibility of such neutrality.¹²

¹²There is obviously much more to be said about the character of such neutrality than I can say here. As the anonymous reviewers have forcefully reminded me, such “neutrality” is difficult to articulate. For a recent attempt, see Siegel (2004), pp. 750–754; cf. also Siegel (1987, 1997). My thanks to the reviewers, whose criticisms prompted the preceding two paragraphs. I borrow the “local/global” neutrality distinction from my former student Timothy Mosteller (2006), who introduced it in his Ph.D. dissertation, *Epistemological Relativism: MacIntyre, Putnam and Rorty* (University of Miami 2002).

It is perhaps worth noting that the neutrality just defended receives support from what may, at first blush, seem an unlikely source: *standpoint epistemology*. The basic idea of standpoint theories is that “in a socially stratified society, different social positions yield distinctive epistemic positions, and some are better than others” (Antony 2002, p. 472). Sandra Harding’s (1991) important account of what she calls “strong objectivity” argues that “a feminist standpoint theory can direct the production of less partial and less distorted beliefs” (p. 138). As Harding puts the crucial point:

A feminist standpoint epistemology requires strengthened standards of objectivity. The standpoint epistemologies call for recognition of a historical or sociological or cultural relativism – but not for a judgmental or epistemological relativism. They call for the acknowledgment that all human beliefs – including our best scientific beliefs – are socially situated, but *they also require a critical evaluation to determine which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims*. They require, as judgmental relativism does not, a scientific account of the relationships between historically located belief and maximally objective belief. So they demand what I shall call *strong objectivity* in contrast to the weak objectivity of objectivism and its mirror-linked twin, judgmental relativism (p. 142, first emphasis added).

There is much in this passage, and in Harding’s work more generally, that deserves extended consideration; I regret that I cannot consider it further here.¹³ But the central point is clear: In Harding’s view, feminist standpoint theories require and insist upon the possibility of a robust (though not “perspectiveless” or “unsituated”) objectivity, and the possibility of fair, critical evaluation of competing knowledge claims in order to establish that particular social situations do in fact “tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims.” Such determinations of objectivity depend upon fair critical evaluation of the relevant evidence and so depend upon the sort of neutrality argued for above; for without such neutrality, we would have no reason to think that a given social situation does (or does not) in fact yield less distorted, more objective knowledge, or that claims to that effect are themselves sufficiently objective. In this way, Harding’s call for “strong objectivity” both supports and requires the possibility (and actuality) of locally neutral, fair-minded evaluation of claims and the reasons and evidence alleged to support them.

Among the criteria (neutral in the “local” sense just specified) in terms of which alternative epistemologies can be critically evaluated are those mentioned in the following questions: Does the epistemology in question utilize research methods that reliably produce reliable evidence? Do its methods require evidence sufficient in quantity, quality, and variety to warrant the conclusions or findings it produces? Do those methods require adequate sample size? Do they control for subject and experimenter bias? Does the epistemology in question possess the conceptual resources to afford adequate explanations of the phenomena it addresses? Does it take adequate note of counterevidence and of criticism?

¹³Harding develops her account of “strong objectivity” in several places; see particularly Harding (1991), Chaps. 5–7, Harding (1993, 1998), pp. 18–19 and Chap. 8.

The proper understanding and application of such criteria are complex and require not only statistics and qualitative method courses but also epistemology courses in which the careful articulation and critique of such criteria are themselves a focus of concern, and philosophy of science courses in which their place in a full understanding of scientific research and its appropriate methods and constraints is itself an object of study. I do not mean to suggest that these criteria are themselves unproblematic or uncontroversial; they are neither. Nevertheless, without an appeal to some such criteria, there can be no critical appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses either of diverse epistemological approaches or of the criteria in terms of which those approaches are evaluated. The anticipated result of such appeals is that some, but not all, “alternative epistemologies” will meet the criteria, that is, pluralism.

It is worth repeating that the criteria in question are neither unproblematic nor uncontroversial; such criteria are always in principle open to challenge and in fact are often likely to be contested. They are manifestly not beyond criticism. But if such contestation can be even potentially effective – if it is possible in principle for the criticism to show a given criterion to be defective – that can only be because fair, legitimate appeal has been made to other criteria or “meta-criteria.” Fair criticism requires appeal to other criteria (or meta-criteria) that are themselves applicable in a way that is locally neutral and so does not beg the question against the criterion being criticized.

Although the sort of epistemological criticism of alternative epistemologies just discussed is most obviously relevant to alternative research methodologies and approaches to research, it is equally relevant to the epistemologies of marginalized or traditionally subordinated groups. This leads directly to the next point.

Is It Morally Suspect to Criticize the Epistemology of a Particular Community of Practice/Approach to Research/Subordinated Group?

I suspect that much of the call for incorporating “epistemological diversity” in the curriculum is motivated by this concern. The communities of education researchers and of graduate students in graduate schools of education are increasingly populated by members of “traditionally subordinated groups” (Pallas 2001, p. 7). It is often thought that criticizing the epistemologies of such groups is *morally* inappropriate – a failure to treat the members of these groups with respect.

I have already expressed my reason for doubting the very idea that epistemologies can be ascribed to such groups in a straightforward, one-to-one way. There is simply too much within-group variation to think that each such group (women, people of color, nonheterosexuals), or even specific subgroups within such groups (Chicana feminists, African men, White Jewish gay men), can be neatly assigned their own epistemology. Indeed, such an assignment smacks of a problematic essentialism.

But even if we could correctly ascribe unique epistemologies to such groups, criticizing those epistemologies would not necessarily be morally problematic. To be sure, treating the members of such groups with respect is a moral requirement – as it is to treat all persons. But treating the members of such groups with respect does not prohibit the criticism of their ideas in general or their epistemologies in particular. Treating people with respect requires taking their ideas seriously rather than ignoring them or regarding them as unworthy of serious consideration. But it does not require regarding their ideas as correct, or correct “for them,” or as good as any alternative ideas. This general point applies in particular to their epistemologies. There is nothing suspect about criticizing the epistemological views of the members of a subordinated group in terms of relevant criteria, including those mentioned in the previous section. Of course, to be taken seriously, such criticisms must be offered in a spirit of cooperative inquiry. Nevertheless, respecting the group and its members does not require making their epistemologies immune to criticism.¹⁴

Readers might well think that this answer, while perhaps good as far as it goes, does not go far enough because it does not squarely address an issue that has been lurking just below the surface for some time now: that of the use or abuse of *power*. Let us address it squarely now.

Is It Inevitably an Abuse of Power to Criticize the Epistemology of a Particular Community of Practice/Approach to Research/Subordinated Group?

I have argued that alternative epistemologies can be legitimately criticized by appeal to suitable, locally neutral criteria. But can such allegedly legitimate critique be distinguished from the imposition of the criteria of the dominant perspective on dominated alternative perspectives? If not, then criticism of alternative epistemologies appears to be nothing more than the hegemonic abuse of power.

This is a deep and serious problem that the position I have been defending must satisfactorily address. Happily, it does so by making clear that charges of hegemonic abuse of power, just like criticisms of alternative epistemologies, must be justified on the basis of reasons and evidence and so must themselves appeal to relevant criteria.

I agree, of course, that the hegemonic abuse of power, in the guise of allegedly neutral criticism of alternative perspectives, must be rejected. This danger is real

¹⁴This point deserves much more attention than I can give it here. For further discussion, see Siegel (1997, 1999, 2001), and especially 2002, pp. 812–813. One further matter I have yet to address is the moral complexity of the classroom situation, and in particular, the fact that the teacher’s authority makes criticism of students’ “alternative epistemologies” especially tricky. My thanks to Susan Suissa for this important point.

and must be avoided. Cases in which critique is indeed an abuse of power must be exposed and seen for what they are. But this is not a flaw inherent in critique *per se*; it is rather a danger of dominating imposition masquerading as critique. The only way to expose and overcome such abuse is to deal with it by way of critique – by making the case (by way of appeal to legitimate criteria, locally and neutrally applied) that the “critique” in question does not stand up to critical evaluation but is rather a matter of inappropriate imposition. What alternative is there? Isn’t this precisely what critics of domination (e.g., feminists, antiracists) do? The feminist case is instructive: To establish that particular “male” criteria were in fact objectionable gendered impositions, feminist scholars offered compelling arguments and evidence that the criteria in question, or systematic application of them, were objectionably biased in favor of “male” interests. In this way, illegitimate dominant impositions were made visible, subjected to fair critique, and eventually overcome (or are at least on the way to being overcome).¹⁵

To this line of response, it might be replied that it is in itself an instance of hegemonic imposition and therefore an abuse of power. The imposition in question is that of imposing “the very tools of mainstream philosophical thought as the standard for determining the merits...of alternative epistemologies.”¹⁶ In this view, if we are to make a serious attempt to make room for alternative epistemologies, we must not hold such alternatives captive to mainstream, dominant criteria of epistemic evaluation. To the extent that such criteria are in fact wielded hegemonically, and so are abusively applied to alternative epistemological perspectives, the appeal to them is indeed inappropriate. But consider: To what criteria could we appeal in sustaining such a charge? To be epistemologically effective, such criticism depends upon the appeal to the criteria embedded in directives, such as “Don’t beg the question against the position you are attempting to criticize,” “Be fair in your criticism,” “Don’t assume without justification what your opponent denies,” and so forth. (In other words, the critic is claiming that the imposition of dominant epistemological values upon dominated others problematically violates these very criteria in finding fault with alternative epistemological perspectives by begging the question against them, criticizing them unfairly and prejudicially, assuming what they reject, and so forth.) There is no logical alternative to such appealing.

But notice that these are exactly “the tools of mainstream philosophical thought.” Without appeal to such “tools,” it is not possible to defend alternative epistemologies from defective critiques that rest upon the illegitimate, hegemonic imposition of dominant criteria. Advocates of alternative epistemologies must rely upon these very same tools in making their criticisms of “mainstream philosophical thought” and defending those alternatives from hegemonic imposition masquerading as legitimate critique. In other words, these aspects of mainstream thought cannot coherently be rejected by the advocates of alternative epistemologies (Siegel 1987, 1997, 2004).

¹⁵For further discussion, see Siegel (1997), esp. Chap. 12.

¹⁶As suggested by a reviewer.

Education research should indeed make room for alternative meanings, values, and ways of knowing. All this is captured by pluralism. But saying this, or indeed making any claim about education research, requires appeal to “the very tools of mainstream philosophical thought.” Consequently, the appeal to such tools is not necessarily or inevitably a hegemonic abuse of power. Sometimes it is; in these cases, the appeal is flawed and can be shown to be so by arguments that demonstrate the flawed nature of the appeal. In other cases, the appeal can be shown to be legitimate by way of arguments that establish the non-question-begging nature of the appeal or the need of the proponent of the alternative perspective to appeal to those very same tools in order to make her case. To forbid or reject all such appeals is to embrace not pluralism but relativism, the difficulties of which have been noted above. The call for “epistemological diversity,” therefore, is defensible only within limits: pluralism, but not relativism.

Is It Pragmatically Suspect to Criticize the Epistemology of a Particular Community of Practice/Approach to Research/Subordinated Group?

Here the idea is straightforward. Such criticism might be thought to be pragmatically suspect simply because all the alternative epistemologies in use are, in fact, in use; education research as a field is the sum total of all the research conducted from these alternative perspectives; education researchers should, to the greatest extent possible, be able to interact meaningfully with all available research. Given the general difficulty of uncontroversially showing a particular epistemology to be deficient, the pragmatic course is simply to take all those currently in use as legitimate so that present and future researchers will be able to communicate with maximal effectiveness, thus maximizing the research output of the education research community as a whole. This will have the added significant benefit of enhancing all research, from whatever perspective, by allowing it to benefit from the insights of all other perspectives (Pallas 2001, pp. 6–7).

With this pragmatic point, I am in considerable sympathy. The more communication and understanding across diverse communities of research practice, the better. Insofar as the motivation for enhancing epistemological diversity in the education research community is this pragmatic one, it is difficult to see any reason for rejecting it other than equally pragmatic considerations, e.g., the multiplicity of extant epistemological perspectives and the shortage of time in a typical graduate student’s schedule for mastering both the epistemologies of multiple communities of research practice and the philosophical knowledge and skills required to evaluate them. But I would be remiss not to note that this pragmatic point is itself somewhat superficial, amounting to little more than: “There are lots of ways to conduct good research; let’s teach our students as many as we can, and help them to become open-minded with respect to the insights of those they do not themselves master, thereby helping them to become skilled in conducting research themselves.”

Conclusion

I have argued that the expression “epistemological diversity” is unclear, and that the possible understanding of it considered thus far is either familiar and uncontroversial, or philosophically untenable; and that our efforts to foster such diversity ought to proceed in a way that is fully cognizant of the philosophical cost of straying beyond a viable pluralism into problematic forms of epistemological relativism or skepticism.

Young (2001), in introducing the articles by Pallas, Metz, and Page, writes:

All three authors... argue especially for thoughtful, intentional, and reflexive consideration of systematic experiences that prepare novice researchers in education to deal with epistemological diversity. Each author calls for rich occasions where students have opportunities to learn multiple epistemological perspectives in order to be able to engage meaningfully with members of other communities of education practice (p. 4).

Understood as calls for students to have substantial familiarity with at least some of the many approaches to research utilized by the various members of the contemporary education research community, such calls for epistemological diversity face practical objections concerning available time and the need for students to specialize and master a particular approach to research, but are otherwise unproblematic. For scientific research, including education research, has always been pluralistic in that researchers bring different knowledge bases to their work, appeal to many distinct types and sources of evidence, and utilize many legitimate ways to gather, evaluate, and infer from that evidence.

Understood as calls for students to learn to see things from the perspectives of alternative communities of research practice and alternative cultural perspectives, such calls for epistemological diversity are likewise unproblematic because this sort of tolerance – involving open-mindedness, openness to objections and alternative points of view, and a willingness to take into account alternative points of view and to take seriously criticisms of one’s own point of view – is part and parcel of the traditional “Enlightenment” epistemology that calls for epistemological diversity are often intended to challenge.

The call for epistemological diversity and for students to engage multiple epistemological perspectives becomes problematic just at the point at which it suggests the sorts of skepticism or relativism that I attempted to discredit earlier. The suggestion that there is no fair way of evaluating any given sort of research, so that any piece of research is as good as any other, is both incorrect philosophically and undermining of the very activity of education research. The quite different suggestion that different cultures or communities have their own, unchallengeable “epistemological perspectives” such that what counts as knowledge or as acceptable research varies from group to group – so that a given research finding counts as knowledge, or as established, for men but not for women; for African-Americans but not for Anglo-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Korean-Americans, or Haitian-Americans; or for gay and lesbian consumers of education research but not heterosexual consumers – is equally incorrect philosophically and equally undermining of

the very point of conducting or reading such research. So understood, the call for epistemological diversity is one that should be resisted by education researchers.

To say this is not to call for the silencing of alternative voices or alternative approaches to research. On the contrary, openness to new voices and approaches should be both welcomed and encouraged by education researchers and incorporated into the education of future researchers. But conflating epistemological pluralism and a problematic relativism or skepticism can only hamper the important project of rethinking the graduate education of future education researchers. Keeping these distinct calls for epistemological diversity clear is a key step in the process of rethinking and ultimately enhancing the graduate education of current and future students of education research.

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Chapter 5

Taking Subjectivity into Account*

Lorraine Code

The Problem

Suppose epistemologists should succeed in determining a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for justifying claims that “*S* knows that *p*” across a range of “typical” instances. Suppose, further, that these conditions could silence the skeptic who denies that human beings can have certain knowledge of the world. Would the epistemological project then be completed? I shall maintain that it would not.

There is no doubt that a discovery of necessary and sufficient conditions that offered a response to the skeptic would count as a major epistemological breakthrough, if such conditions could be found. But once one seriously entertains the hypothesis that knowledge is a *construct* produced by cognitive agents within social practices and acknowledges the variability of agents and practices across social groups, the possible scope even of “definitive” justificatory strategies for “*S*-knows-that-*p*” claims reveals itself to be very narrow indeed. My argument here is directed, in part, against the breadth of scope that many epistemologists accord to such claims. I am suggesting that necessary and sufficient conditions in the “received” sense – by which I mean conditions that hold for any knower, regardless of her or his identity, interests, and circumstances: i.e., of her or his subjectivity – could conceivably be discovered only for a narrow range of artificially isolated and purified empirical knowledge claims, which might be paradigmatic by fiat, but are unlikely to be so “in fact.”

In this essay, I focus on “*S*-knows-that-*p*” claims and refer to “*S*-knows-that-*p* epistemologies” because of the emblematic nature of such claims in Anglo-American

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epistemology. My suggestion is not that discerning necessary and sufficient conditions for the justification of such claims is the sole, or even the central, epistemological preoccupation. Rather, I use this label, “*S-knows-that-p*,” as a trope that permits easy reference to the epistemologies of the mainstream. I use it for three principal reasons. First, I want to mark the positivist–empiricist orientation of these epistemologies, which is both generated and enforced by appeals to such paradigms. Second, I want to show that these paradigms prompt and sustain a belief that universally necessary and sufficient conditions can indeed be found. Third – and perhaps most importantly – I want to distance my discussion from analyses that privilege scientific knowledge, as “*S-knows-that-p*” epistemologies implicitly, and often explicitly, do, and hence to locate it within an “epistemology of everyday lives.”

Coincidentally – but only, I think, coincidentally – the dominant epistemologies of modernity, with their Enlightenment legacy and later infusion with positivist–empiricist principles, have defined themselves around ideals of pure objectivity and value-neutrality. These ideals are best suited to govern evaluations of the knowledge of knowers who can be considered capable of achieving a “view from nowhere”¹ that allows them, through the autonomous exercise of their reason, to transcend particularity and contingency. The ideals presuppose a universal, homogeneous, and essential human nature that allows knowers to be substitutable for one another. Indeed, for “*S-knows-that-p*” epistemologies, knowers worthy of that title can act as “surrogate knowers” who are able to put themselves in anyone else’s place and know her or his circumstances and interests in just the same way as she or he would know them.² Hence, those circumstances and interests are deemed epistemologically irrelevant. Moreover, by virtue of their professed disinterestedness, these ideals erase the possibility of analyzing the interplay between emotion and reason and obscure connections between knowledge and power. Hence, they lend support to the conviction that cognitive products are as neutral – as politically innocent – as the processes that allegedly produce them. Such epistemologies implicitly assert that if one cannot see “from nowhere” (or equivalently, from an ideal observation position that could be anywhere and everywhere) – if one cannot take up an epistemological position that mirrors the “original position” of “the moral point of view” – then one cannot *know* anything at all. If one cannot transcend subjectivity and the particularities of its “locations,” then there is no knowledge worth analyzing.

The strong prescriptions and proscriptions that I have highlighted reveal that “*S-knows-that-p*” epistemologies work with a closely specified kind of knowing. That knowledge is by no means representative of “human knowledge,” or “knowledge in general” (if such terms retain a legitimate reference in these postmodern times), either diachronically (across recorded history) or synchronically (across the late twentieth-century epistemic terrain). Nor have *theories* of knowledge throughout the history of philosophy developed uniformly around these same exclusions and inclusions. Not Plato, Spinoza, nor Hume, for example, would have denied that

¹ I allude here to the title of Thomas Nagel’s (1986) book, *The View From Nowhere*.

² I owe the phrase “surrogate knower” to Naomi Scheman (1990).

there are interconnections between reason and “the passions”; not stoics, Marxists, phenomenologists, pragmatists, nor followers of the later Wittgenstein would represent knowledge-seeking as a disinterested pursuit, disconnected from everyday concerns. And these are but a few exceptions to the “rule” that has come to govern the epistemology of the Anglo-American mainstream.

The *positivism* of positivist–empiricist epistemologies has been instrumental in ensuring the paradigmatic status of “*S*-knows-that-*p*” claims, and all that is believed to follow from them.³ For positivist epistemologists, sensory observation in ideal observation conditions is the privileged source of knowledge, offering the best promise of certainty. Knowers are detached, neutral spectators, and the objects of knowledge are separate from them, inert items in the observational knowledge-gathering process. Findings are presented in *propositions* (*S* knows that *p*), which are verifiable by appeals to the observational data. Each individual knowledge-seeker is singly and separately accountable to the evidence, though the belief is that *his* cognitive efforts are replicable by any other individual knower in the same circumstances. The aim of knowledge-seeking is to achieve the capacity to predict, manipulate, and control the behavior of the objects known.

The fact/value distinction that informs present-day epistemology owes its strictest formulation to the positivist legacy. For positivists, value statements are not verifiable and hence are meaningless; they must not be permitted to distort the facts. And it is in the writings of the logical positivists and their heirs that one finds the most definitive modern articulations of the supremacy of scientific knowledge (for which read the knowledge attainable in physics). Hence, for example, Karl Popper (1972) writes: “Epistemology I take to be the theory of *scientific knowledge*” (p. 108, emphasis in original).

From a positivistically derived conception of scientific knowledge comes the ideal objectivity that is alleged to be achievable by any knower who deserves the label. Physical science is represented as the site of ideal, controlled, and objective knowing at its best; its practitioners as knowers par excellence. The positivistic separation of the contexts of discovery and justification produces the conclusion that even though information-gathering (discovery) may sometimes be contaminated by the circumstantial peculiarities of everyday life, justificatory procedures can effectively purify the final cognitive product – the knowledge – from any such taint. Under the aegis of positivism, attempts to give epistemological weight to the provenance of knowledge claims – to grant justificatory or explanatory significance to social- or personal-historical situations, for example – risk committing the “genetic fallacy.” More specifically, claims that there is epistemological insight to be gained from understanding the psychology of knowers, or analyzing their socio-cultural locations, invite dismissal either as “psychologism” or as projects belonging to the sociology of knowledge. For epistemological purists, many of these pursuits can provide anecdotal information, but none contributes to the real business of epistemology.

