

**FEMINIST RECONFIGURATION OF CLASSICAL EPISTEMIC
JUSTIFICATION: TOWARDS A COMPLEMENTARY EPISTEMIC
ACCOUNT**

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Abstract

The traditional account of knowledge as contained in Justified True Believe JTB for a long time became popularized and adequate criteria of knowledge, albeit numerous criticisms abound. Notable is the popular Gettier's challenge and refutation of the traditional epistemic account. In spite of that, it is rather unfortunate that both the proponents of JTB and the champions of the fourth criterion are both culpable of inaccuracy and inadequacy of epistemic justification process. Filling this gap created by the hitherto traditional accounts of knowledge, in all its variance as dominated by androcentricism and male chauvinism, is the objective of this paper. The paper hence presents a critical analysis of the common justification of epistemic claims whereby the very idea of generic human knowledge is reconsidered, whilst scouting case for a form of feminist epistemology which conveys a more accurate and complementary account of human knowledge that embraces the idea of descriptive cognitive pluralism.

Keywords: Knowledge, Belief, Justification, Feminist epistemology,

Introduction

In recent time, epistemologists have employed diverse methods in order to embark on the processes and practices of analyzing and justifying knowledge claims. One scheme that has had a monumental contribution on the entire epistemological project in contemporary time is found in the contribution of theorists with feminist inclination and orientation, who have attempted to offer an account of knowledge of their own. The need for such an epistemological account was necessitated by the exponents' perception of the apparent requirement of an alternative account of knowledge which can overthrow certain presuppositions inherent in traditional epistemology. For a very long time, the western epistemic narratives have dominated the scene and scheme of knowledge notwithstanding its androcentric perspectives and features. The scheme of knowledge had witnessed series of opinion and counter-opinions on

epistemic justification only from a prejudiced perspective that takes only the male subject or knower into consideration with a total neglect of the female knowing subject. Should knowledge be explained only from a segment of humanity or the totality thereof? Do women indeed possess a unique way of knowing which ought to be synchronized with the hitherto popularized androcentric version of human knowledge? It is to this end that feminist epistemology deems it fit to employ the use of gender as a category of epistemic analysis and reconstruction. This will better present an epistemic account that is derived not only from male or female culture and experience but alternatively supply a balanced epistemic account that puts male and female knowledge into consideration. Also, the erstwhile generic human knowledge which has hitherto been painted from a biased male point of view can be reconfigured paying by gleaning from feminist perspectives. Doing this will thus require an analysis of traditional account of knowledge as well as justification of knowledge claims wherein their thematic perspectives are built on male narratives. A reconstructivist attempt ushered in by feminist epistemological project will be used in the reconfiguration of the epistemic edifice hitherto categorized to the domain of male gender.

Knowledge in Traditional Analysis - Justified True Belief

It is worth noting from the outset that epistemic discourse in traditional epistemology is concerned with propositional knowledge, that is, “knowing that” something is the case. Of course, various forms of ‘know’ include “know how” “know where” and “know that”. However the emphasis here is to demonstrate that the basic concern of traditional account of knowledge in epistemological parlance is “know that”, that is, as exemplified through propositional knowledge, where subject and object or knower and the known are propositionally conditioned (Crumley, 1999: 35-37). It is said to be propositional because it concerns propositions, a meaningful statement that asserts something about the universe and such assertion can either be affirmed or denied. To inquire on someone’s possession of propositional knowledge or what is it for a subject S, to know that P, for Russell (1926), emanates from scepticism and thus admits the difficulty of grappling with such query in philosophical parlance. For him, the question how knowledge should be defined is perhaps the most difficult and important. This may seem surprising: at first sight it might be thought that knowledge might be defined as belief which is in agreement with facts. Nevertheless, the attempt to define knowledge is an ancient one in philosophical discourse as found in one of Plato’s dialogues: *Theaetetus*. There, the dialogue that involves the trio of Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus on the definition of

knowledge ensued. The definition of knowledge supplied is “true belief plus *logos* account”, that is, “justified true belief” (Plato, Cornford, 1972: 201). However, the definition “Justified True Belief” (JTB) turned out to become the acceptable and popular definition of knowledge which is called traditional account of knowledge.

