I

Incorporating Feminist Standpoint Theory
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Abstract:
As has been noted by Alvin Goldman, there are some very interesting similarities between his Veritistic Social Epistemology (VSE) and Sandra Harding’s Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST). In the present paper, it is argued that these similarities are so significant as to motivate an incorporation of FST into VSE, considering that (i) a substantial common ground can be found; (ii) the claims that go beyond this common ground are logically compatible; and (iii) the generality of VSE not only does justice to the inclusive ambition of FST, but even solves a well-discussed problem for the latter¹.

Standpoint theory first emerged within Marxist philosophy as an epistemological theory about how the proletariat, qua workers in a capitalist system, could turn the experience of their particular political predicament into an epistemic resource (Marx, 1964 and Lukács, 1971). By virtue of being exploited and/or oppressed, and their position in the very center of the producing sphere of capitalism, the proletarian workers were thought to be able to attain an epistemic perspective endowing them with ‘a capacity for new kinds of experience and for seeing features and dimensions of the world and of history masked to other social actors’, as Frederic Jameson puts it (quoted in Harding, 2004a, p. 141).

More recently, feminist standpoint theorists have launched a critique against traditional epistemology, arguing that the marginalized and often ignored perspective of the politically conscious feminist, in fact, constitutes a very favorable epistemic point of view, for reasons analogous to the Marxist’s. The present paper is about one such feminist standpoint theory, namely Sandra

¹ Thanks are due to Dag Westerståhl, Helge Malmgren, Margareta Hallberg, Ulla Holm, Arvid Båve, Sven Nyholm, Radha Vij, Jeffrey Green, as well as an anonymous reviewer of this journal, for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
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Harding’s, as it is laid out in her *Whose science? Whose Knowledge?* (1991). I will, henceforth, refer to this particular standpoint theory as FST and argue for the incorporation of FST into Alvin Goldman’s Veritistic Social Epistemology (henceforth, VSE), as this theory is set out in his latest monograph *Knowledge in a Social World* (1999).

As has been noted by Goldman, there are some very interesting similarities between FST and VSE (1999, p. 34, n. 22). For one thing, both stress the fact that a great deal of knowledge and belief is produced in a social context and that, furthermore, some contexts are more epistemically favorable than others. In fact, I will, in the first section of this paper, outline what I take to be a substantial common ground between FST and VSE. In the second and third sections, I will go on to argue that, as for the central components that go beyond this common ground, there is no risk of logical incompatibility. In the fourth and final section, I will argue that what has been shown in the preceding sections – taken together with the fact that the generality of VSE not only meshes well with FST’s non-marginalizing ambitions, but also solves a well-discussed problem for FST – motivates an incorporation of FST into VSE.

As a final note, I ask the reader familiar with the feminist philosophical tradition not to overestimate the scope of this paper. I will, among other things, forego some discussions very central to feminist philosophy, such as the ontological and epistemological status of sex and gender, as well as questions of corporeality etc. The paper will also, to a large extent, not address the particularly political inheritance of feminist philosophy, as an emancipatory and liberal movement (albeit a very heterogeneous one), except to the extent that I will touch upon how FST gives voice to the idea that political activism can be an epistemic advantage.

II

My first aim will be to lay out a common ground for FST and VSE by establishing a set of claims not only consistent with (but also central to) both theories. First and at the most general level:

(C1) The defining aim of epistemic inquiry is the pursuit of true belief.

