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# Feminist Responsibilism, Situationism, and the Complexities of the Virtue of Trustworthiness

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## 11.1 Introduction

Within feminist epistemology\*, there is a significant subset of theorists working with a virtue approach. Most if not all of these theorists can be identified as responsibilists as opposed to reliabilists (see, for example, Code 1987, 1991; Fricker 2007; Daukas 2011; Medina 2013). Feminists are drawn to responsibilism in part because they take it to be conducive to an attention to epistemic agency in a way that reliabilism is not. For example, in her 1987 book *Epistemic Responsibility* that established the feminist epistemologist as one of the early developers of responsibilism, Lorraine Code explains that she identifies her position as responsibilism “because the concept ‘responsibility’ can allow emphasis upon the active nature of knowers/believers, whereas the concept ‘reliability’ cannot” (1987: 50–1).<sup>1</sup> As feminist virtue epistemologist Nancy Daukas has argued, engaging “the point of view of epistemic agency” is one of several commitments shared by feminist epistemologists generally (Daukas 2011). This commitment stems from their understanding that the political projects of feminism require a theoretically coherent concept of agency complete with robust epistemic dimensions.

Yet a responsibilist approach to virtue epistemology that gives a central role to dispositions and character traits does not come without its challenges. Given that the recent situationist critique when applied to virtue epistemology has generally been understood to pose a greater threat to responsibilism than to reliabilism (Alfano 2012),

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, this early book of Code’s, unlike her later work, is not explicitly feminist, yet it is this 1987 work of hers that is most often cited in the virtue-epistemology literature. Code specifically notes that a responsibilist approach is especially important (in contrast to reliabilism) when *human* knowledge is under discussion (1987: 50). In her later works she continues to emphasize ideas of epistemic responsibility as understood through a feminist lens (Code 1991, 2006).

it is worth examining the relationship between feminist versions of responsibilism and the general situationist critique of responsibilism. In the first part of this chapter, I put forth reasons to think that these feminists at least initially share some of the concerns expressed by situationists and can even be interpreted as expanding the situationist position. I also point out how feminist expectations of virtue epistemology differ from those of some of the responsibilist positions that the situationists target. These differences permit the development of a feminist responsibilism that is more compatible with the situationists' concerns, even as it develops in its own direction. In the last section of the chapter, I focus on the central role the virtue of trustworthiness plays in feminist responsibilism. I use it as an example of certain challenges that need to be met by feminist virtue epistemologists, given their situated approach.

## 11.2 Understanding the Projects of Feminist Epistemology

Before delving into comparisons between situationists and feminist virtue epistemologists, it will be helpful first to outline some of the general features of feminist approaches to epistemology and note a few characteristics of the work of feminist virtue epistemologists. Feminist epistemology is concerned with identifying connections between gendered power relations and practices of knowing.<sup>2</sup> Feminists examine such connections both at the descriptive level, asking how gendered social practices have affected the shape of knowledge and the standards and practices of inquiry, and at the normative level, asking in what ways gendered power relations must be taken into account in analyses of how to know or inquire well. With its core interest in the epistemic ramifications of gendered power relations, feminist epistemology can best be understood as a form of social epistemology (Grasswick 2013). As Phyllis Rooney characterizes the situation, feminist epistemology shares with other social epistemologies "similar interests in examining the ways in which social practices and communities influence the development of knowledge" (Rooney 2012: 340). Their understanding of knowing as fundamentally embedded in social practices has led to the extensive generation of work on such topics as the social dimensions of epistemic agency, the social dynamics of and epistemic importance of testimony, and the contextual nature of standards of knowing. Feminist epistemologists incorporate different aspects of the "sociality" of inquiry into their accounts. Two of the most important aspects are the epistemic relevance of agents'

<sup>2</sup> Though here I stress its attention to gendered power relations, feminist epistemology has become increasingly identified as a project that attends to all structured power relations and their effects on knowledge, not simply those of gender. More generally, feminist theory as a whole has evolved to where it is commonly held that gender relations themselves cannot be adequately analyzed without integrating into them an understanding of the varieties of axes of oppression, with race, class, and sexuality included amongst the major categories. As a result, we find feminist epistemology being described as early as 1993 as *not* "involving a commitment to gender as the primary axis of oppression, in any sense of 'primary,' or positing that gender is a theoretical variable separable from other axes of oppression and susceptible to unique analysis" (Alcoff & Potter 1993: 3–4).

social location and the interdependence of inquirers. As I shall argue later, recognizing feminist virtue epistemologies as fundamentally social in multiple ways is a crucial step toward understanding how they escape the main target of the situationist critique of responsibilists and also how they envision socially embedded inquiry and the role of virtues.

