

# CRITICIZING THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF OBJECTIVITY

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Science, it would seem is not sexless; she is a man, a father and infected too.  
— Virginia Woolf<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

This quotation has become the battle cry of feminist philosophers of science. It has led many a feminist to search for, and uncover, vast numbers of historical (and contemporary) examples of sexism surrounding the scientific enterprise.

Most feminist critiques focus on the *practice* of science. That is, they criticize both “the ways in which women are inhibited from entering into science professions”<sup>2</sup> and the ways in which science has, and is, being used (by men) to oppress women.

Some feminist philosophers of science, however, focus on the scientific *method* itself by criticizing the classical desiderata of the scientific method. Special focus is paid to the notion of objectivity. Objectivity, claim some, is only “ostensibly [the] non-involved stance.”<sup>3</sup> In actuality, it is the male stance. Therefore, the story goes, our respect for the scientific method is simply an outcome of our traditional (sexist, hence, male-biased) political inclinations.

Practice-critiques, then, claim only to demonstrate that *men* in the sciences are sexist; that *they* are infected. But method-critiques are intended to show something far more provocative: namely, that science is, *essentially*, sexist; that *it* is infected.

This paper concentrates on the method-critiques of feminist philosophers and attempts to demonstrate that their case—that science is essentially male-biased, via their critiques of objectivity—has not been made. In addition, I will show that had it been made, and the call to *feminize* science answered, such changes would, ultimately, hurt women.

## 2. Interpretations of Objectivity

The concept of objectivity is fleshed out in a number of different ways by a number of different feminists. For Ruth Bleier and Catharine MacKinnon, ‘objectivity’ is synonymous with a “value-free stance,”<sup>4</sup> and the “non-involved stance,”<sup>5</sup> respectively. Evelyn Fox Keller states that the objectivist ideology proclaims “disinterest,”<sup>6</sup> a characterization similar to Jean Grimshaw’s understanding of objectivity as “impartiality.”<sup>7</sup> And Sandra Harding has an entirely different take on the concept of objectivity. She claims that objectivity “is not maximized through value-neutrality”;<sup>8</sup> for, according to Harding,

the paradigm models of objective science are those studies explicitly directed by morally and politically emancipatory interests—that is, by interests in eliminating sexist, racist, classist, and culturally coercive understandings of nature and social life.<sup>9</sup>

I will examine each of the three different interpretations of objectivity—(1) politically emancipatory, (2) value-free or non-involved, and (3) impartiality or disinterest—in order to show: (1) that the first interpretation is too unconventional to take seriously as a target for philosophical criticism from either feminist or nonfeminist camps; (2) that the second caricatures the concept of objectivity held by most scientists and philosophers of science and, therefore, need not be defended from feminist criticism; and (3) that only the third interpretation properly characterizes objectivity and, thus, only it is a worthy target of feminist criticism; but that the criticisms leveled against it—fleshed out in terms of impartiality and disinterest—are not sufficient for claiming that science, itself, is sexist.

### A. *Objectivity as emancipatory*

Harding’s account of objectivity has, I think, already been thoroughly criticized by Kristin Shrader-Frechette.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, I will merely point out the relevant passage in her critique.

Shrader-Frechette states that because

Harding is not employing the term ‘objectivity’ in its ordinary

sense . . . her use is question-begging both because she has not defended it, and because this sense of the term is highly stipulative . . . [that is,] she does not explain how scientific work becomes more objective by being directed by moral and political *interests* . . . how work expressing moral and political *values* lays claim to objectivity.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, Harding must either develop this unusual account of objectivity more fully or retreat to one of the more ordinary senses described above. Until she has done this, her account is neither worthy of criticism from classical<sup>12</sup> philosophers of science, nor deserving of defense by feminists.<sup>13</sup>

### *B. Objectivity as value-free*

The form of the feminist argument against objectivity *qua* a value-free stance is quite simple: A value-free stance is *essential* to the scientific method; the desire to achieve a value-free stance is an *androcentric* goal; therefore, "science is a masculine project."<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately for the feminists, this first premise is false—a value-free stance is not essential to science or the scientific method; therefore, the second premise, even if true, speaks to a straw account.