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2 See Gatens (1996) and Lloyd (1982, pp. 13–22) for two influential discussions of these questions.
3 For a recent and interesting discussion of the political and philosophical commitments of feminism of today, as they relate to questions about nature and differences between the sexes, see Pinker (2002).
4 I here use ‘epistemic inquiry’ in a sense that some might consider too weak. Considering the etymological connection between ‘epistemic’ and the Greek word ‘episteme’ (i.e., roughly
Goldman is very explicit in his adherence to (C1) (see Goldman, 1999, p. 30 1992, p. 192). Harding, on the other hand, is not. When discussing the aims and standards of epistemic inquiries such as science, she is very cautious and prefers to talk about ‘[standards] producing maximally objective results’ (1991, p. 159) and about ‘socially constructed claims that are less false’ (1991, p. 185) rather than “true beliefs”. Still, her formulations clearly presuppose a fairly robust, non-epistemic notion of truth – as will become more obvious to the reader as we progress – and I see no reason to refrain from interpreting this maximising of objectivity as aiming at true belief. Hence, I take it that she accepts (C1) and that her cautiousness is merely tactical in the face of the far more radical claims by many of her interlocutors. Hence, (C1) is our first common ground claim.

Both Goldman and Harding are mainly concerned with a particular kind of epistemic inquiry, namely scientific inquiry, and, in particular, with how the beliefs pertaining to this kind of inquiry are typically shaped by social context (see Goldman, 1999, chapter 1 and Harding, 1991, p. 119). Hence, the second common ground claim:

(C2) Scientific beliefs are typically shaped by social context.

This is what Harding means when she says that scientific beliefs (and knowledge) are “socially situated”, and FST is to be understood as a theory about how to transform the particular set of situated beliefs pertaining to feminist standpoints into an epistemically valuable resource.

As for VSE, Goldman takes his theory to be a social counterpart to so-called individual epistemology, i.e., the traditional epistemological project of philosophically analysing the knowledge of a single subject in isolation or abstraction from other subjects. Although he considers individual epistemology to be a fully legitimate project – Goldman himself is one of its main modern figures – VSE is his attempt to, as he puts it, ‘widen epistemology’s vista’ through a social epistemology, accounting for the traditionally ignored ‘interpersonal and institutional contexts in which most knowledge endeavors are actually undertaken’ (Goldman, 1999, vii).

Note that, since we are concerned with individual believers in social contexts, we may choose either one of two foci when elaborating on (C2). If we chose to focus on the social context we may say that scientific beliefs are typically

‘knowledge’) one might want to argue that the defining aim of epistemic inquiry is not the pursuit of mere true belief but knowledge. For the purpose of this paper, however, I do not need to defend (C1), but merely show that it is part of a common ground between FST and VSE.

5 See Goldman (1986) for his most fully articulated account of individual epistemology.
shaped by social context in the sense that, within science, we seek and arrive at beliefs (and knowledge) by talking to each other, reading each other’s texts, and attending seminars; moreover, we interact with the world and implement our ideas through skills we have acquired from others. This way of establishing the social context brings out the interpersonal and institutional aspect of belief formation in science that Goldman refers to in the quote above, and also puts primary emphasis on the interaction between individuals through the vehicle of language.

If we choose to focus on the individual believer, however, we may say that scientific beliefs are shaped by social context in the sense that, within science, the etiology of the causal processes responsible for the actual belief-formation in an individual scientist (as far as the beliefs in question pertain to science) typically involve other scientists in an interpersonal context. Framing (C2) this way not only makes clear how the belief-production pertains to aspects that go beyond the individual believer (which might be the case for any beliefs that do not only concern the immediate cognitive world of the individual) but also ascertains that the aspects in question correspond to a particularly social sphere involving other individuals. Which focus we choose makes no difference for the purpose of this paper since they merely represent two different ways to flesh out the same relation between individual believers and the social contexts in which they are situated. In what follows, I will choose the focus that happens to serve the explanatory purposes best at the moment.

Note, however, that when focusing on individual believers in social contexts, I do not wish to deny that conglomerates of individuals (e.g., social groups) can also be subjects of belief (and knowledge). Neither do I wish to deny that we might very well come to believe and know things more or less independently of any social context. In other words, while the social dimension is especially pertinent within science, adhering to (C2) does in no way commit one to saying that the same goes for other kinds of beliefs. For one thing, one might want to argue that it does not hold for (some) basic perceptual beliefs.