Given their interest in the epistemic effects of gendered power relations, coupled with their larger goals of reducing the social divides created by such power relations, feminists have been especially interested in developing epistemologies that specifically address how we (the socially privileged and underprivileged alike) can know well under conditions of oppression. Indeed, much of their work is motivated by a sense that standard idealized epistemological analyses have offered very little of use in understanding how to inquire well under conditions of oppression, and may even at times mask oppressive epistemic practices by focusing exclusively on ideal conditions of knowledge acquisition (Code 1991; Scheman 1993). Feminist epistemologists are more interested in developing models of inquiry that can help us know well in the specific contexts we find ourselves in, and, given their broader goals of social justice, analyses of epistemic contexts characterized by oppression are especially important for them. In this respect, their work has a pragmatic orientation to it, seeking to develop tools that can be employed in natural and likely-occurring epistemic settings. This sets their work apart from some of the more traditional framings of epistemology that narrow their subject matter to the conceptual analysis of the category of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Feminist work fits more closely with what Hookway describes as the task of evaluating “well-conducted inquiry” and regulating the activities involved in our inquiries (Hookway 2003: 194). This focus on inquiry makes a difference in how feminist virtue epistemologists conceptualize the virtues, and leads them to adopt a responsibilist conception that focuses on dispositions that help us in the activities of inquiry. As Greco (2002) has noted, various theorists conceptualize virtues differently depending on the epistemological concerns they hope their discussion of the virtues will illuminate. Some take up “traditional epistemological concerns about the nature and structure of knowledge” (2002: 297), for which reliabilist conceptions of virtue are well suited, while others are more interested in “problems that fall outside the scope of traditional epistemological inquiry” (2002: 297). Feminist virtue epistemologists fall into this latter camp with their focus on inquiry under contexts of oppression, and unsurprisingly they develop responsibilist conceptions of virtue that can help explain how to know well under these conditions.

In addition to this interest in specific contexts of knowing such as a social context of oppression, feminist epistemologists have also been especially interested in particular

<sup>3</sup> Relatedly, Ernest Sosa distinguishes between two parts of epistemology: “theory of knowledge” that investigates the nature, conditions, and extent of human knowledge and the broader field of “intellectual ethics” that “concerns evaluation and norms pertinent to intellectual matters generally, with sensitivity to the full span of intellectual values” (Sosa 2009: 89). With its focus on practices of inquiry, feminist epistemology fits more easily into this second, broader category.

kinds of knowing, such as developing understandings and analyses of social relations. Rather than strive to develop a fully generalizable epistemology that is equally applicable to all types of knowing, covering the range of everything from basic perceptual knowing to complex understandings of social phenomena, many feminists focus their attention on analyzing the specific challenges of acquiring particular forms of knowledge that are important for their larger goals of understanding and confronting social injustices. For example, feminists have been interested in understanding how background assumptions of the socially dominant easily find their way into the starting points of many specific knowledge-seeking enterprises, shaping the theories and understandings upon which social policy is then built. Recognizing that feminist epistemologists frame their projects in terms of some specific contexts and types of knowing places us in a better position to evaluate the repercussions of the situationist critique when applied to feminist responsibilists.

Perhaps the most widely cited refrain of various feminist epistemologies is that knowing (and knowledge) must be understood as “socially situated.” Amongst feminist epistemologists there is significant variation in the meaning of this central tenet of the social situatedness of knowing. Nevertheless, two core elements of the tenet can be discerned across a wide variety of feminist theorists (Grasswick 2014b). First, the tenet of social situatedness encompasses the claim that one’s possibilities for knowing depend on one’s social location in a very deep way. Knowers are not simply interchangeable with each other, and the answers to questions of how and to what extent one can access certain forms of knowledge are differentiated on the basis of social location—a feature that one cannot shed, at least not on one’s own.<sup>4</sup> Second, the tenet of social situatedness includes an understanding of knowing as partial and limited in the sense that it is an activity undertaken by a locatable subject, and thus is always offered up from a certain perspective. Although we strive to reach beyond our subjectivity in the achievement of objective knowledge, according to the tenet of socially situated knowing the end result will always be limited, representing at most some form of an intersubjectively attained point of view. There are connections between this aspect of social situatedness and the feminist attention to knowing within specific contexts that I described earlier.<sup>5</sup> But although there is much to be said about this second aspect of social situatedness and how feminist epistemologists have analyzed objective knowing under a perspectival analysis, for my purposes here I shall focus on the implications of the first aspect of social situatedness—that knowers are differentiated according to their social location and that this affects the accessibility of knowledge for them.

<sup>4</sup> Feminist standpoint epistemologists are best known for their development of the idea that the positions of the socially underprivileged carry with them some forms of epistemic advantage (Harding 1991; Hartsock 1983). But here I draw attention only to a more minimal claim shared more broadly across feminist epistemologists including those uncommitted to the idea of epistemic advantage: simply the idea that social location is deeply relevant to one’s capacities for acquiring knowledge of certain kinds (Grasswick 2014b).

<sup>5</sup> In short, if the outcome of inquiry is always limited and perspectival, investigating inquiry within its context (and coming to understand the parameters of that context) become very important for epistemologists.

There are two major implications of this claim concerning differentiated knowers. First, the social situatedness of knowing leads feminist epistemologists to focus on the challenges of knowing *across* social locations. If social location deeply shapes and limits one's access to knowledge, then each of us will depend on those situated differently from us for much of our knowledge in an even more striking and comprehensive way than many epistemologists, even most testimony theorists, have admitted. Understanding how our relative social locations affect our interactions with others through whom we know becomes a major focus of attention for feminist epistemologists generally, and feminist virtue epistemologists in particular.<sup>6</sup> Second, when we consider the case of virtue epistemologists specifically, the differentiation of knowers according to social location opens the possibilities that what constitutes an epistemic virtue, or at least what virtues are needed, may differ according to social location, and that certain virtues may be more difficult to develop in some social locations.

