

## *Contingent Natures and Virtuous Knowers: Could Epistemology be 'Gendered'?*

REBECCA KUKLA  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, ON  
Canada K1S 5B6

and

LAURA RUETSCHKE  
University of Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260-6299  
USA

### I

When Sandra Harding called for an epistemology of science whose systematic attention to the gendered status of epistemic agents renders it 'less partial and distorted' than 'traditional' epistemologies, some commentators recoiled in horror.<sup>1</sup> Propelled by 'a mad form of the genetic fallacy'<sup>2</sup> they said, she descends 'the slide to an arational account of science.'<sup>3</sup> On a less melodramatic reading, feminist epistemologies such as Harding's advocate not irrationalism, but senses of rationality more expanded than those which they associate with 'traditional' epis-

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1 S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1991), 1

2 B. Gross, 'What Could a Feminist Science Be?' *Monist* 77 (1994) 434-44, at 441

3 C. Pinnick, 'Feminist Epistemology: Implications for Philosophy of Science,' *Philosophy of Science* 61 (1994) 646-57, at 650

temology. Our goal in this paper is to try to make coherent the possibility of these less horrifying feminist epistemologies. We begin by working to isolate and articulate that strand of ‘traditional’ epistemology which Harding and other feminist epistemologists have considered too constricted. We then enlist a set of unlikely allies — in particular, Aristotle, Wilfrid Sellars and John McDowell — with the end of finding alternatives to the model of rationality that accompanies traditional epistemology. We consider how these untraditional rationalities may or may not be deployable in feminist epistemological projects. Finally, we consider the widespread worry that making room for genuinely ‘gendered’ epistemology would be tantamount to giving up objectivity as a regulative ideal governing epistemic practices, and we argue that this ideal need not and should not be sacrificed by those adhering to the model of rationality that we develop in the most detail. Our aim is not to induce mass conversion to feminist epistemology, but to indicate the substantive issues upon which the viability of a particular species of feminist epistemology depends.

## II Rarefied Rationality

The traditionalist who forms the paradigmatic target for feminist epistemologists distinguishes the contexts of discovery and justification, locates the epistemic achievements worth tracking in the latter, and devises for their capture a net taking the form of an inductive logic or confirmation theory — a codification of the extent to which evidence (wherever it comes from) supports hypotheses (wherever they come from). The targeted traditionalist moreover attributes to a net of this general weave the capacity to capture *all* exercises of rationality in the sciences. According to the ‘traditionalist,’ epistemic warrant is governed by ‘valid rules of scientific inference’ that take weighted propositions (such as hypotheses or evidence statements) as arguments. These rules are *perfectly general* in the sense that every inference conforming to them is warranted, and *perfectly comprehensive* in the sense that every warranted scientific inference conforms to those rules. Articulation of these rules constitutes the full task of ‘traditional’ epistemology (which, it may be clear by now, is epistemology rather narrowly construed).

Consider a recent expression of such traditionalism:

To my mind, the most interesting aspect [of science] is the epistemic one. I insist (in my Bayesian mode) that this aspect be explained in Bayesian terms. This implies that *all valid rules of scientific inference* must be derived from the probability axioms and the rules of conditionalization.<sup>4</sup>

We will give the name *rarefied rationality* to the type of rationality captured by the traditionalist's rules. Rarefied *warrant*, the evidential support codified by the traditionalist, is invariant under changes in social (or historical or natural) context. Offering this invariance as at least the mark if not the essence of objectivity, the traditionalist contrasts rarefied with *worldly warrant* — the support a hypothesis derives from its 'fit' with political agendas and other such pragmatic considerations. For example, the hypothesis, 'Women are not constitutionally capable of the rigors of higher education,' enjoys worldly warrant from the perspective of those favoring social structures assigning women domestic roles. Wishing to proceed with the business of social life as though the hypothesis were true, those with such a perspective are motivated to treat it as such. Depending for its purchase on the makeup of the social terrain, worldly warrant is not invariant under changes in social context, and fails the traditionalist's test for objectivity.

Harding breaks with traditionalism when she asserts that 'moral and political loyalties ... have counted as *part of the evidence* for the best as well as the worst hypotheses in the natural sciences.... Nature causes scientific hypotheses to gain *good empirical confirmation*, but *so too* does the 'fit' of problematics, concepts, and interpretations with prevailing cultural interests and values' (*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, 100, 101). Unsympathetic traditionalists<sup>5</sup> complain that she's confused rarefied and worldly warrant, and abdicated the noble normative task of epistemology for the lowly anthropological one of *describing* social practices of assertion and denial. Such traditionalists will remind us that it is the task of epistemology to articulate canons of pure warrant in spite of the subjective vagaries of acceptance and confidence.

To allow the dispute to be more complex than this, we need only take Harding's words literally. Saying that a theory's worldly 'fit' can be *part of the evidence* providing it with *good empirical confirmation* implies that social freight has, not just explanatory bearing on the decisions of certain socially situated agents to accept the hypothesis, but *epistemic* bearing on the hypothesis itself. This is to say that there are reasons that lack the invariance feature the traditionalist celebrates — reasons outside the

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4 J. Earman, *Bayes or Bust: A Critical Examination of Bayesian Confirmation Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1992), 204. This Bayesian subspecies of traditionalism is well-represented in prominent journals — although not all traditionalists are Bayesians, and much of mainstream epistemology falls outside of the genus of 'traditional' epistemology as we have defined the term.

5 E.g., S. Haack, 'Science as Social — Yes and No,' in *Feminism, Science, and Philosophy of Science*, L.H. Nelson and J. Nelson, eds. (Dordrecht: Kluwer 1996).

contours of rarefied rationality. If there are such reasons, then “traditional” epistemology of science is at best partial, in the sense of incomplete. It is also distorted to the extent that it appends to its analysis of rarefied warrant the claim that such warrant is comprehensive. Thus to brand Harding confused for allowing social contingencies to enter the constitution of evidential relations is to beg the question against her fundamental epistemological thesis. Lest we rush Harding to judgment, we must ask directly: is there (or could there be) warrant that falls outside of the contours of rarefied rationality?

### III Contextually Limited Warrant and Aristotelian Virtue

Some mainstream epistemological positions posit such warrant by citing contextual features that are independent of the epistemic activities of the justifying agent, yet have an impact upon the strength of justifications. For example an ‘externalist’ might argue that some facts inaccessible to the epistemic agent (and hence not part of the evidence to which she can apply the rules of rarefied rationality) can affect whether the agent’s inferences are warranted. Such a stance attributes the variance of warrant to the world external to the seeker of warranted belief, and not — or at least not directly — to the identity of the reason-giver. Insofar as *feminist* epistemology faults traditional epistemology for its insufficient concern with enfranchising certain types of *inquirers*, this type of externalism is not likely to directly underwrite a feminist critique of traditional epistemology. The case of externalism should remind us, however, that one need not be a wayward radical critic in order to believe that rarefied, invariant warrant is at most a proper subset of epistemically sound warrant.

For an alternative model of rationality that we believe to be more amenable to feminist aims, we turn to a semi-ancient source — Aristotelian moral theory, viewed through the lens of John McDowell’s ‘Virtue and Reason.’<sup>6</sup> For Aristotle, man is by nature rational. But he is not by original nature virtuous. In his words, ‘the virtues are engendered in us neither by nor yet in violation of nature; nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit.’<sup>7</sup> The

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6 J. McDowell, ‘Virtue and Reason,’ *Monist* 62 (1976) 331-50

7 Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, H. Rackham, trans. (London: Heinemann 1956), II.1

virtuous man has, through careful training, developed a *second nature* ability to respond in the morally appropriate way to his circumstances. As McDowell would read Aristotle, the virtue acquired by cultivating the appropriate second natures is not a place-holder for a set of dispositions to deploy some moral calculus. Virtue is not encoded in general rules, but embodied in capacities born of contingent histories: inculcated second natures.