Most "postmodern"<sup>15</sup> scientists (and philosophers of science) recognize that "nature is no longer at arm's length."<sup>16</sup> As Stephen Toulmin has pointed out,

we now realize, [that] the interaction between scientists and their objects of study is a *two-way* affair. . . . Even in fundamental physics, for instance, the fact that subatomic particles are under observation will make the influence of the physicists' instruments a significant element in the phenomena themselves... [T]he scientific observer is now—willy-nilly—also a *participant*.<sup>17</sup>

This is not an acceptance of subjectivity; that would be going too far (see below). Toulmin has only restructured the classical concept of objectivity in a way that acknowledges that we can no longer treat objects of scientific study (be they other people or electrons) in *purely* objectified ways.

Such restructuring does not depend on the notion of a value-free stance; however, it does maintain the spirit of classical objectivity by stressing the desire and attempt to remain *unbiased*.

Examples of not-quite-value-free-but-nonetheless-unbiased acts abound. They occur, for example, any time we adjudicate philosophical disputes at conferences, moderate philosophical analyses in the classroom, or evaluate the work of our students. To quote Toulmin again:

In all these cases, to be objective does not require us to be *uninterested*, that is, devoid of interests or feelings; it requires us only to acknowledge those interests and feelings, to discount any resulting biases and prejudices, and to do our best to act in a *disinterested* way.<sup>18</sup>

Feminist criticism which is aimed at objectivity qua a value-free stance, value-neutrality, non-involvedness, or uninterestedness simply misses the point.

### C. *Objectivity as disinterest*

Some feminist critics of science and scientific methodology do address the concept of objectivity in its more sophisticated form—via the notion of a disinterested or unbiased stance—while still claiming that the classical concept is sexist. Two different kinds of criticisms are offered.

The first focuses on the hermeneutical rendering of the texts of science as androcentric; the second focuses on the claim that “humans cannot be impartial or objective recorders of the world.”<sup>19</sup> Both are problematic.

1. *The hermeneutical fallacy.* The first kind of criticism focuses on the fact that objectivity has been genderized male, while subjectivity has been genderized female.

Such genderization is obvious (to many feminists) from a number of avenues: feminist historical interpretation, literary criticism, and psychoanalysis, just to name a few. It is stated that there are ways to “‘read science as a text’ [which] reveal the social meanings—the hidden symbolic and cultural agendas—of purportedly [disinterested]<sup>20</sup> claims and practices.”<sup>21</sup> This “reading” of text has demonstrated (to feminists) that science is “inextricably connected with specific masculine . . . needs and desires.”<sup>22</sup>

This kind of hermeneutical evidence is illegitimate because it presupposes precisely what is being challenged; namely, that the concept of ‘disinterested stance’ is itself male-biased. To simply adopt an androcentric interpretation without offering some justification for such an adoption is to beg the question.

2. *No such thing as objectivity.* The hermeneutical “reason” is not the only justification feminist critics supply for rejecting the classical notion of objectivity. Their other, stronger claim is that we can never act in a disinterested way.

Why not? Is this a fact of human psychology or the logical/epistemological outcome of the fact that there is no disinterested stance to be had?

a. *The psychological point.* If feminist critics mean the former, then their claim—that “human beings can never act in a disinterested way”—is in the same kind of trouble that surrounds the psychological egoist’s claim that “human beings can never act except in their own best interest.” As an

empirical thesis, the egoist's claim is either false (e.g., Mother Theresa) or unfalsifiable.

The argument against the claim that "human beings can never act in a disinterested way" follows suit—as an empirical thesis, it is either false (e.g., when we rationally *decide*, not merely arbitrarily *choose*, which of our students earned an "A") or unfalsifiable.

*b. The epistemological point.* The psychological interpretation is probably not what feminist critics have in mind. The point is not that there are shortcomings in the human psychological mechanism which prevent one from being disinterested, but that there is no unbiased stance to be had.

If the only stance is a biased stance, then, given science and its history of male-domination, this bias translates into the idea that the male stance is the only stance.

Unfortunately, feminists (in the literature) do not directly argue for the no-unbiased-stance claim. Instead, they often appeal to the (male) authority Thomas Kuhn. They claim that the

Kuhnian strategy of arguing that observations are theory-laden, theories are paradigm-laden, and paradigms are culture-laden... [demonstrates that] there are and can be no such things as . . . objective<sup>23</sup> facts.<sup>24</sup>

And without objective facts there can be no objective, i.e., unbiased, stance.

Of course, relying upon Kuhn leaves an important question open for debate: Is he right? Although a thorough discussion of Kuhn's arguments against objectivity would fall outside the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that at best there is vast body of philosophical literature which claims that he has *not* made his case against objectivity.<sup>25</sup> At worst, he is wrong.