Indeed, when we look specifically at the work of feminist virtue epistemologists, we find that the virtues on which they focus are those required to know well through our interactions with others, particularly when the knowing is done in contexts of oppression. For example, Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic injustice analyzes the testimonial injustices that occur when, due to identity prejudices that are often manifested in the form of stereotypes, marginalized people are not attributed the credibility they otherwise deserve (Fricker 2007). She argues that under such circumstances a corrective anti-prejudicial virtue is required in listeners, a virtue that involves a "distinctly reflexive critical social awareness" (2007: 91) through which the listener is alert to the impact of their own identity relative to that of the speaker. This critical social awareness will allow the listener to correct their credibility judgments of a speaker upwards when appropriate. In this the listener shifts "intellectual gear out of spontaneous, unreflective mode and into active critical reflection in order to identify how far the suspected prejudice has influenced her judgement" (2007: 91).

While Fricker asks speakers generally to take account of the role of social prejudices in one's social epistemic practices, recognizing that anyone, regardless of position, can be infected with social prejudices when they circulate widely in society, José Medina is more explicit in analyzing the specific effects of social position for one's epistemic virtues and vices. Medina denies that social position dictates the manifestation of particular virtues or vices, yet argues that those in socially privileged positions will have tendencies toward the vices of epistemic arrogance, laziness, and close-mindedness, while those in socially underprivileged positions will have tendencies toward virtues of epistemic humility, curiosity and diligence, and open-mindedness due to their lived situated experiences (Medina 2013: 40–4). Medina's analysis elucidates the point that

<sup>6</sup> Pohlhaus argues that it is crucially important for feminists to examine the dialectical relationship between the situatedness of inquirers—the fact that a knower's "social position draws her attention to particular aspects of the world" and the interdependence of inquirers—by which "epistemic resources, needed to make sense of those parts of the world to which she attends, are by nature collective" (Pohlhaus 2012: 716).

“the social positionality of agents does matter for the development of their epistemic character, and...particularly extreme and damaging forms of epistemic vices...can be found in the privileged classes” (2013: 40). According to Medina, vices of the privileged develop because of a lack of experiences of *epistemic friction*: their perspective is consistently reinforced by the dominant forces. On the other hand, the lived experiences of the socially underprivileged offer opportunities to develop the cognitive asset of *meta-lucidity*: they develop a capacity to “see the limitations of dominant ways of seeing” (2013: 47).

### 11.3 The Situationists, their Critique, and Feminist Responsibilism

As I have noted, in the case of feminist epistemology, those who adopt a virtue approach tend to be responsibilists rather than reliabilists, putting them at greater risk of the situationist critique. The situationists challenge virtue responsibilists by questioning the degree to which it is reasonable to posit stable dispositions or character traits that could be understood as necessary for knowledge. In short, the situationists argue that empirical evidence suggests that people fail to hold anything like the type of stable dispositions of open-mindedness, intellectual courage, or epistemic humility that virtue epistemologists typically suggest are necessary for knowledge. Rather, they argue that people’s intellectual traits are “highly sensitive to seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant situational influences” (Alfano 2012: 234). For example, rather than demonstrating curiosity, people tend to exhibit *curiosity while in a good mood*, and rather than demonstrating intellectual courage, people tend to exhibit *intellectual courage in the face of nonunanimous dissent* (Alfano, 2012: 237). Situationists also suspect that as the empirical evidence mounts concerning the degree to which particular features of the context influence epistemic behavior more claims of virtue will fall, making it less likely that the virtues can do the explanatory work virtue responsibilists hope for, and certainly less likely that a virtue epistemology can provide a list of global virtues that would hold across contexts. Furthermore, the situationists argue that virtue epistemologists cannot simply retreat by suggesting that the virtues posited serve only as ideals, without it mattering whether or not most people exhibit the necessary traits. For situationists, it is important that a viable virtue epistemology be empirically adequate, tuned to how people actually go about figuring out their world. Additionally, situationists tackle what Alfano has called the “classical responsibilist”—that is, the thorough-going virtue responsibilist who expects the category of knowledge to be defined in terms of beliefs formed by way of the virtues. If it turns out that the evidence provided by the situationists shows the epistemic virtues to be very rare, the skeptical problem so well known in epistemology rears its ugly head. Knowledge itself becomes exceedingly rare if it is dependent on the epistemic virtues that are themselves exceedingly rare.

How do feminist responsibilists fare then in light of the situationist critique? As we shall see, in many ways the feminist versions of responsibilism fall more in line with the views of the situationists than they do with the traditional responsibilists who are the original targets of the critique. At the same time, feminist responsibilists attend to epistemic situations in a different way than do the situationists, a feature that resolves some of the tensions situationists find between responsibilism and situationism, though it also reframes some of the challenges.

The first point to note in considering where feminist responsibilists fit into these discussions is that they clearly do not qualify as classical responsibilists. Thus, they are not subject to the situationist critique in the same way. As discussed above, feminist epistemology is inquiry-based, with an emphasis on the activities of knowing rather than the assessment of any particular belief and its epistemic status or the analysis of the concept of knowledge itself. Feminists strive to describe practices of inquiry that will help us succeed in our epistemic pursuits overall at the same time as they seek to identify problems with some of our current epistemic practices. Their focus is on articulating activities and practices of knowing that will tend toward epistemic success rather than assessing individual knowledge claims, or defining the category of knowledge in terms of the virtues. Because their central epistemological questions and goals are framed differently from the classical responsibilists, feminist virtue epistemologists escape the situationist attacks of skepticism to which some other responsibilist theories are subject. Feminists simply are not expecting their theories to do the same philosophical work as the classical responsibilists.