³For an account of the central tenets of logical positivism, a representative selection of articles, and an extensive bibliography, see Ayer (1959).

In this sketch, I have represented the positivist credo at its starkest because it is these stringent aspects of its program that have trickled down not just to produce the tacit ideals of the epistemological orthodoxy but to inform even well-educated laypersons' conceptions of what it means to be objective, and of the authoritative status of modern science.⁴ Given the spectacular successes of science and technology, it is no wonder that scientific method should appear to offer the best available route to reliable, objective knowledge not just of matters scientific, but of everything one could want to know, from what makes a car run, to what makes a person happy. It is no wonder that reports to the effect that "Science has proved..." carry an immediate presumption of truth. Furthermore, the positivist program offered a methodology that would extend not just across the natural sciences, but to the human/social sciences as well. All scientific inquiry – including inquiry in the human sciences – was to be conducted on the model of natural scientific inquiry, especially as it is practiced in physics.⁵ Knowing people, too, could be scientific to the extent that it could be based in empirical observations of predictable, manipulable patterns of behavior.

I have focused on features of mainstream epistemology that tend to sustain the belief that a discovery of necessary and sufficient conditions for justifying "*S*-knows-that-*p*" claims could count as the last milestone on the epistemological journey. Such claims are distilled, simplified observational knowledge claims, objectively derived, propositionally formulable, and empirically testable. The detail of the role they play varies according to whether the position they figure in is foundational or coherentist; whether it is externalist or internalist. My intent is not to suggest that "*S*-knows-that-*p*" formulations capture the essence of these disparate epistemic orientations, nor reduce them to one common principle. Rather, I am contending that certain reasonably constant features of their diverse functions across a range of inquiries – features that derive at least indirectly from the residual prestige of positivism and its veneration of an idealized scientific methodology – produce epistemologies for which the places *S* and *p* can be indiscriminately filled across an inexhaustible range of subject matters. The legislated (not "found") context-independence of the model generates the conclusion that knowledge worthy of the name must transcend the particularities of experience to achieve objective purity and value neutrality. Within this model the issue of taking subjectivity into account simply does not arise.

Yet despite the disclaimers, hidden subjectivities produce these epistemologies, and sustain their hegemony in a curiously circular process. It is true that, in selecting examples, the context in which *S* knows or *p* occurs is rarely considered relevant, for

⁴Mary Hesse (1980) advisedly notes that philosophers of science would now more readily assert than they would have done in the heyday of positivism that facts in both the natural and social sciences are "value-laden" (pp. 172–173). I am claiming, however, that everyday conceptions of scientific authority are still significantly informed by a residual positivistic faith.

⁵For classic statements of this aspect of the positivistic program, see, for example, Rudolf Carnap, "Psychology in Physical Language," and Otto Neurath, "Sociology and Physicalism" in A. J. Ayer (Ed.), *Logical Positivism*.

the assumption is that only in abstraction from contextual confusion can clear, unequivocal knowledge claims be submitted for analysis. Yet those examples tend to be selected – whether by chance or by design – from the experiences of a privileged group of people, then to be presented as paradigmatic for knowledge as such. Hence, a certain range of contexts is, in effect, presupposed. Historically, the philosopher arrogated that privilege to himself, maintaining that an investigation of his mental processes could reveal the workings of human thought. In Baconian and later positivist–empiricist thought, as I have suggested, paradigmatic privilege belongs more specifically to standardized, faceless observers or to scientists (The latter, at least, have usually been white and male). Their ordinary observational experiences provide the “simples” of which knowledge is comprised: observational simples caused, almost invariably, by medium-sized physical objects such as apples, envelopes, coins, sticks, and colored patches. The tacit assumption is that such objects are part of the basic experiences of every putative knower, and that more complex knowledge – or scientific knowledge – consists in elaborated or scientifically controlled versions of such experiences. Rarely in the literature, either historical or modern, is there more than a passing reference to knowing other people, except occasionally to a recognition (observational information) that this is a man – whereas that is a door, or a robot. Neither with respect to material objects, nor to other people, is there any sense of how these “knowns” figure in a person’s life.

Not only do these epistemic restrictions suppress the context in which objects are known, they also account for the fact that, apart from simple objects – and even there it is questionable – one cannot, on this model, know anything well enough to do very much with it. One can only *perceive* it, usually at a distance. In consequence, most of the more complex, contentious, and locationally variable aspects of cognitive practice are excluded from epistemological analysis. Hence the knowledge that epistemologists analyze is not of concrete or unique aspects of the physical/social world. It is of *instances* rather than particulars; the norms of formal sameness obscure practical and experiential differences to produce a picture of a homogeneous epistemic community, comprised of discrete individuals with uniform access to the stuff of which knowledge is made.

The project of remapping the epistemic terrain that I envisage is subversive, even anarchistic, in challenging and seeking to displace some of the most sacred principles of standard Anglo-American epistemologies. It abandons the search for – denies the possibility of – the disinterested and dislocated view from nowhere. More subversively, it asserts the political investedness of most knowledge-producing activity and insists upon the accountability – the epistemic responsibilities – of knowing subjects to the community, not just to the evidence.⁶

Because my engagement in the project is prompted, specifically, by a conviction that *gender* must be put in place as a primary analytic category, I start by assuming that it is impossible to sustain the presumption of gender neutrality that is central to standard epistemologies: the presumption that gender has nothing to do with

⁶I discuss such responsibilities in my *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987).

knowledge, that the mind has no sex, that reason is alike in all men, and “man” embraces “woman.”⁷ But gender is not an enclosed category for it is interwoven, always, with such other sociopolitical-historical locations as class, race, and ethnicity, to mention only a few. It is experienced differently and plays differently into structures of power and dominance at its diverse intersections with other specificities. From these multiply describable locations, the world looks quite different from the way it might look “from nowhere.” Homogenizing those differences under a range of standard or “typical” instances always invites the question “standard or typical for whom?”⁸ Answers to that question must, necessarily, take subjectivity into account.

My thesis, then, is that a “variable construction” hypothesis requires epistemologists to pay as much attention to the nature and situation – the location – of *S* as they commonly pay to the content of *p*; that a constructivist reorientation requires epistemologists to take subjective factors – factors that pertain to the circumstances of the subject, *S* – centrally into account in evaluative and justificatory procedures. Yet the socially located, critically dialogical nature of this reoriented epistemological project preserves a realist commitment which ensures that it will not slide into subjectivism. This caveat is vitally important, as it is my contention that realism and relativism are by no means incompatible. Hence, although I argue the need to excise the positivist side of the positivist–empiricist couple, I retain a modified commitment to the empiricist side, for several reasons.

I have suggested that the stark conception of objectivity that characterizes much contemporary epistemology derives from the infusion of empiricism with positivistic values. Jettison those values, and an empiricist core remains that urges the survival- and emancipatory significance of achieving reliable knowledge of the physical and social world.⁹ People need to be able to explain the world and their circumstances as part of it; hence they need to be able to assume its “reality” in some minimal sense. The fact of the world’s intractability to intervention and wishful thinking is

⁷ See Joan Scott (1989) for an elaboration of what it means to see gender as an analytic category.

⁸ Paul Moser in his review of *Epistemic Responsibility* takes me to task for not announcing “the necessary and sufficient conditions for one’s being epistemically responsible.” He argues that even if, as I claim, epistemic responsibility does not lend itself to analysis in those terms, “we might still provide necessary and sufficient conditions for the wide range of typical instances, and then handle the wayward cases independently” (Paul Moser, Review of *Epistemic Responsibility*, p. 155). Yet it is precisely their “typicality” that I contest. Moser’s review is a salient example of the tendency of dominant epistemologies to claim as their own even positions that reject their central premises.

⁹ These aims are continuous with some of the aims of recent projects to naturalize epistemology by drawing on the resources of cognitive psychology. See especially Quine (1969), Kornblith (1990, 1994), and Goldman (1986). Feminist epistemologists who are developing this line of inquiry are Jane Duran (1991) and Lynn Hankinson Nelson (1990). Feminists who find a resource in this work have to contend with the fact that the cognitive psychology that informs it presupposes a constancy in “human nature,” exemplified in “representative selves” who have commonly been white, male, and middle class. They have also to remember the extent to which appeals to “nature” have oppressed women and other marginal groups.

the strongest evidence of its independence from human knowers. Earthquakes, trees, disease, attitudes, and social arrangements are *there*, requiring different kinds of reaction, and (sometimes) intervention. People cannot hope to transform their circumstances and hence to realize emancipatory goals if their explanations cannot at once account for the intractable dimensions of the world, and engage appropriately with its patently malleable features. Hence it is necessary to achieve some match between knowledge and “reality,” even when the reality at issue consists primarily in social productions, such as racism or tolerance, oppression or equality of opportunity. A reconstructed epistemological project has to retain an empirical-realist core that can negotiate the fixities and less stable constructs of the physical-social world, while refusing to endorse the objectivism of the positivist legacy or the subjectivism of radical relativism.

Subjects and Objects

Feminist critiques of epistemology, of the philosophy of science, and of social science have demonstrated that the ideals of the autonomous reasoner – the dislocated, disinterested observer – and the epistemologies they inform are the artifacts of a small, privileged group of educated, usually prosperous, white men.¹⁰ Their circumstances enable them to believe that they are materially and even affectively autonomous, and to imagine that they are nowhere or everywhere, even as they occupy an unmarked position of privilege. Moreover, the ideals of rationality and objectivity that have guided and inspired theorists of knowledge throughout the history of western philosophy have been constructed through processes of suppressing the attributes and experiences commonly associated with femaleness and underclass social status: emotion, connection, practicality, sensitivity, idiosyncrasy.¹¹ These systematic excisions of “otherness” attest to a presumed – and willed – belief in the stability of a social order that the presumpers have good reasons to believe that they can ensure, because they occupy the positions that determine the norms of conduct and inquiry. Yet all that these convictions demonstrate is that ideal objectivity is a tacit generalization from the *subjectivity* of quite a small social group, albeit a group that has the power, security, and prestige to believe that its experiences and normative ideals hold generally across the social order, thus producing a group of like-minded practitioners (“we”) and dismissing “others” as deviant, aberrant (“they”). These groupings are generated more as a by-product of systematically ignoring concrete experiences, of working with an idealized conception of experience “in general,” so

¹⁰ For an extensive bibliography of such critiques up to 1989, see Wylie et al. (1990).

¹¹ For an analysis of the androcentricity, the “masculinity” of these ideals, and their “feminine” exclusions in theories of knowledge, see Genevieve Lloyd (1993) and Susan Bordo (1987). For discussions of the scientific context, see Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), Sandra Harding (1986), and Nancy Tuana (1989).

to speak, than as a conscious and intentional practice of reifying experiences that are specifically *theirs*. The experiences that epistemologists tend to draw upon are usually no more “experiential” than the “individuals” whose experiences they allegedly are, are individuated. These are the generic experiences of generic epistemic subjects. But the end result is to focus philosophical analysis on examples that draw upon the commonplaces of privileged white male lives and to assume that everyone else’s lives will, unquestionably, be like theirs.

...

Naming ourselves as “we” empowers us, but it always risks disempowering others. The “we-saying,” then, of assumed or negotiated solidarity must always be submitted to critical analysis. Now, it is neither surprising nor outrageous that epistemologies should derive out of specific human interests. Indeed, it is much less plausible to contend that they do not; human cognitive agents, after all, have made them. Why would they not bear the marks of their makers? Nor does the implication of human interests in theories of knowledge, *prima facie*, invite censure. It does alert epistemologists to the need for case-by-case analysis and critique of the sources out of which claims to objectivity and neutrality are made.¹² More pointedly, it forces the conclusion that if the ideal of objectivity cannot pretend to have been established in accordance with its own demands, then it has no right to the theoretical hegemony to which it lays claim.

Central to the program of taking subjectivity into account that feminist epistemological inquiry demands, then, is a critical analysis of that very politics of “we-saying” that objectivist epistemologies conceal from view. Whenever an “*S*-knows-that-*p*” claim is declared paradigmatic, the first task is to analyze the constitution of the group(s) by whom and for whom it is accorded that status.

...

My contention that subjectivity has to be taken into account takes issue with the belief that epistemologists need only to understand the conditions for propositional, observationally derived knowledge, and all the rest will follow. It challenges the concomitant belief that epistemologists need only to understand how such knowledge claims are made and justified by individual, autonomous, self-reliant reasoners, and they will understand all the rest. Such beliefs derive from conceptions of detached and faceless cognitive agency that mask the variability of the experiences and practices from which knowledge is constructed.

Even if necessary and sufficient conditions cannot yet be established, say in the form of unassailable foundations or seamless coherence, there are urgent questions for epistemologists to address. They bear not primarily upon criteria of evidence, justification, and warrantability, but upon the “nature” of inquirers: upon their interests in the inquiry, their emotional involvement and background assumptions, their character; upon their material, historical, cultural circumstances. Answers to such questions will rarely offer definitive assessments of knowledge claims and hence are not ordinarily

¹²I borrow the idea, if not the detail, of the potential of case-by-case analysis from Roger Shiner (1984).

open to the charge that they commit the genetic fallacy; but they can be instructive in debates about the worth of such claims. I am thinking of questions about how credibility is established, about connections between knowledge and power, about political agendas and epistemic responsibilities, and about the place of knowledge in ethical and aesthetic judgments. These questions are less concerned with individual, monologic cognitive projects than with the workings of epistemic communities as they are manifested in structures of authority and expertise and in the processes through which knowledge comes to inform public opinion. Such issues will occupy a central place in reconstructed epistemological projects that eschew formalism in order to engage with cognitive practices and to promote emancipatory goals.

The epistemic and moral-political ideals that govern inquiry in technological, capitalist, free-enterprise western societies are an amalgam of liberal-utilitarian moral values and the empirical-positivist intellectual values that I have been discussing in this essay. These ideals and values shape both the intellectual enterprises that the society legitimates and the language of liberal individualism that maps out the rhetorical spaces where those enterprises are carried out. The ideal of tolerance, openness, is believed to be the right attitude from which, initially, to approach truth claims. It combines with the assumptions that objectivity and value-neutrality govern the rational conduct of scientific and social-scientific research to produce the philosophical commonplaces of late-twentieth-century Anglo-American societies, not just in “the academy” but in the public perception – the “common sense,” in Gramsci’s terms – that prevails about the academy and the scientific community.¹³ (For Richard Rorty, tolerance is to ensure that post-epistemological societies will sustain productive conversations.) I have noted that a conversational item introduced with the phrase “Science has proved...” carries a presumption in favor of its reliability *because of* its objectivity and value-neutrality – a presumption that these facts can stand up to scrutiny *because* they are products of an objective, disinterested process of inquiry. (It is ironic that this patently “genetic” appeal – i.e., to the genesis of cognitive products in a certain kind of process – is normally cited to discredit other genetic accounts!) Open and fair-minded consumers of science will recognize its claims to disinterested, tolerant consideration.

I want to suggest that these ideals are inadequate to guide epistemological debates about contentious issues and hence that it is deceptive and dangerous to ignore questions about subjectivity in the name of objectivity and value-neutrality. (Again, this is why simple observational paradigms are so misleading.) To do so, I turn to an example that is now notorious, at least in Canada.

Psychologist Philippe Rushton claims to have demonstrated that “Orientals as a group are more intelligent, more family-oriented, more law-abiding and less sexually promiscuous than whites, and that whites are superior to blacks in all the same respects” (Platiel and Strauss 1989, p. A6).¹⁴ Presented as “facts” that “science

¹³ See Antonio Gramsci (1971).

¹⁴ I cite the newspaper report because the media produce the public impact that concerns me here. I discuss neither the quality of Rushton’s research practice nor the questions his theories and pedagogical practice pose about academic freedom. My concern is with how structures of knowledge, power, and prejudice grant him an epistemic place.

[i.e., an allegedly scientific psychology] has proved..." using an objective, statistical methodology, Rushton's findings carry a presumption in favor of their reliability *because* they are products of objective research.¹⁵ The "Science has proved..." rhetoric creates a public presumption in favor of taking them at face value, believing them true until they are proven false. It erects a screen, a blind, behind which the researcher, like any other occupant of the *S* place, can abdicate accountability to anything but "the facts"; can present himself as a neutral, infinitely replicable vehicle through which data pass *en route* to becoming knowledge. He can claim to have fulfilled his epistemic obligations if, "withdraw[ing] to... [his] professional self,"¹⁶ he can argue that he has been "objective," detached, disinterested in his research. The rhetoric of objectivity and value-neutrality places the burden of proof on the challenger rather than the fact-finder and judges her guilty of intolerance, dogmatism, or ideological excess if she cannot make her challenge good. That same rhetoric generates a conception of knowledge-for-its-own-sake that at once effaces accountability requirements and threatens the dissolution of viable intellectual and moral community.

I have noted that the "Science has proved..." rhetoric derives from the sociopolitical influence of the philosophies of science that incorporate and are underwritten by "*S*-knows-that-*p*" epistemologies. Presented as the findings of a purely neutral observer who "discovered" facts about racial inferiority and superiority in controlled observation conditions, so that he could not, rationally, withhold assent, Rushton's results ask the community to be equally objective and neutral in assessing them. These requirements are at once reasonable and troubling. They are reasonable because the empiricist–realist component that, I have urged, is vital to any emancipatory epistemology makes it a mark of competent, responsible inquiry to approach even the most unsavory truth claims seriously, albeit critically. But the requirements are troubling in their implicit appeal to a doxastic involuntarism that becomes an escape hatch from the demands of subjective accountability. The implicit claim is that empirical inquiry is not only a neutral and impersonal process but also an inexorable one: it is compelling, even coercive, in what it turns up, to the extent that a rational inquirer *cannot*, rationally, withhold assent. He has no choice but to believe that *p*, however unpalatable it may be. The individualism and presumed disinterestedness of the paradigm reinforces this claim.

It is difficult, however, to believe in the *coincidence* of Rushton's discoveries, and they could only be compelling in that strong sense if they could be shown to be purely coincidental – brute fact – something he came upon as he might bump into a wall. Talk about his impartial reading of the data assumes such hard facticity: the facticity of a blizzard or a hot sunny day. "Data" is the problematic term here, suggesting that facts presented themselves neutrally to Rushton's observing eye as

¹⁵ Commenting on the psychology of occupational assessment, Wendy Hollway (1984) observes: "That psychology is a science and that psychological assessment is therefore objective is a belief which continues to be fostered in organizations" (p. 35). She notes: "The legacy of psychology as science is the belief that the individual can be understood through measurement" (p. 55).

¹⁶ The phrase is Richard Schmitt's (1990, p. 71). I am grateful to Richard Schmitt for helping me to think about the issues I discuss in this section.

though they were literally given, not sought or made. Yet it is not easy, with Rushton, to conceive of his “data” in perfect independence from ongoing debates about race, sex, and class.

These difficulties are compounded when Rushton’s research is juxtaposed against analogous projects in other places and times. In her book *Sexual Science*, Cynthia Russett (1989) documents the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century, when claims for racial and sexual equality were threatening upheavals in the social order.¹⁷ She notes that, just at that time, there was a concerted effort among scientists to produce studies that would demonstrate the “natural” sources of racial and sexual inequality. Given its aptness to the climate of the times, it is hard to believe that this research was “dislocated,” prompted by a disinterested spirit of objective, neutral fact-finding. It is equally implausible, at a time when racial and sexual unrest is again threatening the complacency of the liberal dream – and meeting with strong conservative efforts to contain it – that it could be purely by coincidence that Rushton reaches the conclusions he does. Consider Rushton’s contention that, evolutionarily, as the brain increases in size, the genitals shrink; blacks have larger genitals, ergo . . . Leaving elementary logical fallacies aside, it is impossible not to hear echoes with nineteenth-century medical science’s “proofs” that, for women, excessive mental activity interferes with the proper functioning of the uterus; hence, permitting women to engage in higher intellectual activity impedes performance of their proper reproductive roles.

The connections Rushton draws between genital and brain size, and conformity to idealized patterns of good liberal democratic citizenship, trade upon analogous normative assumptions. The rhetoric of stable, conformist family structure as the site of controlled, utilitarian sexual expression is commonly enlisted to sort the “normal” from the “deviant” and to promote conservative conceptions of the self-image a society should have of itself.¹⁸ The idea that the dissolution of “the family” (=the nuclear, two-parent, patriarchal family) threatens the destruction of civilized society has been deployed to perpetuate white male privilege and compulsory heterosexuality, especially for women. It has been invoked to preserve homogeneous WASP values from disruption by “unruly” (=not law-abiding; sexually promiscuous) elements. Rushton’s contention that “naturally occurring” correlations can explain the demographic distribution of tendencies to unruliness leaves scant room for doubt about the appropriate route for a society concerned about its self-image to take: suppress unruliness. As Julian Henriques (1984) puts a similar point, by a neat reversal, the “black person becomes the cause of racism whereas the white person’s prejudice is seen as a natural effect of the information-processing mechanisms” (p. 74). The “facts” that Rushton produces are simply presented to the scholarly and lay communities so that they allegedly “speak for themselves” on two levels: both roughly, as data, and in more formal garb, as research findings.

¹⁷ In this connection, see also Lynda Birke (1986) and Janet Sayers (1982).

¹⁸ The best-known contemporary discussion of utilitarian-controlled sexuality is in Michel Foucault (1976/1980), *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. Sexuality, in Foucault’s analysis, is utilitarian both in reproducing the population and in cementing the family bond.