Aristotle's virtuous man can act appropriately without following universally transparent principles of right conduct. Does he therefore act without reason? Only if exercises of reason *must* take the form of following rules transparent to all. McDowell attributes to Aristotle an alternative model of rational action. For his Aristotle, the contingently ennatured sensitivity to moral demands which is virtue consists not in following rules but rather in exercising something like 'a perceptual capacity,' a capacity, as it were, to see reason: 'The view of a situation which [the virtuous man] arrives at by exercising his sensitivity is one in which some aspect of his situation is seen as constituting a reason for acting in some way' (McDowell, 335). The exercise of moral reason available to Aristotle's virtuous man is not available to those who, lacking the benefit of a proper upbringing, haven't developed the appropriate sensitivities to patterns of moral salience, as he has. And so virtuous activity could be 'a manifestation of reason ... recognizable as such only from within the practice' bounding it (ibid., 345). Virtue thus understood is a situation-dependent sensitivity to reason that looks as though it may fail the traditionalist's tests for rarefied rationality. We'll call sensitivities to reason thus modeled on Aristotelian virtue *second nature rationalities*.

#### IV Untraditional Epistemology

Are there rationalities operating in the sciences analogous to the practical rationality that Aristotle's virtuous man, exercising his contingently ennatured perceptual capacity to see aright, deploys? If so, such rationalities would be unavailable, indeed unrecognizable, to inquirers whose situation in their culture and/or personal history fails to allow them to develop appropriate second natures. These second nature rationalities challenge traditional epistemology only if they meet several conditions.

Firstly, situations and histories have to matter to the availability of second nature warrant *in the right way*; that is, the historical and/or situational events that enable an agent's ability to perceive a reason must be relevant to the reason's epistemic status, rather than just to its accessibility. While it is by no means easy to precisely pin down this notion of relevance, there do seem to be some clear-cut cases of the right and

wrong sort of mattering. We know that the fact that one person is better at seeing reasons than another because the latter had a weight dropped on her head is not interesting or a challenge to the traditionalist. On the other hand, it also seems clear that if someone's past exercises of rationality themselves could help determine whether a reason now has warrant for that agent, then these exercises *are* a relevant part of the epistemic history of this agent. If we are to avoid succumbing to the 'mad form of the genetic fallacy' of which Harding stands accused — namely confusing the empirical conditions that affect our ability to be rational with the conditions that determine what counts as rational — then we cannot say that all contingent histories with epistemic consequences provide challenges to the traditionalist. The history of a second nature capacity provides such a challenge only when the epistemic status of a reason that an agent perceives not only *depends upon* this agent's past, but when this status bears *rational, epistemic* relations of dependence to events in this past, so that these relations of dependence are integral to the reason's ability to provide warrant. It is clear that the dropped weight fails this criterion; it is an open question what, if anything, passes it. But the best hope for finding such relevant relations of dependence would seem to lie in examining the *epistemic* history of the agent, rather than in other events in her history (such as being hit by a weight) that may have epistemic effects even though they are not themselves epistemic events.

Second, it cannot be that second nature capacities are epistemic capacities *merely* in virtue of enabling us to deploy the rules of rarefied rationality. The traditionalist claimed not that these rules were universally *accessible*, but that they were universally *applicable*; it would not challenge the traditionalist if (as many introductory logic instructors might suspect) contingently inculcated capacities were what enabled most of us to access universally applicable rules of rarefied rationality. Second nature capacities must pose a threat to the invariance that the traditionalist requires rational warrant to exhibit. The traditionalist does not care how people got into a position enabling them to be rational, so long as this rationality takes the form of obedience to context-invariant rules of warrant. It is only if the *evidential* status of reasons essentially depends upon the contingent history of the capacity to perceive these reasons that second nature rationalities will be genuinely variant across context in the relevant sense. Thus contingently inculcated second nature rationalities only challenge traditional epistemology so long as the contingent history of the second nature capacity genuinely affects how or whether a reason *gives warrant* to its exerciser, and not merely whether the person is in a position to notice this warrant.

Finally, and likewise in virtue of the distinction between universally accessible and universally applicable rules, second nature rationalities must issue some entitlements that no exercise of rarefied rationality can

duplicate. It is not enough that exercises of second nature rationalities yield doxastic commitments to sets of propositions. The traditionalist claims that rationality lies in maintaining the proper relationship *between* evidence and belief. Any set of weighted propositions can be grist for the mill of confirmation logic. Hence any set of propositions warranted via second nature rationality could in turn be considered by someone else using only rarefied rationality. The traditionalist would claim that rationality lies in properly applying the rules of confirmation logic to such sets of propositions; she would not care why those propositions had come under consideration in the first place. She would claim that *given* a set of weighted propositions, the rational conclusions concerning the warrant of these propositions that would be available to someone with any second nature capacities we like would also eventually be available to anyone who (a) is in no way externally blocked from having access to all the evidence the world provides, and (b) optimally applies the rules of confirmation logic, and (c) does nothing else. Thus, to provide a challenge to the traditionalist, second nature rationalities must either be able to yield rational commitment to something that cannot be translated into a proposition that could be fodder for the logic of rarefied rationality, or they must give access to evidence that cannot show up or does not count as evidence to those without the relevant capacity. Only thus will those with the second nature capacity in question be able to come to warranted conclusions that are unavailable to those with optimal rarefied rationality and no other type of rationality. And only then will the traditionalist's tenet, namely that rarefied rationality is comprehensive, fail.

Second nature rationalities that met all three of these conditions could not be assimilated to an inductive logic or confirmation theory, or to any other model which takes rationality to consist in adherence to a comprehensive template whose validity is independent of the context of its deployment. If sense can be made of some such second nature rationalities, and if some cognitive achievements in science are exercises of these second nature rationalities, then "traditional" epistemology of science is incomplete, and there is room for untraditional epistemology to operate.

Possibilities for specifically feminist epistemologies arise if gender is one of the dimensions interestingly relevant to the constitution of second nature rationalities. Importantly, such possibilities do *not* require that there be any cases in which gender is relevant to the constitution of second nature rationality *in the same way* for all or most of the individuals with that gender. There is enough rich variety among the contingent histories of various women (for example), and enough differences between our rational capacities, that it is in fact radically unlikely that we could ever find an experience, event or situation common to the histories of *all* women that affected *all* our second nature capacities the same way

(especially if we add on the qualifier that this common effect must *distinguish* us from all non-women). But the feminist epistemologist has no need for such a contentious and problematic claim. All she needs is to make plausible the idea that *there exist some individuals* for whom being gendered in the way they were had *some relevant* effect upon their contingent history which in turn altered their second nature epistemic capacities. There are probably no two people whose epistemic history is inflected by their gender in exactly the same way. But to whatever extent an individual's gender can, in her particular case, have an influence over which stimuli she is exposed to, how and when she is encouraged to use reason, what inferences she is called upon to make, and so forth, we have at least *prima facie* reason to think that her gender may relevantly affect her contingently inculcated second nature rational capacities, as long as we believe in such things at all.

## V Alternative Epistemologies, Epistemic Virtues, and Gendered Knowers

We have claimed that second natures challenge the traditional picture, and that gender can be relevant to this challenge, *only if* several conditions are met. We have not claimed that these conditions are in fact satisfied. Next we characterize a variety of ways that rarefied rationality, second nature rationality and gender might be related. Throughout, we will assume that there *is* such a thing as rarefied rationality — an assumption that some feminist epistemologists would certainly contest. In aid of this task, we will employ a loosely Aristotelian vocabulary. Recall that Aristotle distinguishes virtue from mere continence. We will pretend that the distinction is this: the *merely* continent man does proper things, but his reasons arise from a detached moral calculus, and not from a habituated perceptual capacity. His is a good behavior consisting in obedience to rules, but it is not the virtuous exercise of second nature rationality. *Epistemic continence*, then, consists in adherence to universally applicable rules of valid scientific inference. This is the exercise of rarefied rationality that “traditional” epistemology of science is concerned to explicate. *Epistemic incontinence* is violation of the rules of valid scientific inference.