By way of analysis, the idea of JTB implies the necessary and sufficient condition for someone’s knowing a particular given proposition. Gettier (1963) schematize it as follows:

S knows that P *IFF*

- i. P is true
- ii. S believes that P and
- iii. S is justified in believing that P

The idea here shows that a subject claims to have knowledge if and only if the three elements above are present in such epistemic claim, that is, truth, belief and justification. In the same vein, Chisholm (1957) provides a similar representation of knowledge:

S knows that, If and only if, S accepts P

S has adequate evidence for P and P is true

In other words, the necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge claims is embedded in provision of adequate evidence for a true acceptance. Ayer (1956) similarly states that for anything to count as knowledge, the subject must have right to be sure or certain that such a proposition is true. By a way of schematization:

S knows that, If and only if, P is true

S is sure that P is true and S has the right to be sure that P is true.

To further corroborate this account of knowledge, it can be concretely described as: Mary knows that “all unsupported objects fall” if and only if:

1. It is true that all unsupported objects fall
2. Mary believes that all unsupported objects fall
3. Mary is justified in believing that all unsupported objects fall.

Epistemologists have often inferred three conditions of knowledge from the above nature of the traditional accounts viz: (a) belief condition (b) truth

condition and (c) justification condition. In a nutshell, the necessary and sufficient condition that validates any epistemic claim should include that there is a belief which must be true and cannot be faulted because there is evidence for its justification. Supposedly, there are three requirements necessary to be satisfied before a case can be made for knowledge, namely, the objective, subjective and evidence requirements (Dada, 2005: 29-30). The objective requirement is equivalent to the truth condition of knowledge. This implies that for anyone to claim to know a proposition, such a proposition must be true and proposition that is not true cannot be epistemically claimed to be known. Chisholm in this regard observes that when an assertion is made, we are saying that a certain state of affairs exists. That assertion or belief is true if and only if the state of affairs in question actually exists. It is false if the state of affairs does not in fact exist. And a truth, finally, is a state of affairs that exists. Also, there is the subjective requirement or the belief condition which is the act or the attitude of the knowing subject towards the external reality which has been said to be true. It is incongruous to lay epistemic claim to what one does not believe. Belief traditionally is a state of mind of a certain sort and hence it is described as a propositional attitude, as a relation between a subject and a proposition (Ayer, 1958: 32). The evidence requirement is the justification condition. At this point, the traditional JTB account requires that, knowledge of a proposition presupposes the epistemic justification of the belief in the given proposition. Epistemic justification is unlike other forms of justification such as practical or moral justification which are not requirement for knowledge. Rather, it can be said to be that which justifies the belief in the proposition one claims to be true. It therefore emphasizes the necessity of epistemic evidence(s) that makes our true belief to graduate into knowledge.

Even though the three criteria of knowledge adumbrated above are very important to epistemic claims, and the role of evidence in knowledge claim cannot be overemphasized, yet we are confronted with certain problematic issues in knowledge. For instance, what is the type and amount of evidence required for justification? There is the assumption that if there is adequate evidence then it will suffice for justification. However, how to determine the adequate evidence becomes another problem to be tackled.

On Epistemic Justification

Apparently, the traditional account of knowledge became what is known as justified true belief where the truth condition, the belief condition and the justification condition must be met. This conception of propositional knowledge