What urgently demands analysis is the process by which these “facts” are inserted into a public arena that is prepared to receive them, with the result that inquiry stops right where it should begin.¹⁹

My point is that it is not enough just to be more rigorously empirical in adjudicating such controversial knowledge claims with the expectation that biases that may have infected the “context of discovery” will be eradicated in the purifying processes of justification. Rather, the scope of epistemological investigation has to expand to merge with moral-political inquiry, acknowledging that “facts” are always infused with values and that both facts and values are open to ongoing critical debate. It would be necessary to demonstrate the innocence of descriptions (their derivation from pure data) and to show the perfect congruence of descriptions with “the described” in order to argue that descriptive theories have no normative force. Their assumed innocence licenses an evasion of the accountability that socially concerned communities have to demand of their producers of knowledge. Only the most starkly positivistic epistemology merged with the instrumental rationality it presupposes could presume that inquirers are accountable only to the evidence. Evidence is *selected*, not found, and selection procedures are open to scrutiny. Nor can critical analysis stop there, for the funding and institutions that enable inquirers to pursue certain projects and not others explicitly legitimize the work.²⁰ So the lines of accountability are long and interwoven; only a genealogy of their multiple strands can begin to unravel the issues.

What, then, should occur within epistemic communities to ensure that scientists and other knowers cannot conceal bias and prejudice, cannot claim *a right not to know* about their background assumptions, and the significance of their locations?

The crux of my argument is that the phenomenon of the disinterested inquirer is the exception rather than the rule; that there are no dislocated truths, and that some facts about the locations and interests at the source of inquiry are always pertinent to questions about freedom and accountability. Hence, I am arguing, in agreement with Naomi Scheman (1989), that:

Feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science *along with others who have been the objects of knowledge-as-control* [have to] understand and ... pose alternatives to the epistemology of modernity. As it has been central to this epistemology to guard its products from contamination by connection to the particularities of its producers, it must be central to the work of its critics and to those who would create genuine alternatives to remember those connections.... (p. 42, emphasis in original)

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz (1989) comments: “It is not...the validity of the sciences, real or would-be, that is at issue. What concerns me, and should concern us all, are the axes that, with an increasing determination bordering on the evangelical, are being busily ground with their assistance” (p. 20).

²⁰ Philippe Rushton has received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Guggenheim Foundation in the USA: agencies whose status, in the North American intellectual community, confers authority and credibility. He has also received funding from the Pioneer Fund, an organization with explicit white supremacist commitments.

There can be no doubt that research is – often imperceptibly – shaped by presuppositions and interests external to the inquiry itself, which cannot be filtered out by standard, objective, disinterested epistemological techniques.²¹

In seeking to explain what makes Rushton possible,²² the point cannot be to exonerate him as a mere product of his circumstances and times. Rushton accepts grants and academic honors in his own name, speaks “for himself” in interviews with the press, and claims credit where credit is to be had. He upholds the validity of his findings. Moreover, he participates fully in the rhetoric of the autonomous, objective inquirer. Yet, although Rushton is plainly accountable for the sources and motivations of his projects, he is not singly responsible. Such research is legitimated by the community and speaks in a discursive space that is available, prepared for it. So, scrutinizing Rushton’s “scientific” knowledge claims demands an examination of the moral and intellectual health of a community that is infected by racial and sexual injustices at every level. Rushton may have had reasons to believe that his results would be welcomed.

Equally central, then, to an epistemological program of taking subjectivity into account are case-by-case analyses of the political and other structural circumstances that generate projects and lines of inquiry. Feminist critique – with critiques that center on other marginalizing structures – needs to act as an “experimental control” in epistemic practice so that every inquiry, assumption, and discovery is analyzed for its place in, and implications for, the prevailing sex/gender system, in its intersections with the systems that sustain racism, homophobia, ethnocentrism.²³ The burden of proof falls upon inquirers who claim neutrality. The positions and power relations of gendered, and otherwise located, subjectivity have to be submitted to scrutiny, piece by piece, and differently according to the field of research, in all “objective” inquiry. The task is intricate, because the subjectivity of the inquirer is always also implicated, and has to be taken into account. Hence, the inquiry is at once critical and self-critical. But this is no monologic, self-sufficient enterprise. Conclusions are reached, immoderate subjective omissions and commissions become visible, in dialogic processes among inquirers and – in social science – between inquirers and the subjects of their research.

It emerges from this analysis that although the ideal objectivity of the universal knower is neither possible nor desirable, a realistic commitment to achieving empirical adequacy that engages in situated analyses of the subjectivities of both the knower and (where appropriate) the known is both desirable and possible. This exercise in

²¹ Helen Longino (1990) observes: “...how one determines evidential relevance, why one takes some state of affairs as evidence for one hypothesis rather than for another, depends on one’s other beliefs, which we can call background beliefs or assumptions” (p. 43). And “When, for instance, background assumptions are shared by all members of a community, they acquire an invisibility that renders them unavailable for criticism” (p. 80).

²² Here I am borrowing a turn of phrase from Michel Foucault (1966/1971), when he writes, in quite a different context: “And it was this network that made possible the individuals we term Hobbes, Berkeley, Hume, or Condillac” (p. 63).

²³ I owe this point to the Biology and Gender Study Group (1989, p. 173).

supposing that the places in the “*S*-knows-that-*p*” formula could be filled by asserting “Rushton knows that blacks are inferior” shows that simple, propositional knowledge claims that represent inquirers as purely neutral observers of unignorable data cannot be permitted to count as paradigms of knowledge. Objectivity *requires* taking subjectivity into account.

...

Conclusion

The project I am proposing, then, requires a new *geography* of the epistemic terrain: one that is no longer primarily a physical geography but a population geography that develops qualitative analyses of subjective positions and identities and the social-political structures that produce them. Because differing social positions generate variable constructions of reality and afford different perspectives on the world, the revisionary stages of this project will consist in case-by-case analyses of the knowledge produced in specific social positions. These analyses derive from a recognition that knowers are always *somewhere* – and at once limited and enabled by the specificities of their locations.²⁴ It is an interpretive project, alert to the possibility of finding generalities, commonalities within particulars – hence of the explanatory potential that opens up when such commonalities can be delineated. But it is wary of the reductivism that results when commonalities are presupposed or forced. It has no ultimate foundation, but neither does it float free, for it is grounded in experiences and practices, in the efficacy of dialogic negotiation and of action.

My argument in this essay points to the conclusion that necessary and sufficient conditions for establishing empirical knowledge claims cannot be found, at least where experientially significant knowledge is at issue.

...

I have exposed some ways in which “*S*-knows-that-*p*” epistemologies are dangerous and have proposed one route toward facing and disarming those dangers: taking subjectivity into account. The solutions that route affords, and the further dangers it reveals, will indicate the directions that the next stages of this inquiry must take.²⁵

²⁴ Here I borrow a phrase from Susan Bordo (1990, p. 145).

²⁵ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the American Philosophical Association conference at Los Angeles and to the Departments of Philosophy at McMaster University and McGill University. I am grateful to participants in those discussions – especially to Susan Dwyer, Hilary Kornblith, and Doug Odegard – for their comments and to Linda Alcoff and Libby Potter for their editorial suggestions.

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Chapter 6

Epistemology as Trope: Uses and Effects of Claims About “Ways of Knowing”*

Claudia W. Ruitenberg

Introduction

Working in a Faculty of Education in Canada, a country with both a colonial history and an explicit policy of multiculturalism, I am frequently faced with questions about the role of education in strengthening and supporting cultural diversity and pluralism. As a philosopher of education with a particular interest in language philosophy and speech act theory, I cannot but pay attention to the language used in arguments both for and against greater diversity in curricular content, pedagogical approaches, and educational research paradigms. Among the claims about diversity in education I have, in recent years, observed an increasing number of claims about *epistemological* diversity. The previous chapters in this book illustrate this trend well.

The focus of this chapter is a particular phrase that is often used in claims about epistemological diversity: the phrase “ways of knowing.” Besides “women’s ways of knowing” (e.g., Belenky et al. 1986), I have encountered “Indigenous ways of knowing” (e.g., Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005), “African ways of knowing” (e.g., Dei 2002), as well as many spoken instances of the term in classrooms and conference sessions. It seems to me that it is often unclear what precisely a “way of knowing” is, and I have wondered why colleagues use this vague phrase when more precise descriptions, such as “sources of knowledge,” “forms of representation,”

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“ways of learning,” and “regimes of truth,” are available. In this chapter, therefore, I subject the meanings and effects of the phrase “ways of knowing” to careful scrutiny in order to discern what is gained and lost by its use.

In the first part of the chapter, I will discuss the linguistic and conceptual difficulties produced by the phrase “ways of knowing,” especially when considered from the perspective of analytic philosophy. In the second part, I consider the possibility that some of these linguistic and conceptual difficulties are a result of the limitations of the English language, in which there is one verb, “to know,” where in many other languages, two verbs are used (e.g., *savoir/connaitre* in French and *wissen/kennen* in German). In the third and final part of the chapter, I will analyze the *use* of the phrase “ways of knowing” from the perspective of speech act theory and consider the effects of this use. I will develop the hypothesis that the phrase “ways of knowing” may be used as a claim to epistemic authority as well as a demand for recognition of broader *ontological* or *metaphysical* assumptions or worldviews. The phrase “ways of knowing,” on this view, often functions as trope for worldviews or “ways of being.”

Essentialism and Essentializability

Before I get underway, let me say a few words about the adjectives related to gender, ethnicity, and other identity categories that often precede the phrase “ways of knowing.” In this chapter, I focus on the phrase “ways of knowing” in general, that is to say, separate from the adjectives that tend to precede this phrase. This choice is not based on a blindness to the essentialist and essentializing uses, meanings, and effects of phrases such as “women’s ways of knowing,” “Indigenous ways of knowing,” and “African ways of knowing.” In the singular form, the expression “the woman’s way of knowing,” for example, suggests that women “know” differently from men, and that this different “way of knowing” is essential to women, i.e., that a woman is lacking in femininity if she does not “know” in “the woman’s way.” Likewise, “the Indigenous way of knowing” suggests that Indigenous people “know” differently from non-Indigenous people, and that this different “way of knowing” is essential to Indigenous people, i.e., that an Indigenous person is lacking in Indigeneity if she/he does not know in “the Indigenous way.” That the singular form “way of knowing” is less common is probably a reflection of the criticism that such obvious essentialism has provoked. As Harvey Siegel explains quite straightforwardly in his chapter,

There is simply too much within-group variation to think that each such group (women, people of color, nonheterosexuals), or even specific subgroups within such groups (Chicana feminists, African men, White Jewish gay men), can be neatly assigned their own epistemology. Indeed, such an assignment smacks of a problematic essentialism. (Siegel, p. 78)

In the more commonly used plural, “African ways of knowing” implies that there is not one African way of knowing; that there are multiple African ways of knowing but that they have something in common that allows us to identify them as African

and to cluster them together as distinct from non-African. Although the risk of essentializing Africanness is not dispelled entirely by this use, it is less sharp than in the singular form. Here, I simply wish to signal the risks of essentialism and essentializability, but leave this discussion aside so that I can focus my efforts not on the effects of the identity adjectives but rather on the phrase “ways of knowing” and its tropological use.

The Trouble with “Knowing”

More than 35 years ago, Richard Robinson, Fellow and Tutor of Philosophy at Oxford University’s Oriel College, wrote with the certainty characteristic of Anglo-analytic philosophers:

Knowledge is never an act, or any kind of event. ‘The act of knowing’ does not occur. Sentences that seem to imply an act or event of knowing are rare and misleading. ... Although knowledge is not an event, it has events closely connected with itself, notably its origin, that is the coming to know or learning, and its ending, that is the being forgotten or otherwise ceasing, and its recalls or realizations whenever we bring to mind or remember what we know. These events related to knowledge are referred to in English by a variety of words, including *learn, forget, recall, realize, apprehend, see, perceive, observe, recognize, understand, and come to know*; but they are not referred to by the word *know* alone. What John Locke ... called ‘actual’ as opposed to ‘habitual’ knowledge is not in fact referred to by the word ‘know’ in the English language, but by the event-words and act-words which I have listed. This is why there is no actual as opposed to habitual present tense of the verb *to know* in English, why we cannot say ‘She is now knowing that it is raining’. (Robinson 1971, p. 17)

Robinson’s assertions address the unique status of the verb “to know” and the trouble that arises when this verb is used in the actual present tense, or in a way that suggests the possibility of an act or event of knowing. The phrase “ways of knowing” suggests precisely this possibility of an act or event of knowing: at the most literal level, it suggests that “knowing” is something one can do in different “ways.” But is “knowing” something one can “do” at all? If someone uses the phrase “ways of walking,” it is not difficult to imagine that one person might walk quickly and another slowly, that one person might walk with a bounce and another drag her or his heels, that one person might walk in a straight line and another zigzagging across the road. The same would hold for “ways of writing,” “ways of cooking,” “ways of dancing,” and so forth. All of those verbs, and many others, are *dynamic* verbs: they denote acts or activities, which means that they denote something that someone does at a particular moment or for a particular period of time. Dynamic verbs can coherently be used in the actual present tense: I am walking, I am writing, I am cooking, I am dancing.

Not all verbs, however, are dynamic verbs that denote acts; there are also *static* verbs that include feelings (to envy, to fear, to love), sense perceptions (to see, to hear, to smell), states of possession (to own, to belong), states of being (to need, to mean, to seem), and mental processes (to believe, to doubt, to understand). “To know” is clearly a static verb, but the puzzle of “knowing” and “ways of knowing”

does not end there, as many static verbs can be used quite well in the actual rather than the habitual present tense. One can say not only “You *are* a tall woman” but also “Now you are just *being* silly”; one can say not only “I *have* a wonderful job” but also “I am *having* difficulties with this new software.” Other static verbs, when used in the actual present tense, get a slightly different meaning, for instance, from real to imagined, or from involuntary sense perception to voluntary action. Consider the difference between “As soon as she opened the fridge she *smelled* the salami” and “She was *smelling* the leftovers to find out if they had gone bad” and also between “He *saw* the ocean for the first time” and “After a few drinks he was *seeing* double.”

What Robinson points out is that the static verb “to know” is of a different order, as there is no circumstance in which one can actualize the verb “to know” in a coherent way, no circumstance in which one does not “know” but “is knowing.” Another way of getting at the difficulty with “knowing” is to remind ourselves of the distinction made by Gilbert Ryle (1949) and used by R. S. Peters (1970) between “achievement words” and “task words.” The difference is, unsurprisingly, that a task word designates an activity, and an achievement word the (possible) result of that activity. To give some obvious examples: hearing (achievement) is a result of listening (task); seeing (achievement) is a result of looking (task); finding (achievement) is a result of seeking (task); winning (achievement) is a result of competing (task). According to Peters, “education” is an achievement word, different from task words such as “teaching” and “learning”: when I am learning, I do not know yet whether I will end up an educated person, and when I am teaching someone else, I also do not know whether that person will become educated (p. 26). A similar case can be made for “knowing”: while “reading,” “listening,” “rehearsing,” and many other activities or tasks may be undertaken with the intent that they will lead to knowledge, “knowing” itself is an achievement word, not a task word. And yet, “knowing” is used quite widely in ways that directly contradict Robinson, Ryle, and Peters, notably in the phrase “ways of knowing.” What might explain this discrepancy?

When “Knowing” and “Knowing” Are Not the Same

What if at least part of the ambiguity in the phrase “ways of knowing” is caused by the use of the phrase without object, as if knowledge can ever be without object and as if “knowing” could be an intransitive verb? The examples of uses of the phrase “ways of knowing” that I have cited have all focused attention on the *subjects* rather than the *objects* of knowledge: they have been about “*women’s* ways of knowing,” “*Indigenous* ways of knowing,” or “*African* ways of knowing” and not about “ways of knowing *X*” or “ways of knowing *Y*.”

Paul Hirst turned his attention to the relation between different types of knowledge or “ways of knowing” and different objects of knowledge. In commenting on the work of Philip Phenix, Hirst distinguished three categories of objects of knowledge, and the types of knowledge associated with these objects: “knowledge with

the direct object,” “knowledge-that,” (propositional knowledge) and “knowledge-how” (procedural knowledge) (Hirst 1975, p. 57). He was, however, skeptical about both the separate and epistemic status of “knowledge with the direct object”:

Clearly much of what this covers is ‘knowledge that’ about the objects or persons concerned. To this, however, is usually added a claim to have direct experience of the person or object, and many writers speak here of having existential knowledge, a form of experience which is not itself expressible in statements of propositions. Phenix clearly considers ‘knowledge with the direct object’ to be a distinct type of knowledge primarily because of these existential aspects. It is, however, very debatable whether it should be so regarded, and particularly so if knowledge is to be kept clear of all other states of mind. ... What one knows in the existential form of ‘knowledge with the direct object’ is thus characterisable as ‘knowledge-that’ concerning the object on which supervenes an occurrent state of awareness which is of a quite different character. Knowledge of the first kind, I therefore suggest, is reducible to ‘knowledge-that.’ (pp. 57–58)

According to Hirst, it is perfectly coherent in everyday language to say that one knows one’s brother, that one knows the island on which one lives, or that one knows wine, but in a philosophical sense, such statements are confusions between “knowledge-that” and feelings or other “states of awareness” such as affection or pride. Following Hirst’s analysis, “ways of knowing” can thus logically only be understood to refer to “ways of knowing-that” and “ways of knowing-how.” So what does someone claim when she claims that there are several different “ways of knowing”? Does she claim that there are several different “ways of knowing-that” or different “ways of knowing-how” or both?

The area of propositional knowledge is perhaps the easiest to address, for it is simply not linguistically or conceptually possible to claim that one can know that it is raining in several different ways. One either knows that it is raining, or one does not. One may have *come to know* about the rain in different ways, for example, by standing outside and getting rained on, or by sitting inside and looking out through a window, but this, as Richard Robinson explained so clearly, is a matter of different ways of *learning* that it is raining, not different ways of *knowing* it.

The matter is more difficult when it regards procedural knowledge: could one coherently claim that there are different ways of knowing how to ride a bike, or different ways of knowing how to make an omelette? The immediate impulse to paraphrase the question whether one can *know in different ways* how to make an omelette, as whether one can know *different ways of making* an omelette, and the confusion that results from trying to distinguish these two questions, suggests that procedural knowledge might not be a good object of “ways of knowing.” At a breakfast meeting with a colleague, however, he suggested that, surely, there must be a difference between his way of knowing how to make an omelette, something he does only occasionally, and – here he pointed to the chef at the omelette station of the breakfast bar – the chef’s way of knowing how to make an omelette, assuming that he does so several times a day, several days a week. Thus, it indeed seems possible to refer to multiple “ways of knowing how,” although it seems to me that there are much better ways of characterizing the difference between my colleague’s and the chef’s knowledge of omelette making. It is clear that the chef has more *experience* making omelettes, for example, and that he has *learned* how to make an omelette in

different circumstances. We could say that the chef has a more thorough knowledge of making omelettes, and that he can apply this knowledge without consciously thinking about it very much, whereas my colleague may have to make an effort to recall his knowledge about the steps involved in making an omelette. It may be worth examining further if and how the possibility of different “ways of knowing how” might be relevant to the broader investigation into the use of the phrase “ways of knowing” by groups who claim a marginalized epistemic status. However, since these claims themselves typically do not distinguish “knowing-that” from “knowing-how,” I will not pursue this line of inquiry here.

Instead, I will return to Hirst’s claim that “knowledge with the direct object” is not a distinct type of knowledge. I am troubled by Hirst’s assertiveness because he operates in English, in which there is just one verb, “to know,” whereas there are two verbs in Dutch (my mother tongue), as well as in German and French. The French use *savoir* for propositional and procedural knowledge: “She knows that it is raining” would be “*Elle sait qu’il pleut*” and “He knows how to write” would be “*Il sait écrire*.” The verb *connaître* is reserved for being acquainted with a person, object, or phenomenon: “She knows her brother well” would be “*Elle connaît bien son frère*” and “I don’t know much about trees” would be “*Je ne connais pas bien les arbres*.” The German distinction between *wissen* and *kennen* (and the Dutch distinction between *weten* and *kennen*) operates along similar lines as the distinction between *savoir* and *connaître*.¹

The existence in French of more than one verb for the English equivalent “to know” raises interesting problems when the phrase “ways of knowing” needs to be translated. David Edgerton, in reference to John Pickstone’s (1993) “Ways of Knowing: A New History of Science, Technology and Medicine,” writes,

L’identification moderne du savoir de pointe aux savoirs en général ne fait pas seulement violence aux savoirs passés mais aussi aux savoirs actuels. Nous ignorons aussi en quoi les sciences et les techniques sont et ont été *des manières de savoir*, et pas seulement des manières de créer du savoir neuf ou des choses [The modern identification of advanced knowledge with knowledge in general does violence not only to past knowledge but also to present knowledge. We ignore also how science and technology are and have been *ways of knowing* and not only ways of creating new knowledge or things]. (Edgerton 1998, p. 833, emphasis added)

¹ The distinction between knowledge/*savoir* and knowledge/*connaissance* is also important in the work of Foucault, although he uses both terms in ways that are more specific than I will use for the purposes of my discussion. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge (L’Archéologie du Savoir)*, Foucault writes,

By *connaissance* I mean the relation of the subject to the object and the formal rules that govern it. *Savoir* refers to the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to *connaissance* and for this or that enunciation to be formulated. (p. 15, n2)

Translator Alan Sheridan Smith further explains that, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*,

connaissance refers ... to a particular corpus of knowledge, a particular discipline—biology or economics, for example. *Savoir*, which is usually defined as knowledge in general, the totality of *connaissances*, is used by Foucault in an underlying, rather than an overall, way. (p. 15, n2)

Edgerton translates “ways of knowing” straightforwardly with *manières de savoir*, without giving consideration to the conceptual difficulties of this phrase. By contrast, Christelle Rigal, at a book presentation of Pickstone’s (2000) *Ways of Knowing: A New History of Science, Technology and Medicine* at the University of Paris Diderot, chooses not to translate the English phrase “ways of knowing” into French. She notes:

plutôt que de traduire « Ways of knowing » par « façons/manières de savoir » - expression peu élégante - ou par « styles d’élaboration des connaissances » - traduction probablement trop réductrice - j’ai préféré conserver l’expression originale, sous la forme abrégée de WOK [rather than translating ‘Ways of knowing’ with ‘façons/manières de savoir’—not a very elegant expression—or with ‘styles d’élaboration des connaissances’—a translation that is probably too reductive—I have chosen to keep the original expression, in its abbreviated form WOK]. (Rigal 2006, p. 1)

In considering possible candidates for a translation she does not, in the end, adopt, Rigal lists *façons de savoir*, *manières de savoir*, and *styles d’élaboration des connaissances*. The phrases *façons de savoir* and *manières de savoir* are the more obvious and literal French translations of “ways of knowing” although she calls them “not very elegant,” possibly because they sound foreign and translated. Her last suggestion could be translated more literally into English as “styles of knowledge development,” a phrase that may seem, at first glance, far removed from “ways of knowing” but that is connected to the use of “ways of knowing” as shorthand for “ways of coming to know.”