This aside, does not (C2) commit FST and VSE to some kind of relativism? Since both Harding and Goldman deny this, we will delve into the issue. For one thing, a commitment to relativism would indeed make (C2) more radical and maybe even call for a different reading of “true” in (C1).

Let us first consider ontological relativism, which is here understood as the thesis that the truth or falsity of our scientific beliefs is relative to a culture, paradigm, etc. However, we should remember that (C2) is a claim about the circumstances under which people arrive at scientific beliefs. It is not a claim about truth or what constitutes truth. (C2) could, trivially, imply some kind of
ontological relativism together with a claim of the latter sort, but says nothing about these questions when considered in isolation\(^6\).

Things get more complicated when we turn to epistemological relativism. According to epistemological relativism, the rationality, warrant or justification (I will use these words interchangeably) of our beliefs is relative to (again) cultures, paradigms, etc. This thesis should not be confused with sociological relativism, which makes the different claim that, as a matter of empirical fact, what is considered rational differs between cultures, paradigms, etc.

Now, the question relevant to us is whether \( (C2) \), i.e., the claim that scientific beliefs are typically shaped by social context, entails epistemological relativism. The main reason put forward for a positive answer is a purported conflict between rational and social belief formation\(^7\). If social belief formation were not at all compatible with rational belief formation, the contention that scientific beliefs are, in fact, formed in a social context would certainly be bad news for the anti-relativist.

That there is such a radical conflict is exactly what Goldman and Harding call into question. ‘[R]ationality might partly consist in certain forms of social interchange’, says Goldman, who sees no reason to accept any tension between ‘social and rational belief causation’ (1992, 181). Some ways of social belief formation are certainly not compatible with rational belief formation, but this should not mislead us into thinking that this is the case for all social belief formation. He illustrates this point with some commonplace examples of beliefs that are shaped by social context, but that might, nevertheless, be explained in rational terms:

First, suppose a belief is formed rationally as a function of several competing hypotheses and the available evidence. The hypotheses surveyed, however, were generated by a number of different scientists, each working in his own research tradition. In this case, disciplinary

\(^6\) What creates the suspicion that something like \((C2)\) implies ontological relativism are certain ambiguous claims on Harding’s part about knowledge being “contextual” or “situated.” One could quite easily misinterpret Harding as adhering to ontological relativism, if one did not keep in mind that she is referring to knowledge claims, which are, of course, typically made (or “constructed”) in a social context—at least if they pertain to science.

\(^7\) The claim that there is such a conflict is central to the so-called “strong programme” in sociology (see, e.g., Bloor, 1976, and Barnes, 1977). According to this programme, there should be a symmetry in the explanation of a belief, in the sense that, regardless of whether the belief happens to be true or false, the explanation should be formulated in social terms. For this to be a radical idea at all—i.e., a substantial claim about such notions as rationality, warrant, or justification—there needs to be a conflict between explaining belief-formation in social terms and explaining it in rational terms, which is something that the adherents of the strong programme indeed argues. See Harding (1991, pp. 166-168) for a discussion.
fragmentation – a certain social fact – is part of the origin of the competing hypotheses that the working scientist considers. Second, a partial cause of the scientist’s entry into the discipline may be the financial or reputational incentives of organized science. This reward structure, of course, does not by itself explain the scientific content of an explanandum belief. But it is one of many operative causes that ultimately lead to the belief. Third, the rational formation of a belief involves the application of a suitable methodology, which the target scientist employs. Whence this methodology? The scientist may have learned it from his mentors, who in turn acquired it from other members of the scientific community, who (perhaps rationally) enforce that methodology as a condition for respect and acceptance within that intellectual matrix […] In all these cases, the many causes of the belief include some social factors; but these in no way undermine a rational explanation of the belief (Goldman, 1992, p. 181).