At the same time, however, empirical challenges such as those that the situationists present are not irrelevant to feminist virtue epistemologists. Feminists share with the situationists the concern that a viable epistemology be empirically informed.<sup>7</sup> Well-conceived virtues should not be impossible to achieve. As noted, much of feminist epistemology has developed in response to the failures of traditional normative epistemological theory in accounting for women's epistemic experiences. Such empirical failures have been taken by feminists as marks of the inadequacy of these epistemologies. Feminists have insisted that epistemologies be developed with an eye toward revealing and accounting for the problems of our current epistemic practices for particularly situated inquirers, especially the ways in which social power relations infect our epistemic pursuits. This work has included taking seriously empirical work on how people form beliefs and the ways in which social power relations may be implicated. For example, feminists have made good use of the recent social psychology literature on implicit bias, particularly with respect to those biases and stereotypes that concern gender and race.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The substantial number of feminist epistemologists who associate themselves with some form of naturalized epistemology speaks to this concern that their epistemologies be deeply empirically informed. (See, for example, Antony 1993, Code 1996, Longino 2002, Nelson 1990).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the contributions to the special issue of the *Journal of Social Philosophy* on Gender, Implicit Bias, and Philosophical Methodology, edited by Margaret Crouch and Lisa Schwartzman (Crouch & Schwartzman 2012).

Work such as that of Fricker with its introduction of a corrective virtue that helps improve how one hears the testimony of others differently situated from oneself recognizes the importance of accounting for the empirical reality of such implicit biases in our epistemic interactions. Others, such as Elizabeth Anderson, have incorporated the work of cultural-cognition theorists into their epistemic analyses, recognizing and working through the challenges that are posed by empirical evidence suggesting that people form beliefs that agree with their ideals of a good society (Anderson 2011).

But although feminist responsibilists agree with the situationists that epistemologies must account for empirical work on how people form beliefs and whether the display of certain virtues is more or less likely, they draw different conclusions. While some situationists have argued that the influence of trivial features of the situations a knower faces threatens the viability of a responsibilist theory, with epistemic virtues being too difficult to achieve and maintain across contexts, feminist responsibilists are ready to admit that some of the kinds of knowledge they are interested in may at times be quite difficult to achieve and the virtues they articulate likewise may be difficult to develop. For example, in cases where the dominant conceptual resources are inadequate to make sense of the experiences of the socially underprivileged, Medina refers to “hermeneutical heroes” who are “exceptional in defying hermeneutical obstacles and expanding interpretative resources” (Medina 2013: 115). Similarly, Fricker describes those who overcome the limitations of the conceptual resources available in an oppressive situation as overcoming “extant *routine* social interpretative habits and arriv[ing] at *exceptional* interpretations of some of their formerly occluded experiences” (Fricker 2007: 148). In the case of Fricker’s corrective virtue of testimonial justice, through which hearers must exercise a critical social awareness in order to correct for the influence of prejudice on how one is hearing and attributing credibility to another speaker, she admits that it is a virtue “that is bound to be hard to achieve, owing to the psychologically stealthy and historically dynamic nature of prejudice” (2007: 98). It is not that these theorists consider such virtues next to impossible, nor do they see it as unreasonable to expect efforts on the part of individuals to develop and exercise the virtues they discuss,<sup>9</sup> but their language suggests that they are ready to admit that under oppressive circumstances such achievements will be difficult. Part of what feminist responsibilists are doing, then, is considering what virtues need to be introduced into their epistemologies in order to understand how knowers will be able to circumvent the damaging epistemic effects of social power. Unlike some of the situational effects to which the situationists draw attention, these effects are *systematic* in their epistemic distortion. Given their systematic distortion, a corrective virtue makes sense in a way it would not if the situational effects were disorganized or random. When it comes to corrective virtues, feminists do not expect that everyone will display such virtues, and they

<sup>9</sup> As Fricker writes of testimonial justice “it remains...something that we can and should aim for in practice” (2007: 98–9). For Medina, it is crucial to his project to explain how individuals are responsible for their contributions to epistemically unjust practices and the processes of transforming them, even as individuals find their activities of inquiry embedded within these larger social practices (2013).

openly acknowledge the difficulties of developing such virtues. Indeed, to think that these virtues could be easily and widely exhibited would make the feminist observations of the pervasiveness of systems of oppression and their epistemic repercussions difficult to grasp.

Another point of commonality between the feminists and the situationists that at the same time reveals important differences concerns the possibility of a global set of virtues that would be stable across contexts. Feminists share with situationists if not an outright pessimism regarding the potential explanatory power of global virtues that responsibilists are sometimes understood to be committed to, at least a concern about their relevance. Because feminist epistemologists focus their analyses on particular types of knowledge production in specific contexts, they are not especially interested in developing accounts that would commit to a set of global epistemic virtues to be applied across all contexts. If anything, their contextualized approach suggests that global accounts are likely to be inadequate in serving their pragmatic goals of understanding and providing guidance for epistemic agents who seek particular forms of knowledge in specific contexts.