1. *First Position: All rationality is rarefied rationality.  
The biased scientist is incontinent.*

This version of traditionalism captures the line of thought depicting the gender-biased scientist as too interested in securing the invidious conse-

quences of his theory to even conceive of its empirical weaknesses. Like the weak-willed man, the male scientist has vision too clouded by desire to see reason (in particular, empirical reasons for rejecting his theory).<sup>8</sup>

Epistemic incontinence is a good device for explaining the persistence of gender bias in those sciences that carry with them implications for human social structures. Insofar as this position suggests not that conventional science needs new epistemic standards, but that scientists should be stronger-willed in their pursuit of conventional standards, it is not a radical position.

*2. Second Position: All rationality is rarefied rationality, but it is exercised against a backdrop of second nature competencies, and the diversity of this backdrop enhances the capacity of rarefied rationality to weed out flawed hypotheses and/or formulate promising hypotheses.*

Doing science as a feminist (or any other contingently determined person), I am more likely to (say) formulate hypotheses and devise experimental protocols that reveal the empirical shortcomings of theories that are also gender-biased. My second nature, contingently inflected by my interests and values, plays a positive role in the juggernaut of conjecture and refutation — and so does yours. Such a position, which differs mostly in emphasis from the first position, concedes to the traditionalist that rationality consists in obeying universal rules. The position nevertheless resurrects the epistemic significance *in the context of justification* of factors usually buried in the context of discovery, and corrects for the exclusivity of the traditional focus on rarefied warrant by suggesting that contingent histories can constructively interact with rational engines. Admitting that second nature capacities serve as guides and enablers for rational practices, this second position still distinguishes between the exercise of these capacities and the exercise of rationality. It shares with the first position the traditionalist's principle that all rationality consists in maintaining relationships between evidence and belief dictated by the universally applicable rules of rarefied rationality.

The politics of exclusion and inclusion that inflect all domains of social life, including the domain of discursive and epistemic practices, can provide a wealth of examples compelling to a proponent of the second position. Entrenched social practices may engender women who, on average, are more or less comfortable speaking in various fora (such as

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8 Haack might be an example of a traditionalist of this stripe.

academic colloquia) than are men on average, or who are more or less tempted to engage in certain types of rational inquiry (such as the so-called 'hard sciences'). Equally entrenched practices may engender certain inquirers who have decided in advance that women (or homosexuals, or colleagues educated in other countries, or ...) are themselves less rational or systematically biased and hence not to be taken seriously when they speak in an academic or scientific context. These responses of comfort, discomfort, intellectual preference and epistemic trust and distrust may well themselves be built into the contingently inculcated second natures of speakers and inquirers, becoming lived patterns that determine what evidence gets noticed and acknowledged, which rational points are made, and which inferences are drawn. As such, the existence of these politically inflected second natures and their impact on what goes on within both the context of discovery and the context of justification does not challenge traditionalism; the adherent to the second position can assert both that rationality consists only in correctly applying the universally applicable rules of warrant, and also that our socially inculcated second natures may affect when and on what evidence this rational confirmation calculus will be exercised. Even if an inquirer is continent, his continent exercises of rarefied rationality may be limited or expanded by his second nature, or by the second natures of others who might be included in his epistemic community that trades evidence and arguments. If so, then *political* attention to how second natures get inculcated may have *epistemic* importance, and this might be so without any threat to the hegemony of rarefied rationality.<sup>9</sup>

Thus neither of our first two positions constitutes a substantive challenge to traditional epistemology. If (as we're willing to grant) there is such a thing as rarefied rationality, then such a challenge can come either from claiming that there are epistemically valid relationships between belief and evidence not capturable by universal rules, or from denying that rationality concerns *only* the maintenance of such relationships. We will pursue the second species of claim here, by beginning with McDowell's likening of Aristotelian virtues to perceptual capacities — capacities to see reasons. The first two positions we considered drew a sharp distinction between the 'backdrop' of competencies that bring evidence to our attention, and the capacity to respond rationally to our encounters with the world. But this distinction may not be sustainable. McDowell's picture of second nature capacities suggests that these capacities function at the level of the ability to take in evidence itself. If the perception

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9 Many thanks to Mark Lance, whose comments on an earlier version of this paper directly inspired the writing of this paragraph.

of evidence is itself a *rational skill*, then epistemic work will be done at the level of evidence *discovery*, *before* the traditionalist's confirmation rules apply. Evidence recognition, so conceived, would thwart the traditional picture because it would be a kind of rationality not assimilable to following the rules of belief adjustment in the face of evidence.

At this point we will recruit Wilfrid Sellars' account of recognitional capacities in order to provide an example of a developed picture that has the potential to furnish such a challenge to traditionalism. Later, we will argue that Sellars' account provides a theoretical apparatus that can be used to carve out potential room for genuinely gendered epistemology, although Sellars himself certainly never hinted that his picture could be put to such a use. Sellars has argued that no radical schism exists between our recognitional and our rational capacities. Briefly, his contention is that our ability to *see that* some perceptual fact of the form 'x is F' holds requires, among other things, that we have a grasp of the *standard conditions* for the appropriate application of the concept F — that is, those conditions under which things that *are F appear to be F*. Sellars argues that one cannot *see that* x is green unless one understands such facts as that green things look green under natural lighting, that they don't look green when seen on a black and white television, and so forth.<sup>10</sup> Grasping the standard conditions for the recognition of a property involves understanding under what conditions various inferences are or are not licensed by appearances, and likewise, which conditions count as appropriate or inappropriate contexts in which to draw various conclusions about the instantiation of the property in light of various perceptual data. Hence, Sellars claims, the ability to *recognize* that x is F at all is equiprimordial with the ability to make *good inferences* concerning x's F-ness, and likewise with the ability to understand the *normative conditions* governing the epistemic success or failure of our judgments that x is F. Without this inferential ability and normative understanding, we cannot distinguish between *seeing that* x is F and its merely *looking as though* x is F, and without this distinction we cannot drive the crucial wedge between perception and reality which is a prerequisite for our perceptual judgments making contentful claims about an independent world (*ibid.*, §16).

Several features of Sellars' account are relevant for our purposes. First of all, for Sellars, the ability to recognize a piece of evidence cannot be neatly separated from the ability to engage in specific justificatory practices involving that evidence; or in other words, we cannot draw a clean

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10 W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1997), 18

line between the context of discovery and the context of justification in actual epistemic practice. Confuting this distinction makes it implausible to maintain that the interest of the epistemologist lies properly only in the context of justification. *Seeing that x is F* involves knowing that x is F, and this in turn depends on our recognitional episode being placed within 'the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says' (ibid., §36). Our ability to recognize perceptual facts is a rational capacity to recognize reasons, because the recognition of facts comes part and parcel with inferential commitments — both those enabling the recognition and those that are concomitant with the recognition. Thus the exercise of these recognitional capacities is internal rather than external to rationality.