I suspect that Edgerton and Rigal suggest *manières de savoir* rather than *manières de connaître* because of the particular areas of knowledge that are the focus of Pickstone’s book: science, technology, and medicine. *Manières de connaître* are not about technical skills and scientific facts, but about more intimate “ways of knowing”: knowing something like the back of one’s hand, for example, or, in French, like one’s pocket: *connaître quelque chose comme sa poche*.²

Hirst’s assertion that *connaître* is not a distinct type of knowledge seems too bold, not least because of his suggestion that knowledge and other “states of awareness” such as feelings can and should be kept separate. When discussing my investigation into “ways of knowing” with colleague Barbara Houston, she suggested that it might be possible to claim that there are different ways of knowing *anger*. This suggestion extends to many other emotions: knowing joy, knowing sadness, knowing fear, and so on. What we did not discuss at the time was that “knowing” in the phrase “ways of knowing anger” is “knowing” in the sense of *connaître* (*kennen*), not *savoir* (*wissen*). Knowing an emotion is not propositional or procedural knowledge, but a matter of being acquainted with the emotion. This is illustrated quite well by the title of the 1954 novel *Bonjour Tristesse* (*Hello, Sadness*) by Françoise Sagan and the lyrics “Hello darkness, my old friend, I’ve come to talk with you again” in the Simon and Garfunkel song *The Sound of Silence*. Of course here, too,

²Significantly, the first explanation offered by the *Petit Robert* (1991) for the noun *connaissance* is ‘*le fait ou la manière de connaître*’. (p. 367)

one can and should distinguish “coming to know” anger, sadness, or darkness from “knowing” these emotions, but it seems to me that in the context of emotions ways of knowing-in-the-sense-of-*connaître* is indeed possible.

Although this use is now uncommon, the English verb “to know” has in the past also been used to mean to be sexually acquainted with, which is reflected in the expression “knowing in the biblical sense.” In English, this use is perhaps best known from some of the plays of William Shakespeare, such as the comedy *All’s Well That Ends Well*, in which Diana says to the King of France, “By Jove, if ever I knew man, ‘t was you” (V. iii. 286), or *Measure for Measure*, in which Mariana says to the Duke, “That is Angelo, who thinks, he knows, that he ne’er knew my body, but knows, he thinks, that he knows Isabel’s” (V. i. 199–200). In this context, too, different ways of knowing-in-the-sense-of-*connaître* seem quite possible: the King of France’s way of knowing Diana, after all, may be different from another suitor’s way of knowing Diana.

The frequent use of the phrase “ways of knowing” without any object makes it difficult to assess how significant this possibility of a coherent use of ways of knowing-in-the-sense-of-*connaître* is for groups claiming marginalized epistemic status. Cases where the object is used raise interesting questions. For example, Lorraine Code (2008), in discussing health care reform in Tanzania, writes that, “more crucially even than increased funding, radically new ways of knowing local circumstances were required that were sensitive to the detail of their diversity” (p. 36). By using the phrase with the direct object, Code emphasizes that what was needed for this health care reform was not more knowledge of facts about the local context, but rather an intimate and sensitive acquaintance with this context. Likewise, Anthonia Kalu (1996) considers the challenges for African historians and other researchers who are familiar both with African oral history and western standards of historiography. She uses the expression “African ways of knowing history,” which is an example of knowing-in-the-sense-of-*connaître* and indicates precisely the distinction between an intimate familiarity with the passed-down stories of oral history and the propositional knowledge of historical facts (p. 280). As Kalu’s subsequent discussion illustrates, however, when the object of “ways of knowing” is specified, the analysis becomes sharper and the simple dualism between “Western ways of knowing” and (in this case) “African ways of knowing” is harder to maintain.

In educational contexts, it is important to acknowledge that students can know (in the sense of *connaître*) certain social or natural phenomena that are discussed in the classroom differently. David Bouchard’s children’s poem *If You’re Not From the Prairie*, for example, addresses the difference between the ways in which those who are and who are not from the prairie know the sun, wind, and sky:

If you’re not from the prairie,
 You don’t know the wind,
 You *can’t* know the wind.
 Our cold winds of winter cut right to the core,
 Hot summer wind devils can blow down the door.
 As children we know when we play any game,
 The wind will be there yet we play just the same.
 If you’re not from the prairie you *don’t* know the wind.

If you're not from the prairie,
 You don't know the sky,
 You *can't* know the sky.
 The bold prairie sky is clear bright and blue,
 Though sometimes cloud messages give us a clue,
 Monstrous grey mushrooms can hint of a storm,
 Or painted pink feathers say good bye to the warm.
 If you're not from the prairie you *don't* know the sky. (Bouchard 1998)

Less innocently, students in our classes may have different ways of knowing (*connaître*) racism; some may have been the objects of racist oppression and know racism in a way that has seeped into their bodies, while others know racism more distantly as something they have heard and read about but which they have not experienced viscerally. If these different ways of knowing racism are present in the class, they will affect any discussions about racism and antiracist education we have. However, these different ways of knowing (*connaître*) particular phenomena do not amount to different epistemologies or to different knowledge systems that can be attributed to geography, culture, or gender regardless of the object of knowledge.

The Discourse of “Ways of Knowing” and Its Effects

Although knowing-in-the-sense-of-*connaître* may indeed occur in different ways, and although it may also be possible to investigate further whether it is useful to distinguish different ways of knowing-how, I am left with the fact that many authors who use the phrase appear not to be interested in the different objects of knowledge but rather in the *subjects* of knowledge. The point they make over and over again is that people in different geographical locations, or with different histories or cultural backgrounds, or different genders, “know” in different ways regardless of the objects of that “knowing”. Moreover, there are suggestions that such different “ways of knowing” constitute different epistemologies in the sense of sets of ideas about what counts as knowledge, how knowledge is to be distinguished from belief, and what is a proper justification for a knowledge claim. Obviously, there is a significant gap between, say, the acknowledgement of the possibility of different ways of knowing racism, and the claim that African “ways of knowing” constitute a separate epistemology.

However, I am not satisfied with the simple conclusion that authors who use “knowing” in ways that contradict Robinson, Ryle, and Peters are simply misguided about the “proper” way to use the verb “to know.” Such a conclusion would presuppose a view of language as a stable system of references to meanings and real-world objects. This representational conception of language informs the type of literature I have cited so far, which relies on conceptual analysis in the Anglo-analytic tradition. If I believed that conceptual analysis was all that was required, I would simply refer the reader to the work of Richard Robinson or R. S. Peters and leave it at that. But because I do not subscribe to the representational conception of language, my approach in the remainder of the chapter will be different.

Language, in my view, is significantly more than merely representational and in need of conceptual clarification. It also serves to *do* things, as J. L. Austin pointed out in 1961 and as many philosophers since have theorized further. From this perspective, the phrase “ways of knowing” is not just used to *mean* certain things but also to *do* certain things, such as make (and possibly mask) claims or demands and bring about effects.

I take, then, a discursive view of language, and follow Michel Foucault’s (1969/1972) suggestion that discourses ought to be considered “as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). In other words, I am less interested in “ways of knowing” as an expression with a clear or unclear sense and referent, and more in the effects of the use of this phrase. Where Phillips expresses his concern about the tendency to “purloin” epistemological language (Chap. 7), I would like to examine what effects this use or misuse of epistemological language brings about.

Although questions about “knowing” and “knowledge” appear to lie obviously within the purview of epistemology, the textual examples below show that the phrase “ways of knowing” often addresses issues far beyond epistemology. Belenky et al. (1986), for instance, open with the following passage:

We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definition of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private personae, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality. In this book we examine women’s ways of knowing and describe five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority. We show how women’s self-concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined. (p. 3)

“Women’s ways of knowing” are presented here as including not only (epistemological) assumptions about the nature of truth, but also (ontological) assumptions about the nature of reality and the self. Belenky et al. also describe “women’s ways of knowing” as “perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority.” Such perspectives are interpretive frameworks that include but are not limited to epistemological assumptions. They might be more accurately described as “worldviews,” a term which I discuss in more detail below. Ann Stanton (1996), reflecting on *Women’s Ways of Knowing* 10 years after its publication, confirms this interpretation when she writes, “WWK’s model of epistemological development was a welcome eye-opener, describing different *underlying worldviews or perspectives* by which the women made sense of truth, knowledge, and themselves as knowers” (pp. 27–28, emphasis added).

In an article that addresses the need to take into account local knowledge, culture, and spiritual beliefs in educational reform processes in Ghana, George Sefa Dei (2002) positions himself “in the struggle to affirm a transformation of schooling and education that is inclusive of diverse forms of knowledge and ways

of knowing...” (p. 339). Because the phrase “forms of knowledge” is used alongside the phrase “ways of knowing,” the possibility of interpreting “ways of knowing” as just another way of saying “forms of knowledge” is foreclosed. In a later passage, it becomes clear that “ways of knowing” indeed entails something quite different from what Western traditions would call epistemological assumptions:

African spiritual ways of knowing are intimately bound up with the affirmation of self and indigenous subjectivity. Many African ways of knowing affirm that personal subjectivity and emotionality must be legitimized. Thereby asserting that the subjectivity/objectivity and rationality/irrationality splits are false. (p. 340)

Dei presents questions of self and subjectivity as inextricably linked with knowledge. This illustrates an issue raised more often by claims about alternative “ways of knowing”: that “epistemology” and “ontology” are categories produced by a European philosophical tradition, and that these categories are inadequate for describing and understanding the ways in which many people relate to and come to know themselves, others, and the larger world.³

Ray Barnhardt and Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (2005) present a detailed analysis of the ways in which the practice-oriented, contextualized, and integrated knowledge and ways of learning of Alaska Native peoples can enrich more conventional western curriculum and pedagogy. They often use both “knowledge systems” and “ways of knowing,” which suggests that these phrases are complementary and not interchangeable. Barnhardt and Kawagley underscore the connections between cultural practices that have often been driven by survival, and the ways in which people acquire, improve, and pass on knowledge of these practices. They write that “Indigenous peoples throughout the world have sustained their unique *worldviews and associated knowledge systems* for millennia, even while undergoing major social upheavals as a result of transformative forces beyond their control” (p. 9, emphasis added). This description, “worldviews and associated knowledge systems,” is a clear illustration of the way in which “ways of knowing” can be shorthand for the larger worldviews of which epistemologies are a part.

In a slightly different context, Eric and Dawn Riggs (2003) also establish a close link between “ways of knowing” and “worldviews.” Riggs & Riggs write about the possibility of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and “ways of knowing” into the mostly Euro-American knowledge used by geoscientists. They note that by the term “ways of knowing” they “mean to imply the underlying paradigmatic or interpretive framework in which empirical knowledge is situated within traditional Native American cultures – in short, this is the ‘world view’ of the culture” (p. 528).

As I indicated above, a “world view” is considerably broader than an “epistemology.” Daniel Vokey (2007) defines a worldview as:

a set of beliefs about the fundamental nature of things, including the origin, history, and structure of the cosmos; the kinds of objects that exist in the world; the kinds of relationships that hold among those objects; and the nature of humans and their place in the world order. (p. xvii)

³ Indeed Dei, in this article, uses neither the term “epistemology” nor the term “ontology.”

A worldview is thus a set of beliefs about why and how the world and everything in it is the way it is, and as such, it serves as a framework for the ongoing interpretation of the world and one's interactions with it. It is more obviously ontological, cosmological, and metaphysical than it is epistemological in scope. Vokey further notes that "the relationship between a worldview and a *way of life* is analogous to the relationship between the conceptual scheme of a particular paradigm of inquiry... and the attitudes, interests, norms, priorities, and practices of the corresponding community of inquiry" (p. xviii). A particular paradigm of inquiry – a term that is more closely associated with "epistemology" than are either "worldview" or "way of life" – does not produce only one particular set of inquiry attitudes, interests, norms, priorities, and practices and neither does a worldview produce only one particular way of life, but in both cases a reasonable degree of congruency can be expected.

It is worth noting that in Vokey's careful analysis, he does not address how worldviews affect paradigms of inquiry, but he clearly does not equate them. A worldview is distinct both from a way of life and from a paradigm of inquiry, and if Vokey had used the term "way of knowing" (which he does not), I surmise that it would have been closer to "paradigm of inquiry" than to "worldview." In the examples cited above, however, the phrase "ways of knowing" moves beyond epistemological assumptions to include the ontological and ethical assumptions that inform one's interpretive framework.

The term "worldview" is also discussed by Max van Manen in his 1977 article "Linking Ways of Knowing with Ways of Being Practical." In this article – in which, incidentally, beyond the title, he does not use the phrase "ways of knowing" at all – van Manen argues for a broadening of the range of social science traditions that are used and recognized as legitimate in education. In order to contest the dominance and supposed neutrality of what he calls the "empirical-analytic" tradition, van Manen introduces the concept of "orientation," which "refers to the specific ways in which an individual looks at the world" and which is "roughly equivalent" to the concept of worldview (p. 211). "Underlying every orientation," writes van Manen, "is a definite epistemology, axiology, and ontology; i.e., a person's orientation is composed of what he believes to be true, to be valuable, and to be real" (p. 211). In line with my comments above about the metaphysics of epistemologies, van Manen argues that proponents of the "empirical-analytic" tradition must acknowledge that they have an orientation or worldview. Similar to Vokey's definition of this term, a worldview includes an epistemology as well as ontology and axiology.

Beck et al. (2007) make the use of "ways of knowing" in the ontological sense very explicit, arguing against knowledge as commodity and proposing a conception of "knowing as a way of being in the world" (p. 45). Drawing on Erich Fromm's (1976) *To Have Or To Be*, they write,

Unlike the having-mode of knowing that reifies knowledge and objectifies it into discrete quanta of information, the being-mode of knowing embeds knowing into being so that knowing and being become integrated parts of a whole. To know is to be, and vice versa. (pp. 45–46)

Rather than suggesting that “ways of being” affect “ways of knowing” and vice versa – or, in more conventional philosophical language, that one’s ontological assumptions affect one’s epistemological assumptions and vice versa – the proposition “to know is to be” conflates knowing and being. In his contribution, however, Falkenberg explains the “having-mode of knowing” as a conception of knowledge as independent from the knower, and the “being-mode of knowing” as a conception of knowledge as inseparable from the knower (p. 50). He acknowledges that both conceptions of knowledge come with “metaphysical assumptions” (p. 50), and this is precisely the crux of the matter.

The textual evidence above suggests that, not infrequently, the scope of claims about “ways of knowing” far exceeds epistemological concerns. “Ways of knowing” can refer to broader worldviews and, in particular, ontological and metaphysical beliefs.⁴ Martin Packer and Jessie Goicoechea (2000) argue in relation to supposedly “epistemological differences” between theories of learning:

Constructivist and sociocultural accounts of learning each rest on ontological assumptions, but these often go unnoticed. This is due in part to their relatively unarticulated character and in part to a *lingering anxiety*, traceable to the logical positivists, that discussion of ontology is merely ‘metaphysical,’ untestable, and therefore unscientific or even meaningless. (pp. 227–228, emphasis added)

Whether due to scholarly anxiety about ontology and metaphysics provoked by logical positivism, or to the persistent myth that education should not concern itself with value-laden and potentially controversial topics, or to a combination of the two, I share Packer and Goicoechea’s observation that ontological and metaphysical discussions are often avoided among educational scholars. One manifestation of this avoidance may be the framing of claims about ontology and metaphysics and, more broadly, about worldviews, in epistemological terms. In other words, and as suggested by the title of this paper, claims made *through* the term “knowing” are not necessarily only or primarily claims *about* “knowing”; “knowing” is used as a figure of speech or trope (from Greek *tropos*, turn).⁵

Falkenberg observes that epistemological positions are no freer from metaphysical assumptions than are ontological positions (in Beck et al. 2007). Many contemporary philosophers would agree that all epistemologies have to acknowledge the metaphysical assumptions on which they rest; Jacques Derrida, for example, has extensively analyzed and critiqued the “metaphysics of presence” that permeates the western philosophical tradition. Indeed, epistemological and ontological positions cannot be neatly separated and western positivist and post-positivist epistemologies

⁴ Although some treat “ontology” and “metaphysics” as synonyms, I use “metaphysics” as including but exceeding “ontology”: where both are concerned with questions about the nature of being and reality, metaphysics also includes questions about the nature of the spiritual or divine, which are often not included in ontology.

⁵ The type of trope that one believes is used in the phrase “ways of knowing” depends on one’s views about the relation between epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, and worldviews, a question to which I will return at the end of the essay.

are, themselves, also part of larger worldviews. However, a thorough analysis and critique of the metaphysical underpinnings of epistemologies is not helped by the ambiguous phrase “ways of knowing.”

The distinctions and connections between being and knowing are a relevant area of scholarly debate. However, the phrase “ways of knowing” does not help this discussion, as it hides the various terms implicated in this debate – including spiritual beliefs, beliefs about the individuality or relationality of human beings, and beliefs about the relation between reason and emotion – under a single verb with a long history in Western philosophy. The phrase “ways of knowing” suggests that, even when the discussion revolves around conceptions of reality and being, knowledge and truth are the concepts at stake. In the final section of this chapter, I will propose that this use of the phrase “ways of knowing” can be understood as synecdoche and discuss what is gained and lost by this tropological use.

Epistemological Diversity – Diversity of What?

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the phrase “ways of knowing” is typically used in arguments for the possibility and desirability of greater “epistemological diversity.” As other chapters in this volume address this question more generally, I will only rehearse some of the arguments as they pertain to the particular phrase “ways of knowing.” In 2001, sociologist of education Aaron Pallas argued that we ought to prevent “epistemological single-mindedness” in educational researchers and, instead, promote “epistemological diversity” (p. 7). Harvey Siegel takes up this claim in Chap. 4 of this volume and subjects the concept of epistemological diversity to a thorough analysis. Siegel does not take issue with the phrase “ways of knowing” itself, even repeating it in his acknowledgement that “education research should indeed make room for alternative meanings, values, and *ways of knowing*” (p. 81, emphasis added). Elsewhere, however, it appears that he finds claims about “ways of knowing” rather “obscure” (p. 72).

The obscurity remains if we consider claims about “ways of knowing” only, or primarily, as epistemological claims. Siegel examines what kind of diversity is at stake, precisely, in claims about “epistemological” diversity. First, he observes that claims about epistemological diversity have objects that range from beliefs and belief systems to methods of inquiry and research cultures. Second, and more interestingly for my discussion here, Siegel notes that proponents of epistemological diversity typically suggest not that alternative epistemologies should be admitted into academic work so that they can “prove their mettle in the give-and-take of scholarly disputation” (p. 75). Instead, proponents of epistemological diversity, Siegel observes, seem to suggest that alternative epistemologies “are to be accepted at face value as legitimate, and integrated into the graduate study of future researchers” (p. 74). In other words, claims about alternative epistemologies or “ways of knowing” are claims for epistemic authority as much as they are truth claims.

Siegel’s distinction between truth claims and claims for epistemic authority is significant in light of my earlier distinction between a representational and discursive view of language. If claims about alternative epistemologies are understood semantically, i.e., as *meaning* something, this meaning can be examined for its coherence or its correspondence to a real-world object. (Do multiple epistemologies or “ways of knowing” actually exist?) If claims about alternative epistemologies are understood discursively, i.e., as not only meaning but also *doing* something, questions arise about what intended and/or actual effects such claims have. Siegel here indicates that one significant effect is the establishment of “epistemic authority,” the right to make knowledge claims. For people who have historically been objects rather than subjects of knowledge, asserting that one has and can produce knowledge constitutes significant political change.⁶ However, as Levisohn and Phillips point out, this change is best understood from the sociology of knowledge rather than from the branch of philosophy known as epistemology. Claims about the right to be a subject of knowledge are not the same as claims about the possibility and desirability of multiple epistemologies and these, in turn, are not the same as claims about the legitimacy of alternative worldviews.

Tropological Uses

The phrase “ways of knowing” is not used in traditional western epistemology (and I use “epistemology” here in its sense of a branch of philosophy). Beside the question of what this phrase might *mean*, I have noted that one of the things this phrase *does* is claim the position of a subject rather than object of knowledge. In addition, some authors seem to use the phrase “ways of knowing” to position themselves explicitly outside of and even in opposition to traditional western epistemologies and their metaphysical underpinnings. However, other scholars have launched very effective critiques of epistemological hegemony without using the phrase “ways of knowing.” Foucault (1984), for example, analyzes very sharply how knowledge and truth are always part of systems of power:

Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 73)

This is just one illustration of the possibility of making precise and politically forceful claims about epistemology and epistemological diversity. The proliferation of the ambiguous phrase “ways of knowing” in spite of such possibilities leads me to interpret it as a trope and, more specifically, a *metonymy* or displacement of ontology and metaphysics into epistemology. On this view, “ways of knowing” is used metonymically for

⁶See, for example, Dion (2004).

“ways of being” or “worldviews” when “ways of knowing” is considered to be distinct from but closely associated with “ways of being” or “worldviews.”