became widely accepted until 1963 when it was radically challenged by Edmund Gettier in a three-page article titled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge.?" His basic contention is contained in the fact that, to equate justified true belief with 'knowledge' is inadequate. He opined that it is possible for a person to fulfil the three conditions supposedly necessary for knowledge and would not still qualify as someone who knows that something is the case. (Gettier, 1963:121-123). This position was demonstrated by Gettier with two counter examples and this resulted in the quest for the *fourth condition of knowledge*. The aftermath of this has been various responses to the Gettier problem, which are known as post-Gettier analysis of knowledge. These Various reactions have attempted a repair of the traditional account of knowledge. Thus making epistemology not only a theory of knowledge but also theory of justification. For instance, Michael Clark's non-inclusion of relevant falsehood, Keith Lehrer's defeasibility approach and the conclusive reason approach were all reactionary and critical of Gettier's position which has increased the volumes of problems in epistemology Kekes (1977), Gettier (1963), Clark (1963), Lehrer (1990), Dancy (1985). Hence, the project of epistemology can be said to be concerned with the study of human knowledge, its nature, origin, scope, limits, certainty or otherwise, reliability or otherwise and justification of knowledge claims.

That justification plays an essential role in understanding the concept of knowledge cannot be over emphasized as: firstly, it puts a demarcation between knowledge and other propositional attitudes, that is, propositional attitudes such as mere opinion, guess or belief can be distinguished through justification; secondly, a logical inference can be drawn as touching the intrinsic connection between knowledge and justification, thereby presenting every claim to knowledge to presuppose a symbiotic relationship between the knower, the known and the knowing process (Owolabi, 2000 :21), (Laleye, 2008:116-117). Describing epistemology as a theory of justification is therefore not an overstatement; rather it constitutes a process that enables the subject of an epistemic claim to produce a formidable account of his object of knowledge. To this end, various theories of epistemic justification emerged which include but not limited to the following: (a) **Foundationalism**, which holds that if any belief is to be justified, there must be some intuitive beliefs whose truth or credibility is not inferred from other beliefs, (b) **Coherentism**, the view that the justification of a belief is a matter of how well a body of beliefs "*hangstogether*", that is, there is consistency, cohesiveness and comprehensiveness with other beliefs, (c) **Reliabilism**, which posits that belief's justification depends on whether it is formed using a dependable or a defective method or belief-forming mechanism,

(d) **Internalism** and **Externalism**, whilst the former submits that justification is determined by states or factors internal to the believer, or states to which the believer has infallible access, the latter denies that epistemic justification depends entirely on factors internal to the subject's perspective. These various positions are well enunciated by Jimoh (1999), Bonjour (1998), Feldman (1985), and Crumley (1999) respectively.

In spite of the various justification theories that emerged towards validation of human knowledge claims, justification, unlike truth and belief, remains a problematic requirement. On what kind of justification is required for epistemic claim of external realities, Gallagher (1964) identifies the significance of context and circumstances of the knower. According to him, the main aim of epistemology is not so much to answer the question of whether, I can know, but to discover the conditions under which I can know, the extent to which I can know and the limitations of my knowing. Simply put, circumstances and context are capable of influencing the knower in his or her epistemic pursuit. This explains the plausibility and acceptability of **epistemic contextualism**, which is a reactionary position to all the other previous theories of justification put together. According to this theory, whatever one knows is somehow relative to context. The proposition expressed by a given knowledge sentence ('S' knows that P', 'S doesn't know that P') depends upon the situation in which it is uttered. This theory presents justification of knowledge claim with what can be described as simplicity, relativism and tentativeness. It is unlike other theories of justification which are characterized by sophistication, complexities and absolutism but rather on social and circumstantial relevance (Prichard, 2002: 96). Suffice is to say contextualism holds that certain features of contexts - such as intentions and presuppositions of the members of a linguistic communities or conversational context - determines the standards that one must meet in order for one's beliefs to count as knowledge. An apparent implication of epistemic contextualist mechanism of justification is the possibility of different epistemic standards as set by different context that produce them. This further justifies the claims of feminist epistemologists who posit that male and female indeed have distinctive epistemic mechanisms. An extended discussion of feminist epistemology shall be done hereafter.