Second, these recognitional capacities, for Sellars, are inculcated *perceptual* capacities, and the way we learn how to recognize a perceptual fact of the form 'x is F' is through our *contingent history*, 'involv[ing] a long history of acquiring piecemeal habits of response to various objects in various circumstances' (ibid., §19). Thus they count as second nature rationalities in our sense. Furthermore, since this contingent history is a history of concept acquisition — we learn how to recognize that x is F in mastering the concept 'F' — it counts as part of our *epistemic* history. Thus our second nature capacity to recognize instances of F seems to meet our first criterion, above, for providing a potential challenge to the traditionalist. The epistemic status of x's F-ness for the perceiver depends on that perceiver's contingent past, because her ability to recognize that x is F depends on that past, in particular upon her history of concept-acquisition. And it seems to depend on that past in the right way, in the sense that warrant provided to the perceiver by the fact that x is F bears rational, epistemic relations of dependence to events in this past. For consider: My piecemeal history of having experiences, developing habits of response, and developing inferential links between concepts will help determine which inferences I am warranted in drawing from my observation that x is F. Likewise, the contingencies surrounding the past conditions under which I observed x's that were F shapes my understanding of the standard conditions appropriate to the concept 'F.' There will be a contingent interplay between the conditions under which I made observations in the past and the content of my concepts, due to the integral relationship between conceptual content and standard conditions. Thus my contingent history not only conditions my current recognitional and justificatory abilities, it is a source of *epistemically* relevant material for making a fact perceptually available as evidence for me. I can recognize and make inferences from the fact that x is green *now*, only because I have mastered the standard conditions for applying the concept green, and this mastery involves my making epistemic use of information, skills and inference patterns acquired during my past.

A third and closely related point is that Sellars' account implies that *warrant* is not merely a function of the current facts and the rules of rarefied rationality, but also of our contingent history and resulting second nature capacities. Not only do contingent histories yield rational recognitional and conceptual capacities, on Sellars' account, but the epistemic dimensions of these histories are integral to determining *which* concepts and recognitional capacities these are, and concordantly, *which* inferences from the facts are warranted for us and how. Therefore it will be contingent histories and second natures, and not just the rules of rarefied rationality, that will help constitute which beliefs are warranted for various agents in the face of the same worldly events and situations. Exercises of our second nature rational capacities involve the taking in of evidence, rather than just the adjustment of beliefs in response to evidence, and hence these rational activities exceed the scope of rarefied rationality, because no logic of confirmation that takes evidence as arguments could determine or describe how they should proceed. The rules of rarefied rationality concern the treatment of evidence, whereas these rational capacities determine what can count as evidence for us, and what evidence it counts as in the first place. Hence Sellarsian recognitional capacities meet not only our first but also our second and third conditions, outlined above, for providing a genuine challenge to the traditional picture. If we cannot even recognize evidence without such second nature rational capacities then their results cannot be duplicated by rarefied rationality, which is an evidence-processor and not an evidence-collector.

Now if our ability to perceive facts is a second nature rational capacity, then there is no *prima facie* reason to think that we share it in all of its specific details. An agent's contingent history of observational situations and learned responses will inflect her understanding of standard conditions, and in turn the content of her concepts. Different people with different epistemic histories may thus have different perceptual capacities, in which case the reasons these capacities make available would fail the traditionalist's invariance test.<sup>11</sup> Remember that within a Sellarsian

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11 Sellars himself does not offer an explicit opinion on this issue in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. However, one might find reason in that text to think that he would be suspicious of the possibility that the second nature capacity to perceive could vary from person to person. He claims, 'there is an important sense in which one has *no* concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all — and indeed ... a great deal more besides' (ibid., §19). This appears to imply that our habits of response do not get to count as recognitional capacities at all until we have developed all of the conceptual apparatus concerning the observable, spatio-temporal world that anyone who counts as

picture, which recognitional capacities we have does not just determine how things *look* to us, but rather which objective features of the world we are in a position to recognize. Likewise, if people's second nature rational recognitional capacities vary, then it is not merely the case that things *look* different to different people, but rather that different people are in positions that warrant them to recognize different objective features of the world. There is also no *prima facie* reason to think that gender might not be, in some domains, an important determiner of which second nature perceptual capacities we have.<sup>12</sup> After all, if different observational conditions tend to be 'normal' for different genders, then different genders may well develop concepts contoured by slightly different standard conditions. Likewise, if different genders are generally called upon to practice making different types of inferences, then their different inferential habits will change the shape of the concepts that get their life within correspondingly different spaces of reasons.<sup>13</sup>

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an epistemic agent responsive to the spatio-temporal world must have. On the other hand, in *Science and Metaphysics* (134), his account seems to push in the opposite direction, as he speaks there of more and less adequate conceptual frameworks. Where Sellars leaves wiggle room in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* is in how much is covered by the 'great deal more' that we need to have in order to have any concepts at all, and whether the concepts that can vary from person to person, falling outside of this 'great deal more,' can be among those whose grasp is integral to our capacity to recognize perceivable properties. For our purposes, it is sufficient to point out that there is no immediately obvious reason why we would each need an identical, complete repertoire of concepts and recognitional skills in order to count as concept-users and recognizers.

- 12 Many thanks to Maggie Airncliffe for suggesting this line of argument.
- 13 Cut-and-dried examples of such differences are of course hard to find, as any examples will be subject to competing interpretations and would require enormous amounts of detailed empirical study before they could be definitively compelling. But for a *prima facie* suggestive example from actual scientific practice, compare Donna Haraway's descriptions of the field experiences of a woman primatologist and of one of her male counterparts:
- Devore [one of Sherwood Washburn's male students] literally saw a male-centered baboon troupe structure, containing a core of allied dominant males immensely attractive to females and children.
- Jay [one of "Washburn's daughters"] explicitly saw the infant as a key centre of attention in langur troop structure ... she literally, physically saw what almost could not figure in her major conclusions because another story ordered what counted as 'ultimate explanation.' (D.J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* [New York: Routledge 1991], 95, 96)

Devore's observations are observations to which the concept 'dominant male' applies and which support the hypothesis that male dominance hierarchies are the key to primate social organization. Jay's observations neither conform to nor

Our detour through Sellars seems to have opened the way for a genus of more radical critiques of traditional epistemology than those raised by the first and second positions. For instance consider our

*Third Position: The Feminist Standpoint is a Second Nature Rational Capacity whose deliverances are inaccessible to those who don't occupy the social position conditioning that standpoint.*

This maximally radical position maintains that there are second natures enabling those possessing them to warrant beliefs, where at least some of these beliefs can in no way be rationally warranted for those lacking these second natures. Such a radical commitment can plausibly be taken to underwrite the position that Harding names 'feminist standpoint epistemology,' whose characteristic claim is 'that men's dominating position in social life results in partial and perverse understandings, whereas women's subjugated position provides the possibility of more complete and less perverse understanding.'<sup>14</sup> In our terms, the feminist

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confirm this 'baboon model': '[H]er langurs failed to act like good baboons, but still had very stable groups' (ibid., 95). While Devore and Jay were observing different troops of primates, analyses given by Haraway and other feminist primatologists suggest that the difference between the scientists' observational categories is inflected by their gender and not just by the objective differences between the primates. In that era (the late 50s and early 60s), the standard methodology for fieldwork was the methodology of 'opportunistic sampling,' of watching the transactions as they present themselves, without regard to whether the set of transactions observed is representative of the full scope of primate activities. See S. Hrdy, 'Empathy, Polyandry and the Myth of the Coy Female,' in *Feminine Approaches to Science*, R. Bleier, ed. (New York: Pergamon 1986). Paying different sorts of attention, different opportunistic samples will mark different aspects of primate life. Under 'standard conditions,' swashbuckling primatologists might notice copulations and altercations, gather those observations under the concept of male dominance, and use those observations to warrant hypotheses about male dominance hierarchies; under 'standard conditions,' politicized woman primatologists might notice female mating strategies, which observations warrant hypotheses about primate social life according significant agency to troop members who are not dominant males, thereby denaturing (rather than instantiating) the male dominance concept. Standard conditions, one might argue, differ for the two groups because patterns of engagement and attention that affect what one 'spontaneously' observes — and notice that the background that conditions opportunistic sampling includes received explanatory strategies — differ for them. Observing the same apes, the suggestion runs, different observers see different things, take different concepts to apply, and are warranted in drawing different conclusions.