One trope that can be considered a special case of metonymic shift merits more detailed consideration here: synecdoche. A synecdoche is a metonymy where the displacement is one of *scale*: it uses a part of the person, object, or phenomenon to refer to the whole or vice versa. One might refer to a car as “wheels,” for example, or to workers as “hands.” If “ways of knowing” is used synecdochically for “ways of being” or “worldviews,” “ways of knowing” are considered to be a part of “ways of being” or “worldviews.” If we take worldviews to include both epistemological and ontological assumptions, then using the epistemological-sounding phrase “ways of knowing” to invoke ontological assumptions could be considered a metonymy, and using “ways of knowing” to invoke the overall worldview a synecdoche.

Conclusion

If we follow my hypothesis that, when the phrase “ways of knowing” is used, it may be used metonymically or synecdochically, the main question that remains is: does this matter? Having explicitly taken up a discursive rather than representational view of language, I must surely be sympathetic to the idea that terms can be resignified? Is it a problem if “epistemology” or “knowledge” comes to mean or do something broader than what it used to? Or more generally: what is gained and what is lost by the use of this phrase?

Indeed, I believe that terms can be, and indeed are, resignified, both accidentally and deliberately. Not all attempts at resignification, however, are equally successful. The success or failure of deliberate resignification depends on the historical weight of the existing uses of the term as well as the nature and extent of the change sought. The greater or more radical the desired resignification, the heavier the burden on those seeking to make the change. If the new use of the word is far removed from, and/or runs counter to the established uses, further justification is required and, if none is provided, the result tends to be confusion rather than successful resignification. Resignification, after all, works through an iterative process of “unfaithful repetition” which presupposes that the repetition, even if unfaithful, is still recognizable as repetition (Ruitenberg 2008a). If it is not, the result is reminiscent of Alice’s perplexity at Humpty Dumpty’s assertion, “When I use a word,... it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less” (Carroll 1872).

So, one of the losses incurred by the metonymic or synecdochal use of the phrase “ways of knowing” is the possibility for scholars to have substantive disagreements about different epistemologies or worldviews, as these disagreements often turn out to be semantic misunderstandings. As the chapters by Levisohn and Phillips and by Siegel show, those who argue for and against the possibility and desirability of epistemological diversity may actually be arguing at cross-purposes.

As Packer and Goicoechea (2000) suggest, one of the possible motivations for using the phrase “ways of knowing” when more ontological or metaphysical

concerns are at stake is that epistemological questions are recognized as subjects of “proper” academic discussion, whereas ontological and metaphysical concerns are considered too bound up with belief to lead to fruitful academic work. The use of an epistemological-sounding expression such as “ways of knowing,” then, can have the effect of legitimating a discussion that might otherwise be dismissed. However, epistemological-sounding discourse not only legitimates but also obscures the other questions at stake. As I have mentioned, for example, the political importance of marginalized groups claiming a voice as subjects rather than objects of knowledge is to be taken seriously. However, the idea that knowing a life from the inside (from having lived it), is different from knowing that life from the outside (from having observed it) is not addressed very well by claims about epistemological diversity or multiple “ways of knowing.” In fact, the linguistic and conceptual ambiguity of the phrase may actually undermine the very claims to epistemic authority.

Many of the claims made about particular “ways of knowing” seem to be shorthand for broad discussions about worldviews and ways of life that encompass a wide range of beliefs, including, for example, beliefs about divine or spiritual beings, about the role of the emotions in human nature, about the ethical status of anthropocentrism, and about the significance of physical place in human experience and meaning-making. Of course, all of these beliefs are connected in some way to beliefs about what it is possible to know and how it is possible to come to know it, but a thorough consideration of worldviews and their ontological and metaphysical perspectives is not helped by their presentation as only, or primarily, concerns with “knowing.”

It appears, then, that claims about “ways of knowing” are made in several different ways. Some have little to do with knowledge or knowing, and the references they make to epistemology are unhelpful and incorrect; others are “deliberate mistakes,” that is, they use terms such as “knowledge,” “knowing,” or “epistemology” tropologically, as I have explained above. Yet other claims are specifically about a particular direct object (as in the examples of “knowing local circumstances” and “knowing history” I gave earlier) and, as such, they are clear and coherent. The fourth group is the one that, I believe, is most interesting for educational research: it is the type of claim that aims to shift epistemology’s emphasis from propositional knowledge (*savoir*) to knowledge with a direct object (*connaître*). Lorraine Code (1995) makes the argument for this shift compellingly when she writes (in the longer version of her paper reprinted in this present volume): “If epistemologists require paradigms, or other less formal exemplary knowledge claims, knowing other people in personal relationships is at least as worthy a contender as knowledge of everyday objects” (p. 45).

Truth be told, I have not yet seen many claims about “ways of knowing” or epistemological diversity made by educational scholars that truly focus on and elaborate this, but *if* claims about “ways of knowing” aimed to shift the curricular emphasis from, for example, “knowing things about the ocean” to “knowing the ocean,” or the research emphasis from “knowing things about a teacher” to “knowing a teacher,” the debate among educational scholars about epistemological diversity could become quite interesting yet.

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Chapter 7

Epistemological Diversity: A Roundtable

Lorraine Code, D.C. Phillips, Claudia W. Ruitenberg, Harvey Siegel
and Lynda Stone

The following is a lightly edited version of a roundtable discussion held on April 10th, 2010, at the 2010 annual meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society in San Francisco. In addition to the two editors of this volume (Ruitenberg and Phillips), the participants were: Lorraine Code, a philosopher from York University, Toronto, one of whose important essays is reprinted (in part) in this volume; Harvey Siegel, an epistemologist and philosopher of education in the Philosophy Department at the University of Miami, who also has an essay reprinted in the volume; and Lynda Stone, a philosopher of education from the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), who is one of the editors of the book series in which this volume is published.

In preparation for the roundtable, all participants were sent the following materials:

- The manuscript of Chap. 3 by Jon Levisohn & Denis Phillips
- Chap. 4 by Harvey Siegel
- Chap. 5 by Lorraine Code
- The manuscript of Chap. 6 by Claudia Ruitenberg
- A set of questions to be used as points of departure for the discussion

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In the text that follows, all participants are identified by their initials: Lorraine Code (LC); Denis Phillips (DP); Claudia Ruitenberg (CR); Harvey Siegel (HS); Lynda Stone (LS).

CR: The questions that I sent out were, first: “How should the field of educational research respond to claims about alternative epistemologies?” – which, of course, implies the questions: “Should the field of educational research respond to such claims at all?” and “If so, how should it respond?” Second: “Are claims about different epistemologies integral aspects of different but internally coherent paradigms? If so, how might cross-paradigm communication breakdown be avoided or remedied?” That is, are we really talking about incommensurable paradigms and very different sets of epistemologies that can hardly speak to each other, or can we figure out some way that they might be able to communicate with each other? And the third question is, “Claims about new or different epistemologies are typically made by or on behalf of groups that have traditionally been marginalized. To what extent are claims for the legitimacy of new or alternative epistemologies better understood as claims for the legitimacy of the experiences, views, and presence of members of marginalized groups, rather than as epistemological claims? What is gained and what is lost by this loose or non-traditional use of the term ‘epistemology’?”

I wonder if, Lorraine, you would like to start by responding to any or all of these questions?

LC: I have certain hesitations about the terminology. For instance, I really am uncomfortable with the word “alternative.” And the reason that I am uncomfortable with the word “alternative” is that it suggests two things to me. First of all, it suggests some kind of failure to recognize that epistemology itself is a term that is time-bound and space-bound. By “time-bound” I mean that it came into existence, as we all know, in the late nineteenth century, perhaps a little earlier, but it wasn’t around before that. I also think it is place-bound in the sense that talk about knowledge in continental philosophy is vast and extensive and nuanced and sensitive and not particularly restricted to the post-positivist mode – continental philosophy deals with questions about knowledge quite differently. In ways, actually, that connect somewhat with your paper, Claudia, because there is, for instance, in French, no word for the “knower” that can be translated precisely, and this is actually quite difficult because in Anglo-American epistemology, the knower is positioned – perhaps invisibly, but nonetheless positioned – in certain ways.

So it seems to me, first of all, that to give “epistemology” paradigmatic scope in a Kuhnian sense is perhaps not warranted. And what troubles me about “alternative epistemologies” is the sense that when alternatives are offered, it seems like a box of chocolates that you could pick this flavor or that flavor. I think that the so-called “alternative” epistemologies are meant to contest the hegemony of a single sense of epistemology and are meant to suggest a softening – perhaps softening is a bad word because it plays into certain metaphorical associations – or a blurring of the lines.

In a sense everyone engaged in epistemological endeavors is attempting to work out conditions for knowing well whether they can do it with necessary and sufficient conditions or whether they have to do it with social, practical, historical conditions. I'm not wanting to suggest that feminist epistemology, anti-racist epistemology, and various other attempts to develop something under the label "epistemology" all collapse into one and the same and that you can just homogenize it, but I am saying that talking about them as "alternatives", and also using the phrase "women's ways of knowing," makes me feel a degree of discomfort – even though I want at the same time to say that I practice a form of epistemology.

I think we are living in the midst of contradictory positions right now – a conflicted historical situation, which might resemble something like a Kuhnian paradigm shift, or a time when many of the solidities are giving way (although many people are pulling hard to keep the solidities in place). I don't think it means we are giving up on knowledge or truth or objectivity. I don't think it means a collapse into this dreaded relativism that everyone fears, but I do think there are some troublesome issues with the way the questions are posed.

HS: I am sympathetic to what Lorraine just said about it not being entirely sensible to think in terms of alternative epistemologies. I'm happy with that. However, I don't think that the word epistemology was invented in the eighteenth century; I would think that the field of epistemology is easily recognizable before that, through Descartes, through Sextus, through Plato...

LC: But it is so different in each one of them.

HS: Well, people have different views. Those figures have different views, but that's not to say that what they were doing is not recognizably epistemology. It seems to me that there is rather more clarity about what counts as epistemology than that comment of yours indicated.

I'm not sure what to say about Kuhn; I'd be happy just to leave Kuhn out of this. I'm not sure talking about paradigms helps.

LC: I agree with you there.

HS: Let me say one other thing. Claudia asks: "To what extent are claims for the legitimacy of new or alternative epistemologies better understood as claims for the legitimacy of the experiences, views, and presence of members of marginalized groups?" That seems to me quite right, at least in the literature that I was addressing in my paper; it does seem to me that that is what's going on. That is, they're not about epistemology, they are about justice. And so the follow-up question, "What is gained and what is lost by this loose or non-traditional use of the term 'epistemology'?" It seems to me that what's lost is this: It is already the case that hardly anybody knows what "epistemology" means anymore and that this is not a happy situation. So I think that the cost of talking loosely about epistemology is that the word loses all recognizable meaning. I would like to cling to the idea that there is a recognizable meaning, still.

LS: A couple of things I'll pick up from both of you. One of the things that we want to keep in mind is the audience for this discussion, and for the book. There is

a range within this audience from some who perhaps are a little more technical to some that are not. I was particularly struck by rereading Harvey's and Lorraine's papers when I thought about the kinds of sensitivity and the kinds of things I would want to do with my own graduate students because we happen to have quite a few minority students in our doctoral program and they are clinging to this notion of having their own individual epistemologies and their own culturally determined ways of knowing. My Native American students will say: "this is my knowledge because I believe it," even though they have read numerous other things.

It seems to me that there are a couple of things we want to keep in mind, and there are a lot of things that we can agree about. For example, clearly there is a problem of language confusion, and there is a problem of not studying traditions deeply enough to be able to see, for instance, that there are alternative traditions. I do a lot of work in continental and American social theory, so my language is probably closer to Lorraine's and Claudia's than perhaps to Denis's and Harvey's. I always want my students to see that there are multiple traditions and multiple languages. I don't think "paradigm" works either because it is tied too closely to the kinds of things that Kuhn actually did.

There is the additional issue for me that the nature of knowledge is a political issue. I certainly don't want to make the claim that all knowledge is political but knowledges *can* be political, and they certainly are potentially political, and we have to keep this in mind because it's really an important issue for our researchers. The second issue has to do, then, with our pedagogical purpose in this current book project – which is how do we educate our future researchers? How we do this pedagogically so that we not only are sensitive to cultural beliefs but also begin to give our researchers the kind of language and philosophical distinctions that can be useful. Let me give you an example. I think you, Harvey, are right that many researchers and students misunderstand "methodologies" for "epistemologies." They think there is a distinction between qualitative and quantitative epistemologies, and from what I can tell, they're pretty much running from a fairly standard modernist epistemology that they think is different, but it's not. The more sophisticated of them may get into hermeneutic, interpretive traditions and be able to read through Geertz and others, and go through some alternative European theory, but most of them never get that far because they move right to methodology, and yet they think they are doing something different! And then they fight. I don't know about your programs, but in mine, the students seem to establish camps the first day they come into graduate school and heaven forbid that they should move out of these.

So there are some questions that we want them to explore. For instance, are there distinctions between educational research and scholarship that has a basis in natural sciences (an orientation which I take to come primarily out of the Anglo-American tradition), and more historical, culturally mediated discourse practices that I think you get out of a continental tradition? This kind of distinction, I think, is really important. Those are the kinds of things that I'd like students to have some connection to.

I think we can agree about a whole lot of things that I read in your papers. I think they're very useful, and I can use them and I will; but to get advanced students to see new kinds of language and distinctive kinds of language that can help them (for instance) make a distinction between beliefs and knowledge could be really important. At this point, I don't know how we do that, actually, to fight against the kinds of traditions which they are already embedded in.

DP: I first really became interested in these complex issues when Jim Banks was president of AERA and the theme for the conference that year was "ethnic epistemologies" or something like that. I decided I would attend as many as possible of the special sessions that were on a cultural group's epistemology. It was a horrible experience. The last session I attended was in a hall packed with about 500 people, and instead of sitting on the aisle so that I could escape, I was trapped in the middle. There were 500 education researchers of a particular ethnicity, and someone I didn't know but who was obviously a very important figure in that community was the keynote speaker. She got up and announced that she had been invited to speak about this ethnic/cultural group's epistemology. This is almost an exact transcript of her opening statement: "I didn't know what epistemology meant so yesterday I looked it up in the dictionary." Cheers from the audience. And then she said, "I read the definition and I still didn't understand it but I did note it was on the same page as 'episiotomy'." Upon which there were more cheers. I thought, this is appalling; there is obvious disdain for the field of epistemology, but also a great desire to purloin the word. That really spurred my interest in trying to pin down what was going on.

It seems to me there is a real disjunct between the way philosophers and researchers talk about cultural epistemologies or multiple epistemologies, whether they use the word "alternative" or not. It seems clear that philosophers on the whole know what they are talking about, and they're clearly doing epistemology. Whether I agree or disagree with your position, Lorraine, your paper is clearly an important paper in epistemology. But the way educational researchers use the term seems to me to be very much in the spirit of the third question. They rightly feel that their voices are not heard in shaping research questions, in research funding, that the sorts of issues that are important in their communities are not valued, and so on, and that's what this keynote speaker at AERA was on about, but the mystery was why the language of epistemology is used to express this concern. This is where Claudia and I still disagree. I think these educational theorists and researchers simply do not understand the word and would be better served by phrasing their concerns more straightforwardly, because they are valid concerns. Claudia keeps prodding me that maybe they do understand, so I'm grappling with that. I'm still very puzzled by Asante's quote that music and dance are a form of logic and proof. If he had said that music and dance are ways we express our religious or cultural beliefs or attitudes, or something along those lines, I would understand that, and maybe it should be a research topic, but to say that it's a canon of proof, what does that mean?

LC: I wouldn't dismiss it so lightly.

DP: I still grapple with this. Maybe I don't see their point. That is a real concern.

CR: I come at this mostly from speech act theory. I have a life-long fascination with how people use language and what they do with it. Obviously I can go through the logic and read the text closely, and say: This doesn't make any sense; this is so far removed from what we would traditionally conceive of as epistemology that it makes no sense that they're using the term "epistemology" for that. At that level, there doesn't seem to be much disagreement between us. But I'm dissatisfied with leaving it at that because I wonder what else is going on. There may be some other political or strategic reasons for choosing that language and for actually deliberately using that language unfaithfully, if you will, in order to make a political claim. So what I'm concerned about and why I keep returning to texts that, on one level, annoy me, is that I keep wondering: To what extent are marginalized groups, or just groups wanting to make claims about knowing or thinking about knowing differently, in a "Catch 22"? They either use the language of epistemology to try to speak back to epistemology and get told that they are doing it wrong, or they don't use the language of epistemology and they don't get taken seriously in the academy because they're not using the language of epistemology! So that is the resignification exercise that I suspect some of them are engaged in. And as I wrote in my chapter, I think that some are not engaging in that resignification very well; they're making enormous leaps, but I don't think it's impossible in principle.

It's easy to find an example of somebody who uses the term "epistemology" badly: "I looked up epistemology last night in the dictionary, and I didn't understand it." It's fairly easy to agree that that is not a good way of using "epistemology," it's not a useful way of doing anything with it, it doesn't speak back in a really savvy way, but it doesn't mean it's not possible to resignify the term. I'm more interested in the good examples, the people that really do so in an intelligent way.

One of the questions that I have concerns Harvey mentioning that epistemology is in danger of losing all recognizable meaning. Okay, so to what extent can the meaning of epistemology change, and how can the boundaries be stretched so that it remains recognizable? How can it be an incremental kind of process? I'm particularly interested, through my translational exercise, in Lorraine's comment that the focus of Western traditional epistemology has been so much on propositional knowledge that other forms of knowledge such as knowledge by acquaintance have been pretty much left out of the discussion. What happens when we try to bring knowledge by acquaintance (or knowledge with the direct object I think Searle calls it) back into the discussion and how do we find ways to value that, because some of the claims that I hear graduate students or my colleagues making about the value of these alternative epistemologies or alternative "ways of knowing" (whatever language they choose) is precisely about this type of knowledge by acquaintance. So is there room for that or not, and again, what would be lost or gained by including that?

LC: I have two or three comments. First of all, to Harvey's comment that the word loses its meaning: I think its meaning has evolved. Wherever you want to place the history, I don't think the word "epistemology" was there in Descartes and Kant, but I don't want to argue about that. I think its meaning has evolved, and it has actually become narrower so that it becomes increasingly a punctiform exercise focused on demonstrating the way in which one can determine the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing things that are so trivial that, frankly, I don't give a damn about whether I know them or not. And those don't serve as very good examples for more complex knowledge claims. And the fact is that they can't translate simply cumulatively, knowing more and more little discrete facts into knowing something of the complexity that one needs to know – for instance what a social scientist needs to know of a culture with which she or he might be trying to engage, or that a child might need to know in order to know about, let's say, the Vikings or the Egyptians (which are two things that my grandson is very keen to know about right now). That can't be done by accumulation of the kind of propositional knowledge that can be confirmed perhaps by a museum exhibit or by something in a book. The meaning of epistemology seems to me has changed, as we have moved from Russell through to wherever we are now, through Quine to a more elaborated sense of naturalized epistemology, and it seems to me there are perhaps two, maybe more consequences of this. Either what we know in the old "S knows that P" sense has come to represent an increasingly small portion of what we claim to know, so that the meaning of epistemology has shrunk and become very narrow. And I think that's possibly true that we know much less than we thought we did, and I think that's a salutary lesson. Or the meaning of epistemology really has to shift drastically.

I want to respond to a couple of other things. There was a sense in various comments that we were talking about individual epistemologies that claimed first person privileged access. I don't think first person privileged access can be claimed. I don't think it can be claimed almost anywhere, except where Russell got reduced down to the place where he had to say, "this here now." I just don't think it can be claimed. I think *knowing* is a communal project – I don't know about *knowledge*. And I think a whole lot of weight has to be put on Claudia's *savoir/connaître* or *wissen/kennen* distinction (I don't know how to pronounce the Dutch equivalent). I think a whole lot has to be put on that – and I've often thought myself because I've worked in both French and German – that much of the restrictiveness of Anglo-American epistemology has to do with the fact that somehow there is no place for *connaître*; there is no place for *kennen* rather than *wissen*.

One other point I wanted to make has to do with the "alternative tradition," again, and why I object to it. If you call something an alternative tradition, you preserve the mainstream, the hegemonic tradition, and I really don't like that.

CR: How would you propose we talk about it differently? Because the fact of the matter is there is a mainstream, a dominant tradition.

- LC: It's not even necessarily dominant in continental philosophy, which is not inaccessible to white educated adults. I don't know how to talk about it differently, but maybe we've got it wrong at the moment. This is probably the most interesting issue we need to talk about. I think we're at something of an impasse, and I think it's a fruitful impasse; I don't think it's a destructive one.
- DP: I'm going to raise an editorial question. Lorraine's remarks still raise this tension for me that there are really two conversations going on. I'm just wondering in the book whether we need to address them as two conversations. There's the conversation between philosophers about the nature of epistemology and whether the "traditional" epistemology is outdated and needs to be modified in some way. But then there's the other conversation among people interested in multiculturalism as an educational concern, and their use of the word epistemology. I still think we need to discuss what they could possibly mean, and I still cling to the view that they really don't understand the word because they don't, on the whole, raise such issues as how do we know that these claims that we know another person are true?... Don't they recognize the possibility of error? Those sorts of discussions never occur in this educational literature. So there are these two parallel conversations that we somehow have to grapple with. At the moment I've been focusing on the educational one, but of course, the more fascinating one is the one between us as philosophers.
- LC: It's a productive tension, I think, not an aporetic one.
- HS: I want to start by conceding the point that the word "epistemology" has evolved. Of course, like all language, I don't want to deny that. But I don't think that says very much.
- LC: I think it says a lot.
- HS: Well, I disagree with you about that. Plato and Theaetetus and Protagoras, for example, and Sextus Empiricus, all the way up to Lorraine Code, are talking about knowledge.... The cluster of issues at the center of those discussions are, it seems to me, quite clear. I know you disagree, Lorraine, but I'm asserting something contrary to your belief at the moment. I think knowledge by acquaintance is not something that is left out of the contemporary epistemological discussion. It is true that epistemologists in a certain Anglo-American analytic tradition have focused on propositional knowledge and that does have a long history, I would agree with that, but it's not true that that's the only game in epistemology town. Russell introduced the notion, or at least the language, of knowledge by acquaintance and, as Claudia pointed out, so did Searle; so it's there, and to say that contemporary epistemologists of a certain camp concentrate on a particular cluster of questions and don't concentrate on another cluster of questions which some might argue are worthy of pursuit is a perfectly sensible thing to say, but it doesn't suggest anything other than the narrow range of interests of a particular group. It doesn't say anything about the nature of epistemology, that epistemology somehow rules that out of bounds; I think that's not right.