Harding argues in a similar fashion:

[…] the identification of social causes for the acceptance of a belief does not exclude the possibility that that belief does match the world in better ways than its competitors. That is, we can hold that some social conditions make it possible for humans to produce reliable explanations of patterns in nature, just as other social conditions make it very difficult to do so (Harding, 1991, p. 83, see also Harding 2004b, pp. 131-2).

Hence, the third common ground claim:

(C3) Some social contexts are epistemically better than others.

Both Goldman and Harding seem to think that whether one social context is better than another has something to do with reliability, which is measured by the ratio of true beliefs to the total number of beliefs formed in a particular social context. Consequently, Harding argues that we ought ‘to get our inquiry processes and institutions inserted into the kinds of social contexts that have tended to cause less false rather than more false beliefs’ (1991, p. 169). Unfortunately, however, Harding does not elaborate further on this notion of reliability.

In earlier texts, Goldman has argued that social practices and institutions are epistemically good to the extent that they do well along a number of dimensions of evaluation, one important dimension being reliability (1992, pp. 194-195). So let us say that, to a first approximation, a social context c is epistemically
better than $c^*$, if a higher ratio of true beliefs to total number of beliefs is produced in $c$ than in $c^*$, ceteris paribus\(^8\).

However, The ceteris paribus clause may conceal several epistemically relevant factors. For one thing, a large set of true but non-related beliefs is not in any obvious way epistemically better than a smaller set of connected and related true beliefs\(^9\). Furthermore, and as pointed out by Goldman, while reliability may very well be a necessary component when considering the epistemic superiority of one social context over another, it does not seem to be a sufficient one. In fact, Goldman argues for at least five dimensions of evaluation relevant for assessing epistemic practices, one being what he calls power, understood as ‘the problem-solving, or question-answering, power of a practice […] measured by the ability of a practice to help cognizers find and believe true answers to the questions that interest them.’ Because even if a ‘reliable practice helps prevent error [it] does not necessarily combat ignorance’ (1992, p. 195).

III

With (C1) through (C3) in place, we have established a substantial common ground between FST and VSE. In order to make plausible the further claim that we should incorporate FST into VSE, I will now do two things, namely (1) show that, as for the central claims of FST and VSE that go beyond the common ground, there is no risk of logical incompatibility between the two theories, and (2) show why it is FST that should be incorporated into VSE, rather than the other way around.

Let us start by looking into whether there are any candidates for central components of VSE that are in conflict with central components of FST. As I just mentioned, the kind of conflict I have in mind is that of logical incompatibility—a conflict that would arise if a central component of one theory were to claim that $P$, while a central component of the other theory claimed that not-$P$.

As we have already seen, the two theories share a substantial common ground, represented by (C1) through (C3). As for the components of VSE that go beyond this common ground, the major difference has to do with exactly how to spell out the evaluation of different social contexts or standpoints. As we saw above, both Harding and Goldman seem to have some kind of notion

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\(^8\) Note that, while (C1) claimed that the defining aim of epistemic inquiry is the pursuit of true belief, epistemic considerations can very well be overridden by other considerations concerning, say, efficiency, cost, etc. In other words, $c$'s epistemic priority over $c^*$ is consistent with $c^*$'s priority over $c$, other things considered.

\(^9\) Thanks are due to an anonymous reviewer of this journal for pointing this out to me.
of reliability in mind. In his *Knowledge in a social world* (1999), however, Goldman does not talk in terms of reliability (or power), but instead in terms of a more formalized and mathematical concept of veritistic value. Veritistic value comes in two forms: fundamental and instrumental. States such as knowledge, ignorance and error, are taken by Goldman to have a fundamental value or disvalue, while such things as practices, institutions, social contexts, etc., have an instrumental value in so far as they promote or impede the realisation of states with a fundamental or instrumental value or disvalue.