Briefly, Kuhn's concept of incommensurability (which is at the heart of his version of relativism) is caught between the horns of a dilemma. Either it supports radical incommensurability which entails unintelligibility on the one hand; or it allows for intelligibility and therefore objectivity on the other. As Israel Scheffler has pointed out, "[o]bjectivity requires simply the possibility of intelligible debate over the comparative merits of rival paradigms."<sup>26</sup>

Although it is not clear whether Kuhn himself actually supports the radical reading of the incommensurability claim,<sup>27</sup> it is certain that the feminists cannot simply rest on their Kuhnian laurels. If Kuhn is a radical incommensurabilist, then feminist critics of science must take the vast body of criticism of (Kuhnian) relativism seriously and attempt a rejoinder. If, on the other hand, Kuhn is not a radical incommensurabilist, then these particular feminist arguments against objectivity cannot be based on his work. In either case, it seems, the feminists will have to develop a completely Kuhn-independent attack on objectivity.

### 3. Is the Feminist Project Committed to Relativism?

#### A. *The abandonment of science*

Even if the Kuhnian arguments with respect to the critique of objectivity were correct, what follows for the feminists is unclear; for if there is no disinterested (unbiased) stance to be had, then the only stance would be a stance biased by someone (or some culture, sex, or whatever).

Under such a relativistic interpretation, scientific theories are never about the "way things are," for there is no "way<sup>28</sup> things are." Scientific theories are about the way things are for *this culture, that sex, you, or me*. Such an interpretation, however, does not entail the need for a feminist interpretation of the scientific method, but rather an abandonment of the enterprise of science itself. If objectivity is at the heart of the scientific method, then its removal would be fatal.<sup>29</sup>

#### B. *Feminism and relativism*

Before proceeding with the pragmatic problems of such a relativistic interpretation, it is important to note that most feminists, including Harding, have never been comfortable with the brand "relativism." Harding, especially, has tried to tackle the issue.

1. "Old" Harding. In *The Science Question*, Harding claims that "the leap to relativism misgrasps feminist projects."<sup>30</sup>

This "leap" is unjustified, she argues, because

feminist inquirers are never saying that sexist and antisexist claims are equally plausible. . . . [E]vidence for feminist vs. non-feminist claims may be inconclusive in some cases. . . . [A]gnosticism and the recognition of the hypothetical character of all scientific claims are quite different epistemological stances from relativism. Moreover, whether or not feminists take a relativistic stance, it is hard to imagine a coherent defense of cognitive relativism when one thinks of the conflicting claims.<sup>31</sup>

So what exactly is Harding's point?

a. *Agnosticism or relativism?* Harding might be making one of three possible claims. The first is that if one believes sexist and antisexist claims are equally plausible, then one is not necessarily committed to relativism. I agree, but this does not help her case, for such a position is, nonetheless, compatible with relativism.

The determination of relativism depends on *why* someone maintains an agnostic position. If one maintains such a position *because* both claims are supported by the evidence equally well, this is compatible with absolutism. Absolutists often maintain positions of agnosticism—a position of equal support for two (even two logically incompatible) theories pending

further evidence. It may be that although one believes that both positions cannot be correct (which may simply be a recognition of the law of non-contradiction), *one is unable, at this time, to rationally choose.*

If, on the other hand, one claims that both sexism and antisexism are equally plausible positions, not because the evidence for both is legitimate but *because* there is no objective stance from which to judge the legitimacy of the evidence at all, then one is committed to relativism.

Harding does not make it clear which *reason* for adopting both sexism and antisexism as plausible she is denying that the feminists maintain; that is, she has not made clear what is motivating feminist agnosticism. The point is only that if the motivation is that there is no objective stance to be had, then feminists are committed to relativism.

If, on the other hand, the motivation is simply to await further evidence, then it is not clear what reasons Harding has left for criticizing the classical concept of objectivity.

*b. The hypothetical character of science.* Nor is it clear what Harding means when she says feminists are not relativists simply because they recognize the hypothetical character of scientific claims. Does this mean she thinks that scientific claims are only conjectures, postulates, or contingently true? Fine, so do classical scientists and philosophers of science.

Does this mean one avoids relativism by denying that scientific claims are ever wrong? It depends on what one means by 'wrong'. Does 'wrong' mean relatively wrong, or *really* wrong? If the former, then yes, feminists are committed to relativism; if the latter, then feminists are not committed to relativism, but then, again, it is not clear what of interest is left of their criticism. To acknowledge that the claims of science can be wrong, *really* wrong,<sup>32</sup> presupposes that there is an objective concept of right, which is precisely what is being denied by the feminist philosophers of science.