On the idea of Feminist Epistemology

An upshot from contextualism is feminist epistemologist which attempts an alternative to epistemic justification conundrum by identifying the uniqueness of male and female epistemic contexts. Feminist epistemology can be considered a

reactionary and revolutionary application of feminism to the production and justification of human epistemic claim. Its fundamental concern is *objectivity* of knowledge. It will be recalled that objectivity is a leading and principal feature of traditional account of epistemic discourse, which necessitates that knowledge be abstract and certain. This account of knowledge as justified true belief places the principal criterion of knowledge as rational certainty which involves an objective reality and cognitive subject. This traditional view, according to the feminist epistemologists, has led to an incomplete account of knowledge. They opine that knowledge is not complete when the multiple experiences of diverse groups in society and the interrelatedness of their experiences are not put into consideration. A mixture of issues can be said to have inspired feminist interests in epistemic theories; for instance, stereotyped perception of women nature and action based upon them. Carol Gould laments this as being among the most intransigent of constructs that shape women's experiences and make it difficult for women to move beyond domination (Gould, 1983:14). Little wonder why mainstream epistemologies systematically exclude the possibility that women can be knowers or agents of knowledge. This is made obvious as history is written from the male perspective and the knower in traditional epistemology is always assumed to be a man. Various feminist epistemologists argue that dominant knowledge practice disadvantage women by excluding them from inquiry: denying them epistemic authority; denigrating their feminine *cognitive* style and models of knowledge; and producing theories of women that represent them as inferior, deviant, or significant only in the ways that serve male interests.

The abstraction and objectivity of traditional account of knowledge can be seen to be epitomized in scientific knowledge. This is the reason why feminist epistemologists have been seriously dissatisfied with modern scientific knowledge and are concerned with challenging it. Hence, the notion that the project of modern science crystallizes or informs 'masculinist' models of thinking has been a prominent theme in various contemporary feminist writings. Karl Stern argues that what we encounter in Cartesian rationalism is pure masculinisation of thought (Stern, 1965: 104). In the same vein, the scientific model of knowing can be described as what represents a super - masculinisation of rational knowledge (Harding, 1991:17). It is not a ruse therefore to claim that the female thought has not been put into consideration all the while in what constitute knowledge. In fact, Hillman rightly puts it this way that,

The specific consciousness we call scientific western, and modern is the long sharpened tool of masculine mind that has discharged parts

of its own substance calling it due, female and inferior. (Hillman, 1972: 250)

Influenced by this marginalization and exclusion of women's way of knowing, feminist epistemologists have critique science generally and the idea of objectivity as expressing an essentially male approach to knowledge and the world. For Bleir, science is the male intellect: the active knowing subject: its relationship to nature- the passive object of knowledge - is one manipulation, control and domination: it is the relationship of man to woman of culture to nature. (Bleir, 1984: 196)

This according to the feminist is known as the problem of androcentrism. It occurs when theories take the male's experience or "masculinity" as the norm or standard for humans or animal generally with female differences either ignored or represented as deviant⁹. It also occurs when male activities or predicaments are represented as the primary causes or sites of important changes without regard to the roles of females in initiating or facilitating changes (Harding, 1990: 96). Hence, we say androcentrism involves the attitudes of viewing the world from the perspective of men's lives without regard to how women see them differently.

Thus, feminist epistemology is set out to grapple with the problem of androcentrism in order to redefine what counts as knowledge. Code describes the dominant themes in traditional epistemology as the autonomous obsession of ideal knowers with the separation of subject from object or the knower from the known. According to her, there is therefore need to remap the epistemic terrain (Code, 1991: 24). Mapping out the epistemic terrain calls for an analysis of what it means to say that 'S knows that P'. The knower who occupies the S position is anonymous and interchangeable with any other S who is rational, self-conscious and autonomous. It is also assumed that such knower can have the same cognitive access to P. In order words, it will no longer be that the female experiences are side-lined or counts as irrelevant in the account of epistemic matters. The problems feminists are contending with lie not simply in the primacy of individual knowers, but rather these individual knower themselves conceptualized as generic (or interchangeable) and capable of self-sufficiency in knowing (Grasswick, 2004: 24)

To this end, it can be said that feminist epistemologists are concerned with the possibility of an epistemic scheme which is that of a situated knower, and hence of a situated knowledge. This is knowledge that reflects the particular perspectives of the subject. The interest of feminist philosophers or

epistemologists is thus in how gender situates knowing subject. This made them to have demonstrated the importance in evaluating any epistemic event of the social arrangement of power and to show the privilege by which it is legitimated or discredited. They also embark upon a critical project of demonstrating the privilege-sustaining, androcentric character of epistemological project in most of its received forms and in transformative projects of reconstructing methodologies and justificatory procedures, so as to eradicate their oppressive and exclusionary effects (Code, 2000:278).