This notion of veritistic value may be applied in several ways. At the most general level, we may work with a trichotomous scheme of three basic creedal attitudes towards a proposition: believing it, rejecting it, or withholding judgment. We may then assign different V-values to different attitudes, for example V-value 1 for believing a true proposition, 0.50 for withholding judgment on a true proposition, and 0 for rejecting a true proposition.\(^\text{10}\)

To make the notion of veritistic value more sophisticated, we may also apply it to a scheme invoking degrees of belief in propositions. Let ‘DB’ stand for ‘Degree of Belief’ and range from 0 to 1, where ‘0’ represents disbelief and ‘1’ (firm) belief. Let ‘V-value’ be short for ‘veritistic value’ and any DB in a true proposition have the same amount of V-value as the strength of the DB. By way of example: suppose that a subject S is interested in whether P or not-P and that S’s DB in P is 0.33 at time \(t_1\). At a later time, however, S changes her mind so that her new DB in P is 0.75 at \(t_2\). How does this affect the V-value of her belief? Given that P is true, her V-value at time \(t_1\) is 0.33 and 0.75 at \(t_2\). In other words, the V-value increases as she gets more convinced about the true proposition P. If P is false, however (i.e., if not-P is true) the V-value changes from 0.67 at \(t_1\) to 0.25 at \(t_2\), since this corresponds to her DB in not-P at the respective time-points. So, in that case, the V-value decreases as she gets more convinced in a proposition that is in fact false, namely P.

Against this background, the instrumental V-value of such things as practices, institutions, social contexts, etc., may be determined by their causal contribution to states with various V-values, or various changes in V-values pertaining to changes in such states. More specifically, we are interested in their ‘propensities’ to contribute to certain V-values, i.e., how they would contribute to certain V-values in a range of not only actual but also possible cases.

Note, however, that these are but two ways to apply the notion of veritistic value. If one finds the DB scheme too artificial in its quantification of degrees

\(^{10}\) Under the simplifying assumption that belief in a proposition involves a rejection of its negation, we do not need to add further principles concerning false propositions.
of belief, one may instead opt for a scheme based on confidence intervals. One might also want to define V-value relative to questions of interest, and thereby make it sensitive to relevance. I will not dwell on further details of the framework of such veritistic measure. Still, two things need to be noted. First, as Goldman himself notes, the concepts of reliability and power are reflected and encapsulated in this concept of veritistic measure (1999, p. 90, note 16). Within the degree of belief scheme, the concept of reliability – i.e., the ratio of true to total number of beliefs – is reflected in that the V-value is sensitive to the extent to which practices promote states with a high V-value, where the highest value is rendered by belief in true propositions and disbelief in false propositions. The concept of power – i.e., the tendency to produce belief in true answers to questions of interest – is reflected in that, within the trichotomous scheme, not only error (here understood as rejecting a true or believing a false proposition) but also ignorance (here understood as withholding judgment on a true proposition) has a negative impact on the V-value, compared to belief in a true proposition.

Second, as it stands, the mathematical framework of veritistic measure is neutral as far as its exact implementation goes, in the sense that it supplies a means to evaluate the (instrumental) value of different epistemic contexts in terms of the (instrumental or fundamental) value of the states they produce, but without, in itself, committing us to emphasizing one particular set of factors in the evaluation. Differently put: apart from the commitment to the pursuit of truth and knowledge, and avoidance of error and ignorance encapsulated in the common ground, the framework of veritistic measure leaves open exactly how to evaluate different states and contexts. Consequently, the notion of veritistic measure is sufficiently neutral in its implications, and even though one might, of course, object to it on other philosophical or theoretical grounds, it is clearly logically compatible with FST.