Under this interpretation, feminists are either relativists or objectivists.

*c. Relativism is an untenable position.* Perhaps all Harding is saying is that the feminist position cannot be equated with relativism because "it is hard to imagine a coherent defense of cognitive relativism."<sup>33</sup> But to claim that feminists could not be committed to relativism because relativism is an untenable position is merely a case of wishful thinking.

Furthermore, if feminist philosophers of science are not embracing relativism, it becomes difficult to see why nonfeminist science, via the classical notion of objectivity, is being challenged at all and why Kuhn's account of science is offered in defense.

*d. Harding's dilemma.* Harding has set herself between the horns of a dilemma. That is, in her attempt to save the feminist account from having to address all the problems of relativism, she has weakened the account. Her efforts have forced the feminist position to be something that classical scientists (and philosophers of science) would find uninteresting and un-

objectionable.<sup>34</sup>

I conclude, then, that Harding has not made her case that the inference from feminism to relativism misgrasps the feminist project.

2. *"New" Harding*. In her most recent work, however, Harding no longer attempts to show that feminism is not committed to relativism. Her new tack is to claim that feminism is committed to relativism, though only to historical/sociological/cultural (HSC) relativism, not to *judgmental* relativism.

By distinguishing judgmental relativism—"an epistemological relativism that denies the possibility of any reasonable standards for adjudicating between competing claims"<sup>35</sup>—from HSC relativism, Harding hopes to both embrace relativism and yet avoid its logical and pragmatic pitfalls. She is unsuccessful.

*a. Distinction without a difference*. First, the judgmental/HSC dichotomy makes a distinction which pulls no epistemic weight, for HSC relativism, at least the way it is presented by Harding, is not an epistemological thesis at all. In *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, she describes HSC relativism as a

respect for historical (or sociological or cultural) relativism [which] is always useful in starting one's thinking. Different social groups tend to have different patterns of practice and belief and different standards for judging them; these practices, beliefs and standards can be explained by different historical interests, values, and agendas. . . . (*WS*, 152)

This account is merely a description of individuals or societies, of what is often called "cultural relativism." The belief that cultural relativism is true is not only *not* equivalent to epistemological relativism, it is compatible with the belief that epistemological relativism is false. Furthermore, HSC relativism is not at issue. The truth (or falsity) of HSC relativism is a purely empirical matter. It is the philosophically provocative thesis—that there is no way to adjudicate between the beliefs of different individuals, cultures, etc.—that concerns epistemologists. Unfortunately for Harding, once her position on HSC relativism becomes epistemically relativistic enough to become philosophically interesting, it cannot be distinguished from judgmental relativism and, therefore, is susceptible to all of the latter's problems.

*b. Harding: Not really a relativist*. Maybe Harding wants to avoid judgmental relativism because she is not a relativist at all. She does claim

that not all social values and interests have the same bad effects upon the results of research. Some have systematically generated less partial and distorted beliefs than others—or than purport-

edly value-free research. . . . (WS, 144)

If some are not as *bad*, then there must be standards by which to determine which are and which are not. The belief in such standards entails a belief that epistemological relativism is false.

It seems that HSC relativism does not

commit one to the further epistemological claim that there are therefore no rational or scientific grounds for making judgments between various patterns of belief and their originating social practices, values, and consequences (WS, 152)

because HSC relativism is not a form of epistemological relativism. In the final analysis, HSC relativism is Harding's misnomer for her feminist "standpoint epistemology" of old. After all, HSC relativism is, according to Harding, precisely what "standpoint epistemologies call for" (WS, 142). Why she attempts to defend relativism at all, since her account does not necessitate it, is unclear.

*c. Judgmental relativism is not a problem.* I believe the best answer is that Harding, although she does not want to be liable for the problems of relativism, wants even less to be slapped with the charge of dogmatism. If a "feminist standpoint" is not a form of relativism, then it is epistemologically absolutist. As such, some defense must be offered; if none is, then feminism is simply dogma.

Without the smokescreen of relativism, Harding will have to put forward some argument as to why a feminist epistemological standpoint is at least worthy of consideration. Unfortunately, this kind of positive account would require offering reasons, which in turn requires some commitment to garden-variety, i.e., objective, evidence.