One last thing which I think is also central to our disagreement: the idea that knowledge has a political use or dimension. I don't think contemporary

epistemologists want to deny that or would deny that. I certainly don't want to deny that.

LC: I would like to use "dimension" and not "use."

HS: Yes, fine, let's make it "dimension." I don't myself want to deny that, and I'm pretty sure I acknowledged it in my article. But I think that saying that knowledge has a political dimension leaves open the question: What do we want to do with that fact? And there are certain epistemologists, like Lorraine, who want to pursue that hard – Lynda as well – and that's perfectly fine. I don't see why any epistemologist should disagree with that or should rule that out of bounds or something like that. But at the same time, doing that, pointing out the political power of institutions of knowledge declaration, if that's a legitimate expression, is a different thing from asking questions about, for example, what counts as knowledge and what are the conditions of knowledge, and so on. Similarly, questions about *knowers*, which Lorraine wants to emphasize, are salutary, but they're not the same as questions about *knowledge*. That's another thing we could argue about, of course. So it seems to me that there's a little bit of caricature going on of what contemporary epistemology actually is like and what questions count and what questions don't count. It seems to me that we really should distinguish between claims that certain things don't even count as epistemology... There *are* some things, I would say, that don't even count, but that's one claim. That's different from: Among the things that count, which do we view as the most important things to pursue? And I think that there are legitimate disagreements among epistemologists about which are the ones to pursue. I like my set of questions, you like your set of questions, so let at least those two flowers bloom, that's perfectly okay. It seems to me there are all those things going on here that need to be unpacked.

CR: One of the things that is worth saying, which is one of the things that you're getting at, is that there might well be a caricature of epistemology happening in faculties and departments and schools and colleges of education, precisely because we're not epistemologists as our first orientation. If you look at the way in which epistemology is discussed in many educational research methods courses, it's very cursory, it's very superficial, and I think that some of the dualisms that get set up between western and indigenous or between traditional and non-traditional come out of the fact that there's not a really in-depth study of epistemology, and then you get that caricature. I think that it is worth acknowledging that that is a problem in educational research.

One of the questions I wanted to raise concerns your statement, Harvey, that the question of knowers is different from the question of knowledge. In my cursory reading, more traditional epistemology has focused on questions of justification and warrant than on the knower. You make a claim in your paper, Harvey, that the criteria by which we assess knowledge claims are themselves neutral. You ask, for example, is there ample evidence, what is the nature of the evidence, and so on? So what do you do with the following example?

Imagine that I have a colleague – this is an imaginary colleague, a composite of graduate students and colleagues – who says the following to me: "When

I talk to an elder in my community, when that elder tells me that something is the case, or even when the elder says I know this because I have dreamt it, then that is not just a claim of belief, but it is a claim of knowledge because of the status of the elder, and because of what we know as a community about that elder and about his or her wisdom. That then becomes in itself a warrant to call this knowledge rather than belief.” Now for myself – coming from a Dutch upbringing, and an atheist upbringing at that – I might have some issues here; I can’t really wrap my head around this type of position. But is this a real challenge, can this truly represent an alternative epistemology that has a different set of criteria for justifying claims as knowledge?

DP: That is, is it an epistemology, whether or not we fully endorse it?

CR: Yes, I might say, that is not the one I endorse because it comes with certain metaphysical assumptions, but is it a separate epistemology?

HS: If the claim is the bold claim: “In our group we take as knowledge what the elder believes to be knowledge,” then that seems not to count as knowledge at all. As you expanded it, you said, “well, look, in our community we have a lot of experience with these elders and we recognize that they are often right, that is, that they are repositories of wisdom, so when an elder says something, it has more going for it, other things being equal, than when a non-elder says that same thing.” That is perfectly understandable within something like mainstream epistemology, right? You’ve got evidence for the reliability of an elder, and you bring that to bear when the elder says that p, and you say, the elder is making a knowledge claim that p and on the basis of good evidence I regard the elder as reliable, and so I now claim to know that p.

CR: So you admit evidence about that particular knower rather than evidence about that particular claim. Because the elder might say: In this case I am claiming this because I have dreamt it.

HS: Oh, sure. If I say I take this to be knowledge not because the elder dreamt it but because the elder has an excellent track record, then I’m not appealing to the elder’s dream; I’m appealing to the elder’s track record.

DP: He has established himself as an epistemic authority.

HS: If he has. Not obviously, I mean, we’d have to look at the case in more detail.

LS: Another way to think about that would be to see what these knowledge claims are *for*. One of the ways we would judge that is, if the group put in practice the decision that the elder offered, and (this is a pragmatist notion about playing out its consequences) we see if it works. So then we have some kind of warrant – we could use that kind of language – for granting epistemic authority to the elder. It seems to me that one of the questions we have to ask is not only what kinds of justification, what kind of reasoning, but what kind of purposes we would use the knowledge for; and I think we could use that kind of language across a lot of communities.

LC: Can I take another example that seems to be very similar to this one, and that goes one step further in the enactment. There was a famous case in southern Australia in 1996 where an aboriginal land claim on the part of women was being contested, because an aboriginal women’s sacred site down in Victoria

state (south of Melbourne near the ocean) was being claimed by some developers who wanted to build a marina or a golf course or whatever it was. The strength of the claim rested on the sacredness of the site which the women presumably, given their authority as elders and practitioners in the community, should know. The claims that they made in court were consistently contested – and this is another issue that deserves to be folded into the discussion – because they relied entirely on an oral tradition and on oral testimony. They testified frequently as a group or a subset of the group, and frequently the testimony was inconsistent. But often the aboriginal elders or other aboriginal elders would say, “yes but sometimes it’s sacred in this way and sometimes it’s sacred in that way, sometimes the sacredness moves this way and sometimes it moves that way.” So you could say that the courts were having problems because they couldn’t fit the testimony, with its inconsistencies but nevertheless its consistent thread of recognition of sacredness, into the language of a court which presumably we can, for the sake of the argument, call a mainstream way of dealing with evidence on which a decision was going to be based. And the impasse was very difficult. I can’t remember how it got resolved, but the fact of evidence consistently repeated and consistently corroborated but with no written record in a culture that values and validates written records as evidence and testimony to rely on in situations of this sort, suggests to me... I don’t want to say that they had a different way of knowing or an alternative way of knowing, but I want to say that indeed they had knowledge. People were prepared to acknowledge that their knowledge in some way deserved respect, and indeed deserved to be taken, not exactly at face value (because it wasn’t clear what face value would account for) – but somehow it needed to be brought to bear as the basis of a legal decision, which is actually crucial. This knowledge seems incredibly unstable, and if you wanted to talk about their epistemology, which I’m not sure I would want to do, it would be hard to formulate it or tabulate it.

- HS: Can I ask you a question about this example? Would you regard it as a butchering of the example or a distortion of the example if you simply removed knowledge from the picture and talked about the rights of aboriginal women to their traditions, turning it into a question about justice rather than a question about knowledge, which it what it seems to me to be?
- LC: I wouldn’t object to that at all, but that’s because I think the scope of what we – leaving the extension of that word “we” very vague at the moment – the scope of what we call knowledge and claim as knowledge is actually much narrower than relying on what (perhaps a caricature of) mainstream epistemology allows us to do. But the point is that the court needed to have something that would stand up as evidence. Now, if anything is going to count as evidence, does it have to be knowledge?
- HS: I would say, no, evidence doesn’t have to be knowledge. But my suggestion was a little bit more extreme than that; I meant that this is not about evidence. What has to be established is simply that the women’s belief about the land is something they were entitled to, as a matter of justice. That’s not about

evidence. If you could establish that they were entitled to it as a matter of justice, then...

LC: ... you don't need evidence to do that?

HS: You need evidence to establish that they are entitled to it as a matter of justice, but you don't need evidence for the claim itself because we're not saying that the claim is well justified. This is my suggested re-reading of the example.

LC: It just seems to me that what was at issue there for the court was that it had to have something that it could tabulate and rely on and say, "For these, these, these and these reasons we need to believe these women." And if they are going to believe these women then it seems to me we are entering at least the fringes of epistemological discussion.

HS: To say the court needs evidence, certainly that's right, but the question I was raising is, what do they need evidence about? Do they need evidence about the truth of the women's claim? That seems to me not what they need. What they need is evidence concerning the entitlement of the women as a group of the kind it is, as a matter of justice to their claim. And that seems to me evidence for something else, and not problematic, from an epistemological point of view.

LS: I think you've raised a really interesting issue. What I'm concerned about with this continual reliance on knowledge is that, if I look at the ethical and political ramifications of the society in which we live, knowledge hasn't gotten us very far. We keep saying, if we know the other, we're going to be able to be generous – and I don't know about you – but I don't see it happening a whole lot. It seems to me that a more fruitful direction is to think about the relationship between ethics and politics, and it seems to me that you've raised that, which I like a lot. That is the kind of language we ought to be encouraging in schools because that's where, in a sense, we don't have to rely on this old knowledge thing, which isn't working anyway, and we can give other kinds of criteria for the kind of society in which we wish to live and the kind of ethics and politics that we want to come out of it. We can use knowledge claims for other things, but we don't have to necessarily rely on knowledge to get to politics and ethics in order to achieve justice.

DP: I just wanted to go back to both of the examples, which are very helpful. The issue that is still of concern to me is whether, when folks use the word "epistemology" here, they know what they're talking about. Irrespective of whether it's a good epistemology or whether we have criticisms of it, if they understand claims to know or claims to substantiate beliefs as being true and require some backing, this is epistemology. So, this is the leader of the tribe and he holds a certain position and his word is to be trusted – it may not be a very good epistemology but it would indicate that there is an understanding that claims need to be backed up in some way – so I'd say the group concerned is not misusing the word "epistemology"; and we can now sit down and have a discussion about whose epistemology is more adequate. But in a lot of the literature in education and the social sciences, the authors don't push deeply enough to raise that epistemological concern, so they seem to me to be

misusing the word. And finally, is my concern that these authors are misusing the word epistemology just a case of my carping about the misuse of a word? No, first of all, the authors' concerns are important, and although it is clearer not to use the word epistemology, they can use the word if they need to. But by using the word this way, it distracts attention from the more traditional meaning of the word, which *also* is important because epistemology *is* important and I want both these sets of important concerns to be acknowledged.

CR: There seems to be considerable agreement, that once you start digging down, we can see that a lot of claims really aren't primarily about epistemology, we can see the need to support claims that ought to be made in ethical and political terms, we can see that the term "epistemology" evolves, and we can see that when you really start analyzing it (with the example of the elder, for example), you can actually explain this very well in existing epistemological terms, and so on. So, if a lot of these claims of – I don't know what to say instead of "alternative" – alternative epistemologies can fit very well in existing epistemology, why, then, are there so many claims in my graduate classes and in the seminars I attend about "our or my epistemology doesn't fit" or "my epistemology isn't being recognized"? What is so tempting, what is so seductive about the term "epistemology" that people keep wanting to use it in spite of the confusion that results, in spite of their claims perhaps being made better in ethical and political terms, in spite of the fact that, once you dig down, perhaps you can explain it very well in either neo-positivist or pragmatic epistemological terms?

DP: How much philosophy have these people done?

LS: Not very much.

DP: I remember a dissertation defense at Stanford where the student made a philosophical claim and I questioned it; he got really indignant and said, "I know what I'm talking about, I've taken a course in philosophy!" One course in philosophy!

CR: What is it then, about that term? Is it just academic cachet?

LC: It gives a level of legitimation, I think, that is unwarranted.

LS: It's the modern worldview in which we are situated. I do think this is part of it.

LC: Can I go back to something you said, Lynda? You said something along the lines that it's not about knowing people, and the idea that we would do more justice to them if we know them. But I think that partly there is a kind of moral epistemology that does involve claims to the effect that although we may never know people well enough to do justice by them, it's quite clear that very often we – whoever "we" may be – don't bother to know people well enough to prevent doing gross injustice to them. I want that to stay in.

LS: Nobody is saying that knowledge doesn't help, but if we're talking back to our necessary and sufficient conditions for justice, I don't think it gets us there.

LC: I will be talking in my address to PES this afternoon about needing to know people in their particularity in order to talk and act well. But also, in a completely different register, I want to ask you what your response is to what I think is one of the best books about knowing that has recently appeared, and

that is the *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* text, co-edited by Nancy Tuana and Shannon Sullivan. It came out of the “Ignorance” conference at Penn State, which was held in 2004. There is a second text called *Agnotology*, which is edited by Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger. In both cases the central argument is that, while epistemologists have been deeply concerned to understand the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge (basically the conditions for the possibility of knowledge), in many of the specific cases that are analyzed in both of these texts, there is a concern with the production and maintenance of *ignorance* in various places and in various circumstances. For instance, Proctor and Schiebinger talk about the climate change issues and how knowledge is shaded and fudged to create and maintain a level of not knowing. They do it about cancer surgeries, they do it about smoking, and they do it about classified information. In *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, for instance, one of the best pieces is Shannon Sullivan’s “Why I know so little about Puerto Rico.” She talks about how the schooling that she received presented a picture of “Porto Rico,” constructed and presented and maintained as a colony whose representation that way enabled certain actions and patterns.

I wondered if you would blanch and fall off your chairs when I talked about “epistemologies of ignorance.” But more to the point here is the analysis that goes on there, which I don’t think misuses the term “epistemology,” although it does use it with a certain tongue in cheek; I think it suggests a way of rethinking knowledge as a product that obliterates ignorance, and ignorance as absence of knowledge. And I think pedagogically it is very interesting for students to know about places where our knowledge comes up against its own limitations or is blocked for certain reasons. For instance, Londa Schiebinger has a very interesting piece in the *Agnotology* book about a plant substance that was discovered by explorers in the South Pacific, that was extremely effective as an abortifacient, and there was a strong prohibition against bringing that back and introducing it into western culture because the prevalent Christian view was that abortion should be extremely difficult to obtain. So there are some very interesting issues there.

- HS: Can I ask you a question about that? You say you think they are using the word epistemology correctly there, but tongue in cheek?
- LC: Maybe, maybe. What I meant to raise, in a sense, is whether they are using it for its startle effect. Because when you talk about “epistemologies of ignorance,” it seems an oxymoron.
- CR: In educational literature, one of the people who have been taken up in that vein is Shoshana Felman, who talks about ignorance as an activity. If I can direct us back to Denis’s question about, I forget how you phrased it, dance as epistemology...
- DP: I think Asante says that “dance, music, art” are canons of proof. It comes in a section of his book that is titled “Epistemological Issue.”
- CR: So we are dealing with colleagues, and graduate students who sometimes are practicing teachers, and they will want to do research, and they might say things like, “I feel that my emphasis on embodied knowing isn’t recognized in the

dominant ways in which we go about education, the dominant ways in which we talk about knowledge, and I really want to work with K-12 students to reconnect them with their bodies because our bodies are sources of knowledge and I don't find that view legitimated here, so I want to claim a different kind of epistemology, one in which the fact that my body tells me so is ground for knowledge."

LC: Tell them to read Iris Marion Young.

CR: The Asante quote that you gave comes from a slightly different context, but these claims about alternative epistemologies are not necessarily from ethnically marginalized groups; they can come from students working in arts-based inquiry. How to respond to this? What's going to be the pedagogical value of this? Rather than lay down the law and say stop using this term this way, to actually say, how can we make less of a caricature of epistemology in colleges, schools, faculties of education, and what can we do pedagogically to have a better conversation about this? I don't want to shut them down, but I do want to get them to come to see that either what they're talking about might not be epistemology or it might fit very well with existing epistemologies out there.

LC: Or epistemology might need to be expanded and changed to accommodate it.

LS: One thing that I was thinking of: We haven't really talked about this notion of "publicly shared." If you take something like a dance, the dancer can explain what he or she did and then it becomes a matter of language. Students can talk about their interpretations and then it takes on a different form, some kind of public sharing, and I've always thought that that was at least a reasonable route to talk about beliefs. We can have some form of consensus or we can disagree, and we can locate our various positions. After all, Wittgenstein did it and Vygotsky did it, and all kinds of people who gave us these notions of public, of a publicness, in terms of beliefs. We can have knowledge beliefs, but we can also have political and ethical beliefs. The notion of belief, it seems to me, is really helpful. We can go right back to Quine and Ullian. There are all kinds of things we can do with "belief." I haven't done that with my own students, but I'd like to spend some time trying that one out.

LC: What you've just introduced, which we've neglected (and I'm surprised that we have since it's a hot topic for me, always), is the notion that knowing is mostly communal; it's about talking and interpretation and all kinds of social interaction... I think the idea of the abstract individual really has to go; I don't think you could know anything if you were an abstract individual; you could know nothing.

HS: I'm not sure if I agree or not, but I'd just like to remind us that the claim you just made was not about knowledge, it was about *knowing*. I just want to make sure that that distinction is not trodden over, because it seems to me important. If the targets of critique of traditional epistemology involve epistemology's understanding of knowledge when what the critics are really concerned about is *knowing*, then it seems to me the critique is misplaced in that way or at least it's ambiguous and unclear in that way. So I'm not disagreeing with what you said, I just think it's important to keep those two things separate. I know that there is a tradition that argues that they can't be kept separate...

- LC: Knowing sometimes turns into knowledge.
- HS: Right, but what's involved in knowing is different from what's involved in knowledge.
- LC: Knowing couldn't turn into knowledge if it were radically different.
- CR: Can we rephrase Lorraine's claim to something like: It is not possible to reach knowledge as an individual in a vacuum.
- HS: Reaching knowledge is different from knowledge. Suppose I pose myself the question for my doctoral dissertation: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge? If somebody comes to my defense after I've laid out my view and says, "ah, but your view doesn't take account of the fact that it's impossible for any lone individual to reach knowledge," it seems to me I'd be well within my rights to say that my dissertation wasn't about reaching knowledge, it was about knowledge.
- CR: So among the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, you would not count that it must have a communal aspect?
- HS: This is a made up example. I don't have an account of knowledge in my head in this example. My point is just, what's involved in reaching knowledge is different from what's involved in some things being knowledge.
- DP: In a French restaurant, cooking a perfect soufflé, say, is maybe a communal activity. It necessarily involves the activity of sous-chefs, and so on; but the *criteria* for a perfect soufflé, there's nothing communal about them. It is fluffy, it is a certain height and color, it has particular ingredients....
- LC: The soufflé wouldn't be there if people hadn't conceived of it.
- CR: Yes, the soufflé didn't come falling out of the clear blue sky! In order for the soufflé to come into being, is it a necessary or sufficient condition that more than one person contributed to it?
- DP: That is a different question from: What is a soufflé?
- LC: No it's not. It is a human artifact, just as knowledge is a human artifact.
- CR: That's an interesting sticking point, because you'll see that discussion going on as well in educational circles.
- LS: I'm reminded of Hacking's book, *The Social Construction of What*, which I actually discuss with my doctoral students, and the claim that he makes that rocks aren't made up, but human categories are. If I can get my students to have fun with the examples in that book, that does at least deal with one of the major questions that is part of educational research today. Because all our students talk about social construction, "this is socially constructed," but they haven't thought through the distinctions; and maybe that provides a way to look at the kind of thing that Harvey was talking about. Some things aren't made up.
- LC: Like what?
- LS: He would argue that rocks aren't made up.
- LC: Right.
- LS: I'm with you in thinking that this is fairly narrow.
- CR: Perhaps this is a way to come back to the very first question. Given all this, and given that there is a lot of consensus – about which I am not entirely surprised, quite frankly, because when Denis and I correspond, we keep finding that our

disagreements are really quite small among a lot of agreement – how should the field of educational research respond to claims about indigenous African women’s epistemologies?

LC: But not “alternative” epistemologies.

CR: No, that’s why I’m differentiating.

LS: Diverse? Not multiple, but diverse?

DP: I rather like Helen Longino’s expression, and not just because she is a colleague! She says something like, it doesn’t make sense to talk about multiple epistemologies or alternative epistemologies, but what’s important is to do epistemology with a cultural, multicultural sensitivity.

LC: As long as the one dominant category doesn’t remain an unmarked category. Because that’s the issue. When you put those others in brackets, they become marked, they are marked categories, but you’re leaving...

CR: ... the “default”

LC: ... the “default,” you’re leaving it untouched as an unmarked category. And I think part of the point of these so-called “other” epistemologies is to demonstrate that if they are marked categories, so too is the one that has claimed hegemonic ascendancy.

LS: And in western thought we can show different traditions, in terms of, at least, the language by which knowledge gets talked about. The other thing we didn’t raise too much here is how we take the issue of context and what counts as context. Do we take it as a kind of weak notion of influence, or do we take it in a very strong way – do we look at it as being something like Foucault’s notion of epistemes? Those kinds of notions extend our discussion, but they are part of, it seems to me, contemporary concerns.

CR: Granting all that, if we try to figure out a different way of working with our language to decenter the supposedly neutral default option, what do we do in fields of educational research with these claims – whether they’re claims about research epistemologies being racially biased, which is the Scheurich and Young claim, whether they are claims about dominant research epistemologies being exclusive, intolerant of either particular ethnic groups’ positions or of other “ways of knowing”? What do we *do* with these claims, what do we do with them either in scholarly venues or in classrooms?