14 S. Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1986), 26

standpoint theorist must hold that women's (or feminists', or some women's) second natures do epistemic work to which traditional epistemology of science is oblivious — epistemic work that rarefied rationality can't duplicate. Consequently this third position endorses the *inaccessibility thesis* that exercises of second nature rationality can warrant beliefs unwarrantable by any exercises of rarefied rationality.

Notice that positing second nature rationalities, even those that vary as a function of gendered history, does not on its own commit one to the inaccessibility thesis, for one could believe their deliverances to be accessible, perhaps inelegantly and at far greater cost, to exercises of rarefied rationality. Just because I cannot directly perceive a fact using my second nature capacities doesn't mean that I cannot be warranted in believing that fact using other rational means,<sup>15</sup> including perhaps the tools of rarefied rationality. Second nature rationalities may make the justification of various claims vastly simpler, and they may make it much more probable that such justifications will be found, but this doesn't rule out the possibility that in principle we could eventually discover justifications for these claims using only rarefied rationality — perhaps by costly, inefficient, or roundabout means. Thus in order to support the inaccessibility thesis, and the third position, we would need to argue that the *kind* of claims to which second nature rationality gives entitlements are not of a sort that could be yielded up by rarefied rationality.

In fact, there is hope for such an argument. Our use of Sellars has let us portray recognition as itself an exercise of rationality, and thereby treat recognition as an epistemic activity within the space of reasons, so that our recognitional and justificatory capacities can be seen as drawing upon and constituting one another. For a Sellarsian, registering facts about the world, or taking in evidence, itself involves exercising our rational capacities. If our recognitional capacities are second nature rationalities, then they can give warrant to direct observational statements of the form 'I see that *x* is *F*,' whereas no such claims could be generated by rarefied rationality, which *operates on* evidence rather than *taking in* evidence. Rarefied rationality may allow me to derive *that x is F* through indirect inference, but I cannot use it to *derive that I see that x is F* unless I already have exercised the second nature recognitional

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15 Unlike some people, we do not have the ability to perceive that a symphony is in D minor, but we can have good reasons to believe it to be so. For instance, we might look up what key it is in, or alternatively, we might find out that the entire community of music experts (or even just one trustworthy, sincere, music-knowledgeable friend) claims to be able to perceive it to be in D minor.

capacity that allows me to see that  $x$  is  $F$ . Therefore, while the mere assertion of the existence of varying second nature rationalities does not commit one to the inaccessibility thesis, it appears that our suggestion for how to cash out the idea of second nature rationalities in Sellarsian terms does indeed lend support to this thesis.

On the other hand, notice also that commitment to the inaccessibility thesis is only necessary, not sufficient, for commitment to the Third Position. In order for the deliverances of women's second natures to be inaccessible to those outside the feminist standpoint, they must be not only inaccessible to rarefied rationality, but also inaccessible to *other* second natures, such as men's. That is, even if we could show that some deliverances of some second nature rationalities are not duplicable by rarefied rationality, *and* that women are systematically more likely to have such second nature rationalities, we would *still* not be able to attribute 'less partial and perverse' knowledge to women unless we could *also* show that these deliverances are unavailable to the second natures of others. We will call the claim that some segments of the population develop second natures warranting beliefs that are unwarrantable by the second natures of other segments of the population the *demographic inaccessibility thesis*.

Unless an adherent to the third position claims that those outside the feminist standpoint are simply rarefied rationality machines, with no second nature rationality — a position whose common sense implausibility is proportional to the plausibility of second nature rationalities to begin with — he or she must adhere to the demographic inaccessibility thesis. The thesis implies that it would never be rational for those outside the feminist standpoint to accept rational deliverances issuing from women's second natures. This result certainly appears to encourage gender-separatism among epistemic communities, as well as political quietism with respect to attempts to include diverse inquirers in rational discussions and epistemic pursuits. We consider these to be disastrously unacceptable implications of the third position. But we will suggest that luckily, a plausible and politically encouraging version of feminist standpoint theory would not require unmitigated acceptance of the demographic inaccessibility thesis.

For a wholesale denial of demographic inaccessibility, in the form of a position that still accepts the inaccessibility thesis, consider the fourth position.

4. *Fourth Position: The deliverances of second nature rationalities are inaccessible to rarefied rationality, but the deliverances of each rational agent's second nature are accessible to the second nature of every other rational agent.*

According to this position, second natures developed through our contingent epistemic histories are rational capacities whose exercises cannot be duplicated via rarefied rationality. Yet, despite our contingent differences, our second nature capacities give us rational access to the same results. Despite our differences, this story goes, all of us who are rational agents end up with equivalent capacities to perceive the same reasons and to justify the same claims, even though some of those reasons are uncodifiable by rules of rarefied rationality.<sup>16</sup>

This position renders the language of *virtue* for analyzing second natures somewhat misleading. To call our second nature rationalities 'virtues' would seem to imply that they can function better or worse than (or at least differently from) one another. This position also suggests a conclusion about the homogeneity of rationality that may be too strong even for the rank traditionalist, namely that all good reasons are universally *accessible*. But one would think that not all rational agents have the capacity to be *fully* rational. If some of our rational capacities depend on our contingent history, it is counterintuitive to think that by the time we are rational at all, we all have necessarily developed capacities that give us equivalent access to reasons (but see notes 4 and 11). Even rarefied rationality, one would think, could encompass some complex, universally applicable rules whose application is beyond the capacity of some epistemic agents, and there seems to be no good reason to withhold the same differential accessibility from second nature rationality.

Of course, for an adherent to the fourth position, there is nothing epistemologically special about women's second natures or the feminist standpoint.

It seems that a plausible and politically encouraging version of feminist standpoint theory requires a middle ground between our third and fourth positions. It requires the claim that the feminist standpoint gives those who have it epistemic access not directly duplicated by every other second nature rationality, without the consequence that this access is forever cut off from those who are differently situated.

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16 Donald Davidson appears to hold a view much like this one; it follows from his brand of interpretivism and lies at the root of his denial of the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes. See 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Science,' in D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon 1984).

One way toward this middle ground is to claim that second natures can be *educated*, through epistemic practices, experiences, and so on. Second natures are, after all, products of contingent histories, and the apparently epistemically relevant histories of inquirers are ongoing: we at no point cease responding to reasons and engaging in rational activities. This suggests that second natures are not stable, but evolving — possibly even into new and improved second natures. If this is right, then the present incapacity of some inquirers to duplicate the second nature entitlements of other inquirers is consistent with their future capacity, born of education, to access those entitlements. One might even wish to defend the stronger claim that *all* rational agents can be educated into the virtues of *any* second nature rationality. For instance, one could take the line that it is in the nature of rationality itself and its relation to the objective world that were an individual to be given the right experiences and training, and were she at each stage respond *fully rationally given her current capacities* to this experience and training, then she could *through the very exercise of her rationality* retool her second nature so as to come to be able to see any reasons that anyone can see.

Second natures strongly plastic in this optimistic sense would give us a new, temporalized and idealized kind of universal accessibility of reasons; this universal accessibility would in effect be a built-in regulative ideal of rationality itself. At any given time, different reasoners may, while using their rationally capacities maximally well, have access to different reasons, given the same worldly situation. But anything that is a reason for one reasoner can *become* a reason for another reasoner, given the right education and use of reason. No rational second nature is hopeless, and the demographic inaccessibility thesis fails, for there is no segment of the population irredeemably cut off from some rationally warranted results.