Therefore, in order to maintain consistency with her original objections to objectivity, Harding continues to defend relativism, even real "judgmental" relativism, from attack. In one last-ditch effort, Harding claims that

[j]udgmental relativism is not a problem originating in or justifiable in terms of the lives of marginalized groups [i.e., women]... Relativism arises as a problem only from the perspective of men's lives. (WS, 154)

Furthermore, she claims that "an implicit acceptance of . . . judgmental relativism . . . appears to be the only condition under which women's voices . . . can be heard" (WS, 155). She asks: "Isn't feminism forced to embrace [judgmental] relativism by its condition of being just one among many counter-cultural voices?" (WS, 155).

In other words, Harding was unable to maintain any kind of interest-

ing distinction between HSC relativism and judgmental relativism. In addition, she could not opt for absolutism, because this would make her account either self-refuting or dogmatic. Her only strategy was to admit that feminist critiques of classical epistemology are committed to relativism and then to appeal to the claim that feminists have no other alternative.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. Relativism: Not Good for Women

If feminists are relativists, then there are some serious pragmatic problems with which they will have to contend.

With respect to theory choice in science, a feminist (relativistic) scientific method leaves one with the ability to choose evidence or theory in the one way that classical science condemns—taking seriously criteria other than our reasoned decisions based on evidence. To relativize the warrantability of a theory with respect to personal or political motivations is to do precisely what we ought not.

For feminists to adopt such a negative response to objectivity misses the spirit of their original intent—to make the sciences less sexist. Their political point is that science has misused its power and has hurt women in the process. However, the ability to say that science has been wrong requires that one forgo relativism and develop an account of science which can take feminist criticism seriously.<sup>37</sup> At the very least, this requires one to be able to point to objective evidence—not evidence *for feminists* or evidence *for men*, but evidence simpliciter. To make sense of the fact that someone misuses evidence, or brings political and personal desires into play when deciding on the worth of a theory, requires, at some level, a commitment to objectivity.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, it is important for feminists to realize that insofar as they have been able to track sexism—make sense of where it is coming from and why—and defend the position that specific men or specific research projects are sexist, feminists have appealed to the very same objective criteria which they deny exist or claim exist only for men.

If feminists accept relativism, they must realize that decision making, by their own lights, will be left to either providence or politics. If they leave decision making to the former, their chances for emancipation are at best fifty-fifty. If they leave it to the latter, the odds against are even greater. For men hold all the cards.

The only hope for this account with respect to theory choice in science is to presuppose a feminist political agenda and then develop those (and only those) scientific theories which are consistent with feminist goals. This may offer political and personal gains, but only at the cost of trivializing the very position which allowed feminists to initiate the serious criticism that science is sexist. By presupposing feminist goals, science will

remain sexist; it will cease to be *androcentric* only because it will have become *gyno*centric.

Feminists must make peace with the concept of objectivity. This does not mean the acceptance of any specific account of objectivity, only a commitment to its underlying spirit—to do one's best to act in an unbiased way.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, I have argued that the feminist case against science—that *it* is infected—has not been made.

Insofar as the interpretation of the classical concept of objectivity is developed in terms of a value-free stance, it caricatures the classical concept. Insofar as it is developed in terms of disinterestedness, appeals to Kuhn are unhelpful and a Kuhn-independent case has not been made.

Finally, I have attempted to show that it is in the best interest of women to give up the feminist<sup>39</sup> fight against objectivity. They should cease defending the political party line, "Science is a man, science is infected," and, instead, make good use of the classical concept of objectivity to cleanse science of its sexist practices. Although such an enterprise would not be particularly feminist, it would, nevertheless, be good, especially for women.<sup>40</sup>

1. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1938).
2. Nancy Tuana, "Review of *Sex and Scientific Inquiry*," *APA Newsletter on Feminism*, vol. 89, no. 2 (1990), pp. 61-62; see p. 61.
3. Catharine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," *Signs*, vol. 7 (1982), pp. 515-44; see p. 538.
4. Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender* (New York: Paragon Press, 1984), p. 4.
5. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," p. 538.
6. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 12.
7. Jean Grimshaw, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 83.
8. Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 249.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-50.
10. Kristin Shrader-Frechette, "Review of *The Science Question in Feminism*," *Synthese*, vol. 76 (1988), pp. 441-46; see p. 444.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

12. I use the term 'classical' instead of 'traditional', since I believe that the latter term is too easy a target for feminist criticism.