LC: One thing that might not seem relevant, but I think it is: I think seeing or knowing (or whatever words you want to use) from a point of view does not necessarily determine the consequent product, whether it’s knowledge or knowing, but it influences it. And I think often the idea that diversity plays a part in *shaping* knowledge is too quickly translated into the idea that diversity *determines* knowledge. I think it’s very important not to say that being a woman means that you care about the soufflé.

CR: So it’s contesting essentialization.

LC: Well, it’s contesting single factor determinism, contesting the idea of single factor determinants. One of the other problems with these so-called diverse epistemologies is that several of the marks of diversity are often born by one putative knower. I don’t need to spell that out.

- HS: You're looking for a grand statement, Claudia, so I'll give you the grand statement: I think we should just call it like it is: They're not epistemologies. If students don't understand that by the end of their graduate education, they haven't been well educated.
- DP: Maybe we have to struggle more to understand what the concerns of these individuals and groups are.
- LC: Of course, it does have to do with politics, and it has to do with listening, which is one of the pieces missing from a lot of attempts to talk across difference.

Epilogue 1

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Reflecting on this discussion, what is outlined sharply in my mind is the question of what we can do pedagogically with the points raised. How can we work with beginning and future educational researchers so that they feel supported in the ethical and political concerns they have about education, while we also, as Lynda Stone suggests, “begin to give them the kind of language and philosophical distinctions that can be useful” in pursuing those ethical and political concerns well?

It strikes me that the problem may be one of recognition, or rather misrecognition. As was raised in the discussion, the vast majority of educational researchers do not learn about epistemology in philosophy courses, but rather in research methodology courses. In these courses and the texts used in them, students learn that an educational researcher has to be able to articulate her or his epistemology. Michael Crotty (1998/2003), for example, in his much-used *The Foundations of Social Research*, distinguishes epistemology from theoretical perspective, methodology, and method, and writes that social researchers “need to describe the epistemology inherent in the theoretical perspective and therefore in the methodology we have chosen” (p. 8). He lists three main epistemologies: *objectivism*, which he discusses in relation to the theoretical perspectives of positivism and post-positivism; *constructionism*, which, according to Crotty, is “the epistemology that qualitative researchers tend to invoke” (p. 9); and *subjectivism*, which he discusses in relation to the theoretical perspectives of structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism.

Philosophically, these terms and categories are quite problematic – the suggestion that poststructuralism relies on a “subjectivist epistemology,” for example, strikes me as both odd and unhelpful – but it is important to know that this is how many educational researchers are introduced to epistemology. As Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) points out – and notwithstanding Denis Phillips’s experience in the AERA session – “it is not, after all, out of the dictionary that the speaker gets his words” (p. 294).

Rather, Bakhtin argues, the language that we learn “exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one’s own” (p. 294). So educational researchers learn about epistemology from research methodology courses, and these are not courses in which epistemology tends to be discussed philosophically.

Denis asserts that educational researchers from marginalized communities “rightly feel that their voices are not being heard in shaping research questions, in research funding, that the sorts of issues that are important in their communities are not valued, and so on.” This is an issue of misrecognition. In order to shape a research project that does not replicate these historical wrongs, then, and bearing in mind the lessons of the research methodology course(s), these educational researchers want to ensure that they position themselves in a methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology that recognize and honor the kinds of questions they believe need to be asked and that approach their community respectfully. Following the logic that a particular epistemology is inherent in one’s theoretical perspective and methodology, it is not surprising that educational researchers do not want to use the epistemology (or epistemologies) that has (have) been inherent in theoretical perspectives and methodologies which have been used for past research that has, at best, been insensitive to marginalized communities and has, at worst, done considerable harm.

Let me elaborate a little on the issue of misrecognition. Harvey Siegel has argued that most of the claims about epistemological diversity are not about epistemology but about justice. Not infrequently, I believe, the perceived injustice is one of misrecognition. From the perspective of Nancy Fraser (1996), misrecognition is indeed a matter of justice, and not just of individual “status injury” because

it is unjust that some individuals and groups are denied the status of full partners in social interaction simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of interpretation and evaluation in whose construction they have not equally participated and that disparage their distinctive characteristics or the distinctive characteristics assigned to them. (p. 24)

The fact that certain groups of people have traditionally been positioned as objects of research and knowledge, rather than as researchers and knowledge producers, is an example of such recognitive injustice. All participants in the roundtable agree that this injustice must be remedied.

Philosophical epistemologists, however, will point out that the blame for this recognitive injustice is not epistemology but politics, so it is important to reiterate that there is a significant gap between the ways philosophers and educational researchers talk about epistemology. One of the pedagogical tasks, then, would be to (re-)introduce philosophical discussions of epistemology in the preparation of future educational researchers. It should be acknowledged that philosophical epistemology is a specialized practice that has its own technical language. Terms such as “warrant” or “propositional knowledge” have a particular and precise meaning – just as any other specialized practice from scuba diving to neurosurgery has its own technical terms that have a particular and precise meaning. The difficulty is that the technical language or “tools” of the practice can become conflated with particular, dominant traditions of that practice. While Harvey is right, of course, that the

particular Anglo-Analytic tradition that has been quite dominant in epistemology “is not the only game in epistemology town,” it can be hard, especially for non-specialists, to imagine epistemological tools being used in ways that are, for example, not masculinist, and that do not focus on, as Lorraine Code puts it so poignantly, “knowing things that are so trivial that, frankly, I don’t give a damn about whether I know them or not.”

The technical language of philosophical epistemology can, therefore – and I use a phrase here that recurs often in students’ writing – be perceived as “the master’s tools” that “will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 1984, p. 123). The pedagogical task, I would suggest, is to encourage students to see that “there is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tool lying there” (Butler 1990/1999, p. 185). Epistemological tools can and should be taken up in critical ways, so that, as Lorraine has suggested, epistemology can be expanded and changed. In order for this to be done thoughtfully, however, educational researchers should learn to take up the actual tools of philosophical epistemology – its careful distinction of knowledge from belief, its evaluation of warrants for knowledge claims, its explication of different types of knowledge, its discussion of the relation of knowing subjects to knowledge, and so forth. And once the tools have been taken up, perhaps they can be put down in new places.

Epilogue 2

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Reflecting upon the roundtable discussion raised the question, in the mind of my co-editor, of “what to do pedagogically” with the points raised. The same concern was raised within the discussion itself, for example by Lynda Stone. I must join the bandwagon here; rigorous doctoral training has been much on my mind of late, as I recently spent 18 months chairing a task force of academics from eleven prominent schools of education which was charged with reporting on this very issue. The focus of the task force was rather narrow – doctoral students being prepared as empirical researchers – while our concern in this book is the whole range of graduate students, which in addition includes curriculum theorists, teacher-educators, historians and philosophers of education, and many others besides. I must admit that the roundtable discussion brought into focus again for me the difficult issues that need to be resolved here.

The roundtable conversation changed direction a number of times, often before closure had been reached (this of course is a characteristic of oral interaction), but the tradeoff was that many important issues were touched upon. The most central of these was the issue of whether or not those who write in the “multicultural epistemology” tradition are attempting to reform epistemology (Lorraine Code’s

suggestion), or are raising issues of justice but doing so using the language of epistemology (Harvey Siegel's suggestion) – or of course, they might be doing both. My own view, based upon the chapters in this book including the transcript of the roundtable, is that it is important to recognize that there are two distinct literatures in this domain that often get run together. On the one hand, there are the writings of epistemologists such as Lorraine Code herself, Helen Longino, and Sandra Harding who are indeed attempting to reform this branch of philosophy from within, raising issues of particular concern to feminist philosophers and those with multicultural concerns. My personal assessment is that they have produced substantive arguments on behalf of their reform efforts, and they have affected my own thinking. The second body of literature is that which was briefly surveyed in Chap. 2 and which forms the main focus of this book; this literature consists of the writings of multiculturalists who are not philosophers, and (on my reading) they do not produce philosophical arguments. This literature, at bottom, is concerned to argue for the just treatment of all cultural groups in matters of curriculum, classroom politics, and so forth. Again my assessment is that their case needs to be taken very seriously – but it has confused the issue by being cast in epistemological language. There is no evidence at all, in my view, that this second group is attempting to reform traditional epistemology.

Another point that occurred to me as I re-read the transcript was the fact that the philosophically able participants occasionally were at cross-purposes and sometimes failed to push their points far enough to expose the underlying, central points of disagreement – if not to reach agreement (probably an impossibility with a group of philosophers). An example from near the end of the discussion can serve as illustration: Harvey Siegel's point that knowledge and knowing are different. Knowledge (and soufflés!) are products (in a sense, are things), while knowing (and cooking a soufflé) are processes (in a sense, are events); the characteristics that identify these different types of entities/events are different, notwithstanding the fact that processes are sometimes characterized by the type of products they produce. I take it that Harvey's point (certainly it was mine) was that when multiculturalists and others talk of "ways of knowing," they are referring to processes, but too often they neglect to discuss epistemologically the features of the products so produced that make them items of knowledge rather than items of belief. Furthermore the processes of "knowing" themselves are rarely if ever assessed in the relevant literature to see if they have the capability to actually produce knowledge rather than belief. (This was illustrated, I believe, by some of the material covered in the literature review in Chap. 2) On the other hand, I suspect that Claudia Ruitenberg and Lorraine Code would want to argue that, for much of the knowledge that is important to discuss in educational circles today, the way in which people have come to hold certain beliefs and have come to know certain things is so important that it does not make much sense to discuss the product of knowledge separately from these processes. The roundtable discussion, however, changed course before these potentially very important points were opened for deeper discussion.

As I studied this portion of the transcript, I naturally was slightly saddened by the failure of this talented group to make headway on what I regard as an interesting philosophical issue, but the realization also struck me that if trained philosophers

can fail to make headway, then there is little, if any, hope that lesser mortals will fare any better. The thought even arose (of course, it has arisen many times before, for example in seminars with doctoral students representing a variety of disciplinary orientations) that what a philosopher finds interesting might leave others stone cold – and it is not the case that even all philosophers will share this interest!

Just as all roads supposedly lead to Rome, these scattered thoughts lead back to the daunting pedagogical challenge: How can doctoral students, who are not philosophers but are facing careers as educational researchers of one stripe or another, be educated so as to be able to maneuver through extremely tricky epistemological terrain? Should this even be an aim of their doctoral work? And if it is (comfortingly, all participants in the roundtable agree that it is), how can this aim be achieved when those who are teaching these students are themselves philosophical neophytes? – for the sad fact of doctoral training life is that most research training programs do not have more than a single philosopher of education (if that), and of course, it is not the case that all faculty members who hold positions as philosophers of education have substantial epistemological training or interests. This is not the place to discuss the vagaries of doctoral training programs, but it is worth commenting that those in which students are encouraged or even required to take courses in the humanities and/or social science departments outside of education, often will have opportunities to have worthwhile discussion of epistemological issues (the social sciences, in particular, perhaps because they have concerns about their status in the academic hierarchy of the sciences, can be quite assiduous in raising epistemological issues in their seminars and colloquia).

The task force mentioned at the outset also endorsed the education – rather than the training – of doctoral research students, and also argued that in order to be prepared for the world of the twenty-first century, they needed at least to have met (as students) some of the epistemological challenges they (and their work) will face as they move into their careers – face in print, face in the form of reports of referees, face in the presentations of respondents at conferences, and so on. Indeed, the members of the task force saw these rhetorically fraught situations as being the key to successful motivation and training; the more that students took the opportunity to publish, to present at conferences, to attend conference sessions that had the promise of prompting deep and exciting debate, the more they would realize the importance of these epistemological issues and the need to do at least a modicum of reading. Speaking personally, being attacked (unjustly) for being a positivist, and (contra-wise) for being too enamored of the epistemology of Karl Popper (who was the self-confessed executioner of positivism), and (justly) for failing to appreciate the important doctrines of postmodernism, have all been important growth experiences. Such good luck needs to bless all nascent educational researchers.

One other aspect of the roundtable served as a challenge to me – the point that came to the fore several times about the politics of knowledge production and dissemination. Our discussion was good-natured but forthright, with disagreements honestly acknowledged; but obviously, dealing with the important and emotionally charged issues here with our students presents another serious pedagogical challenge, even at the doctoral level. Establishing a seminar-room environment

where students (and for that matter, faculty members) from all backgrounds are free to raise issues honestly, and where they are enabled to take a philosophical perspective – that is, engage in careful assessment of their own claims as well as those of others – all without venting or establishing a tone that disenfranchises others within the group, involves a set of skills that I am sure that I and, no doubt, many of my friends and colleagues, have not mastered. And it is not clear where we should turn to get help.

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Chapter 8

Second Thoughts

Aesthetic Epistemology?

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A few years ago, one of my colleagues was confronted with an interesting question. In a graduate seminar in the Faculty of Education, she had asked students to select a week in which they would introduce the readings. The week before a text by Heidegger was to be discussed, the student responsible for introducing this text asked the instructor: “Can I *dance* Heidegger?” The instructor said no.

This little encounter became quite the topic for discussion in my Faculty, and it was clear that some of the students and faculty believed that the student’s having been denied the opportunity to perform a piece of dance as a way of introducing a text by Heidegger in a graduate seminar was evidence of the oppressively positivist slant of the university and of an intolerance for other “ways of knowing.”

Now, it seems uncontroversial to me that it is possible to “dance Heidegger” – if, by that expression, it is meant that there are dancers and choreographers who could insightfully interpret a text by Heidegger and share that interpretation in the form of dance. The real question raised by the exchange I described is thus not whether one can “dance Heidegger” but what, in the context of a graduate seminar in education, one might be doing besides dancing. For I should underscore that the graduate seminar in question was not a seminar in dance, nor in dance education or even art education more broadly, and so it seems fair to expect *something else besides dance* to take place when a student introduces a reading to her or his colleagues in such a context. That something else could, in the context of this graduate seminar and the charge to introduce the text by Heidegger, be imagined to be any of a number of things: summarizing the text, asking questions about its claims, putting forward an

argument, comparing the text to other texts read in the seminar, and so on. The difficulty is that dance is not a medium very well suited to doing any of these things. So what is going on when someone asks to dance (or paint, for that matter) and to do so *as educational theory or research*?

The reason I raise this question is because the title of this book promises a discussion of “education, culture, and epistemological diversity,” and yet I feel we have fallen somewhat short in the discussion of culture. Most of the examples given in the various chapters have been of culture in the sense of ethnicity, but there are other cultures in the academy that feel marginalized and make claims about epistemology and “ways of knowing.” I use “culture” here much like C. P. Snow (1959/1990) did in his famous lecture “The Two Cultures.” Snow observed in Cambridge in the 1950s that there were two cultures in the university whose members hardly spoke with one another: (physical) scientists and (literary) intellectuals. The gulf separating these two cultures did not remain confined to the academy, Snow argued, but extended to society more broadly:

This polarisation is sheer loss to us all. To us as people, and to our society. It is at the same time practical and intellectual and creative loss, and ... it is false to imagine that those three considerations are clearly separable. (p. 171)

The polarization, Snow argued, rested by and large on a mutual lack of comprehension, resulting in caricatures of the other side (“the kind of joke which has gone sour,” p. 171), and a further reduced chance at conversation or collaboration. I am interested in a similar polarization that appears in Faculties of Education: between those educational researchers whose research attempts in some way – however critically – to respond to the traditional demand for objectivity and universalizability and those whose approach to research focuses on the subjective, the “authentic,” and who feel that the university is inhospitable to such concerns.¹ The gulf separating these cultures also has implications for society more broadly, as it means that educational researchers often do not collaborate with researchers from the other culture, nor make use of their research, which impoverishes the work done on both sides – work that is, after all, about a collection of social phenomena we call *education*. I agree with Snow that “the clashing point of two subjects, two disciplines, two cultures... ought to produce creative chances,” not stony silence (p. 172).

One prominent stream among those whose research focuses on the subjective and authentic is arts-based educational research (ABER), and I believe that the student’s request to “dance Heidegger” can be understood most easily in this context. If ABER can be understood as, or as part of, a “culture” that encounters incomprehension when faced with another (and more established) culture, the question is whether it has, as Sorokin suggested, a distinct system of truth and knowledge, a distinct *epistemology*.

¹ Like Snow’s characterization, the dichotomy I sketch here is a simplification, and many actual educational researchers will not recognize themselves as fitting in either one of these categories.

In one of the earlier and much-cited accounts of ABER, Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner (1997) describe this type of research in the following way:

First, arts-based research is engaged in for a purpose often associated with artistic activity: arts-based research is meant to enhance perspectives pertaining to certain human activities. For ABER, those activities are educational in character. Second, arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or *design elements* that infuse the inquiry process and the research “text.” (p. 95)

Thus, ABER is conducted for particular purposes, and the research process and product have particular features. Since the purpose of research is generally associated with the production of knowledge of some sort, Barone and Eisner explain what they mean by ABER’s purpose of “enhancing perspectives”:

Educational research has traditionally been conducted for the purpose of arriving at knowledge that is highly valid and reliable, as truthful and trustworthy as possible. Honoring an epistemology that strives toward certainty, traditional research “findings” are meant to explain, predict, and sometimes control the outcome of similar future events. ... If traditionalists generally seek to secure solid explanations and confident predictions, arts-based researchers aim to suggest new ways of viewing educational phenomena. ... [I]t moves to broaden and deepen ongoing conversation about educational policy and practice by calling attention to seemingly common-sensical, taken for granted notions. (p. 96)

Barone and Eisner here position ABER as a set of approaches that are qualitative and interpretive. They see the particular purpose of ABER, in line with what artists have done for centuries, as proposing *new ways of looking* at things. Distancing ABER from research approaches that focus on certainty and predictability, they also distance ABER from the propositional knowledge that such more traditional research approaches typically strive for (“Based on this research, we know that ...”).²

What I want to focus on here is that although ABER does not aim to produce propositional knowledge, it does not get out of the knowledge business altogether. If the products of ABER are to “enhance perspectives” on educational phenomena, then such perspectives should, presumably, be insightful rather than trite, well-justified rather than unsubstantiated, and so forth. Just as five different paintings of Marilyn Monroe might be said to provide five different perspectives on Marilyn Monroe and hence an opportunity to *know* Monroe better (in a “knowledge by acquaintance” - sense of knowing), one could say that five different artistic renderings of an educational phenomenon offer an opportunity to *know* this educational phenomenon better.

Indeed, Barone and Eisner provide several criteria for assessing the quality of ABER *as research*. They are: (1) “illuminating effect – its ability to reveal what had not been noticed”; (2) “generativity – its ability to promote new questions”; (3) “incisiveness – that is, its ability to focus tightly on educationally salient issues

² I will leave aside here the fact that, within the “traditional” research approaches that are here painted as one homogeneous entity, there are significantly different views about what it means to say that one “knows” anything based on research. Popperians, for example, who believe hypotheses cannot be verified, only falsified, would argue that one never knows with full certainty that something is the case, and that research findings can only increase the confidence with which one believes something to be true.

and questions”; (4) “generalizability; that is, its relevance to phenomena outside of the research text” (p. 102). The usually important criterion of *truth* is not explicitly mentioned here, although when Barone and Eisner indicate good ABER should “reveal what had not been noticed,” it seems to me that this does not include cases where the researcher claims something that had not previously been noticed *because it is simply not there*. The term “reveal” suggests that, whatever aesthetic media or methods s/he makes use of, the arts-based educational researcher needs to employ an observational acuity to be able to discern something in an educational phenomenon that has not yet been brought to light. Moreover, the researcher should be able to justify why s/he proposes the new perspective that s/he does, and how s/he has come to it.

Piantanida et al. (2003) agree that arts-based educational researchers, if they want their research to be taken seriously as *research* (and not only as *art*), would do well to articulate a “logic of justification” for their work:

Viewed as a logic-of-justification, method is less a matter of precisely executed techniques than a matter of the philosophical assumptions that guide a researcher’s thinking. These assumptions relate to what one takes to be reality (ontology) as well as to the nature of truth claims (epistemology) that one values (axiology). (p. 185)

In other words, just as is the case with educational research that does not make use of artistic media, ABER is informed by a conception of knowledge, and arts-based educational researchers should be able to explain how that conception is operative in their work.

Piantanida et al. (2003) draw on Snow’s distinction between the “culture of science” and the “culture of art” to suggest that ABER is disputing the hegemony of the culture of science and claiming a space for the culture of art in the larger educational research community. In order to do so effectively, they argue that arts-based educational researchers should be prepared to articulate what is distinctive about the logic of justification that guides their mode of inquiry:

For some, the concept of a “logic of justification” may conjure up images of logical positivism that are at odds with the creative processes associated with artistic endeavors. This is an overly narrow conception of “logics.” ... Arts-based educational research as a distinctive mode of inquiry has emerged because scholars such as Barone, Bruner, Donmoyer, and Eisner have argued so persuasively for *aesthetic logics*. (p. 190, n. 3, emphasis added)

In the abstract of the article, the authors refer to these aesthetic logics of justification as “aesthetic ways of knowing.” This suggests that a given piece of ABER tends to be guided by an epistemology that is different from the epistemologies that guide other educational research. Once again, we have arrived at the claim of epistemological diversity as bound up with the presence of different cultures in the academy and in the field of educational research in particular; the cultures in question here, however, are not ethnic cultures but the culture of science and the culture of art. Piantanida et al. do not articulate what these “aesthetic ways of knowing” are, or how they operate; the purpose of their article is, rather, to “call for ongoing and explicit discussions among arts-based educational researchers about the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of our work” (p. 190).