But unlike some of the situationists who see their threats to globalized virtues as threats to responsibilism per se, feminist responsibilists do not see the dim prospects of a global account as a failure of the virtue project. Instead, they embrace the idea that the epistemic challenges inquirers face will differ according to context and that certain virtues might rise and fall in importance accordingly. For example, there may be contexts where Fricker's corrective virtue of testimonial justice that invokes reflection on one's positionality in order to circumvent the effects of identity prejudices will not be as important for good inquiry; there may be contexts where identity prejudices are not prevalent (post-oppressive contexts), or contexts where the identity prejudices that do exist do not apply to the particular field of inquiry at issue. Imagine, for example, that there exist stereotypes concerning the inability of a particular social group to comprehend mathematics, but there are not such epistemically relevant stereotypes concerning the same group's abilities to comprehend literature. Under these conditions, a corrective virtue of testimonial justice will be much more important in the mathematics inquiry than the literature inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most important point of comparison between the situationists and the feminist responsibilists, however, stems from the feminist tenet of situated knowing itself and the conceptualization of socially differentiated epistemic agents embedded in it. Feminist responsibilists can plausibly be interpreted as expanding the situationists' insights concerning the epistemic relevance of "situation" by arguing that the social location (social situation) of the epistemic agent is itself epistemically relevant. But in spite of this expansionist interpretation, the feminist position also marks an interest-

<sup>10</sup> At the same time, a common approach in feminist epistemology is to investigate different areas of inquiry and epistemic practices to find out if gendered power relations shape the current inquiries. Without assuming that gendered power relations have an effect on every area of inquiry, feminists adopt a "look and see" approach in order to reveal such effects when they are present.

ing and important shift in how the epistemic influences of “situation” are framed. In the case of the original situationists, the details of the situation or context of knowing and their influence on how individuals behave were taken to be a threat to the potential for agents to exercise stable virtues. They conceptualized “situation” as something fluctuating and existing outside of the agent herself, yet nevertheless very influential on the agent’s behavior. But in the case of feminist responsibilists who work with the tenet of situated knowing, the agent herself is conceptualized as situated within social relations in epistemically relevant and systematic ways. The agent’s positionality needs to be understood in relation to that of other inquirers, and feminist responsibilists argue that because of this situatedness epistemic agents need to incorporate into their inquiries critical awareness of their relative social position for epistemic success. Because feminists frame their epistemologies as social both in the sense that social aspects of our context affect our abilities to know and that we are deeply epistemically dependent on each other, the relevance of various aspects of one’s situation are not viewed as threatening to epistemic agency and the virtues in the way that they are for those responsibilists committed to an individualistic model of epistemic agency. Instead, feminist responsibilists come to virtue epistemology with an interest in analyzing what kind of epistemic agency can be exercised under particular social conditions when we are understood as epistemically interdependent beings.

Some of the strongest and most interesting contributions of feminist responsibilists are the tools they develop to explain the kind of epistemic agency and virtues that individuals can exercise while being thoroughly epistemically interdependent and embedded in a social environment. Part of such an analysis involves moving away from the atomistic view of knowers so common in traditional epistemology, through which epistemic agents are abstracted from their social contexts, and conceptualized as individual, generic, and self-sufficient knowers (Grasswick 2004). Nancy Daukas clarifies this shift in the conception of the epistemic self that feminists employ when she examines the potential uses of virtue theory for feminists, writing “[w]e can effectively align virtue theory with feminist goals by turning away from a traditional, individualistic conception of the self, instead embracing a relational or social conception, on which individual well-being and community well-being are interdependent” (Daukas 2011: 49). Medina also notes that conceptions of shared and collective responsibility are required an account that finds a place for the agency and virtues of individuals who are themselves embedded within larger collective epistemic and social practices (Medina 2013).

In sum, whereas the original situationists portrayed epistemic “situations” as threatening epistemic agency and the virtues because of their external, fluctuating, and trivial nature, feminist responsibilists understand epistemic agency as thoroughly embedded in social situation in a systematic way. The aspects of our situations that they investigate are neither trivial nor fluctuating. As a result, feminists view social situation as an element that must be incorporated into a robust virtue analysis rather than eliminated. But although conceptualizing the epistemic agent as socially situated herself relieves

some of the tension between responsibilism and situationism, no longer posing a threat to the very possibility of a responsibilist account, the challenge for feminists shifts instead to questions of how to understand the interactions between the social practices themselves and the individual participants in those practices. Similarly, they must consider how to negotiate between the epistemic burdens to be placed at the level of social practices and communities, and those that remain at the level of individuals. Given the systematic and structural nature of social power relations and their epistemic impact, it should not be surprising that for at least many feminist responsibilists, the virtues of individuals will be understood as insufficient to fully transform our epistemic practices in the ways they believe are necessary. As Elizabeth Anderson argues, epistemic virtues also will need to be fostered at the levels of epistemic institutions and systems of institutions (Anderson 2012a). Pointing out the limits of Fricker's rendition of testimonial injustice that emphasizes transactional solutions between individuals through the development of corrective virtues, Anderson writes, "structural injustices call for structural remedies" (Anderson 2012a: 171). As an example, she suggests the virtue of "epistemic democracy" at the level of institutions, a virtue that will be manifested with the achievement of "universal participation on terms of equality of all inquirers" (2012a: 172). For Anderson, the integration of a diversity of socially situated inquirers is crucial to epistemic institutions insofar as it can bring a multiplicity of perspectives into the inquiry.