We have finally found potential room for gendered epistemology that does not descend into epistemic separatism. Let us express it as the fifth position.

*5. Fifth Position: The Feminist Standpoint is a Second Nature Rational Capacity whose deliverances are essential to an adequate objective picture of the world.*

The fifth position asserts that a gendered standpoint conditions a second nature yielding access to results duplicated neither by rarefied rationality nor by other second natures *as they are currently constituted*. It thus envisions warrant lacking the invariance feature the traditionalist celebrates. But, the adherent to this position argues, these results can become accessible to others through the education of their second natures. One

might well think that this education can take the form of exposure to feminist critiques, the unmasking of hidden gender biases and of the way that political investments have skewed research, and so on. According to this line, the feminist standpoint is epistemically privileged, but it need not remain permanently so, and one task of the feminist epistemologist is to reeducate other inquirers' second natures.

Assuming that the deliverances of second nature are inaccessible to rarefied rationality, this reeducation would not take the form of the simple presentation of propositions to be churned through the mill of rarefied rationality. Rather, a subtler form of education is required, one which trains people's rational perceptions by example, practice, repetition and so forth.<sup>17</sup> Developing an account of how this reeducation of second nature works would be an interesting project beyond the scope of this paper. But notice that this training would be genuinely epistemological work, in that it would not just help people exercise the rational capacities they already had, but give them new ones, thereby giving them new access to genuine warrant.

Indeed, the epistemic practices of feminists inquirers, conducted in public fora — such as practices of nonstandard methods of inquiry, applications of atypical norms for standard conditions and the employment of atypical recognitional capacities, as well as the public critique of traditional theories and protocols — may themselves have the power to alter the epistemic capacities of others. The feminist empiricist (committed to our first or second position) might argue that the only capacities that get altered by exposure to feminist practices are those that help people effectively apply rules of rarefied rationality to which they are already, in principle, committed (such as the capacity to detect gender biases in hypothesis formation, the capacity to avoid being swayed by sexist commitments into misapplying inference rules, and so forth). In this case, practiced feminist criticism will not alter justificatory possibilities. But instead it might be that exposure to feminist practices can actually educate others' rational capacities to see reasons. In that case, feminist epistemic practices may play a constitutive role in creating

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17 This suggestion seems to have resonance with the actual experience of feminists who study knowledge. Male interlocutors often challenge their feminist friends to hand them that crucial fact or argument that will prove that standard epistemology is biased; they rarely come away satisfied. But often, repeated contact with feminists' discomforts, critiques, reorientations of the issue during debate, redirection of the conversation, etc., eventually convince all sorts of people that there is something to what these feminists are on about after all. Such *reorientations of vision* — reorientations that do not seem to be the product of direct argument — seem excellent contenders for being understood in terms of changes in second nature.

warrant, altering the space of justifications available to others. If this is so, then one of the ways in which feminist epistemologists can educate the second natures of others is by practicing feminist epistemology in the presence of others.

In order to see the fifth position as plausible, it is important to guard against a few possible misinterpretations and confusions to which the position can lend itself. Firstly, notice that the position involves commitment to the thesis that different people are responsive to *different* features of the world, and that gender is a (contingent) factor in determining which features of the world we have the capacity to recognize. However, this is emphatically *not* to say that different people are responsive to *incompatible* features of the world. According to this position, second nature rationality gives us access to *objective* features of the world. Allowing that different second natures could give access to incompatible facts would certainly seem to undermine this objectivity, and to initiate a descent into relativism. But allowing this is unnecessary and contrary to the spirit of the move to second nature rationality that we have been advocating. If second nature rationalities are recognitional capacities ineliminably involving receptivity, then they can only enable those who have them to recognize features of the world that really are there to be received and recognized. Within the Sellarsian framework with which we have been working, the capacity to recognize a property invokes the capacity to make rational inferences from and to facts about the instantiation of the property, and such rational inferential ties would certainly be impeded in a world with contradictory properties. Our neo-Sellarsian story does not challenge the idea that there exists a single determinate objective world for inquirers to discover.

But holding second nature rationalities to this independent tribunal of the world in no way implies that all agents should have receptive access to the same subset of the world's objective features. The neo-Sellarsian story suggests that during actual processes of inquiry, different techniques of justification will be available and rationally applicable depending upon the contingent history and inculcated second nature of the inquirers. For notice that our principles for adjusting our beliefs in response to evidence will to some extent be specific to the types of objects that the evidence concerns, and how we have learned that various objects normally behave (i.e. under standard conditions). This suggests that our contingent history of epistemic concerns and typical conditions of observation will contribute to determining which objects and properties can show up for us, and what counts as normal and aberrant behavior for various objects. Hence if there is a single, final picture of the world that is ideally grasped via our rational capacities, still the legitimate techniques available to us for approaching this picture will be ineliminably inflected by our second natures, in ways that govern not only what we

notice and care about but what counts as noticeable at all. In fact, in *Science and Metaphysics*, Sellars explicitly commits himself to both the possibility of different conceptual frameworks within which different truth claims are formulable, and the claim that such frameworks will be more or less adequate insofar as they approach an ideal of maximal, fine-grained objectivity. He writes,

There is a sense in which it is correct to say that truth does not admit of degrees ... on the other hand, one conceptual framework can be more "adequate" than another, and this fact can be used to define a sense in which one proposition can be said to be "more true" than another.<sup>18</sup>

Sellars gives the moniker 'Peircish' to the (yet to be constituted) ideal language that expresses the conceptual framework in which users can 'form *ideally* adequate pictures of objects' (ibid., 140). The optimistic ideal for adherents to the fifth position is that each rational second nature could be educated to the point where *all* the objective features of the world that are available to *any* rational second nature are available to it — i.e. that everyone with a rational second nature is capable, under the right circumstances and given the right education, of learning Peircish. Presumably, the ideal accessible world would be one with consistent rather than incompatible features. Thus a story in which agents are responsive to incompatible features, and the 'different worlds' style of relativism towards which it would point, neither follows from nor is in the spirit of the fifth position, as bolstered by the neo-Sellarsian story we have developed.

Second, one might object to the fifth position by finding its regulative ideal, namely that second nature rationalities be educated to the point where all reasons are universally accessible, to be inherently implausible. Mark Lance has developed an objection along these lines.<sup>19</sup> Some second natures, he argues, could not possibly be educable in this way, because it is part of their character to *refuse* to consider certain types of evidence. We can easily concoct examples in which someone develops a second nature that inures him to the rational testimony of members of some group of people that have been consistently marked as marginal or irrational. For instance, surely for some men it is *second nature* to dismiss

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18 W. Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview 1992), 134

19 M. Lance, 'Rationality, Oppression, and Taking Others to Heart: Comments on Kukla, Ruetsche, Cudd, Haraldsson, and Glaister,' presented at the memorial symposium in honor of Tamara Horowitz at the Eastern Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association, New York, 2000

women's testimony as not reason-providing, as least when it comes to certain topics (giving directions, pointing out sexism within the academy, correcting gender biases in experimental protocols...). But if this is so, this objection continues, then those with such second natures — those that are constitutionally limited in what evidence they can acknowledge because their capacities *build in the exclusion* of certain evidence — could not be educated into the ideal space of universal access to the maximal set of reasons. Is it not then, the objection concludes, politically unrealistic to hope that epistemic agents can, through their rationality alone, exercised in the proper educative contexts, all learn to perceive all the reasons that give genuine warrant for anyone? Or, to put the point briefly, aren't some second natures hopeless after all? Don't they need political *rather than* rational recalibration?