Feminist Critique of traditional epistemic claims

The target of feminist epistemology is a rebuilding of the entire traditional epistemic edifice which is biased and stereotypic. To this end, Code (2000) delineates central features to the traditional epistemology as follows:

1. The knower assumed in the 'S knows that P' formulation that begins typical contemporary analysis of knowledge treat S as an abstraction, or a generic epistemic subject because epistemic subjectivity does substantially differ from one rational individual to another.
2. Such analysis of knowledge seeks to find necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge that will determine the positive epistemic status of any belief held by any epistemic subject.
3. Once a belief's epistemic status is determined by such conditions, it stands as knowledge.

This can be said to be responsible for the impact of feminism on epistemology which has relocated the question, "Whose knowledge are we talking about?" to a central place in epistemological inquiry. Hence, the need for conceptions of knowledge in a specifically centralized, situated and of a socially responsible epistemic agency (Code, 2000:277).

The entire feminist epistemological project is thematically surrounded by the critique of four traditional but interrelated assumptions that governs the mainstream account of knowledge. These assumptions are the idea of a generic humanity, the view from nowhere, the pure impersonal reason and the Robinson Crusoe assumption (Lawhead, 2003: 168).

(a) The 'Generic Humanity' idea holds that there is one universal human nature. The implication of this for epistemology therefore is the assumption of a cognitive structure that is common to all individual, whether male or female. The argument of feminist the epistemologist is that this single universal human nature has been created so far using men's experience and psychology as the

unquestionable paradigm, whereas other perspectives and models of humanity, particularly those that make use of female experiences, have been neglected from consideration. They are marginalized because they are considered too subjective or unconventional. The problem as identified by the feminists is that the tendency to make male viewpoint the norm infects most traditional theories of knowledge (Folley, 1987: 49).

(b) The second assumption is the *View from Nowhere* which holds that the particular identity of the knower is inconsequential to the production and assessment of that person's epistemic claims. Such identity can include gender, race, class and, historical circumstances. However, feminist epistemologists contend vehemently against this assumption. In the words of Baber,

Advocates of feminist epistemology... reject the view from nowhere specifically on the grounds that the norms it embodies are male norms and hence that their acceptance sets standards which women find it difficult or impossible to meet. In particular they hold that the traditional epistemic ideal of an objective, detached observer, conducting his investigations in isolation from any historical or social context, is alien to women's engaged concrete, contextual way of knowing. (Baber, 1994: 403)

The traditional account of knowledge is no doubt suggesting the possibility of an ideal knower who is capable of approaching reality from any particular perspective or historical background which is not connected to any personal prejudices, interests, engagements or concerns. However, this position, for feminist thinkers, is incoherent. This is because all knowers irrespective of their gender and ideology always approach the world from within some particular context. Of course, this context might be defined by conceptual scheme, language, culture, gender or whatever influencing factor. Harding (1991) reminds us that there is always a subjective person and point of view behind every knowledge claim.