In the last section of this chapter, I leave behind explicit comparisons with the situationists and turn more specifically to the role of epistemic trustworthiness on a feminist account. It is a virtue that can be manifested at both individual and institutional levels, though my discussion will focus on understanding trustworthiness at the level of individuals. Recognizing that we are dependent for our epistemic successes on the character of other inquirers and the nature of the communities and social practices of inquiry in which we are engaged, trustworthiness becomes a central virtue for feminist responsibilists to analyze, though it is not without complications on a situated account.

#### 11.4 The Virtue of Trustworthiness on a Situated Account

For a feminist epistemology that takes account of the multiple ways in which inquiry is social, emphasizing especially the need to rely on others differently socially situated from oneself, the virtue of epistemic trustworthiness might be considered a kind of umbrella virtue in the service of which many other virtues play an important role. Ultimately, epistemic trustworthiness speaks to how well an individual or institution can be depended upon to serve us well in our joint epistemic inquiries. Though on an individualistic account of inquiry, we can ask whether one is trustworthy for oneself, on a social account that recognizes our epistemic dependence on each other we can ask whether we are trustworthy for others as well as ourselves. For feminist epistemologists

who draw our attention to the ways in which social situation differentiates inquirers, attention to and analysis of the virtue of trustworthiness is crucial. A virtuous inquirer needs a well-developed sense of when, to whom, and how to express to others not only their specific epistemic claims, but also their epistemic status—how confident they are in those claims and how relevant they take those claims to be for the person at hand. This can prove challenging in contexts of epistemic practices that have historically been organized to serve some groups better than others.

I begin my discussion with the work of Nancy Daukas, a feminist responsibilist who has explicitly analyzed the virtue of trustworthiness. As Daukas characterizes it, epistemically speaking, trustworthiness has to do with whether or not one “tacitly [grasps] her epistemic strengths and weaknesses at a time, in context, regarding a subject matter or domain” (Daukas 2006: 112). One can only be trustworthy for oneself or others if one has a good sense of one’s epistemic competencies. Daukas formalizes her understanding of epistemic trustworthiness as follows:

A is epistemically trustworthy in circumstances C with respect to domain D, if and only if A is disposed to behave as though A’s epistemic status in C with respect to D is S if and only if A’s epistemic status in C with respect to D is S (2006: 112).

Daukas’s account captures several basic features of epistemic trustworthiness, recognizing that its fulfillment must be domain and context specific, and identifying at its core the idea of acting in accordance with appropriate confidence levels in one’s epistemic judgments. Trustworthiness involves not just having available epistemic competencies, but also having the ability to judge the degree of those competencies.

Daukas’s ultimate goal is to demonstrate how social location, within a particular context of social power dynamics, can make a difference to one’s epistemic trustworthiness by drawing attention to the component of trustworthiness that involves credibility assignments to other inquirers. For Daukas, how well one is able to assess the trustworthiness of *other* inquirers affects one’s own trustworthiness as an inquirer. She argues that I can only be a trustworthy source for others if I am relatively good at judging others’ epistemic characters and competencies in a particular domain, having a good sense of when to place my trust in them and either incorporating their contributions into my inquiry or possibly even giving more weight to their judgments than my own on a particular epistemic matter.<sup>11</sup> By way of example, she suggests that:

[I]f I confidently dismiss the views of a D-expert without serious consideration, I reveal my close-mindedness, dogmatism, or, at best, epistemic impatience. I thereby reveal that I cannot

<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere I have framed trustworthiness on behalf of speakers and what I call “responsible trust” on behalf of hearers as two necessary parts of successful inquiry, arguing that ideally the responsible trust of hearers and the trustworthiness of speakers will be balanced (Grasswick 2014a). Though the conditions of responsible trust also require analysis if we are to understand successful social inquiry, it is important to recognize Daukas’s point that trustworthiness does not stand on its own. Rather, trustworthiness itself involves knowing when to trust others given that our own contributions to inquiry need to be understood within a network of possible epistemic resources.

be trusted to make sound judgments regarding when to listen seriously to whom about D, or whose input and criticism to seek out as I form my own D-related views (2006: 113).

For Daukas, then, epistemic trustworthiness is a *social* epistemic virtue “insofar as it depends on appropriate attitudes towards others, as well as toward oneself, as epistemic agents” (2006: 113–4).<sup>12</sup>

The claim that one’s epistemic trustworthiness depends on one’s attitudes toward others allows Daukas to reveal some of the complex ways in which individual epistemic agency can interact with existing social epistemic practices, damaging trustworthiness, reinforcing epistemically problematic social power relations, and harming community inquiry in the process. As Daukas points out, in cases where prominent stereotypes result in the socially underprivileged receiving less credibility than they deserve in testimonial transactions (cases of testimonial injustice), damage is done to the trustworthiness of the person who employs the stereotype. But another one of the effects will be that fewer of the socially underprivileged will manage to attain positions of authority within epistemic institutions, since they will be taken less seriously epistemically. The resultant infrequency of their presence may be interpreted as evidence for their unsuitability in a particular epistemic domain, and if members of such a group object to their exclusion testimonial injustices against them may simply become reinforced. As Daukas claims:

Where unjust power relations are in play, the link between individual epistemic agency and social epistemic practices forged by attitudes about the epistemic capacities of self and diverse others, creates a mutually supporting “feedback loop” between a widespread, socially inculcated habitual failure of epistemic trustworthiness, on the one hand, and patterns of epistemic interactions, on the other, which perpetuate those power relations (2006: 116).