IV

Turning now to central components of FST, the main candidate for potential incompatibility with VSE can be found in the following passage from Harding:

The distinctive features of women’s situation in a gender-stratified society are being used as resources [...] [and] [i]t is these distinctive resources, which are not used by conventional researchers, that enable feminism to produce empirically more accurate descriptions and theoretically richer explanations than does conventional research (Harding, 1991, p. 119).
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The claim is analogous to the Marxist standpoint theorist’s claim about the epistemic significance of the experience of the exploited proletariat. But in this case, it is women who, in virtue of their traditionally marginalized position, are more competent at exposing previously uncontested but nonetheless oppressive and epistemically bad assumptions. The general idea behind this is that, as Harding herself puts it, ‘a maximally critical study of scientists and their communities can be done only from the perspective of those whose lives have been marginalized by such communities’ (2004b, p. 136). One reason for this is:

If the community of “qualified” researchers and critics systematically excludes, for example, all African-Americans and women of all races and if the larger culture is stratified by race and gender and lacks powerful critiques of this stratification, it is not plausible to imagine that racist and sexist interests and values would be identified within a community of scientists composed entirely of people who benefit — intentionally or not — from institutionalized racism and sexism (Harding 2004b, p. 137).

This is why marginalized standpoints may constitute a favorable epistemic vantage point from which to uncover marginalising interests and values. One way to frame this claim in the context of a particularly feminist standpoint theory is by way of the following assumption:

(C4) Being traditionally marginalised, women are more prone than men to expose the very assumptions that underlie this marginalisation.

This seems intuitively plausible, but FST makes a further claim. As standpoint theorists often emphasise (Harding included), a standpoint is an achievement. Women do not automatically occupy a feminist standpoint just by virtue of being women; a standpoint has to be achieved, and the way to achieve it is to raise one’s consciousness through, among other things, a critical examination (which might very well be a self-examination) of the dominant institutional beliefs and practices that systematically disadvantage women and other traditionally marginalised groups (Harding, 1991, p. 127, 2004b, p. 135). Consequently, it is not even necessary to be a woman. According to Harding, a feminist standpoint is achievable by men (Harding, 1986, p. 655). And, Harding claims:

11 Harding herself mentions the connection between Marxist and feminist standpoint theory on p. 175 in her *Whose science? Whose Knowledge?* (1991). Other feminist standpoint theorists, like Nancy Hartsock (1983, p. 284), are more explicit about the analogy between the proletariat and women as a group.
(C5) Occupying a feminist standpoint contributes to generating more objective descriptions and explanations.\(^{12}\)

Is this in conflict with VSE? I do not believe that it is, given an important qualification concerning the status of (C4) and (C5), namely that they are to be subordinate to (C1). Despite the centrality of (C4) and (C5) within FST, I believe Harding would agree to this, and I will show why by considering her account of objectivity.

On Harding’s account, as in feminist epistemology in general, there is a criticism of a traditional notion of objectivity. Unfortunately, the notion in question is seldom specified beyond claims to the effect that it involves a conception of inquiry as value-free. According to Harding, there are two problems with this conception of objectivity, which she calls the weak conception (1991, p. 143). First of all, practically all scientific inquiry that is commonly considered objective is simply not objective in this sense, if it is to be understood in terms of absolute value-freeness. Interests and values, many of which are social in character and not necessarily apparent to the inquirers themselves, shape scientific inquiry. Second of all, however, there is no reason to ask for inquiry to be objective in this weak sense. While some values and interests indeed have an epistemically bad influence on inquiry, this is, most likely, not the case for all values and interests. If we acknowledge this, Harding argues that we can extend this weak notion of objective inquiry by including a systematic examination of the epistemically good and bad values respectively, thereby getting strong objectivity (1991, p. 149 and 2004b, pp. 136-137).

Disregarding that it is not altogether clear (a) that the (supposed) adherents of the traditional notion are not a group of straw men, and (b) that the notion of strong objectivity is not already present in (or even equivalent to) our everyday notion of objectivity, this seems to be a fairly plausible account, and I would like to make two points in connection to it. First, note that the all-embracing aim for Harding is to maximize the objectivity of our beliefs.