(c) The consequence of the above traditional epistemic assumption is the possibility of another assumption, which is that, *an ideal knower should have a pure, impersonal reason*. In other words, that there can be pure objectivity which is untainted by the subjectivity or the emotion and interests of the knower. It will be recalled that a characteristic of traditional epistemology is the existence of strict dichotomies such as reason in opposition to emotion, objective versus subjective, mind against body, logic opposed to intuition, intellect versus imagination, male versus female and so on (Derida, 1982: 23). Feminists'

objection to this kind of assumption includes the fact that the supposed binary concepts in each case are not mutually exclusive dichotomies. Rather, they opine that knowledge has both subjective and objective components and that there is no reason to choose between one or the other. There is therefore no reason to place priority on one or the first member of the pair as the ideal knower while the second is devalued. It is no longer news that the preferred alternative is taken to describe the male approach while the second is assumed to be a stereotypically female trait. They concluded that what the traditional epistemic account refers to as objectivity is thus nothing but subjectivity of the male. (Rich, 1979: 207).

(d) Another view of traditional epistemology is that which claim that the acquisition of knowledge is primarily a project of isolated individuals. Such knowledge is independent of any social context and free of political implication. It is like Descartes' cogito, where the knower becomes independent and autonomous with complete detachment from any other philosophical and cultural assumptions that may be prevalent. However, for Lorraine Code, knowledge production is a social practice of embodied, gendered, historically, racially, and culturally located knowers whose products bear the marks of their makers and whose stories need, therefore to be told (Code, 1998:593). In the same vein, Longino has aptly contended that,

The development of knowledge is a necessarily social rather than individual activity, and it is the social character of scientific knowledge that both protect it from and renders it vulnerable to social and political interests and values. (Longino, 1990: 12)

Knowledge is initially gotten from individual culture and further quest for knowledge is informed by the epistemic community to which we are responsible.

Towards a Reconfigured Generic Human Knowledge

The corollary from the above depicts feminist epistemology as thematically, a critique of the mainstream epistemology which will help achieve a reconfigured epistemology as exponents advocate. This will involve firstly, the elaboration of genealogical and interpretive method; secondly the reconstructions of empiricism; thirdly, the articulation of standpoint positions; and, finally, the demonstration of the potential of psychosocial and post-structural analyses to counter the hegemony of epistemological master narratives (Code, 2000: 277).

Rather than being a mere attack on the influencing idea of traditional account of knowledge, that is, generic humanity, it attempts to proffer a better and new perspective towards our epistemic claims of the external reality. Doing this involves a transformative reconstruction of the methodologies and justificatory procedures inherent in the so called androcentric model of the traditional account of knowledge. To this end, Sandra Harding's view on feminist critiques of science provides a great approach. For her, feminist epistemology can be divided into three well-developed programme: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory and feminist post-modernism (Harding, 1986: 138). A cursory explication of the above as it elaborates the project and programme of feminist epistemology will be done.

Feminist Empiricism

Harding's view on the science question in feminism explains feminist empiricism:

Feminist empiricism argues that it is possible to remove sexist and other biases from the processes of research particularly when problems for study are initially being identified and defined, in the belief that once these have been eliminated value-neutral work will be produced. (Harding, 1986: 10)

She regards this as an attempt to reform bad science, simply by adding women into existing frameworks rather than questioning the prejudiced assumptions that are constitutive of science per se. By so doing, new perspectives on women's lives and specifically those that challenge sexist assumptions will result in more accurate explanations of women's experiences.

For this reason, we can say that what constitutes the engagement of feminist epistemology in generally is consideration of how scientific methods can be improved in the light of feminist demonstrations of bias in currently accepted methods. Also, they are concerned with the impact of social practices relating to gender, race, class and other bases of inequality on inquiry. They take seriously studies like sociology, history and sciences in their analysis. Duran (1991) holds that most of them advocate a socialized epistemology in which inquiry is treated as a fundamentally social process and the basic subjects of knowledge may even be communities or network of individuals. They maintain that sexism and androcentrism are identifiable biases of individual knowers that can be eliminated by stricter application of existing methodological norms of scientific and philosophical inquiry.