Furthermore, she points out that when an individual “colludes in perpetuating the problem of unjust epistemic exclusion, to that extent her own epistemic character suffers” (2006: 117).

Understanding the strength of such feedback loops is important for feminist virtue epistemologists who seek to understand both the seriousness of the challenges socially situated epistemic agents face under conditions of oppression, and also the potential contributions virtuous individuals can make to transforming epistemic practices. Daukas notes that the existence of such problematic feedback loops also suggests “a vehicle for a mutually supporting, epistemically constructive feedback loop between the inculcation of epistemic trustworthiness, on the one hand, and inclusive epistemic

<sup>12</sup> Sanford Goldberg characterizes social virtues as those that are “bound up with those forms of inquiry involved in social routes to knowledge” (Goldberg 2009: 237). Clearly Daukas’s account of trustworthiness qualifies. Goldberg also considers whether or not a social (anti-individualistic) account of the social virtues is required, or whether all of the virtues that are involved in social routes to knowledge are properly thought of as being possessed an individual subject, and whether such virtues depend on social factors for their individuation. I do not take up this discussion here, but there is reason to suspect that feminists such as Daukas will side with the need for a social account of the social virtues.

behaviors that would displace unjust epistemic exclusion” on the other hand (2006: 122). She suggests that such trustworthiness could be developed by self-consciously shifting one’s socialized habits of responding to the testimony of others differently situated from oneself by adopting a “methodological humility,” a phrase she takes from Uma Narayan (Daukas 2006: 121). Not unlike Fricker’s corrective virtue of testimonial justice by which one actively reflects on the possible effects of one’s social position on one’s judgments, the self-conscious employment of methodological humility suggested by Daukas invites those in privileged positions to consider how their privilege might be affecting the relative weight they are giving their own assessments versus those in other positions who present alternative perspectives. But appropriate attributions of credibility to others as one is formulating one’s beliefs and then acting accordingly are not the only points where an analysis of trustworthiness needs to consider relative social position and the relevant power dynamics. Though much of the feminist discussion of trustworthiness has focused on issues of testimonial injustice and the need to correct for it in order to appropriately incorporate the contributions of others into one’s inquiries, equally important is an understanding of how one can be a trustworthy conveyer of knowledge and understanding.

Daukas’s account claims that trustworthiness manifests itself when one is “disposed to behave” in accordance with one’s epistemic status within a certain context and for a certain domain. In this she recognizes that one of the primary values of trustworthiness concerns not just what beliefs one forms inside one’s head, but how one acts outwardly—and this includes when and how one makes claims to others. Norms of communication of one’s understandings are a crucial part of successful epistemic practices. When I trust someone epistemically, I look to them to inform me about something. What Daukas does not discuss explicitly or fully take into consideration are the implications of the fact that one is trustworthy *to someone* or some group in particular. To claim that one is trustworthy means that *someone* (perhaps many people) can depend on that person for some form of knowledge or understanding. The situated approach of feminists suggests that we need to at least investigate potential social differences between speakers and listeners to see if these differences may be relevant to attributions of trustworthiness. It is possible that one might be epistemically trustworthy for one person, yet be less epistemically trustworthy to another who is differently situated socially.

How can it happen that one can be epistemically trustworthy to one person yet not another? The easiest way to illustrate this is to show how features of social situation and context can sometimes interfere with one’s trustworthiness with respect to a differently situated person. Naomi Scheman provides a useful example of this when she considers our reliance on scientific institutions as a source of trustworthy knowledge. Scheman argues that a particular historical context of interactions between the institutions of scientific knowledge and socially marginalized groups can give members of such groups good reasons to distrust those institutions and their epistemic claims (Scheman 2001). Scheman notes that when a particular group has suffered a history of poor

treatment by a scientific institution, including unethical treatment as research subjects, unjust exclusion from the institution, and the production of poor quality research that has in turn been used against the group, group members have good reason to distrust the institution in the production of knowledge. She claims that “[i]t is, in short, irrational to expect people to place their trust in the results of practices about which they know little and that emerge from institutions—universities, corporations, government agencies—which they know to be inequitable” (2001: 43).

Though Scheman’s focus is on the trustworthiness of institutions of science, her account obviously has ramifications for the trustworthiness of individual inquirers who use the epistemic tools of these dominant institutions, and who often represent these institutions. Consider, for example, a medical researcher being publicly interviewed on the topic of the state of the AIDS epidemic and the current trajectory of HIV research. Whether or not a listener finds the researcher trustworthy depends on many heuristics and cues she uses with respect to judging the individual’s epistemic capacities (Origgi 2012), but it also depends on her perceptions of the institutions and practices of medical research within which the interview subject and her research are embedded. These perceptions may be influenced by historical patterns of interaction with those institutions that differ across different social groups, and some of those may be well-grounded perceptions. For example, Scheman cites patterns of distrust of AIDS/HIV research evident in African-American communities, and she (among others) attributes this higher level of distrust in part to a long history of African-Americans being abused as medical research subjects, such as in the Tuskegee syphilis experiment (2001: 37).