13. Actually, Harding wavers on this point. In Sandra Harding, "Starting from Women's Lives: Eight Resources for Maximizing Objectivity," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol. 21 (1991), pp. 140-49, she claims that

[m]aximizing objectivity requires critically examining not only those beliefs that differ between individuals . . . but also those that are held by virtually everyone who gets to count as inside the "scientific community." (p. 149)

This move, though, I will argue below, only serves to make the feminist objection impotent and uninteresting, for it restates what the classical account has always been committed to.

Furthermore, in her most recent book, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), Harding goes back to the more radical position of *The Science Question*. She ostensibly supports 'objectivity', but only after distinguishing what she purposely misnames "weak" objectivity—the desire for unbiased research—from "strong" objectivity—research biased by emancipatory desires. Then, by supporting only "strong" objectivity, she is clearly employing the term 'objectivity' to mean something radically different from what everyone else does. Shrader-Frechette's criticism still holds.

14. Harding, *The Science Question*, p. 177.

15. By this phrase I mean any scientist or philosopher of science since the development of subatomic physics.

16. Stephen Toulmin, "The Construal of Reality: Criticism in Modern and Postmodern Science," in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 112.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

19. Harding, *The Science Question*, p. 83.

20. The original actually reads "value-neutral." I am giving the case its most sympathetic reading.

21. Harding, *The Science Question*, p. 23.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Harding actually equates 'value-neutrality' with 'objective' here. This tells me that she too reads the majority of feminists' criticisms of the classical concept of objectivity as directed to the straw notion of value-neutrality.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

25. Just to name a few: Israel Scheffler, *Science and Subjectivity* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); Carl R. Kordig, *The Justification of Scientific Change* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1971); W. H. Newton-Smith, *The Rationality of Science* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); and Harvey Siegel, *Relativism Refuted* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1987).

26. Israel Scheffler, "Vision and Revolution: A Postscript to Kuhn," *Philosophy of Science*, vol. 39 (1972), pp. 366-74; see p. 369.

27. Steven Yates, for example, believes that Kuhn rejects the radical reading, citing Kuhn's "Commensurability, Comparability, Communicability," *Philosophy of Science Association* (1982), vol. 2, ed. Peter Asquith and Thomas Nickles (East Lansing: Philosophy of Science Association, 1983), pp. 669-88. Yates claims that Kuhn's ideas are actually quite similar to Scheffler's and that their real difference lies in the rhetoric, not the substance, of their work. Because of this, he claims that "there is nothing for the feminists to exploit in any accurate reading of Kuhn; they simply do not understand him." (Personal correspondence, August 1992.)

28. Or even *ways* things are. Feminist criticism must be more than just an acknowledgment of pluralism, for pluralism is compatible with classical science and philosophy of science.

29. This point has been recognized by some feminist philosophers of science. Elizabeth Fee, for example, claims that a rejection of objectivity "need not . . . go so far as to reject the whole human effort to comprehend the world in rational terms, nor the idea that forms of

knowledge can be subjected to critical evaluation and empirical testing. . . . [T]hese are aspects of scientific objectivity which should be preserved and defended" (Elizabeth Fee, "A Feminist Critique of Scientific Objectivity," *Science for the People*, July/August 1982, pp. 5-33; see p. 7). Unfortunately, as will be shown below, once such a concession is made, it is not clear what is interesting or provocative about the feminist project.

30. Harding, *The Science Question*, p. 138.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

32. There is also the implicit denial of skepticism, that is, a presupposition that what is right or wrong can be known at all.

33. Harding, *The Science Question*, p. 27.

34. In informal discussion with Harding over the phone (in 1989), I questioned her directly on this dilemma. Her response was that I was to read her book more carefully. Later in 1991, at Johns Hopkins University—where she was a guest lecturer—I posed the same dilemma. Her response was indirect and unsatisfactory.

35. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (see n. 13 above), p. 139; subsequent references to this book (hereafter *WS*) will be given in parentheses in the text.

36. A similar "tension" has been pointed out by Margareta Halberg, "Feminist Epistemology: An Impossible Project," *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 53 (1989), p. 6.

37. This point has been appreciated by some feminists. See, for example, Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 45, 255, 319-20.

38. Steven Yates, in "Multiculturalism and Epistemology," *Public Affairs Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1992), argues a generalized version of this same point.

39. This is reminiscent of a point often made by Christina Sommers; that is, what is good for women is not always entailed by (or even compatible with) what is being pushed by mainstream academic feminists.

40. Special thanks to Harvey Siegel, Kristin Shrader-Frechette, Christina Sommers, Steven Yates, and David Fenner for their helpful comments and encouragement.