Feminist Standpoint

This idea is generally contained in the claim that in any historical period, the prevailing worldview is a clear reflection of the interests and value of the dominant group. The argument of this theory is that women's specific location in particular societies is actually a resource in the construction of knowledge (Harding, 1991:21). Another explanation is that an individual is advantaged in the evolution of certain claims about economic or social structure if he or she has been socially stigmatized, subordinated, economically deprived in relevant ways; and is subsequently or simultaneously empowered to reflect upon the implications of such experiences and their alternatives. Feminist standpoint theory is thus a critical theory which attempts and aims to empower the oppressed in order to improve their situation. It is opined that women are central to the system of reproduction - of socializing children and caring for bodies - as workers are central to the system of commodity production. Hence, their epistemic privilege rests on the fact that they as a class have superior access to information about whose needs get better served under patriarchy. In a nutshell, the female gender is in a particular socially situated perspective where they can lay claims to epistemic advantage or authority. Harding's position buttress this further as she says,

Women's social experience provides the possibility of more complete and less perverse human understanding -but only the possibility. Feminism provides the theory and motivation for enquiry and the direction of political struggle through which increasingly more adequate descriptions and underlying causal tendencies of male domination are revealed. Only through feminist inquiry and struggle can the perspective of women be transformed into a feminist standpoint-a morally and scientifically preferable 'location' from which to observe, to explain and to design social life (Harding, 1987:130-131)

If the claim that what we do shapes and constrains what we know is true, then it can be implied that: Women can base their knowledge of the world on their common experience; and, by occupying such a location already, women can transform their knowledge based on their experience into an epistemological tool through their participation in the feminist movement.

Feminist Post-Modernism

Generally, post modernism embodies skeptical sensibility that questions the attempts to transcend our situatedness by appeal to such ideas as universality,

necessity, objectivity, rationality, essence, unity, totality, foundations, and ultimate truth and reality. However, as noted by Anderson (2007), it at the same time stresses the locality, partiality, contingency, instability, uncertainty, ambiguity and essential contestability of any particular account of the world, the self, and the good. Now, within feminist epistemology, Butler (1990) holds that this theory has been deployed against theories that purport to justify sexist practices – notably, ideologies that claim that observed differences between men and women are natural and necessary, or that women have an essence that explains and justifies their subordination. In a nutshell, feminist post modernism identifies the notable radical critique of both feminist empiricism and the mainstream as being compromised. Instead, it considers feminist standpoint as being on a pathway to a more wholesome grounding for knowledge via women’s experiences.

Concluding Remarks

The idea of feminist epistemology as adumbrated above shows that it borders on the ways in which gender does and ought to affect our notions of epistemic claims, epistemic subject and epistemic practices of inquiry and justification. This is in a sharp contrast to what is obtainable in the mainstream epistemic account that recognises the ideal knower as a male and uses the cognitive status of the male as paradigm for epistemic claim. Having seen that the dominant conceptions and practices of knowledge attribution, acquisition and justification systematically disadvantage the female folks, feminist epistemology seeks and strives to reconstruct these conceptions and practices so that the female interest is served. Hence, women will no longer be excluded from enquiry and will not be denied of epistemic authority. Their feminine cognitive styles and modes of knowledge will not be belittled and will no longer be labelled deviant, inferior or made significant only in an androcentric context. As against the traditional analysis a generic and isolated knowing subject, the feminist analyses believe that specific circumstances of the knower can make no difference to the evaluation of his or her knowledge. Feminist position clearly repudiates such things like a view from nowhere, and insist that knowledge is always to some degrees relative to the particular circumstances and needs of a particular knower or community of knowers. To conclude this project of the reconfiguring mainstream epistemology, feminists’ argument agrees with the fact that the cognitive status and circumstance of the knower(s) are central among conditions for the possibility of knowledge. This is reinforced by descriptive cognitive pluralism, the view that different people, or people in different cultures, go about the business of reasoning and arriving at epistemic claims, in significantly

different ways. It is a claim that understanding of the world only comes through many special-purpose mental models of a variety of content domains, and an exploration of the philosophical implications (Horst, 2016: 12). Suffice to say therefore that by this epistemic reconfiguration, there is no direct rivalry between feminist and classical epistemologies. Rather, a complementary account of knowledge emanating from two different dimensions of epistemic evaluations.

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