Luckily, developing the objection in this much detail suggests the appropriate response. Surely, this objection points to a politically crucial issue — in fact, one that we implicitly flagged during our discussion of the second position. There, we pointed out that the politics of discourse is such that the social practices of inclusion and exclusion that embody it can determine what evidence gets noticed and acknowledged and by whom, which rational points are made, and which inferences are drawn. However, the fifth position does not assert that all *second natures* are optimally plastic in the way we described, but rather that all *second nature rationalities* are. Our second natures include all sorts of capacities and dispositions that are not epistemic at all; it is second nature for many of us to type without needing to look at the keyboard, to tie our shoelaces, to drive without hitting other cars, and so forth. These are not practices of securing warrant and determining truth. Furthermore, not all practices that are attempting to be rational are in fact so; most of us are suspicious of those who claim that their ability to read someone's aura through a laying on of hands is second nature, though certainly *some* set of relevant dispositional responses may well have become second nature for that person. The point is this: it seems clear that a second nature dismissal of some group of people's testimony as potential evidence, simply based on the origin of that testimony (i.e. that it came from a woman) is *not* a second nature *rational capacity*. And to the extent that someone's second nature recognitional capacities are marred and distorted by such an entrenched blind spot, these capacities are *irrational*. The very fact that these blind spots need a kind of political correction that will not take the form of straightforward exercises of the agent's rationality — which was the objection's whole punch-line — is an indication that we are not dealing with a second nature rationality at all here. But the fifth position maintains, as a regulative ideal, that second nature *rationalities* can be educated towards induction into an ideal space

of universally accessible reasons, not that all second natures, whether rational or not, could be.

The second position was not a challenge to traditionalism, specifically because the second nature factors in knowledge that it considered were arational *compromises* of people's rational functioning. But the fifth position concerns itself only with second nature capacities that are likely limited, but are genuinely rational within their sphere of receptivity and ability. The hope of the fifth position is that all agents with rich enough rational capacities to recognize any genuinely objective features of the world have the *potential* to be educated *through the use of their rationality*, helped by guided exposure to experiences and training at various practices, into becoming an agent with maximally rich rational capacities. It remains of course the case that people's various forms of *irrationality* — including entrenched blindness to reason and incontinence — may well prevent them from reaching this goal and from being educated in this way. If it is true that the proper use of rationality can lead us to have ideally rational second natures, this in no way proves that those whose first and second natures *prevent* them from being rational can also become ideally rational given the same training. Hence second natures that, for political or other reasons, have become inherently irrational or arational — such as those incapable of recognizing reasons when they are offered by a specific sort of person — are a serious political concern, but not a challenge to the fifth position.

This leads neatly to the third and final misinterpretation of the fifth position against which we must guard. The fifth position, which builds in a regulative ideal of maximal rationality and universal access to reasons, might be confused with a pseudo-Hegelian necessitarian position that portrays the community of rational agents as marching inexorably towards this rosy epistemic utopia. But we can see from the above discussion that this march could only be far from inexorable. Even if agents were entirely continent at all times and had entirely rational second natures, there would be no *prima facie* reason to assume that they would necessarily receive the type of education and training that would shape their second natures into better and better approximations of ideal rational capacities; this is, after all, part of the point of talking about second natures as shaped by *contingent* histories. But in fact, we are imperfect reasoners, *not* just because our second natures haven't been fully educated, but because we are in various ways downright *irrational*, and there is no reason to think that rational education could or would take care of this problem. Thus while the fifth position builds in a regulative ideal of maximal shared rationality, achieving this ideal, *if it is possible at all*, is a project that may or may not succeed, and may require all sorts of work, only some of which would directly involve the exercise of people's rational capacities.

## VI The Puzzle of Strong Objectivity

Harding involves standpoint theory in her project of strong objectivity. Strong objectivity 'require[s] a critical evaluation of which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims' and aims to produce 'a scientific account of the relationships between historically located belief and maximally objective belief' (*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, 142). Put another way, the project of strong objectivity is to identify those standpoints that 'produce empirically more accurate descriptions and theoretically richer explanations' (119), by paying careful attention to the deliverances of diverse standpoints, including those traditionally excluded from the practice of science. (Harding identifies these standpoints as feminist standpoints, but this seems to be jumping the gun: such a declaration is one of many possible mature pronouncements of the presumably embryonic project of strong objectivity.)

One might call the following problem 'the puzzle of strong objectivity': How and from what standpoint are we to attend to the deliverances of various standpoints in order to assess their objective adequacy, if, as standpoint theory asserts, their entitlements defy duplication by rarefied rationality and by one another? Suppose that a typical finding of strong objectivity is:

*Standpoint A gives rise to more accurate descriptions and theoretically richer explanations than does Standpoint B.*

What endorses this finding? It can't be the second nature rationality of those with Standpoint B, for they favor the B descriptions and explanations, and it shouldn't be the second nature rationality of those with Standpoint A, for that threatens to collapse strong objectivity into relativism. Perhaps the scientific capacities of standpoints A and B are adjudicated by a third standpoint — but which one? It seems we would need to have already completed the project of strong objectivity in order to have good reasons to privilege a third standpoint in virtue of its ability to adjudicate between the other two. Perhaps they are adjudicated by a committee of other standpoints — but wouldn't such adjudication amount to mob rule? We don't want to find a place for gendered epistemology at the cost of the ability to adjudicate between more or less adequate sets of results, where adequacy is held to the tribunal of an objective world. As Harding puts it, 'there have to be standards for distinguishing how I want the world to be and how, in empirical fact, it is' (*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, 160).

A naïve case can be constructed that the best hope for strong objectivity rests on the unradical possibility that second natures are redundant, in the sense that rarefied rationality can duplicate their entitlements (that

is, a position no more radical than our first or second positions above).<sup>20</sup> Then Harding can understand the traditionalist, carefully obedient to valid rules of scientific inference, on the model of Aristotle's merely continent man. Plodding and rule-bound, traditional justifiers are nevertheless able to evaluate the deliverances of second nature rationalities. Mere continence makes possible the 'critical evaluation of which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims' constitutive of the project of strong objectivity. Putting second natures to more radical work, as Harding wishes to do, by limiting the ability of the merely continent traditionalist to appreciate the entitlements of diverse standpoints, would frustrate this project. Or so this naïve argument runs.

But notice that the generation of a tension between standpoint epistemology and strong objectivity relies on the assumption that the inaccessibility of the deliverances of the feminist standpoint is inaccessibility *tout court* for those who do not share this standpoint. If second nature is plastic, then it does not seem that accepting the inaccessibility thesis need leave us without any objective tribunal for adjudicating between more or less adequate standpoints.

Suppose that second natures admit education into new epistemic virtues through rationally managed encounters with other reason-givers in the world. We can then replace the tribunal of rarefied rationality with the tribunal of intersubjective agreement, where this is to be understood as what *ideally* educated subjects would agree to (whether or not such ideally educated subjects can or will ever exist). This type of intersubjective agreement would be a product of objectively responsive rationality, and not arational coercion or 'mob rule.' We already saw, in the previous section, how standpoint theory, which admits the existence of agents with second natures that give them access to different reasons, need in no way implicate relativism. On the contrary, we will not call a second nature capacity a *recognitional* capacity unless it is genuinely receptive to the objective features of the world. Through rational education, we could then come not merely to possess a new second nature, but to be justified in taking this new nature to be an improved one, in virtue of its heightened rational responsiveness to the objective world. The project of strong objectivity would thus become the project of critically evaluating which second natures, and which contingent histories, situations,

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20 Our fourth position, which does challenge traditional epistemology, is not clearly more or less 'radical' than our first and second positions, which do not. We need not try to perform this commensuration, for if the fourth position is right, then no adjudication among distinct standpoints would ever be necessary, even though traditional epistemology would be incomplete.

and educational practices constituting these second natures, have the richest and most epistemically productive rational, responsive capacities. Adjudication between competing standpoints can be done from the perspective of a standpoint that has at least all the theoretical and responsiveness richness and accuracy of each competing standpoint. The ultimate adjudicator would be one with the standpoint of the ideally educated subject, as understood above. At any given time, there may be no one who possesses such a standpoint, and we may have little sense of what things would look like from such a standpoint, but such an inclusive standpoint can still stand as an adjudicating tribunal in theory if not in practice, since we know what the standards for its existence would be.