A few arts-based education researchers use the term “aesthetic epistemology”; Patrick Slattery (2003), for example, in his response to Piantanida et al. writes that he is concerned that his colleagues’ call for the articulation of a logic of justification “might lead some researchers to apply a positivistic or modernistic process for advancing an aesthetic epistemology,” but he does not indicate here what such an aesthetic epistemology might be (p. 195).³

Perhaps surprisingly, “aesthetic epistemology” seems to be discussed most in management education. Nick Nissley (2002) provides an account of “how aesthetic epistemology (aesthetic ways of knowing), or arts-based learning is informing the practice of management education” (p. 27). Evidently, Nissley does not clearly distinguish “ways of knowing,” “ways of learning,” and accounts of what counts as knowledge. “Aesthetic epistemology” in management education has been elaborated as a response to the perceived inadequacy of the dominant approaches to understanding management, and teaching and learning in management education. Nissley discusses two principal ways in which the arts can be used in management education: through “art metaphors” that inform thinking about the “art of management” and through art-perceiving and art-making by managers. Nissley’s examples of using the metaphor of jazz improvisation to understand managers’ need to be attuned to the situation, or of using dramatic role plays in management education, are uncontroversial. Unfortunately, he does not explain here what, if anything, is *epistemologically* distinct about the use of art by managers and in management education.

Nissley’s argument draws on the earlier work of Antonio Strati, who did not use the term “aesthetic epistemology” but who did argue that more attention should be paid to the aesthetic dimensions of organizational life and the aesthetic experiences of people in organizations. Strati claims, for example, that “aesthetics are a form of knowledge and they have their own truth” (1996, p. 216) and that “it is possible to gain aesthetic, rather than logico-rational, understanding of organizational life” (1999, p. 7, as cited in Nissley 2004, p. 291). Based on this view, Nissley (2004) further elaborates how the use of arts can play a role in organizational knowledge and understanding. Of particular interest is his account of how artistic representations can “allow one to see what one is thinking and to inquire into that thinking” (p. 293). In other words, artistic representation, according to Nissley, can play a role in a process of clarifying and deepening one’s thoughts by allowing for forms of representation other than linear prose.

³ As Levisohn and Phillips have analyzed in their chapter in this volume, the term “epistemology” in general is used to refer to several different things, and it is no different with “aesthetic epistemology.” While philosophers in that branch of philosophy known as aesthetics have discussed “aesthetic epistemology” in the first sense of the term as discussed by Levisohn and Phillips, the normative sense of epistemology of aesthetic judgments (discussions about how we can “know” that a painting is beautiful), I limit myself here to “aesthetic epistemology” in the second and third senses of the term as discussed by Levisohn and Phillips, that is, as a particular normative set of beliefs about how the arts or the use of artistic media produce knowledge or a description of such a set of beliefs.

Perhaps this is what the student in the graduate seminar intended when she asked to “dance Heidegger”: that by representing her interpretation of Heidegger’s text in the form of dance rather than academic text, she would make available for her colleagues a different object of inquiry that might lead to a deeper understanding of the text in question. However, the artistic representation of the text is thus only one step in a process of achieving knowledge about the text: discussing the interpretation and having to justify one’s views of the text remain other crucial components.

Moreover, a distinction should be made between the interpretation of a text an individual can achieve with the help of her or his own artistic representation and subsequent inquiry and the interpretation an individual can achieve with the help of someone else’s artistic representation. In the case of the former, no great technical expertise is required in the artistic medium, as only the individual her or himself is asked to use the artistic product for further inquiry. In the case of the latter, much more technical expertise is required, as the artistic product now has to be interpretable by others who, typically, are much less schooled in the interpretation of such media than they are in the interpretation of linear prose. For example, I can, in the process of grappling with Heidegger’s (1951/1971) essay “The Thing,” draw a picture to get a better grasp of his argument about the “thingness” of a jug. The physical activity of drawing a line to create a separate space in the shape of a jug that was, just moments ago, part of the larger blank page may give me a better insight into Heidegger’s point or may enable me to explain his point better in class. No great skill at drawing is required to arrive at this point, since the drawing is only part of my private process of grappling with the text, and it does not need to communicate anything on its own. It becomes a very different question if I want to create a drawing that can, on its own, convey what I would otherwise explain in words about the essay “The Thing.” I would have to be an extremely skilled artist – and my students very experienced art interpreters – to pull that off. Therefore, if I were asked by a student whether s/he could offer a choreographic interpretation of a text to be discussed in a graduate seminar, I would insist that the student also demonstrate how the dancing allowed her or him to see what s/he was thinking about the text and how s/he continued her or his inquiry into the text based on the experience. That spoken or written further explanation and inquiry, and not the dance by itself, could then serve as points of departure for further class discussion.

Importantly, the examples of the use of artistic media I have considered so far have not suggested an “aesthetic epistemology” or any other distinctive epistemology in Levisohn & Phillips’ sense of a different normative set of beliefs about knowledge and what distinguishes it from belief. Those educational researchers who identify more with the “culture of art” than the “culture of science” may have reason to perceive the university or the field of educational research as inhospitable to aesthetic concerns and examples, but it is not yet clear whether this perceived inhospitality has anything to do with *epistemology*. I therefore heartily endorse Piantanida et al.’s call to arts-based educational researchers not to shy away from “ongoing and explicit discussions ... about the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of our work” (p. 190).

Plain Old Epistemology, But...

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It has often been commented that in the process of research, straightforward questions frequently become more complex; in my experience, this certainly holds true of philosophical inquiry – and alas, it is true of the contributions to this book. But a moment's reflection shows the “alas” is misplaced, for it is no service to anyone to mask complexities, to preserve a façade of simplicity where the issues are indeed complex. Important issues deserve to be treated honestly, and if they turn out to be complex, so be it! In the process of working on this book, and in particular in the course of working with my co-editor, I have been forced to grapple with some of these complexities and to re-think some of my initial suppositions (which is not to say that I have completely abandoned all of them).

Several factors contributed to my developing a philosophical interest in the general topic that is the focus of this book (my educational, social, and political interests, on the other hand, were fostered by my experiences as a high school teacher of science in an extremely diverse setting and by my later work with impressive, socially aware graduate students in Australia, Stanford, and elsewhere). First, I had a great difficulty in understanding what was meant by “an alternative epistemology”, especially when this alternative seemed to pay no heed to what I regarded as a necessity – the requirement that there be some coherent ways of warranting the knowledge-claims that were being advanced under the ambit of this so-called “alternative” (that is, for distinguishing false from true or likely-to-be-true beliefs). I still harbor this attitude, which is why I admire Catherine Elgin's (1996) remarks quoted in this book's Frontispiece: commitments or beliefs or knowledge-claims are tenable only when they have a “place in a maximally tenable system in reflective equilibrium” (pp. 117–118); this is coupled in my mind with the words of John Dewey (1938/1966):

We know that some methods of inquiry are better than others in just the same way that we know that some methods of surgery, farming, ...or what not are better than others.... we ascertain *how and why* certain means and agencies have produced warrantably assertible conclusions, while others have not and *cannot* do so. (p. 104)

This puzzlement about “alternatives” in epistemology came to a head in several discussions and public exchanges I had with my friend and colleague at Stanford, Elliot Eisner, about art as an alternative form of knowledge; I argued essentially that it was not a “maximally tenable” alternative epistemological system. Claudia Ruitenberg also discusses this position in her “Second Thoughts,” and I will return to it below.

However, I should stress here that for what seems like eons I have recognized that there can be – indeed that there are – alternative views about what counts as acceptable ways of establishing truth and error in knowledge-claims, about what types of evidence and arguments are allowable, and so forth. Thus, it is clear to me

that there are alternative ways of *doing or applying* epistemology (although, of course, it is open to debate which if any of these ways of pursuing epistemology are “tenable” or “better” in Elgin’s and Dewey’s senses), but saying there are alternative *ways* within epistemology is quite a different matter from saying that there are *alternative epistemologies*. One reading of the multicultural epistemology sources discussed throughout this book is that they are, indeed, advocating for alternative ways of proceeding within epistemology – ways that display sensitivity to cultural diversity issues (in a way that parallels the call by feminist epistemologists for the field to proceed with “feminist sensitivity”). Personally, I am not completely convinced that this *is* the right way to read this literature, but if it is, then certainly the point that is being made is both valid and important.⁴

Another factor that helped to pique my interest in the topic pursued in this book was the event that occurred at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, which I described early in the roundtable discussion in the previous chapter. As I indicated there, I was horrified by the speaker’s disdain for epistemology yet bemused by her obvious desire to keep using the term that she admitted she did not understand. What on earth was going on?

Partly as a result of this experience, I eventually inveigled Jon Levisohn to join with me in authoring the essay that now appears as Chap. 3; it had the distinction of being rejected by several leading journals, whose referees (almost certainly the same people) claimed not to understand the basic distinction that was drawn between “knowledge” and “belief”. Again, I was perplexed: why was a distinction that is clear enough to students in “Philosophy 1” so difficult for experienced researchers to comprehend? Or were they dissembling, and if so, why? Having a distaste for continued rejection, Jon and I put the essay aside, until that taxi ride in Kyoto with Claudia Ruitenberg.

Working with Claudia over the past 2 years has given me a heightened sensitivity to the uses of language. Her attitude essentially is a Wittgensteinian one (although she may not have acquired it from this source) – there are many language games, and each has a different point or focus. What I had (rashly?) taken to be a muddled attempt to play the “philosophy game” using the term “epistemology” might instead, Claudia insisted, be a clear move in an entirely different game. I needed to be more intellectually generous, more interpretively flexible – and I have to concede that she was right. On the other hand, she has yet to learn from me (perhaps!) the danger in being overly charitable. When, for example, someone appears to be misusing a word or to be saying something nonsensical, it might be the case that – providing we can find the right interpretive context – they are actually saying something profound or are extending the use of the word in a way that is of great potential social importance. But my view is that charity should not be unbounded; sometimes a word *is*

⁴ An interesting philosophical complexity arises here: how many internal changes or “improvements” need to be made before the traditional epistemology can be said to have been transformed into a new one? The sources discussed in this book do not pursue issues such as this, perhaps another indication that it is a mistake to identify their concerns as being philosophical.

being misused, and sometimes an otherwise intelligent person *is* talking nonsense. There is a brilliant essay by Ernest Gellner (1973) that shows it is almost always possible to find a context that will “save” an incoherent statement. Warning of “over charitable exegesis”, he wrote:

In science, the best safeguard may be a vivid sense of the possibility that the initial theory which is being saved may have been false after all; in sociological interpretation, an equally vivid sense of the possibility that the interpreted statement may contain absurdity. (p. 44)

Thus, the one defect I see in Claudia’s interesting and scholarly essay (Chap. 6) is that she is extraordinarily thorough in suggesting readings or interpretations of the writings of advocates of multicultural epistemology so that their use of the term “epistemology” and its cognates becomes sensible. A charitable person, with ingenuity, can accomplish this “resignification” – and she accomplishes it well, but overzealously! On the other hand, I suggest (and in fact did suggest in the literature review in Chap. 2) that if close attention is paid to the context in the text in which these quasi-epistemological references appear, a simpler and more warranted interpretation leaps out, to which I now turn.

The upshot, then, is this: In my (perhaps uncharitable) judgment, some – probably many – multiculturalists misuse the term “epistemology” simply because they do not know much about philosophy (there is nothing sinister about this – all of us have lacunae in our knowledge base and are apt to misuse technical words from unfamiliar fields); some knowingly misuse the word in a new domain in order to take advantage of its intellectual cachet – which it is hoped will transfer over to this new context; and some are not misusing the term at all but are attempting to make an important point about some genuinely epistemological matter. (Perhaps they are arguing that the scholarly community needs to recognize the existence of quite different, alternative epistemologies, or perhaps they are making what to my mind is a more sustainable claim that epistemological procedures need to be improved, that there are better ways to pursue epistemology.) Whatever their point, however, it requires a considerable degree of philosophical acumen to argue, and, of course, it demands full, clear, and careful exposition (which I judge to be lacking so far in the relevant literature).

This discussion can serve as segue to consideration of the key epistemological thesis that at least some multiculturalists seem to be quite explicitly canvassing (if their words are taken literally) and which was the focal issue with which this book set out, namely, that there are “alternative epistemologies.” In her “Second Thoughts,” my co-editor uses as an illustrative example the position held by Barone and Eisner, and others, that the field of art provides a case of such an alternative, and she introduces her discussion with the story of the student who asked permission to “dance Heidegger.” Despite our differences, my co-editor and I have pretty much the same position on the issues here, although perhaps Claudia is again slightly (but only very slightly) more charitable than I am (for she finds a context in which the student’s request is uncontroversial). This interesting example provides a relatively simple context in which I can make clear the deficiencies I see in the view that there are so-called “alternative ways of knowing” – and pretty obviously, it is an example that

calls to mind Molefi Asante's claim, discussed in Chap. 2, that at least in the Afrocentric cultural context, dance is one of the "sources of knowledge, the canons of proof, and the structures of truth."

Stated in my uncharitable way, to suppose that a person could "dance Heidegger" (or use dance as a canon of proof or to convey the structure of truth) is, to use Gellner's words, incoherent and/or absurd. One can certainly perform a dance that expresses one's feelings or attitudes toward Heidegger's writings – personally, I would rush on stage, writhe about, then tear out my hair, a performance that would convey its point clearly enough. And if one could boil down Heidegger's work to some simple thesis, such as "the loneliness of Man," no doubt this could be conveyed (although this hardly counts as "dancing Heidegger," and members of the audience might well offer different interpretations of what the performance was about and might not even recognize the Heideggerian reference). But feelings and attitudes and "sound-bite" interpretations are not the issue here. How could a dance convey Heidegger's philosophical *theories and conclusions*? He makes many distinctions and devises a variety of concepts, using technical language and lengthy arguments. How can a dance summarize a lengthy and technical argument? And how can a dance offer an assessment or a possible refutation of one or all of these elements? Finally, an interpretation or assessment or summary is itself a knowledge-claim and therefore is open to dispute and possible refutation. Can one look at a dancer's pirouette and meaningfully remark "I think you have misinterpreted Heidegger's point here..."? Could a spectator who knows nothing about Heidegger or German philosophy come away from the dance performance saying "My word, that concept of *Dasein* is really profound"? Dance simply does not come close to being an adequate epistemological medium or even to being an inadequate one – it is a "category mistake" to suppose that it is an epistemological system at all.

Thus, I want to stress that central to any epistemological system is the guidance it provides about the assessment of the viability of the claims or hypotheses or theories that are advanced by those who work within that particular framework. What kinds of evidence are acceptable? How should evidence have been collected so that it is valid? What forms of argument are acceptable? Who, if anyone, counts as an epistemic authority? How are errors and faulty conclusions recognized? Without such guidance – without the ability to recognize errors and invalid arguments, without the ability to detect weak or misleading or compromised evidence, and so forth – an epistemic system is not, as Elgin put it, "a maximally tenable system"; in fact, it is not an epistemological system at all, and as a way of producing tenable beliefs (that is, tenable knowledge-claims), it seems liable to lead to disaster when relied upon in a hostile universe. (Could a fisherman in a Southeast Asian village, for example, survive for long if he had no way of distinguishing what were likely to be false beliefs about the weather at sea from those that were likely to be true?)

I should point out that I have been discussing the production of what might be called large-scale beliefs, beliefs about what the world contains and about how it operates. (I have not been concerned with the kind of "atomic" beliefs that Lorraine Code also disdains; it will be recalled that in Chap. 5, her starting point was the traditional epistemological formula "S-knows-that-p," where the "p" was a rather

trivial thing such as a patch of red about which she said she cared very little.) And in this context, I have found the work of feminist philosophers (for example, Code herself, Helen Longino, and a number of others represented in the Alcoff and Potter volume) to be extremely enlightening. Such knowledge is not produced by solitary knowers who are cut off from all social and cultural influences; rather, as Elgin (1996) again put it, such knowledge is like a “medieval tapestry...the work of many hands,” that is, “understanding and knowledge are collective accomplishments” (p. 116). But to actually *be* an “accomplishment” rather than a phantasm, the epistemological guidelines within which the relevant collectivity or community or cultural group is operating must be *viable* ones.

I also judge that there is much to be said in favor of Lorraine Code’s critique, alluded to above, of traditional, Western epistemology that often has taken as its starting point a decontextualized knower who is confronting a patch of red or some-such and is concerned about whether he or she is justified in believing that it is, indeed, a patch of red. (Code also points out that epistemology would look quite different if it took as its starting focus cases of “knowledge by acquaintance” where the subjectivity and positionality of the knower could be argued to be epistemically relevant.⁵) It is a long way from knowing a patch of red to knowing that viruses can cause disease or knowing that the ethnic group to which one belongs has systematically been victimized by the structure of the economic system operative in society, and it is even further to knowing what to do about this injustice. The 64,000-dollar question is whether multicultural epistemology can help direct this complicated journey or whether plain old epistemology can rise to the challenge (old but updated with multicultural sensitivity, that is, with sensitivity to the concerns raised by those who are pointing out that cultural diversity issues are largely invisible in the way epistemology currently is pursued). I opt for the second alternative.

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⁵ I am sympathetic to this point, to a degree. The result of an analysis is often strongly determined by the case or example that is taken as representative and thus a focus for the analysis; I have called this the “foxtrot problem” (Phillips 2006, pp. 12–13). I do not go all the way with Code, for I hold that subjectivity is not a virtue in many epistemologically important inquiries, although it might well be crucial in the kind of cases that she (and Ruitenberg) focuses upon – knowing a person, for example.

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Index

A

ABER. *See* Arts-based educational research
Aesthetic epistemology, 145–150
Afrocentric epistemology, 19–24, 33, 54, 55
Afrocentrism, 30
Arts-based educational research (ABER), 146–148
Asante, M.K., 13, 30–33, 43, 53, 61, 65, 125, 134, 135, 154
Authority (as warrant), 5, 130

B

Banks, J.A., 14–19, 46, 48, 56, 61, 67, 70
Belenky, M.F., 27–30, 53, 101, 110

C

Code, L., 3, 11, 15–17, 48, 85–98, 108, 117, 121–143, 154, 155
Collective *vs.* individual, 7, 53
Collins, P.H., 13, 18–24, 33–37, 42, 43, 54, 55, 61, 70
Constructivism, 12, 13

D

Dance, 30, 31, 43, 65, 125, 134, 135, 145, 146, 150, 153, 154
Debate, 1–3, 7, 14–16, 18, 21, 22, 35–37, 45, 93, 95, 96, 114, 117, 142, 152
Descriptive *vs.* normative, 35, 41, 47, 49–55, 60, 61, 96

Disputation, 36, 75, 114

Dreams (as warrant), 4, 5, 130

E

Empiricism, 12, 13, 15, 21, 26, 28, 32, 48, 90
Essentialism, 59, 78, 102–103
Ethics, 21, 22, 132
Experience, 7, 13–21, 23, 25–29, 31, 32, 46, 54–56, 59, 61, 67, 70, 72, 74, 82, 88–92, 98, 105, 109, 117, 122, 123, 125, 130, 138, 142, 149–152

F

Feminism, 3, 59
Feminist epistemology, 3, 5, 19–27, 33, 44, 54, 55, 61, 62, 123
Foucault, M., 15, 16, 34, 95, 97, 106, 110, 115, 137

H

Harding, S., 3, 11, 15–17, 25, 26, 58–62, 70, 77, 91, 141
Hesse, M., 3, 88

I

Identity, 25, 39, 43, 49, 85, 102, 103
Individual *vs.* collective, 7, 53

J

Justice, 25, 27, 123, 131–133, 139, 141

K

Knowledge by acquaintance, 23, 126, 128, 147, 155

Kuhn, T.S., 8, 9, 50, 56, 123, 124

L

Learning, 27–29, 53, 54, 61, 68, 69, 72, 73, 102–105, 110, 111, 113, 149

Longino, H., 3, 6, 7, 11, 35–37, 47, 53, 62, 97, 137, 141, 155

M

Marginalization, 9, 71

Marginalized groups, 5, 10, 14, 18, 52, 60, 62, 78, 106, 108, 117, 122, 123, 126, 135

N

Normative *vs.* descriptive, 35, 41, 47, 49–55, 60, 61, 96

O

Objectivity *vs.* subjectivity, 12, 31, 32, 36, 43, 88, 91–93, 97, 98, 111

Ontology, 50, 111–113, 115, 148

P

Pallas, A.M., 66, 71–74, 78, 81, 82, 114

Paradigm, 2, 7–9, 15–18, 20, 25, 27, 33, 34, 50, 85–87, 89, 92–94, 98, 101, 111, 112, 117, 122–124

Political concerns, 138

Politics, 19–24, 55, 70, 92, 115, 132, 138, 139, 141, 142

Popper, K., 5, 28, 47, 87, 142

Positivism, 12, 14, 21, 22, 28, 47, 75, 76, 87, 88, 113, 138, 142, 148

Procedural knowledge, 29, 105–107

Propositional knowledge, 98, 105–108, 117, 126–128, 139, 147

R

Racism, 9, 12–14, 25, 42, 51, 60, 65, 91, 95, 97, 109

Rationalism, 12, 13, 21, 26, 28, 29, 48

Relativism, 5, 35, 49, 59, 69, 75–77, 81–83, 90, 91, 123

Representation, 17, 31, 33–35, 56, 101, 109, 110, 115, 116, 134, 149, 150

Robinson, R., 103–105, 109

Rorty, R., 15, 16, 45, 53, 76, 93

S

Siegel, H., 9, 36, 65–83, 102, 114–116, 121–143

Sociology of knowledge, 15, 24, 35, 46, 52–53, 56, 67, 87, 115

Standpointism, 48, 49, 55, 57, 58, 60

Standpoint theory, 58, 77

Subjectivity

vs. objectivity, 12, 31, 32, 36, 43, 88, 91–93, 97, 98, 111

strong, 32

weak, 32

T

Tenability, 2, 3, 151, 152, 154

Truth status, 26, 53

W

Ways of knowing, 2, 12, 27–30, 42, 53–55, 65, 66, 71, 81, 101–117, 123, 124, 126, 137, 141, 145, 146, 148, 149, 153

Wittgenstein, L., 8, 87, 135, 152