\(^{12}\)This formulation may be too weak to match the claim Harding is actually making, since she discusses consciousness-raising feminist politics and activism as ‘a necessary condition for generating less partial and perverse descriptions and explanations’ (1991, p. 127). But this is supposed to be a claim about feminist research, not a general claim about every single domain of research. At the same time, I believe that Harding would want to understand feminist research not just in the narrow sense of inquiry into specifically feminist issues, but also in the sense of conducting all types of research with a feminist standpoint-consciousness. And if feminist research is understood in this latter sense, the claim almost seems to amount to feminist activism in fact being a necessary condition for all research. But, lacking good textual evidence to this effect and giving her the benefit of the doubt, I have settled for the more modest formulation in (C5).
through the promotion of epistemically good values. Maybe feminist activism helps us to do this in some (or even many) cases, or maybe it does not. What interests us here, however, is that the incorporation of feminist activism is motivated by arguments for its epistemically beneficial features: by the fact that it promotes the aim cited in (C1). That is, (C1) clearly occupies a more central position within Harding’s theory than do (C4) and (C5). Whether there in fact are such epistemically beneficial features of feminist activism remains to be investigated, but if there are, I doubt any social epistemologist would do anything but welcome such activism.

So, by way of conclusion: since (C1) through (C3) is common ground for VSE and FST, VSE’s concept of a veritistic measure clearly is compatible with FST, and the truth of (C4) and (C5) need only be a matter of internal social epistemologist-research and discussion, I see no risk of logical incompatibility between the two theories.

V

A common objection launched against feminist standpoint theories is that there is no such thing as a women’s perspective homogenous enough to ground the feminist standpoint. The objection can be formulated as there being a disanalogy between the proletariat and women as a group. There is simply no such thing as a women’s perspective, and hence, it has been argued, standpoint theories are marginalising by their own standards, since they thereby run the risk of excluding the perspectives of less influential groups within the feminist movement.

Harding takes this to be a serious problem for FST, but refers to the theory’s acknowledgement of (C2) as a solution. That seems to be a wise move due to the generality of that claim; (C2) does not say anything about any specific social contexts. Still, it is somewhat puzzling that she is so worried about this objection, since she, as we saw above, does not define the relevant standpoint as a women’s standpoint, but as a feminist standpoint achieved by engaging in feminist activism and politics. Remember, the feminist standpoint was not out of reach for men.

Still, this very move raises an interesting question: Why stop here? Why this specifically feminist standpoint theory, given the apparent inclusive ambition of its adherents, reflected in the objection in question? Harding herself considers not only men but, among others, African Americans, Japanese Americans, Third

World peoples, and lesbians to be included into such a broader feminist project. In other words, there is an evident inclusive ambition of FST. What is interesting with this ambition is that it transgresses the original feminist ambition, and thereby, as far as I can see, calls for a more general epistemology. VSE could serve this need and for this reason, I claim that we should incorporate FST into VSE. While FST is a theory about particularly feminist standpoints, VSE may be understood as a theory about standpoints in general. By virtue of its framework of veritistic measure, which, as we saw above, leaves open the question of exactly which factors of evaluation are to be counted as relevant, VSE does not favor or marginalize any particular epistemic standpoints—as long as they can be motivated by the pursuit of truth central to epistemic inquiry, as stated in common ground claim (C1). In this respect, VSE is more general than FST, and, given the inclusive ambition of the latter, we have a reason to incorporate the latter into the former.

To sum up, my line of argument for the inclusion of FST into VSE runs as follows. Given (i) Harding’s and Goldman’s acceptance of the common ground claims (C1) through (C3); (ii) that, as for the central claims that go beyond this common ground go, there does not seem to be any risk for logical incompatibility between the two theories; and (iii) that the generality of VSE not only does justice to the inclusive ambition of FST, but even solves a well-discussed problem for the latter, there is a good case to be made for the incorporation of FST into VSE.

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