Why, then, is the puzzle of strong objectivity so tempting? Why do we tend to think that undermining the universality and invariance of rationality is tantamount to undermining the possibility of objective adjudication between the merits of different kinds of rationality? We suggest that the temptation to associate epistemic separatism and relativism with contextually variant warrant derives from the two sources: an inheritance of that part of the traditional picture which presumes rationality to be *static*, plus an inappropriate assumption that contingently variant ways of knowing must be insulated from one another's influence. Second nature rationalities inculcated through contingent histories are emphatically neither static nor insular. It is their plasticity that, on the story we just sketched, exorcises the specter of epistemic separatism. This plasticity can be invoked, furthermore, by developing educational familiarity with the epistemic practices of others with different rational capacities. This same plasticity is in turn what opens up the possibility that inhabitants of one standpoint might develop rational grounds for assessing the deliverances of their own and other standpoints, in virtue of coming to recognize new sorts of reasons.

Ian Hacking's 'styles of reasoning'<sup>21</sup> are ways of going about inquiry; they are 'how we find out' (ibid., 1). Like our second natures, Hacking's styles are developed through contingent histories (ibid., 10). According to him, some styles, once inculcated, are 'self-authenticating,' in that they tend to persist, in virtue of having achieved a kind of stabilizing coordination between their many elements that once established is difficult to undo.<sup>22</sup> It is a good thing that styles are *self-authenticating*, for Hacking takes them to admit of no *external* authentication:

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21 Such as the 'laboratory style.' See I. Hacking, "'Style' for Historians and Philosophers," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 23 (1992) 1-20.

We cannot reason as to whether alternative systems of reasoning are better or worse than ours, because the propositions to which we reason get their sense only from the method of reasoning being employed. The propositions have no existence independent of ways of reasoning toward them. (Hacking, 'Self-Vindication,' 65)

Hacking thus openly gives up on any hope for a program like Harding's 'strong objectivity,' instead embracing an insular relativism of truth to style. Hacking's styles are the way to reason, not because they are the 'best impartial ways to get at the truth ... but because they have settled what it is to be objective. (Truths of a certain sort are just what we obtain by conducting certain sorts of investigations answering to certain standards.)' (ibid.). Thus for Hacking, the deliverances of styles are demographically inaccessible to those who do not share the relevant style, and 'objective' truth is defined in terms of these styles and deliverances.

Most of us balk at such rank methodological relativism and the epistemic separatism that it seems must inevitably follow. Even if we were to resign ourselves to these results, however, our discomfort may resurface once we take a closer look at Hacking's notion of objectivity. It would seem that a minimum condition for any adequate account of *objectivity* in epistemic practice is that, whether or not people with other ways of knowing can assess these practices, the beliefs these practices warrant can be rationally and recognizably corrected by the testimony of the independent objects which these beliefs are about. For Hacking, however, objective truth is *defined* relative to epistemic practices, and thus it is hard to see how it could come into conflict with the beliefs warranted by such practices. For this reason, the practices are immune from correction by the world itself. Styles can die out due to lack of interest, a plague infecting practitioners, or for other non-epistemic reasons, but styles make no room for their own falsification in the face of their objects of inquiry. But in this case it seems a misnomer to call them epistemological styles at all; we may as well count them as styles of dancing. Hacking's styles, as he describes them, fail to be ways of *knowing* by this standard.

As long we think of standpoints along the lines of Hacking's styles — as insular and incommensurable practices immune from external correction — it will not be surprising if we also think of them as reasonably static. For after all, why would they change, except by contingent drift? Certainly there would be no *rational* compulsion to change them. Our neo-Sellarsian second natures, on the other hand, do not face this pitfall.

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22 Ibid., 13, and I. Hacking, 'The Self-Vindication of the Laboratory Sciences,' in *Science as Practice and Culture*, A. Pickering, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992)

Second nature rationalities can be discovered to be inadequate to objective reality as they evolve into other, richer and more skilled second natures; furthermore, because of the receptive dimension of our second nature capacities, it is objects themselves that show up as the tribunal vindicating the successor rationalities. Remember that not all second nature capacities are second nature rationalities. A mark of the rationality of some capacities is that they are themselves subject to correction and modification in the face of the tribunal of the world, including other people and their findings and concerns. In this way, rational capacities are distinguished from mere second nature habits and the like. It is the plastic and objective *improvability* of second nature capacities such as second nature rationalities, in contrast to Hacking's static styles, that earns them the right to be called *virtues*. Including this correctability criterion in our definition of rational virtues seems true to the spirit of Aristotle, for whom virtues were essentially educable, as well as essentially responsive to the objective world in which they were practiced.

Thus we suggest that in order to avoid the puzzle of strong objectivity, we should think of the types of rationality that vary by contingent history along the lines of virtues rather than styles, and we should insist that since virtues are essentially responsive to and educable by the objective world, objectivity cannot be defined in terms of their deliverances. While there may be no invariant, universal test for comparing the objective adequacy of the results of various second nature rationalities, there will be context-specific yet rationally authenticated procedures *within* various second nature rationalities for assessing the deliverances of others. We can have good *rational* reasons for preferring one second nature rationality to another, even when some second nature rationalities are genuinely inaccessible to one another and to rarefied rationality. And this is what we need in order to make coherent the pursuit of Harding's strong objectivity.

We have posited that second nature rationality, unlike rarefied rationality, is contextually variant. We now see that the damage thereby done to the objectivity of its deliverances depends on what sort of contextual variance we have on our hands. If second nature rationality is relative to social context in the sense that its results are bound, in their scope, by that context, then objectivity does seem to be under threat. However, the deliverances of second nature rationality may only be accessible from certain situations, histories and standpoints, and yet we may still be able to get the relevant sort of independence of truth from social context, not by expunging the role of contingent history in warranted epistemic practice, but by insisting upon the strong and optimistic plasticity of second nature. There is no reason to think that robust objectivity in our epistemic practices must come along with a set of articulate rules for authenticating those practices, nor should we think that all features of

the objective world are accessible at any given time to any robustly objective set of practices.

How does the possibility of a gendered epistemology fare in this story? It may be contingently the case that feminine or feminist commitments or positionings result, in some of us, in second natures that access some robustly objective reason-giving facts unavailable to their present counterparts. In this case, feminist critiques may be critical tools in educating the second natures of others. In particular, one thing that women's, or perhaps feminists,' second natures may be especially adept at perceiving is the very fact that different second natures yield different warranted results. It is not farfetched to suggest that this is a consequence of being positioned so as not to share in the contingent history of those with dominant positions, and thus being called upon more often to notice alternatives.<sup>23</sup> In this case the feminist epistemologist could have at least two (perhaps related) tasks: one would be to educate others so that they can develop the epistemic virtues contingently tied to a feminine or feminist standpoint, and the other would be to educate others into developing a general sensitivity to the rational virtues available from various standpoints.<sup>24</sup>

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23 Such a move, which gives a special epistemic privilege to marginalized social positions, obviously has its roots in Marx's attribution to the working class of the potential to see through false consciousness. It has been developed into an analogous move with respect to gender by several feminist theorists in varying ways. Some famous examples include Nancy Hartsock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited* (Boulder, CO: Westview 1998); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (Boston: South End 1984); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1985); and Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press 1983).

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