Though Scheman’s argument clearly demonstrates how individuals’ trustworthiness can be deeply connected to the degree of trustworthiness of the institutions through which they engage inquiry, and it further demonstrates how trustworthiness can depend on different historical contexts, one may still object that the individual inquirer or speaker is in fact trustworthy for the particular listener, in spite of the acknowledgment that the listener has good reasons for distrust, or at least lacks (enough) reasons to trust given the weight of historical evidence. As Scheman herself clarifies, she is “not denying...that even socially unjust codes of trustworthiness might actually be reliable as ‘trackers of truth’: That’s a different question from whether or not someone in particular has good reason to think that they are” (2001: 35). It could simply be an unfortunate situation where the trustworthiness of the speaker is present, but it cannot be conveyed, and thus cannot be made use of by the listener given their particular social situation with its burdens of a particular historical context of unjust epistemic interactions.

However, Scheman’s example of the relevance of the historical context and the track record of particular epistemic institutions and their inquirers with respect to groups that have been typically excluded from and unjustly treated by such institutions also leads us to notice that Daukas’s account of trustworthiness lacks a certain specificity that needs filling out. In short, when one appeals to the epistemic trustworthiness of a

speaker, one does so in terms of their ability to provide the kind of knowledge or understanding that is important to one.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Scheman's example of the institutions of science, some of the reasons for distrust stem from social groups' awareness that these institutions have historically done a poor job of providing them with the kind of knowledge that they are most interested in and most need to be able to make sense of and improve their lives. For example, feminists have argued that the history of research on women's bodies and sex differences reveals many episodes of poorly done science, generating claims that have in turn been used to justify women's subordination (Anderson 2012b). One conclusion to draw from such evidence is that such epistemic institutions and their members have historically not proven themselves trustworthy in being able to provide sound research of relevance for women. Adding support to this, feminists have argued relatedly that a pattern of androcentric research has meant that historically women's health issues have not been investigated with the same enthusiasm or scrutiny as have men's health issues, resulting in bodies of ignorance of particular concern for women.<sup>14</sup> The trustworthiness of an inquirer for a particular socially situated listener, then, depends on whether the inquirer is capable of providing not just any knowledge, but knowledge that is relevant and significant for the listener or the recipient of the knowledge. When there are patterns of the production and conveyance of knowledge that seem to be focused on knowledge more relevant to other groups than the one in question, at the expense of producing timely and group-relevant knowledge, this suggests a lack of trustworthiness on the part of the institutions. With respect to individual members or representatives of those institutions, certain demands on their trustworthiness follow. When an inquirer or speaker is not in a position to provide the right kind of knowledge, a trustworthy knower needs to recognize this, acknowledging the gap in relevance between what they have to offer and what the receiver is seeking, and behaving in accordance with her epistemic status (as described by Daukas).

For that to happen, the inquirer must have some sense of the epistemic needs of our socially situated listener. Once again, we return to the importance of a virtuous knower in contexts of oppression being disposed to attend to the epistemic relevance of another's social location, this time with respect to learning what the epistemic needs of another are so that one can develop an appropriate awareness of one's epistemic status with respect to the needs of that person. Such an awareness is a necessary part of an individual's trustworthiness for that socially located person.

<sup>13</sup> There are connections here with Fricker's work on hermeneutical injustice (2007) in which a society lacks the conceptual resources necessary to make sense of some of the experiences of the socially marginalized that are particularly important for them to understand. The example she uses is a woman's experience of sexual harassment prior to the concept "sexual harassment" coming into cultural circulation. Without the concept, the woman was denied a clear understanding of an experience that was especially central and important to her life and the significance of this knowledge denied to her is what classifies it as an epistemic injustice.

<sup>14</sup> Richmond Campbell uses the example of androcentric research on heart disease that failed to recognize how the disease manifests itself differently in women than in men (Campbell 2001).

Understanding trustworthiness as relative to a socially located person has the implication that, ultimately, assessments of trustworthiness depend on to whom we take ourselves to be epistemically accountable. As responsible inquirers we need to direct our epistemic attentions according to whom we think we need to be accountable. This is in keeping with the overarching outlook of many virtue epistemologists: that the goal of our epistemic inquiries is not just the acquisition of knowledge per se, but rather it is to know and inquire well, to help us live well. Our epistemic practices succeed when we are able to produce knowledge that matters. In the case of a socially situated virtue epistemology, considerations of to whom it matters need to be incorporated. This inevitably leads to questions of social justice finding a central place within a socially situated virtue epistemology, for which feminist virtue epistemologists are well prepared.

## 11.5 Conclusions

I began this chapter by outlining several features of feminist approaches to epistemology and drawing attention to what a feminist approach looks like within a responsibilist virtue epistemology. In describing their relationship to the situationists and traditional responsibilists, I noted that feminist responsibilists take very seriously the systematic epistemic effects of situation, and they propose virtues for individual agents that are not always easy to achieve, particularly since the agents' actions are embedded in social and institutional practices with their own vices and systematic epistemic effects. The virtue of epistemic trustworthiness offered an excellent illustration of such challenges for socially situated inquirers. My analysis demonstrated both how trustworthy individuals need to see themselves in relation to differently situated contributors to inquiry, as well as how they need to consider their inquiries and results in relation to the epistemic needs of differently socially situated recipients of those results. Though it is obvious from feminist contributions to these discussions that individual virtues will not be enough to transform our epistemic practices in ways that would allow us to know and inquire better than we do in our current society, marked as it is by both epistemic and social injustices, it is also clear that the epistemic virtues of individuals that feminists describe can play an important role in such a transformation. Explicitly incorporating an awareness of one's social location into one's inquiries in various ways is key to undertaking this epistemically transformative work.

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